

Dr.
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DELHI, NAMA

IF THE HIMALAYAS BELONG TO THAT secret place in your being that can only be accessed through dreaming, then come to Tibet. On the roof of the world, on the other side of Mount Everest, dreaming comes as naturally as believing in Buddhism.

Indian monk Padmasambhava is believed to have travelled across the Karakoram and Himalayan ranges — in what is now Pakistan — in the eighth century AD. Arriving here in Tibet, he spread the word of the Sakya Muni.

More recently, Tibetan Buddhism's most revered leader, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, fled to India in 1959 after Mao Zedong's Red Army invaded — or if you prefer, liberated — Tibet, ousting the theocracy that had dominated it for centuries. For the last 45 years the Dalai Lama has been living in Dharamsala, a small town in the hills of Himachal Pradesh in India, creating a mini-Tibet with the help of scores of thousands of exiled Tibetans.

The point of this story is, that the time may now have come for the wheel, the 'kalachakra' of the Tibetan Buddhism, to come full circle. Over the next few weeks, special envoys of the Dalai Lama — his representative in Washington and Brussels, Lodi Gyari and Kelsang Gyalsen — will prepare to travel to China for their first substantive talks in ten years.

For a start, the impending discussions will take place in the wake of a "White Paper" on Tibet released by Beijing on May 23, which emphatically rejects the idea of a special deal with Tibet, on the lines of the "One country, two systems" compromise that Beijing has undertaken with Hong Kong and Macao. It points out that while the latter territories were once occupied by imperialist powers — Britain and Portugal — Tibet has been an integral part of China



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out for the Chinese as well as the exiled Tibetan community, if only because the Dalai Lama was getting older. He said Beijing should stop being "suspicious and afraid" of his popularity.

Indicating that the time to cut a deal was now, the Tibetan leader pointed out that younger Tibetans were already chafing at the Dalai Lama's restraining presence. "We are absolutely sure that the Tibet issue would be resolved within the lifetime of the Dalai Lama. No one would dare despoil his Middle Path approach to non-violence. After him, the Tibetan leadership cannot give any assurance," Rimpoché said.

According to one view, it might be better for Beijing to come to terms with the Dalai Lama while he still wields influence across the Tibetan diaspora. On the other hand, once the Dalai Lama is dead, the Chinese aver, Tibetan Buddhism will be split into so many parts that it might never have a leader as strong and powerful as him.

The battle for the Tibetan mind, within China and without, is in full flow.

Meanwhile, Washington, a key player in the China-Tibet tangle, encouraged both sides in a State Department report on July 10 to "hold without preconditions substantive discussions aimed at a resolution of differences at an early date..." (which) could lead to a negotiated settlement on questions regarding Tibet."

Analysis point out that in the space of 45 years, since the Dalai Lama fled Tibet to seek refuge in India, new refugees from Tibet have continued to stream in, day after day, into Dharamsala. As the carefully nurtured dream of a "Free Tibet" receded behind the Dhaulagiri ranges, the Dalai Lama has kept alive the notion of an ancient historical culture. He called it the "Middle Path" approach. The idea of inde-

pendence for Tibet would be abandoned, in exchange for Tibetans being allowed to keep their educational, cultural and religious customs and traditions.

This is how analysts see the Tibetan dilemma. On one hand, the big powers have abandoned all pretence to the inviolability of human rights and scrambled to trade with a rising China. India is engaged in direct border talks with Beijing. It does not take a rocket scientist to see that the Tibetans realise it was best to directly cut a deal with the Chinese.

In Lhasa, the Dalai Lama's invisible presence is all over the place. The reason it is "invisible" is because the Chinese government has directed that no photo or likeness of the spiritual leader be put up in any temple or monastery in Tibet. Indeed, Tibetans have been warned that they will be punished if they are found carrying his photo.

And yet, Lhasa's Tibetans will openly talk about the omnipresence of the Dalai Lama. "If every Tibetan was allowed a passport, they will surely leave the place and escape to Dharamsala, where the Dalai Lama lives," one Tibetan woman who runs a shop in the vicinity of the holy Jokhang monastery told me.

For the moment, though, life must go on as it has for the last 45 years, since the Chinese "peacefully liberated" Tibet and introduced the "democratic reform". The jargon is certainly a Tibetan take on socialism with Chinese characteristics — and few really believe it. On the other hand, as most Tibetans will readily agree, if you say something often enough, in time it must become true.

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