

FREE TIBET

Issue 83 June 2019 | issn 1360-4864

www.freetibet.org



པར་འདི་ནི་ཡེ་ཤུ་ཆེན་མོ་གླུ་ཐེང་།། དགེ་འདུན་ཚོས་ཀྱི་ཉི་མ་མཚོག་གི་ཚན་རྩལ་དབྱེད་ཐིམ་པར་རིས་ཡིན། དངོས་པར་མིན། ཕྱི་ལོ་ ༢༠༡༩ ཕྱི་ཟླ་ ༤

Forensic artist's impression of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, Tibet's 11th Panchen Lama. April 2019.

free
TIBET

• Escape to freedom • Face to face with the Panchen Lama • A picture of repression •

Dear friends...

In the last magazine I wrote about this year being the 60th anniversary of the 1959 uprising. This issue delves a little deeper into the events of 1959 and covers the Dalai Lama's journey into exile. We also cover the Panchen Lama's 30th birthday and showcase the incredible age progression image which has been produced to show how he might look today.

By the time this magazine goes to print, another significant date will have passed: 4 June – the 30th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre. This 4 June, we will join Tibetans, along with Chinese, Uyghurs, and supporters of many different nationalities outside the Chinese Embassy in London to remember the sacrifices made in Tiananmen Square in the name of human rights.

We are often asked what we can achieve against opposition as implacable as the Chinese government. However, in this area, our victory is guaranteed. I recently read an article which described "Beijing's Great Forgetting" and the effort which China has put into erasing the evidence and memory of inconvenient facts, manipulating history both distant and recent. The article went on to describe how the authorities had responded to Chinese citizens who dared to carry out "any public act of remembering".

This is why anniversaries are so important. For people living under China's control, remembering the past accurately is, in itself, an act of defiance and resistance – and a dangerous one at that. Tibet Watch is dedicated to recording the truth of events in Tibet and Free Tibet works hard to ensure that information reaches as many people (and governments and institutions) as possible. But we all have a role to play in the act of remembering. And, as long as we do, "Beijing's Great Forgetting" will fail.

With best wishes



Eleanor Byrne-Rosengren, Free Tibet Director.



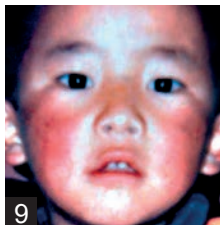
Contents



3 An interview with Chemi Lhamo
Student leader speaks out against online threats.

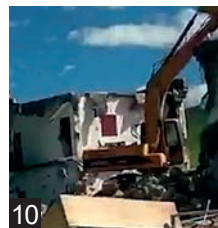
4 Escape to freedom
How the Dalai Lama's flight from Tibet started the struggle for freedom.

6 Campaigns update
Google campaign gets results.



7 Tibetan Children's Village Handicrafts
The story behind one of our merchandise suppliers.

9 Face to face with the Panchen Lama
Gedhun Choekyi Nyima has been missing for 24 years.



10 News update
Tibetan torture survivor dies after detention; Tibetan prisoners develop severe health conditions; Residents ordered to demolish their own homes; Restrictions on Tibetan festivals and key anniversaries; Tibetans imprisoned following prayers for Panchen Lama.



12 A picture of repression
The CCP's attempts to erase the Dalai Lama from Tibet.

13 Pah-La
Theatre review.

14 Letters



28 Charles Square,
London, N1 6HT
T: 020 7324 4605
F: 020 7324 4606
E: mail@freetibet.org
W: www.freetibet.org

Our vision is a free Tibet in which Tibetans are able to determine their own future and the human rights of all are respected.

Free Tibet campaigns for an end to China's occupation of Tibet and for international recognition of Tibetans' right to freedom. We mobilise active support for the Tibetan cause, champion human rights and challenge those whose actions help sustain the occupation.

Editor: John Jones
Design: Catherine Quine
Print and mailing: Intygra

Front cover photo: Forensic artist's impression of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, Tibet's 11th Panchen Lama. April 2019. Tim Widden Forensic Art.



