

# News Updates

Information and analysis of developments in Tibet



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## Tibetan Newspaper Sabotage; Lama's House Bombed

**A worker at Tibet's main newspaper sabotaged a recent edition of the paper to indicate discontent with Chinese policy over the Panchen Lama succession, according to unofficial sources in Lhasa.**

**The unknown newspaper worker altered a front page photograph in the Tibetan language edition of the *Tibet Daily* so that it made China's top leaders appear to be sitting behind a row of Tibetan lamas instead of in front of them.**

**The incident has emerged amid reports of violent opposition to China's decision last November to appoint its own protege as Panchen Lama, the second highest figure in the leading school of Tibetan Buddhism. A Hong Kong paper today claimed that a bomb had exploded outside the house of the main Tibetan lama who supported the Chinese authorities in the succession dispute.**

According to reports from the Tibetan capital no-one has so far been identified as responsible for the alteration in the newspaper photograph, which looks at first glance like a printing error. The newspaper, the official mouthpiece of the Communist Party in Tibet, usually carries the same photographs and text as the previous day's edition of *Xizang Ribao*, the Chinese-language edition of *Tibet Daily*.

The photograph, which had been published in its untampered form throughout China a day earlier, showed President Jiang Zemin, General Liu Huaqing and four other Party leaders sitting in front of three rows of senior Tibetan lamas and dignitaries. It had been printed prominently on the front page of the *People's Daily*, the English-language *China Daily*, and the *Xizang Ribao* on 13th November 1995,

and was intended to show the Party's control over the selection process for the reincarnation of the Panchen Lama.

But when it appeared the next day in the *Bod-jong Nyen-re Tsag-par*, the Tibetan-language edition of *Xizang Ribao*, the picture had been reduced and shifted to a corner of the front page, and the first row of lamas had been copied to the bottom of the picture, so that the Chinese leaders have one row of lamas in front of them as well as three rows behind.

The alteration to the photograph is crudely done, without any attempt to disguise the join where the front row has been added, probably so that the newspaper workers involved could argue that it was a production error. Photographers in London who were shown the newspaper said it was unlikely to have been done unintentionally and Tibetans contacted in Lhasa have described the photograph as a veiled criticism of Chinese policy.

The photograph shows the formal conclusion on 11th November last year of a much publicised meeting in Beijing, at which Tibetan lamas had been told by President Jiang to accelerate the process of choosing a new Panchen Lama. "Tibetan soul search nears end - President calls for early confirmation", said the *China Daily* in its front page headline over the original version of the photograph. The lama leading the search team had delayed the process for nearly 6 years in an attempt to get the Chinese to accept a child confirmed by the Dalai Lama in exile, and has been missing, believed imprisoned, for the last eight months.

The Tibetan lamas shown in the picture, described officially only as members of the "Leading Group for Locating the Reincarnation Child of the Panchen Lama", had been ordered to Beijing a week earlier and had agreed, apparently under strong Chinese pressure, not to recognise the child identified by the Dalai Lama as the correct reincarnation. A different child was selected under Chinese guidance two weeks later and enthroned in Shigatse on 8th December.

The 24 lamas and dignitaries in the picture are not identified by name in any of the newspapers and look grim and uncomfortable, squashed behind the President and General Liu, both of whom are smiling for the camera. A senior lama from southern Gansu, formerly part of the north-eastern Tibetan area known as Amdo, is known to have made a statement at the meeting protesting against the decision to reject the Dalai Lama's nominee.

Subversive comments rarely find their way into official Chinese papers, although in March 1991 a Chinese student in the US succeeded in getting the *People's Daily* to publish an apparently innocent poem called "Yuan Xiao" which, when read diagonally, called for Premier Li Peng to be replaced. The incident led to an enquiry into the newspaper by the Public Security Bureau.

## Reports of Bombings in Lhasa

Earlier today a Hong Kong based newspaper, the *Sunday Morning Post*, reported that a bomb had been detonated in Lhasa in an attack on a prominent Tibetan supporter of the Chinese position on the Panchen Lama issue. The incident is unconfirmed, but is the first indication of a dangerous escalation in political violence from attacks on property - which themselves are alleged to have killed two people - to attacks on people.

The newspaper said the bomb exploded at 10pm on 18th January at the house of Sengchen Lobsang Gyaltsen, a lama and political dignitary who led the pro-Chinese faction in the recent dispute over the Panchen Lama. Sengchen, who in July was made titular head of the Panchen Lama's monastery at Tashilhunpo, was away in Beijing at the time of the explosion, but one unnamed person was seriously injured, according to the *Post* article.

The reported attempt to kill Sengchen Rimpoche comes after up to five attempts at sabotage last year, all of which were directed not primarily at people but at Chinese installations in Lhasa in the run-up to the celebrations on 1st September last year of the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Tibet Autonomous Region. There is no evidence so far as to who carried out the alleged attacks, and none of the incidents have been confirmed or reported by the official media.

Three of the attempts were made in June and July on an obscure Chinese monument dedicated to road builders in the western suburbs of Lhasa. The first attempt was on 25th June, according to the US-based organisation International Campaign for Tibet, and failed to detonate. The two other bombs exploded on or around 2nd and 18th July, but caused only slight damage to the obelisk. "The only damage we could see was two tiles on the ground, and what might have been a scorch mark on one side of the monument", said a German tourist who was detained for a day on 3rd July for trying to take photographs of the monument, which includes an inscribed message from the former Chinese leader Hu Yaobang. Some Tibetan sources say a person was killed in the third attempt.

A well known Tibetan activist, Lobsang Choedrag, who has already served three prison sentences for political activities, was arrested on 5th or 7th July, reportedly on suspicion of involvement in the earlier explosion.

Two separate sabotage attempts in August involved more strategic objectives, one at the West Lhasa Suburban Power Station and another at a fuel dump, also on the western outskirts of Lhasa. The bomb in the fuel dump detonated, according to well-placed sources, and local sources say that it killed a Chinese driver who worked there.

The incidents follow warnings by the authorities in the official press in March 1995 of sabotage attempts by "forces working for national separatism ... with the support of some Western countries" in the run-up to the 30th anniversary celebrations. The last reported sabotage attempts in Tibet were when three bombs were set off during the 20th Anniversary celebrations in 1985, although none detonated effectively.

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