

China blocks 'underage' Tibetan monks from returning to monasteries

Novices in Qinghai province told to give up their robes after returning home for Lunar New Year



Authorities in northwestern China's Qinghai province are blocking young Tibetan monks visiting home for the Lunar New Year from returning to their monasteries, demanding instead that they give up their robes and attend government schools, sources said.

Tibetan prayer flags (Picture: YANGCHAO / Shutterstock)

The move by officials in the Tsonub (in Chinese, Haixi) Mongol and Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture's Tulan (Dulan) and Terlenkha (Delingha) counties follows similar campaigns last year in Tibet aimed at restricting the size of Tibetan monasteries, often seen as centers of resistance to Beijing's rule.

To issue their orders, county authorities took advantage of the monks' annual visit to their family homes to observe Losar, or Lunar New Year, celebrations, which began last week, a local source told RFA's Tibetan Service.

"On February 23, four days after the first day of the new year, government officials held meetings with parents in Tulan and Terlenkha counties and told them that young monks now studying in distant monasteries will not be allowed to return there," RFA's source said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

“Instead, they must attend local schools as lay students when the holidays end,” he said.

The move appears especially to target monks from rural nomadic areas who are under 19 years of age, RFA’s source said.

Tibetan language classes organized for students who have already graduated from local schools have now also been banned, he said.?? ??

“Parents have regularly complained that Tibetan language is not being taught in the schools,” a second source said, also speaking to RFA on condition of anonymity.

“To compensate for this, an educated local Tibetan had organized special classes to teach the language, but these have now been shut down,” he said. “So parents are asking that Tibetan language classes be included in the curriculum of local schools.”

The young monks now forbidden to return to their monasteries had chosen on their own to study there, one local source said.

“Now the government is forcing them to revert to lay status and to attend local schools without Tibetan language classes in their curriculum.”

“This confuses us as parents and places us in a dilemma,” he said.

“If we disobey the government’s directive, this could create problems for us. And if we comply, this could hurt the future of our children.”

The new clampdown in Tsonub prefecture echoes moves last year in Driru (Biru) county in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), where authorities in October ordered that monks aged 12 and under be

expelled from their monasteries and returned to family homes.

Tibetans in Driru, a county considered “politically unstable” by Beijing, have long resisted forced displays of loyalty to Beijing, which has imposed tight restrictions in the area.

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