

**"3/14", the new TAR party secretary, a "last ditch-struggle" and "the heads of monks and nuns".**

After a winter characterised by strong Tibetan religious fervour and demonstrations of loyalty to the Dalai Lama, Beijing has sent a firm warning that any further politically undesirable Buddhist activities will not be tolerated, and appealed to local authorities to remain vigilant of the *"international anti-China forces"* and the *"Dalai clique"*. As well as innumerable occurrences of fur burning, following the Dalai Lama's appeal not to use wildlife skins, the destruction on 14 March 2006 in Ganden Monastery of a statue of Dorje Shugden, was the climax of the season. Shugden is a deity whose cult the Dalai Lama discourages, but the Chinese authorities, for their own reasons, effectively encourage. It is this incident which was explicitly referred to during a conference of leading regional cadres of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) held on the 15 and 16 May 2006 by the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) Party Committee. Though unambiguous, Tibetan gestures of deference to the Dalai Lama are nothing new, the recent audacity of these gestures, and the resulting media attention, appears to be raising anxiety levels amongst the Chinese leadership. Such attention could not come at a worse time for the authorities, coming as it does just a few weeks before the opening of the Beijing-Lhasa railway when Tibet is likely to come under the full glare of the international media. Zhang Qingli, who headed the conference in his position as acting secretary of the TAR party committee, was promoted to full-fledged secretary of the TAR party committee on 30 May 2006, half a year after his arrival in the province. Zhang, replaces Yang Chuantang, and, like CCP secretary Hu Jintao, was a member of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Youth League. Zhang also served in Xinjiang, giving him valuable experience of working in "remote" and "troublesome" regions.

## **New details on the Ganden incident**

On 14 March 2006, monks in Ganden, the main seat of the dominant Gelugpa school of Tibetan Buddhism, reportedly destroyed a statue of Shugden, a protective deity linked to sectarian tendencies among the Gelugpa. Since 1996 particularly, the Dalai Lama has repeatedly expressed his disapproval of the Shugden cult. A fight between monks led to the intervention of the security forces and the arrest of several monks. The official Chinese news agency Xinhua appears to have been the first to report the incident, a few weeks after its actual occurrence, and presented it as *"a case of disrespect of religious freedom by the Dalai Lama"*.

Despite many, often contradictory rumours circulating, few details have leaked out about the incident. However, it can be confirmed with a high level of probability that 17 of the monks who had been arrested following the incident have been released after signing a statement acknowledging their 'crime' and agreeing to pay compensation for the *"damage done"*. This is likely to mean financing the reconstruction of the Shugden statue that they destroyed. Since most of the monks have no personal money, their families are said to have agreed to act as guarantors or to provide the funds themselves.

Although the incident occurred at Ganden monastery and primarily concerned Ganden monks, sources state that monks from two other monasteries were involved. One is said to be Rato Monastery. Rato is situated to the west of Lhasa, close to Nyethang and Chushul. Rato is Gelugpa, but originally adhered to the Kagyupa school of Tibetan Buddhism. The monastery has a reputation as a centre for Buddhist dialectics, and during the winter months, Rato is a meeting point for many monks from other monasteries who come to study the subject. There are contradictory reports as to which monastery was the third one involved in the disturbances.

While the incident might be linked to religious infatuation at the climax of the fur burning movement throughout Tibet, it also reflects a reaction to the continuous pressures monks from the Gelugpa school are subjected to in order to make them publicly take side against the Dalai Lama in the Shugden issue. In Autumn 2005, for example, the monastery of Labrang (Chin: Xiahe; Gansu province) received an unsolicited, proposal from Gangchen Rinpoche, a prominent supporter of the Shugden cult residing in Italy, to fund the construction of a new dormitory for the monks. The proposal was accompanied by generous personal donations to the monks. However, the funding proposal was conditional. In order for it to happen, the monastery would have had to agree to the construction of a Shugden shrine within the monastery, similar to the one in Ganden. Following a meeting of the monks, and despite the pressure exerted by the local authorities supervising religious affairs, the proposal was finally refused.

## **Regulations on religion to "enter the heads of monks and nuns".**

According to a report in the Tibet Daily of 17 May 2006, the meeting of 15 and 16 May was held in order *"to discuss and draw up a plan on the specific issue of fighting against splittism"*. However, rather than set up new policies, it emphasised the *"in-depth"* implementation of existing ones, the implementation of *"the spirit of the Central Party's instructions"* and the necessity *"to analyse correctly the current situation of Tibet"*, (meaning the TAR), in order to secure the development of its economy *"by leaps and bounds, and run the country in permanent safety"*. The events in Ganden, labelled by the authorities, *"The 3/14 Ganden incident"*, were extensively reported to the conference by the deputy secretary of the TAR Party Committee, Thubten Tsewang, one of the three politically highest ranking Tibetans currently in the TAR. The two others, Jampa Phuntsog (Chin: Qiangpa Puntso), chairman of TAR government, and Leqocog, chairman of the TAR Congress, *"passed on the Central [Party]'s instructions"*, and gave the concluding speech at the end of the conference.

The key speech however, was delivered by the Chinese Zhang Qingli, at that point still the acting Secretary of the TAR Party Committee. Zhang emphasised the perceived necessity to deepen *"understanding of the grim situation of Tibet's present stability"*. He also urged conference members to *"earnestly awaken and galvanize people into action"*. Zhang also pointed out *"due to special political and historical reasons"*, the TAR is the focus of China's fight against the *"Dalai clique and the hostile forces of the West"*. Those, said Zhang, have in recent times *"continuously created some incidents"* in the region, and *"carefully calculated plots to carry out their splitting activities"*. The *"hostile forces of the West"*, according to Zhang, have *"stirred up the Dalai clique to put up a last-ditch struggle"*. Zhang declared, without further elaborating, that *"host of facts"* show that the Dalai is the *"commander in chief of the splittist political clique plotting 'Tibet's independence'"*, a *"true instrument of the international anti-China forces"* and *"the main cause of social upheaval in Tibet"*.

Zhang Qingli reminded the conference that the struggle against the Dalai Lama is *"a struggle of life and death"*. He said *"patriotic education"* needs to be *"resolutely and vigorously carried out"* in the monasteries, and their *"democratic administration committees"*, (government organs based in most monasteries and through which the authorities exert internal control of religious institutions), *"overhauled and consolidated"*. It must be ensured that *"the power of authority (...) is firmly in the hands of religious personnel who are patriotic and love religion"*, that the 'Regulations on Religious Affairs' be implemented, and that the constitution and the law *"enter into the monasteries"* (...) and *"enter into the heads of the monks and nuns"*.

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