



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Important Tibet religious event prohibited, organizers detained

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Chinese police in northeastern Tibet have interfered in an important several days-long Buddhist ritual, the Kalachakra initiation ceremony, by stopping it and detaining the organizers.

A sand mandala, part of the ritual, has been destroyed, and devotees who protested against the police action were reportedly beaten and told to return to their homes, some of them having travelled from distant locations.

“We are deeply concerned about the ban on the Kalachakra in Tsolho Prefecture, as the authorities’ interference, apparently by force, represents a violation of the right to manifest religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance,” said the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT). Although ICT could not independently verify the reports due to information clampdown by the Chinese authorities, ICT believes the incidents are highly probable. *“The Chinese authorities must restore Tibetan Buddhists’ right to freedom of religion and allow events such as the Kalachakra to be held without undue state interference.”*

Kalachakra

The Kalachakra (“Wheel of Time”) is a major practice in Tibetan Buddhism and was scheduled for July 20-23 at Samey-shi village in Gumong town in Mangra (Chinese: Guinan) County in Tsolho (Chinese: Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai.

It was to be led by the ritual master Athi Kalsang Tashi Gyatso Rinpoche, the head of Athi Monastery in Tsolho Prefecture. Athi Rinpoche as he is popularly known is the root teacher of around 2,000 families residing in the Logya, Tsonak, Joser and Rungon villages in the region.

The preparation was [stopped July 19](#), the day before the ceremony began, during pre-initiation rites, despite the event reportedly having been approved by the authorities earlier.

According to sources, a large group of Chinese officials accompanied by armed police arrived at the venue in the early morning of July 19 and stopped the initiation process by destroying the sand mandala and forcing Athi Rinpoche to leave.

The officers detained the organisers for interrogation and shoved and beat the crowd of pleading devotees, ordering the congregation to return to their respective homes.

Videos circulating

Videos of the welcoming reception the public accorded to Athi Rinpoche was widely circulated on social media before it was scrubbed by China’s official censor.

Sources say that the wide circulation of the video may likely have drawn the attention of the central government to the influence of Buddhism, which led to the issuance of the order to stop the religious event.

It is unclear on what legal grounds the event was stopped.

Integral to spiritual education

Such teachings are an integral part of spiritual education in the Tibetan Buddhist community. They are also necessary for individuals who want to further their spiritual practice to the highest level.

It is for this reason that many devotees congregate when the Kalachakra initiation is bestowed by the Dalai Lama in exile. The Kalachakra is characterized by extensive preparation days before the actual initiation, most notably a sand mandala that is prepared before the initiation that devotees are allowed to see as the completed mandala after the initiation.

The timing of the Kalachakra initiation corresponds with the Choekor Duechen (the first turning of the wheel of dharma) falling on July 21 or the fourth day of the sixth month of the Tibetan lunar calendar, marked to honor the day Buddha first taught the four noble truths.

Other religious events cancelled

The 7th Athi Kalsang Tashi Gyatso is from Kumbum Tsotuk in the Tibetan region of Amdo. He was recognized as a reincarnate in his teenage years and enthroned in 1997. He resides in Kumbum monastery. He also [studied at Labrang Tashi Kyil monastery](#).

Some Tibetan media also reported that a similar Kalachakra Initiation by 7th Gungthang Rinpoche of the famed Labrang Tashi Kyil Monastery in Kanlho (Gannan) Prefecture of Gansu in July [was also cancelled](#).

The authorities cancelled the teachings scheduled to take place in Dzoerge (Ruo'ergai), Ngaba (Aba) Prefecture, in Sichuan Province, citing the month of July as Gannan Prefecture's 70th founding anniversary.



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