



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Dalai Lama's birthday celebrated in Tibet, several arrested

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July 14, 2021

Despite the Chinese government's brutal crackdown on support for the Dalai Lama inside Tibet, brave Tibetans celebrated the religious leader's birthday last week, with several arrested as a result.

The Dalai Lama, the spiritual head of Tibetan Buddhism and one of the most admired people on Earth, turned 86 on July 6, 2021. His birthday met with outpourings of support from enthusiastic followers and world leaders around the globe, including Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

It was a different story, however, inside Tibet, the historically independent country that China annexed more than 60 years ago after forcing the Dalai Lama into exile.

Golog Jigme, an escaped Tibetan political prisoner who now lives in Switzerland, told Radio Free Asia that Chinese police arrested two Tibetans in their 40s—a man named Kunchok Tashi and a woman named Dzapo—on “suspicion of being part of a group on social media that shared images and documents, and encouraged the reciting of Tibetan prayers on the birthday of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.”

The arrests occurred in Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture's Kyaglung town in the Chinese province of Sichuan.

Jigme said there were another 20 to 30 Tibetans arrested for celebrating His Holiness' birthday, “but due to strict restrictions on communications in the region, nothing more is known about their names or where” the arrests took place.

Social media messages

Despite the obvious risks, some Tibetans celebrated the Dalai Lama's birthday on social media using Tibetan and Buddhist images symbolizing him.

Along with the images, Tibetans shared messages of support, including:

“When I think of the eminent gurus alive, I feel warm in my heart and clear in my eye. Lama, to you I pay homage! We are so lucky! How blessed we are!”

“The karma from life to life is like a gust of wind, involuntarily dragging me into the earthly world time to time again, but in this life, I have such great blessings that I can coexist with you in the same time and space.”

Other Tibetans posted prayers, such as:

*“Your body white and unblemished,
Your crown adorned with the perfect Buddhas,
Your eyes of compassion gazing on all beings—
Chenrezig (Avalokiteśvara), to you I pay homage!”*

Oṃ maṇi padme huṃ!”

*“May Vajra Guru live long and his wish fulfilled,
May the Sangha grow and the teaching flourish,
May all disciples and benefactors be spiritually rich,
May the Buddha Dharma be in the world for long time!”*

Punished for celebrating

This year is hardly the first time Chinese authorities have punished Tibetans for celebrating the Dalai Lama’s birthday.

In 2013, authorities shot two Tibetan monks in the head and seriously injured several others after opening fire at a crowd that gathered peacefully to celebrate the Dalai Lama’s birthday in eastern Tibet.

Two years later, authorities arrested nine Tibetans who organized a small picnic in honor of the Dalai Lama’s birthday. The nine Tibetans received prison sentences of varying lengths, with the longest sentence, 14 years, going to a monk named Drugdra, whose release is due sometime shortly before 2030.

These vicious crackdowns are part of China’s ongoing campaign to eliminate any expressions of support for the Dalai Lama in his homeland.

As part of these efforts, Chinese authorities have arrested Tibetans for simply listening to the Dalai Lama’s teachings on their phones and even for owning his photograph.



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