



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Octogenarian Tibetan sets himself on fire in protest against Chinese rule

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In the latest self-immolation protest against Chinese rule in Tibet, an 81-year-old Tibetan named Taphun set himself on fire in the early morning on March 27, 2022.

The elderly Tibetan self-immolated in front of the police station located outside of Kirti Monastery in Ngaba county (Chinese: Aba), Ngaba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan, according to reliable sources confirming to the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT). According to reliable sources, Taphun is believed to have died during his fiery protest.

Taphun was known to be a socially-conscious individual. In 2021, while celebrating his 80th birthday he advised those around him, saying, “On account of the blessings of the Gyalwa Rinpoche [“Victorious and Precious One” an epithet for the Dalai Lama], it is certain that the sun of happiness will shine in Tibet. The young children should not become discouraged.”

Recent self-immolations

After two years without any known self-immolations in Tibet, Taphun is the second person confirmed to have self-immolated this year in protest against the Chinese government after Tsewang Norbu, a 25-year-old Tibetan singer, adopted the same form of protest in Lhasa on February 25, 2022. Tsewang succumbed to severe burns in the People’s Hospital of the Tibet Autonomous Region in early March.

Another Tibetan is also reported to have self-immolated in Kyegudo (Jiegu) in Yulshul (Yushu) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai, but ICT has not yet been able to confirm this. According to information trickling out of Tibet, Tsering Samdup reportedly self-immolated in front of a police station in Kyegudo at around 4 pm on March 30, 2022. Chinese police allegedly took him away and his status is unknown.

Aftermath of Taphun’s protest

It is not known whether Ngaba county police handed his body back to his family. Taphun belonged to the Phurtsatsang household of Ngaba’s Meruma (Mai’erma) pastoral area.

Elderly Tibetans from Meruma and other pastoral areas nearby Ngaba county frequently stay for several days, or even weeks, in guesthouses in Ngaba town during pilgrimages to Kirti monastery. According to reliable sources, Taphun seem to have arrived in Ngaba county several days before his self-immolation.

Since the most recent self-immolation, security has been tightened in Ngaba county. Police, officers from various security agencies and government officials have been conducting investigatory visits to businesses in the town for several times a day. These visits serve the dual purpose of looking for clues to enable the Chinese state to slander Taphun as suffering from mental illness, alcoholism, or family disharmony, as they have done with previous self-immolators, and to warn local Tibetans against sharing information to the outside world.

Ngaba, where the contemporary Tibetan self-immolation protests first started in 2009, is among the most active areas of Tibetan nationalist sentiment and resistance to Chinese rule outside of the Tibet Autonomous Region. Since 2009, 159 Tibetans have self-immolated in protest against the government of China. A third of the total self-immolations took place in Ngaba.



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