



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Monasteries and temples around Lhasa reopen after coronavirus lockdown, but religious restrictions continue

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March 31, 2020

Amid continued efforts to bolster its image internationally and indicate a sense of normalcy after the Coronavirus crisis, Chinese authorities have announced the reopening of some monasteries around the Tibetan capital Lhasa to the public, starting today.

In a circular on March 30, 2020 the Lhasa City Buddhist Association said that 214 monasteries and temples on the outskirts of the city will be opened from today, March 31, while major monasteries such as Sera, Drepung and Ganden and the Jokhang Temple will remain closed, the circular said.

"Permission to open these monasteries and temples will be of little solace to the Tibetan Buddhist community while stringent restrictions on religious freedom remain in place. The Chinese government wishes to portray an image of normalcy in Tibet, and the Buddhist institutions are a key factor in this effort. Unfortunately, there is nothing normal in subjecting temples to 24/7 surveillance, or prohibiting children and government officials from participating in religious ceremonies," Matteo Mecacci, president of the International Campaign for Tibet, said.

China's strict control of religious activities takes many forms. Tibetan monasteries are controlled through regulations such as the 2011 policy called the "Complete Long-Term Management Mechanism for Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries." This system requires a "Management Committee" of up to 30 lay officials appointed by the government to be responsible for the rituals and other matters in the monastery. This policy constricts the education of new monks in the monasteries according to the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, while it forces them to learn through government-controlled curriculum.

In December 2019, a school in Lhasa issued a directive to parents saying that students could not participate in any religious activities, nor could parents take them to "faraway places," during the winter vacation. The directive said parents would be responsible for any consequences.

Given below is the translation in English of the Tibetan-language circular issued by the Lhasa City Buddhist Association.

Circular permitting the opening of centers of religious activities (located) at a distance from Lhasa City

In accordance with implementing the important speech and directions of General Secretary Xi Jinping, implementing the Region Party Committee's and Lhasa City Committee's new directives and new hopes, the Lhasa City Buddhist Association having looked at the situation of the city-wide Tibetan Buddhist centers, size and impact, as well as the prevention and control of the pandemic, has the basic plan of their gradual opening.

Initially, it will be from faraway (places), then county-cities, then the main city (Chengguan district) respectively. After survey, it has been decided that other than Drepung Monastery, Sera Monastery, Gaden

Monastery, Tsurphu Monastery, Tsuglakhang; as well as under Toelung Dechen county Khyormolung, Taklung Drak, Shongpa Lhachu, Gadhong Monastery; under Taktse county, Sang-ngak Monastery; under Lhundup county, Gadhen Choekhor; under Medrogongkar county, Katsel Monastery, Dhamchen temple; under Nyemo county, Upper and Lower Bero, Nyima Thang monastery of Newukhulsar, Sangphu Monastery, Besar monastery, Namgyal Serkhang, Tsamkhung Mani temple, Karchung temple, Dagpo monastery, and those under the Chengguan district, those religious faraway religious places numbering 214 will be open from March 31, 2020. The general religious believing public can bring along their good health certificate and citizen card and go for prayer blessings. However, for the time being, religious activities involving the assembly of large number of religious believers are being halted.

The monasteries should continue work to prevent infection from outside and spread from inside. Accordingly, monasteries should guarantee that no issues arise: at the door of the monastery, temperature should be taken, masks worn, sanitization done, good air flow system so that good work of prevention and control is done.

The opening period of the religious centers in the county and city will be announced taking into consideration the situation of the prevention and control of the pandemic. Accordingly, the general public's understanding and support are requested. You are also requested to circulate this circular to others.

Lhasa City Buddhist Association

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