



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

New 'defense' villages and infrastructure being built on Tibet's border

<https://savetibet.org/new-defense-villages-and-infrastructure-being-built-on-tibets-border>

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- China has accelerated construction of “border defense villages” in Tibet this year as part of the far-reaching agenda of Chinese Chairman Xi Jinping to create an advanced, impenetrable “security barrier” between Tibet and the outside world.
- Chinese Communist Party (CCP) cadres will be stationed in the new border villages with the aim of countering “infiltration” by “hostile forces,” such as Tibetans loyal to the Dalai Lama, and ensuring compliance with CCP objectives. Relatedly, monks and nuns have been given training in countering the influence of the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of their Tibetan Buddhist faith.
- A major tunnel and bridge have just been completed on the railway under construction from Tibet's capital of Lhasa to the Chinese province of Sichuan. The railway is of key strategic importance to China and close to the border with India.

Wu Yingjie, the CCP chief of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), has said that “Tibet is a special frontier ethnic region” and “an important national security and ecological security barrier.”¹ Wu's comment reflects Chinese authorities' increasing emphasis on infrastructure development and militarization on the borders of Tibet, as outlined by Chairman Xi Jinping when he said, "To govern the country well we must first govern the frontiers well, and to govern the frontiers well, we must first ensure stability in Tibet."²

Tibet, a historically independent country in the Himalayan region, was annexed by Chinese troops [60 years](#) ago and is brutally occupied to this day.

According to the "Plan for the Construction of Well-off Villages in the Border Areas of the Tibet Autonomous Region (2017-2020)," issued in 2017, more than 600 “well-off” (Chinese: xiaokang) border defense villages will be constructed.³

¹ Wu Yingjie, Party Secretary of the Tibet Autonomous Region, speaking at a press conference in Beijing on September 12, 2019 Transcript in Chinese http://www.china.com.cn/zhibo/content_75195567.htm
http://epaper.chinatibetnews.com/xzrb/html/2019-08/15/content_904883.htm

² Xi Jinping, remarks to delegation from Tibet Autonomous Region at the first session of the 12th National People's Congress, March 9, 2013 http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-03/28/c_137930954.htm

³ 今年边境地区小康村首批计划总投资135.25亿元(The first batch of planned investments in the well-off villages in border areas this year totaled 13.525 billion yuan), People Daily, May 13, 2019
<http://xz.people.com.cn/n2/2019/0513/c138901-32931795.html>

At the celebrations marking the [70th anniversary](#) of the founding of the People's Republic of China in October 2019, Wu—who also heads the Border Defense Committee of the TAR—announced the acceleration of construction of the border villages.

According to Chinese state media, the plan is to construct 624 such villages in Tibetan border areas.⁴ Most of the construction is taking place in the key border areas of Nyingtri (Ch: Linzhi, also rendered in English by Chinese sources as Nyingchi)—which borders India's Arunachal Pradesh state—Ngari (Ch: Ali) and Shigatse (Ch: Rikaze)⁵

The sites of the new “well-off,” border defense villages are often remote and sparsely populated and are on the routes that Tibetans once took to escape into exile into Nepal and then India.

Systematic ideological campaigns aim to reinforce message

CCP cadres, paid more than their counterparts elsewhere,⁶ will be transferred to each village and there have been intensive political education sessions in border areas as part of their efforts to undermine and eliminate the Dalai Lama's influence, such as the training of monks in Nyingtri, on countering “espionage activities by the Dalai Lama”. The Global Times cited Penpa Lhamo, deputy head of the contemporary studies institute of the Tibet Academy of Sciences, as saying that this was important because: “Nyingchi is of special importance to anti-espionage efforts because there are many military sites.”⁷

The infrastructure closest to the actual border is described as “first line” construction. A state media report said there were 427 “well-off border villages” situated in the “first line” and 201 in the “second line.”⁸ The same state media report acknowledged that Tibetans have been forcibly relocated and resettled in the construction of the border village.

Talking about a new model village called Demchog (Ch: Dianjiao) in Gar county near the Indian border in the western Tibetan region of Ngari, Zhu Hong, head of the organization department of the Gar County Committee, said: “Our goal is to build Demchog Village into a party-building position and an indestructible battle fortress led by demonstrations on the border, keep the gate for the motherland, let the people live in peace, and make everyone a guardian of sacred land and happiness.”⁹

The new developments were also heralded in a letter Xi sent to two sisters from a herding family in a remote Tibetan area close to the border soon after the 19th Communist Party Congress in Beijing in

⁴ 西藏：边境地区小康村建设得真美丽Tibet: Beautifully constructed well-off village in border areas, Tibet Daily, May 11, 2019, <http://www.tibet3.com/news/zangqu/xz/2019-05-11/113806.html>

