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Freedom in the World 2011 - Tibet

Capital: N/A

Population: 3,000,000

Political Rights Score: 7 *

Civil Liberties Score: 7 *

Status: Not Free

Overview

The atmosphere of tight security established in 2008 generally remained in place in 2010. Repression intensified in March ahead of the anniversary of the Dalai Lama's 1959 flight from Tibet. During the year, the list of those facing detention expanded beyond the monastic and activist communities to include intellectual, cultural, and business figures, some of whom had previously been favored by the Chinese government.

The Tibetan plateau, or substantial parts of it, was ruled by a Dalai Lama or his government from the mid-17th century onward. Chinese Communist forces entered Tibet in 1950 and defeated the Tibetan army. The region was formally incorporated into the People's Republic of China the following year. In 1959, Chinese troops suppressed a major uprising in Lhasa, reportedly killing tens of thousands of people. Tibet's spiritual and political leader – the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso – was forced to flee to India with some 80,000 supporters. During the next six years, China closed 97 percent of the region's Buddhist monasteries and defrocked about 100,000 monks and nuns. Most Tibetan territory was reorganized as the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) in 1965, but some eastern portions of the Tibetan plateau were included in separate Chinese provinces. During the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-76), nearly all of Tibet's estimated 6,200 monasteries were destroyed.

Under reforms introduced in 1980, limited religious practice was allowed again, and tourism was permitted in certain areas. Between 1987 and 1989, some 200 mostly peaceful demonstrations were mounted in Lhasa and surrounding areas. After the antigovernment protests escalated in March 1989, martial law was imposed; it was not lifted until May 1990.

In the 1990s, Beijing reinvigorated its efforts to control religious affairs and undermine the exiled Dalai Lama's authority. Six-year-old Gendun Choekyi Nyima was detained by the authorities in 1995, and his selection by the Dalai Lama as the 11th Panchen Lama was rejected; he subsequently disappeared from public view, and Beijing orchestrated the selection of another six-year-old boy as the Panchen Lama. Since one of the roles of

the Panchen Lama is to identify the reincarnated Dalai Lama, the move was widely seen as a bid to control the eventual selection of the 15th Dalai Lama.

China hosted envoys of the Dalai Lama in 2002, marking the first formal contact since 1993. The Tibetan government-in-exile sought to begin talks on genuine autonomy for Tibet, particularly to ensure the survival of its Buddhist culture, but no progress was made during subsequent rounds of dialogue, and the Chinese side said repeatedly that it would only discuss the return of the Dalai Lama and not broader conditions in Tibet. Meanwhile, other Tibetan exile groups increasingly demanded independence.

Under Zhang Qingli, who was appointed as secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the TAR in 2005, the authorities amplified their repressive policies. To protest religious restrictions and arrests, a group of 300 monks conducted a peaceful march in Lhasa on March 10, 2008, the 49th anniversary of the 1959 uprising; security agents suppressed the march. A riot erupted four days later, with some Tibetans attacking ethnic Chinese and burning Chinese- or Hui-owned businesses and government offices. The authorities reported that 19 people were killed, primarily in fires. Over 150 other protests, most of them reportedly peaceful, soon broke out in Tibetan-populated areas of the TAR and other provinces. The government responded with a massive deployment of armed forces and barred entry to foreign journalists and tourists. The Chinese authorities admitted to the death of three Tibetan protesters in Lhasa, but overseas Tibetan groups claimed that between 100 and 218 Tibetans were killed as security forces suppressed the demonstrations.

Although the region was accessible to tourists and journalists under special conditions for parts of 2009 and 2010, the high level of repression established in 2008 was generally maintained. Security measures were especially tight surrounding politically sensitive dates, such as the March anniversary of the 1959 uprising and 2008 events. As part of a "strike hard" campaign in March 2010, uniformed and plainclothes police rigorously checked residential permits in Lhasa, searched hotels and private homes, and detained approximately 400 Tibetans.

In April 2010, a powerful earthquake struck Tibetan areas of Qinghai Province, leaving over 2,000 people dead and 10,000 injured, according to official figures. Chinese security forces and civilian organizations assisted in rescue efforts, but the government ordered a large number of Tibetan monks who provided extensive help to locals, particularly in handling the bodies of the dead, to leave the area, and generally denied official recognition for their work. The government rejected the Dalai Lama's request to visit the region to console victims and perform burial rites.