An interview with Chemi Lhamo

In February this year Canadian-Tibetan Chemi Lhamo made headlines in Canada when she was elected president of the University of Toronto Scarborough Campus Student Union. The election was met with a wave of online abuse and death threats from seemingly independent Chinese students. On 8 February, days before her victory was announced, an online petition was launched which gained over 10,000 signatures demanding that she be stopped from becoming president. It said that she was “deep into” a group called Free Tibet and “irrational” about it. Online comments were posted that expressed hopes that she would die or be raped. A consultant with the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) told Free Tibet he believes the online abuse was coordinated by Chinese diplomats in the country. Chemi Lhamo recently spoke to Free Tibet about the experience.

Free Tibet: I guess this was really unexpected and it's not something you saw coming?

Chemi Lhamo: Definitely not on campus. For me it truly feels like my two worlds have collided finally. I have always been part of Tibetan organising spaces and involved in the Tibetan community. And this type of bullying tactics and them interfering has always been seen in different spaces, like... Confucius Institutes and Chinese entities trying to tap the phones... So I've grown up in those kind of spaces, but for that to happen here on campus was very unexpected. But when it did come about I wasn't too surprised, I have to say.

Why do you think you were attacked?

My assumption is that the Chinese government or the Chinese embassy is involved. But because I do not have any proof, I must say that it's my assumption. Their bullying tactics work for Tibetans and other oppressed groups inside of Tibet and inside of China. So they think that it's also possible here in Canada. But of course it's not going to [work here]. I think it's solely based on my Tibetan identity. It's just the idea that I'm Tibetan and involved in Tibetan organising spaces. It's a threat to them to see that there is someone Tibetan who will be representing a very prestigious university... One of the three campuses being led by a Tibetan – I guess it scared them. I hope it did!

Have you been afraid... Are you afraid now? What are your feelings about the situation?

I must say because the police investigation has started and all these other entities are involved... I'm not just casually or freely running around campus anymore as

I used to. I now walk around with a walkie talkie....I'm a psychology and neuroscience student so maybe it's just my head playing with me, but now when I see students who causally look at me and then look away... I just have my guard up because some of the comments online said that “when I see you I'm going to punch you”. So, that worries me sometimes. Apart from that I feel great. The love and support that has been flowing in from all parts of the world has been making me feel like I have a bulletproof vest.

What's your involvement in the Free Tibet cause, and what do you want to see happen in Tibet?

There's a saying that any Tibetan born after 1959 is born an activist so I don't think we have a choice to ever let go of the movement. We all have the responsibility and duty to make sure the voices inside of Tibet are always being amplified and respected and heard by the rest of the world. That's the duty that I feel I have as a Tibetan who was born in exile and grew up in exile... Ultimately what I want...in terms of my stance is just basic human rights. It's a quality of life that I think every human deserves, not just in Tibet but everywhere in the world.



Chemi Lhamo at a protest in Toronto

Escape to freedom

How the Dalai Lama's flight from Tibet started an international struggle for freedom.

Lhasa, 17 March 1959. The Tibetan uprising against the Chinese occupation has been underway for a week and the response has become progressively more bloody and brutal. What began on 10 March as a peaceful demonstration by thousands of Tibetans to protect the Dalai Lama has turned into an assault on the Tibetan capital by Chinese soldiers who are under orders to crush the protests and retake the city. The 23-year-old Dalai Lama is in his residence, the Norbulingka, where he is overseeing a cabinet meeting. Then the silence is shattered by a huge explosion. Scarcely a hundred yards away from the Norbulingka, an artillery shell crashes into the ground. The Dalai Lama and his advisers barely have time to understand what has happened before a second explosion is heard outside.

To those inside the Norbulingka, the missiles appear to be a sign that the Chinese People's Liberation Army has turned its fire on the Dalai Lama and that it is no longer safe for him to stay. Plans have already been drawn up for the Dalai Lama to be taken to a place of safety, but there is no indication that they would be set in motion today. At the Dalai Lama's insistence, the Nechung Oracle is consulted. Against the backdrop of ritual horns and drums, the Oracle slips into a trance and then utters the decisive and pivotal words: "Go! Go tonight!"

