

## Extra Feature Story

### **China Cracks Down on Violent Protests in Tibet**

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#### **Chinese paramilitary police have clamped down on anti-Chinese protesters in Tibet, the Himalayan region with a history of struggling against Chinese rule.**

Protests began March 10 in Lhasa, the region's ancient capital, coinciding with the anniversary of a failed Tibetan uprising against Chinese governance in 1959.

Buddhist monks calling for the release of other imprisoned monks were soon joined by Tibetans making political demands, including a call for independence from China.

#### **Violent protests**

The Tibetans rampaged through the city's old quarter, burning and looting Chinese shops and banks.

After the initial 24 hours of protests, during which police seemed unsure how to respond, authorities cracked down on demonstrators with tear gas and guns. Paramilitary police searched Tibetan neighborhoods and seized suspects. One foreigner saw four Tibetan men beaten so savagely that the police sprinkled white powder on the ground to cover the blood, the New York Times reported.

Chinese authorities said 18 "innocent" civilians and one police officer were killed, but Tibetans living outside of the region say the number is much higher and includes many monks and other Tibetan protesters.

China has accused the Dalai Lama, the exiled spiritual leader of the Tibetan Buddhists, of masterminding the protests.

The Dalai Lama denied involvement and urged his followers to use only non-violent means of protest or he would resign as their leader.

"Violence is almost suicide. Even if 1,000 Tibetans sacrifice their lives, it will not help," the Dalai Lama told reporters in Dharamshala, India, where he now lives as the head of the government-in-exile. "If things are getting out of control ... resignation is the only option."

The Dalai Lama has called on Chinese authorities to meet for talks to discuss the situation, but the government refused, saying any opposition to Chinese rule in Tibet must be eliminated.

"China must resolutely crush the conspiracy of sabotage and smash 'Tibet independence forces'," an editorial in the People's Daily, the communist government's newspaper printed late last week.

#### **Tibet**

Control of Tibet, which is located in the Himalayas in Central Asia, has been disputed since China's People's Liberation Army invaded in 1950. Although a peace agreement in 1951 granted China rule of the area, many Tibetans consider the deal to be illegitimate.

The current protests are the largest since a similar series of protests in the 1980s, when Chinese authorities also dealt harshly with protesters.

Since then, the Chinese government has worked to improve the area economically, infusing lots of money into the region.

### **Ethnic divisions**

In addition to financial aid, the Chinese government also encouraged a large migrant population of Han Chinese settlers to move to the region. The government hoped that by diluting the Tibetan population, they would prevent future calls for independence.

But many Tibetans resent the newcomers.

"Tibetans get the low-income and the hard-labor jobs," a Tibetan man told the Times. The Han, he added, "are all paid as technicians, even though some of them really don't know anything."

The Tibetans are also angry about government interference in Tibetan Buddhism, placing limits on nuns and monks and attempting to undermine the Dalai Lama's influence.

Conversely, many of the new Han migrants believe the Tibetans to be ungrateful, and anti-Tibetan sentiment is spreading in China.

"Our government has wasted our money in helping those white-eyed wolves," Wang Zhongyong, a Han shop manager whose shop was burned, told the Times. "Just think of how much we've invested in relief funds for monks and unemployed Tibetans," he added. "Is this what we deserve?"

### **The Olympics**

The protests come at a time of heightened international awareness in the run up to the summer Olympic Games in Beijing, China.

The journey of the Olympic torch from Greece to China began Monday in Ancient Olympia. The lighting was marred by small protests, including a Tibetan woman covered in red paint -- to symbolize the region's bloodshed -- who lay in the road in front of a runner carrying the torch.

The planned torch route is through Tibet and even to the top of Mount Everest along the border between Tibet and Nepal.

-- **Compiled by Annie Schleicher for NewsHour Extra**

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