Talks between the government and representatives of the Dalai Lama, which had last taken place in November 2008, resumed in 2010, but neither side reported any substantive progress. President Hu Jintao in January touted the government's existing, deeply unpopular religious and economic policies in Tibet, and both state-run media and "patriotic education" campaigns continued to vilify the Dalai Lama during the year. Beijing also pursued an increasingly aggressive and often effective policy of pressuring foreign leaders to refrain from meeting with the Dalai Lama and publicly express support for the official Chinese position on Tibet.

The government's economic development programs have disproportionately benefited ethnic Chinese and a select category of Tibetans, such as businessmen or government employees. Most other Tibetans cannot take advantage of economic development and related opportunities for higher education and employment. The development activity has also increased Chinese migration to the region and stoked Tibetan fears of cultural assimilation.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

The Chinese government rules Tibet through administration of the TAR and 12 Tibetan autonomous prefectures or counties in the nearby provinces of Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu, and Yunnan. Under the Chinese constitution, autonomous areas have the right to formulate their own regulations and implement national legislation in accordance with local conditions. In practice, decision-making power is concentrated in the hands of senior CCP officials; in the case of the TAR, Zhang Qingli, an ethnic Chinese, has served

as the region's CCP secretary since 2005. The few Tibetans who occupy senior positions serve mostly as figureheads, often echoing official statements that condemn the Dalai Lama and emphasize Beijing's role in developing Tibet's economy. In January 2010, Padma Thrinley (named "Pema Choling" in the Chinese press), a Tibetan, was appointed to replace Jampa Phuntsog as chairman of the TAR government.

Since 1960, the Dalai Lama has overseen the partial democratization of the government-in-exile in Dharamsala, India. Current institutions include a popularly elected Assembly of Tibetan People's Deputies, a Supreme Judicial Commission that adjudicates civil disputes, and – since 2001 – a directly elected prime minister. Buddhist scholar and lama Samdhong Rinpoche was chosen as prime minister in 2001 and reelected in 2006. The electorate consisted of Tibetans living in India, Nepal, the United States, and Europe; an estimated 100,000 are eligible to vote, but voter turnout was reportedly about 30 percent. Observers have noted that such arrangements fall short of a fully democratic system due to the absence of political parties and the ongoing role of the unelected Dalai Lama in decision making. In November 2010, the Dalai Lama hinted he may retire from his political responsibilities within a year, though a significant number in the exile community have resisted such proposals in the past.

Corruption is believed to be extensive in Tibet, as in the rest of China. Nevertheless, little information was available during the year on the scale of the problem or official measures to combat it. Tagyal, a Tibetan intellectual, was detained in April 2010 and held for six months after he signed an open letter warning residents not to donate earthquake relief funds through government channels due to corruption concerns.

Chinese authorities control the flow of information in Tibet, tightly restricting all media. International broadcasts are jammed. Increased internet penetration in urban areas has provided educated residents with more access to information, but the online restrictions and internet cafe surveillance in place across China are enforced even more stringently in the TAR. Security forces periodically confiscate communications devices from monasteries and private homes, and routinely monitor calls in and out of the region. Tibetans who transmit information abroad often suffer repercussions including long prison sentences, while some internet users have been arrested solely for accessing banned information. During 2010, the list of targets for detention expanded beyond the monastic and activist communities to include intellectuals and cultural figures, some of whom were previously favored by the Chinese government. In one prominent example, environmentalist and art dealer Karma Samdrup was sentenced in June to 15 years in prison on tomb-raiding charges. The case was widely seen as a trumped-up attempt to punish him for trying to free his brothers, who had been detained after starting an environmental protection group in their village and accusing local officials of poaching. According to overseas Tibetan groups, over 60 Tibetan writers, intellectuals, and cultural figures have been arrested since 2008, with some sentenced to lengthy prison terms. In December 2010, three Tibetan writers were sentenced to between three and four years in prison on charges of "inciting subversion," having published articles about the protests of March 2008 in a Tibetan-language magazine, *Shar Dugri*.

Authorities continued to restrict access to the TAR for foreign journalists in 2010, though restrictions in eastern Tibetan areas were not as tight. Foreign reporters were denied entry around politically sensitive dates and high-profile events like the April 2010 earthquake in Qinghai. During other periods, they were required to travel in groups and obtain prior official permission; Tibet was the only area of China to require such special authorization. Residents who assisted foreign journalists were reportedly harassed.