The first group to escape the palace, the Dalai Lama's mother, sister and two brothers, slip out at 9:30 pm that night, transported to a ferry in a covered truck, beyond the Chinese army patrols. Half an hour later, the Dalai Lama walks out of the Norbulingka, disguised as a Chinese soldier with a scarf across his face. A horse is waiting to carry him to the ferry. Once they cross the river, the Dalai Lama and his entourage, accompanied by mules carrying a month's worth of supplies, set off on their journey out of Tibet...

The plan that was thrown together that day might just have saved the Dalai Lama's life. Back in Lhasa, it took the Chinese army several

days to realise that they had been outwitted. Large swathes of the city were now in ruins, the gates to the Norbulingka had been blown open and both the Dalai Lama's residence and the Jokhang Temple had been seized by soldiers. There was also the death toll, an often forgotten aspect of the uprising. Tens of thousands of Tibetans were estimated to have lost their lives, while the men of fighting age who did survive were forcibly relocated. But despite the PLA turning the city upside down, the Dalai Lama was nowhere to be found.

By this time, he and his entourage were miles away, cautiously making their way through the Himalayas towards the Indian border on a journey that would take 14 days. The inhospitable conditions were a constant threat, as was the possibility of discovery by the thousands of troops deployed to scour the mountain passes, or by the planes flying overhead. None of the PLA's efforts succeeded. Rumours at the time described "mist and low clouds conjured up by the prayers of Buddhist holy men" shielding them from the view of the Chinese planes.

Deep in the Himalayas, the Dalai Lama was hidden from the army, but also from the Tibetan public, many of whom feared that he had been killed during the military crackdown. They would have to wait until he crossed the border to learn that those rumours were untrue. After news finally spread about the Dalai Lama's escape, some 80,000 Tibetans followed the same route across the mountains.

On 31 March, the Dalai Lama crossed the Indian border, where he was escorted by Indian guards to the town of Bomdila. Having finally reached safety, he sent a message. On 3 April, Jawaharlal Nehru, the Indian Prime Minister, announced that India had granted asylum to the Dalai Lama. Nehru also granted the new arrivals from Tibet permission to establish a community in exile in the hill station of Dharamsala.

Dharamsala today is a testament to the Dalai Lama's commitment to freedom and his desire

Background:
The Dalai Lama
and his entourage,
travelling through the
Himalayas in 1959.

The Dalai Lama escapes to India on horseback in 1959.



BOTH IMAGES: MTMEMORIAL.ORG

to preserve Tibet's culture. It is home to over 50,000 Tibetans, including some of those who followed him into exile. It is also the base of the Central Tibetan Administration, an elected Tibetan parliament-in-exile, brought about under the guidance of the Dalai Lama and inspired by his wish to see Tibet become a modern democracy. In 1970, he opened the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives. Housing over 80,000 manuscripts, the library has, to this day, preserved Tibet's history and culture even as the Chinese Communist Party across the border seeks to eradicate it. The Dalai Lama has also used his freedom and his status to become a charismatic and exhaustively vocal advocate for Tibet, bringing countless new supporters to the Tibetan cause.

The events of 1959 are often described in the media as a "failed uprising". Yet while it is true that the protests were crushed and that the occupation persists decades later, the hopes for a free Tibet remain undimmed. The importance of the Dalai Lama's irrepressible dedication to this cause cannot be underestimated. The story of his escape, 60 years ago, is integral to the Tibet movement, which works to this day to ensure that Tibet will one day be free.



A multimedia timeline of the events of 1959, including the story of the Dalai Lama's escape, can be found on our website: freetibet.org/tibetan-uprising-1959



The Dalai Lama on the cover of Time magazine, 1959 ...and again, 60 years later.



Campaigns update...