⁵ The Shigatse City government stated in April that it had started the construction of 349 “well-off border villages, [with a] cumulative investment of 2.96 billion yuan”. Shigatse government website, April 9, 2019, http://www.xizang.gov.cn/xwzx/dsyw/201904/t20190409_178514.html

⁶ Jayadeva Ranade September 24, 2019, “China's Xiaokang (Well Off) Border Defence Villages in the Tibet Autonomous Region”, Vivekananda International Federation, <https://www.vifindia.org/article/2019/september/24/china-s-xiaokang-border-defence-villages-in-the-tibet-autonomous-region>

⁷ ‘Tibetan nuns, monks receive anti-espionage education’, November 13, 2015, Global Times

⁸ 西藏：边境地区小康村建设得真美丽Tibet: Beautifully constructed well-off village in border areas, Tibet Daily, May 11, 2019, <http://www.tibet3.com/news/zangqu/xz/2019-05-11/113806.html>

⁹ 噶尔县扎西岗乡典角村建设“边境第一村” (Construction of “No. 1 Village on the Border” in Demchog Village, Tashigang Township, Gar County), Tibet Daily, June 6, 2018 <http://www.xzdyjy.gov.cn/folder967/yw/qnyw/2018-06-07/92879.html>

2017. Xi encouraged the family “to set down roots in the border area, safeguard the Chinese territory and develop their hometown,” according to state news agency Xinhua.¹⁰

The enthusiastic promotion of the new border villages seems at least in part intended to demonstrate and underline the loyalty of leaders and officials in Tibetan areas to the CPC leadership.

The new settlements and infrastructure also underline the core policy of military and civilian integration in Tibet, a priority of the CCP. Analysts have pointed out that the role of People’s Liberation Army (PLA) political commissars has been expanded to include research across the border into India while Party officials posted in “border defence villages” are also involved in political work, building relationships and influence on the Indian and Nepalese sides of the border.¹¹

New bridge, tunnel and airports in strategic infrastructure network at the border

Chinese state media also announced the completion of a bridge and tunnel last month on the strategically important Lhasa to Nyingtri section of the “Sichuan-Tibet” railway, which Chinese engineers have described as the “world’s riskiest” rail connection. The route is of key geopolitical significance, and despite scientists’ warnings of untold environmental consequences and risks of earthquakes and other disasters, it is considered a priority at the highest political levels in China.

Xi has emphasized the Chengdu-Lhasa rail link’s importance in relation to securing the border. In November, workers completed the joining of the Bayul Bridge for the railway across the Yarlung Tsangpo River (which is the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra River).¹² They also completed the 13,073 meter Bayul Tunnel.¹³

The Lhasa-Nyingtri section of the line is part of a second, 1,700-km rail route linking Tibet to the China (following the opening of the line from Golmud in Qinghai in 2006), connecting Lhasa to the Sichuan provincial capital of Chengdu. Tian Yun, director of the China Society of Macroeconomics Research Center, said: “When the railway is completed, it will be easier to ensure the security of the Tibet Autonomous Region by logistics from Sichuan.”¹⁴

The Chinese government also announced that it will start construction of three new airports in the TAR in 2019 (in addition to the five that are currently there).¹⁵ China has announced that its airports are being integrated both for civilian and military uses.¹⁶ At the ceremony announcing the new airports,

¹⁰ Xi encourages Tibetan herders to safeguard territory, Xinhua, October 29, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-10/29/c_136713312.htm

¹¹ “China’s Xiaokang (Well Off) Border Defence Villages in the Tibet Autonomous Region”, Jayadev Ranade, Vivekananda International Federation, <https://www.vifindia.org/article/2019/september/24/china-s-xiaokang-border-defence-villages-in-the-tibet-autonomous-region>

¹² ‘Tibetan railway joins key bridge on Yarlung Zangbo River’, Xinhua, November 9, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-11/09/c_138542814.htm

¹³ Construction wraps up on tunnel for Sichuan-Tibet Railway, Global Times, November 3, 2019, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1168835.shtml>

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Air travel in Tibet achieves 54 years of safe operation, March 29, 2019, http://www.china.org.cn/china/2019-03/29/content_74625450.htm

¹⁶ China strengthens integration of civil-military airport, Xinhua, July 30, 2015 http://english.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2015-07/30/content_6605984.htm

the Commander of the Tibet Military District and three other PLA officers were present, indicating the airports' military importance.¹⁷

Two of the new airports are located in Lhokha (Ch: Shannan), north of Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh in India, and in Purang (Ch: Burang) in Ngari near the trijunction of Nepal, Tibet and India. The third airport will be at Tingri (Ch: Dingri), near the Nepal border.

¹⁷ 3 new Tibet airports near border pose threat, Claude Arpi, The Asian Age, June 20, 2018, <https://www.asianage.com/opinion/oped/200618/3-new-tibet-airports-near-border-pose-threat.html>