The authorities regularly suppress religious activities, particularly those seen as forms of political dissent or advocacy of Tibetan independence. Possession of Dalai Lama-related materials can lead to official harassment and punishment, though many Tibetans secretly possess such items. CCP members, government employees, and their family members are not allowed to practice Buddhism, at least within the TAR. The Religious Affairs Bureaus (RABs) control who can study religion in monasteries and nunneries; officials allow only men and women over the age of 18 to become monks and nuns, and they are required to sign a declaration rejecting Tibetan independence, expressing loyalty to the Chinese government, and denouncing the Dalai Lama. Regulations announced in 2007 require government approval for the religious recognition and education of reincarnated Buddhist

clergy. In March 2010, the Beijing-selected Panchen Lama joined the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, an advisory body closely linked to the CCP. The government manages the daily operations of monasteries through Democratic Management Committees (DMCs) and the RABs. Only monks and nuns deemed loyal to the CCP may lead DMCs, and laypeople have also been appointed to these committees.

Since March 2008, the authorities have intensified ideological education campaigns that had been conducted sporadically since 1996 and began to escalate after Zhang Qingli's appointment in 2005. These campaigns have occasionally been extended beyond monasteries to reach Tibet's general population, forcing students, civil servants, farmers, and merchants to recognize the CCP claim that China "liberated" Tibet and to denounce the Dalai Lama. Monks and nuns who refuse face expulsion from their religious institutions, while others risk loss of employment or arrest. In January 2010, the state-run Buddhist association announced measures to reregister monks and nuns, raising concerns that the process would be used to weed out disloyal clergy; little information was available about the implementation of the measures as of year's end.

University professors cannot lecture on certain topics, and many must attend political indoctrination sessions. The government restricts course materials to prevent the circulation of unofficial versions of Tibetan history.

Freedoms of assembly and association are severely restricted in practice. Independent trade unions and human rights groups are illegal, and even nonviolent protests are often harshly punished. In May 2010, a crackdown on protests in Xiahe County against the expansion of a cement factory left 15 Tibetans injured. In August, police in Baiyu County, Sichuan Province, opened fire on people protesting extensive gold-mining operations, killing at least one and reportedly wounding 30. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) focused on development and health care operate under highly restrictive agreements.

Despite the risks, Tibetans continue to seek avenues for peacefully expressing dissatisfaction with government policies. In the largest protests since 2008, hundreds of students in Qinghai demonstrated against the establishment of Mandarin as the primary language of instruction in October 2010. The authorities responded by increasing the security presence around high schools and colleges, but they reportedly did not use violence to punish demonstrators.

The judicial system in Tibet remains abysmal, and torture is reportedly widespread. Defendants lack access to meaningful legal representation. Trials are closed if state security is invoked, and sometimes even when no political crime is listed. Chinese lawyers who offer to defend Tibetan suspects have been harassed or disbarred. Security forces routinely engage in detention without due process. Periodic waves of arbitrary arrests continued in 2010, though not on the same scale as in 2008. Though precise figures were unavailable, a partial list of political prisoners published by the U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China included 824 Tibetans as of September 2010, the vast majority of whom were arrested on or after March 10, 2008.

Heightened restrictions on freedom of movement – including troop deployments, roadblocks, and passport restrictions – were employed sporadically during 2010, particularly surrounding politically sensitive anniversaries. Increased security efforts kept the number of Tibetans who successfully crossed the border into Nepal at around 800 during the year, compared with over 2,000 in 2007. In the first incident of its kind since 2003, the Nepalese authorities in June 2010 repatriated three Tibetan refugees to China, where they were immediately detained.

As members of an officially recognized minority group, Tibetans receive preferential treatment in university admission examinations, but this is often not enough to secure entrance. The dominant role of the Chinese language in education and employment limits opportunities for many Tibetans. Private-sector employers favor ethnic Chinese for many jobs, especially in urban areas. Tibetans reportedly find it more difficult than Chinese residents to obtain permits and loans to open businesses.

Since 2003, the authorities have intensified efforts to resettle rural Tibetans – either by force or with inducements – in permanent-housing areas with little economic infrastructure. According to official reports, over 300,000 farmers and herders have been

resettled since 2008, both within the TAR and in surrounding provinces. Many have reportedly tried to return to their previous lands, risking conflict with officials if they are discovered.

China's restrictive family-planning policies are more leniently enforced for Tibetans and other ethnic minorities than for ethnic Chinese. Officials limit urban Tibetans to having two children and encourage – but do not usually require – rural Tibetans to stop at three children.

** Countries are ranked on a scale of 1-7, with 1 representing the highest level of freedom and 7 representing the lowest level of freedom.*

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