Google campaign gets results

We have pushed ahead with our campaign calling on Google to scrap its controversial plans to launch a search engine in China. These secret plans, codenamed 'Dragonfly', are a source of concern for Tibetans and Tibet supporters because the search engine would comply with Beijing's notoriously repressive censorship laws and its increasingly tight regime of Internet surveillance.

In January, we carried out an international day of action, with protests at Google offices around the world, including some constructive chats with Google employees, many of whom are concerned by the project. We also received widespread media coverage and online actions have been taken by thousands of people.

After pressure from Tibet groups, governments and staff inside the company, Google bosses stated that they would be moving engineers off Project Dragonfly and no longer had plans to launch it. However, some employees, who have been responsible for leaking information about the search engine, are sceptical. One of them is software engineer Colin McMillen, who worked at Google for nine years before quitting the company in early February due to concerns over Dragonfly. Shortly before leaving, McMillen said Google bosses had gone silent on the project, but that he and his colleagues had "strong indications that something is still happening".

We are determined to find out the truth and make sure that these plans are shut down.



Free Tibet and Tibet Society protest outside Google's London office in January.

At the time that this magazine went to print, we were busy working with our partners to put Dragonfly on the agenda at Google's shareholder meeting in mid-June, further demonstrations are planned and we are working with former members of Google staff and tech experts to build a strong coalition to stand up for Internet freedom and human rights.

Action

You can join in with our campaign by visiting our website: freetibet.org/take-action

Can you help...?

If it goes ahead, Dragonfly would see Google work together with authorities to actively censor itself. This cannot be allowed to happen.

Already subject to some of the worst repression on Earth, Tibet remains physically sealed off from the outside world. Now, Google are looking to help the Chinese authorities ensure Tibetans will be digitally isolated too, unable to learn about their history or about what is happening elsewhere in the country.

Please donate today to help ensure that Dragonfly does not land in Tibet. Visit freetibet.org/dragonfly, or use the form supplied with this magazine.



Stop Google Censorship





Tibetan Children's Village Handicrafts

Something we really enjoy at Free Tibet is bringing you exciting products from our shop, which we meticulously source from the highest quality suppliers. We are proud of all our partners, but we want to take the opportunity to tell you about one in particular: Tibetan Children's Village (TCV) Handicrafts.

TCV Handicrafts is a non-profit organisation based in Dharamsala, north India. Their purpose is to preserve Tibetan arts and crafts, and provide a solid education to recent Tibetan refugees, young and old, who have joined their exiled community. TCV realised early on that it was not only Tibetan children who needed training and guidance – many who were too old for school were arriving from Tibet with no education. There was an overwhelming need to provide budding artists and craftspeople in exile with the training required to secure gainful employment in India.

Thus, in 1974, TCV Handicrafts was established. TCV has developed six different vocational training courses designed to equip Tibetan refugees with skills they can utilise to build a new life in their new community. Tibetan refugees attending TCV courses can learn tailoring, woodcarving, bakery, screen printing, thangka painting and carpet weaving. All the items produced from these courses are available to buy and the proceeds are donated directly to their educational branch, TCV Schools.

The first TCV school was founded in 1960 after the Dalai Lama recognised the grave circumstances in which Tibetan refugee children were living. Realising that the children were the future of Tibet, TCV Schools was established to take care of orphans and other recent young arrivals from Tibet. TCV nurtures and cares for the children, ensuring they are

surrounded by a strong family community and grow up understanding the values of Tibetan culture, beliefs and identity. Their work for young Tibetans in exile is invaluable. They have continued to grow over the years and now proudly take care of over 18,000 children by providing them with nurseries, day schools, residential schools and summer camps.

TCV depends almost entirely on the support of friends and donors to be able to carry out their vital work. This is why we are so happy to stock products created by the skilled members of TCV Handicrafts which contribute to the maintenance of these two organisations and the preservation of Tibetan heritage.

In the Free Tibet shop, our Gata Rucksacks and Free Tibet Friendship Bracelets are made by the artists and craftspeople of TCV Handicrafts. Over the years TCV have produced hundreds of highly skilled workers, many of whom have gone on to serve as master craftspeople in handicraft centres around India, a true reflection of the outstanding quality of the TCV organisations.

We absolutely love these products and the humbling story behind them, and we think you will too. You can see these products and more in the accompanying catalogue.

The story behind one of our merchandise suppliers



Face to face with the Panchen Lama

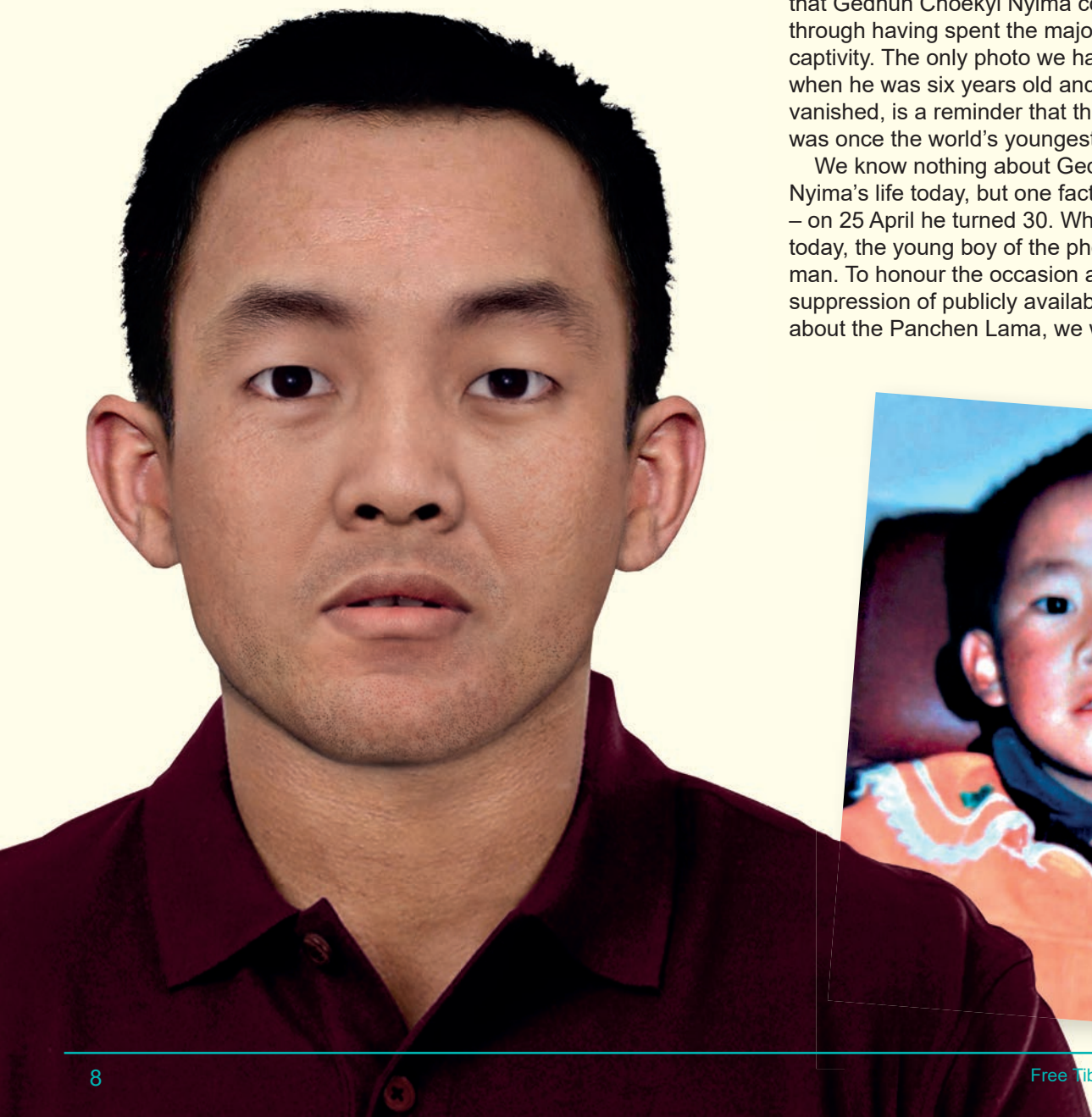
Once the world's youngest political prisoner, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima has been missing for 24 years.

On 17 May 1995, three days after being chosen by the Dalai Lama as the second highest spiritual leader in Tibetan Buddhism, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the 11th Panchen Lama, went missing. Since then there has been barely any information about his location or well-being, with Chinese authorities

only prepared to insist that he is living a “normal life” and “does not wish to be disturbed.” For years, Free Tibet and other Tibet groups have demanded that they prove it.

For Tibetans, the pain is twofold; there is immense sadness that one of their most important spiritual leaders has been taken from them and also a recognition of the personal pain that Gedhun Choekyi Nyima could be going through having spent the majority of his life in captivity. The only photo we have of him, taken when he was six years old and just before he vanished, is a reminder that the Panchen Lama was once the world's youngest political prisoner.

We know nothing about Gedhun Choekyi Nyima's life today, but one fact is indisputable – on 25 April he turned 30. Wherever he is today, the young boy of the photo is now a man. To honour the occasion and highlight the suppression of publicly available information about the Panchen Lama, we worked with



our friends at the International Tibet Network and Tim Widden, a London-based forensic artist, to construct an age progression image of the Panchen Lama. Trained in Forensic Art and Facial Identification, Tim has worked with several police services and missing persons organisations to painstakingly create images of how people who disappeared years ago might look today. His goal is to seek justice for victims of crime and their families. As he put it when he spoke to us, “everyone missing deserves to have a regular age progression to keep their case alive in the eyes of the world.”

For the Panchen Lama, Tim researched the changes that would be observed in Tibetan people’s faces as they aged, focusing specifically on Gedhun Choekyi Nyima’s native region of Tibet, Lhari County. While he acknowledges that no age progression image will ever be one hundred percent accurate, it is possible to pinpoint facial features and proportions and produce a credible projection.

When Tim showed us the final image, we were thrilled. The face looked like that of an adult Tibetan man with certain facial features, such as Gedhun Choekyi Nyima’s ears and eyes, incorporated in a way that felt natural and believable. There was a feeling that the man in the picture really could be out there in the world somewhere.

This was only the beginning of an exciting journey that would culminate with the Panchen Lama’s face appearing on prime time television. The One Show, the BBC’s daily magazine and chat show, expressed an interest in the new image. They did not just want to talk about it on television, they wanted to unveil it to their millions of viewers on the week of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima’s 30th birthday. But first, they wanted to capture the reaction of members of the Tibetan community in the UK.

And so, one evening in early February, staff from Free Tibet, Tibetans and Tibet supporters excitedly gathered in the Jamyang Buddhist Centre for a private first look at the image. We handed over our phones to make sure that there were no photos before the April broadcast and took our seats in front of a large print-out of the image, covered with cloth. The BBC film crew were ready for the dramatic moment as our Director, Eleanor, removed the cloth and revealed the artist’s impression of the Panchen Lama as a 30 year old man. The faces among



the audience showed a mix of wide-eyed wonder, silent reflection and tears. Tibetans came forward to examine the face and place white khata scarves around it to honour the missing Panchen Lama. It felt like a reunion between Tibetans and their captive religious leader.

The segment went public on 23 April. Tim sat on the One Show sofa for a live interview with the hosts in which he explained the significance of his age progression image. Outside BBC Broadcasting House, Tibetans gathered with flags and messages thanking the BBC. Around the world, Tibetans embraced the new image, with support coming from Tibet’s government in exile, the Central Tibetan Administration, and the residents of the Tashi Lhunpo Monastery, historically the seat of the Panchen Lama.

Cut off from the world, Tibet often struggles to make the news. Yet here it was, being talked about on one of the BBC’s most popular programmes and seen by millions of people. This renewed attention can only help spread awareness of the Panchen Lama’s case. We have launched a new campaign, in collaboration with a broad network of Tibet organisations, to make sure that this momentum can endure, in the hope that one day soon Tibetans can once again see the real face of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima – and that Gedhun Choekyi Nyima himself can once again see real freedom.

Above: The new Panchen Lama portrait on the BBC One Show; Free Tibet and the Tibetan Community gather outside Broadcasting House.

Left: Forensic artist’s impression of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, April 2019; and as a boy in 1995.

News update...

Tibetan torture survivor dies after detention

Former Tibetan political detainee and torture survivor Pema Wangchen passed away in April this year.

He was arrested in April 2016, two months after a video appeared online of him singing the Tibetan national anthem in his native Ogzang Township in eastern Tibet. The video brought him to the attention of the local police, who detained him without any explanation. He spent a month in police custody where he was beaten and tortured before being released due to his deteriorating health.

Following his release, Pema Wangchen continued to suffer from poor health. His condition deteriorated earlier this year, leading to him being taken to a local hospital in April 2019. Doctors there were unable to determine his illness, so he was taken to a hospital in Chengdu, where he died days later.

Pema Wangchen was in his early thirties. He is survived by his three children, his mother and father and his brother, Palden Trinley, himself a former political prisoner.



Pema Wangchen.

Tibetan prisoners develop severe health conditions

We have received worrying news that two Tibetan political prisoners arrested for their role in the 2008 uprising have developed “severe” health conditions as a result of forced labour and torture.

In March, Free Tibet’s research partner, Tibet Watch, learned that Buddhist monk and activist Thapkey Gyatso was in a condition of “half paralysis” with both of his eyes damaged. He is serving a fifteen-year prison term in Dingxi Prison, western China, having been arrested in March 2009.

Following one interrogation session in which he spat at a member of prison staff, he was badly beaten and left partially paralysed. He spent a long period of 2018 in Dingxi Prison Medical Centre.

Another Tibetan monk, Tsultrim Gyatso, who is serving a life sentence in Tainshui Prison, is suffering from a damaged eye. Tainshui Prison is known as a site where Chinese Communist Party authorities subject prisoners to heavy labour. Sources have also reported that Tsultrim Gyatso was badly beaten during an interrogation session and that his health has suffered from a combination of forced labour, beatings and poor living conditions in the prison. He was sentenced to life in prison for leading protests in 2008 and, in 2017, had to be transferred from prison to a hospital in Lanzhou City for an operation.



Thapkey Gyatso.

Residents ordered to demolish their own homes

In spring, authorities in Tawu County in eastern Tibet ordered Tibetans to demolish any “big houses” they own and relocate to new places assigned to them by the government. Tibetans were also barred from building any new “big and grand” homes.

Those residents who demolished their homes were given little in the way of compensation. Some residents demolished their own houses before the arrival of the government to save their building materials and furniture which government workers have destroyed in previous rounds of demolitions. Tibet Watch found that in some cases, where large homes belonging to Tibetans were not forcefully destroyed, the local government instead collected large sums of money from the owners.



A Tibetan building is torn down near Lake Qinghai.

Restrictions on Tibetan festivals and key anniversaries

The Tibet Autonomous Region was closed to outside visitors and security across the whole of Tibet was increased in March. The restrictions have become an annual occurrence, timed to take place during the 15-day Losar (Tibetan New Year) festivities and around 10 March, the anniversary of the 1959 Tibetan uprising.

Tibetans in numerous counties were subject to a range of restrictions. Government employees were denied holiday for Losar and were also prohibited from visiting monasteries during this period.

In Markham and Chamdo, police and military personnel were stationed on the streets. In the capital, Lhasa, authorities carried out random checks on hotels and guest houses, while almost a hundred police patrols moved through the city during the day and night of 10 March. Tibetan Buddhist pilgrims visiting Lhasa over the period came under particular scrutiny and were questioned about the purpose of their visit and length of their stay. Some Tibetans reportedly moved away from Lhasa during the anniversary period to avoid being wrongly accused of criminal activity.

Local government authorities in eastern Tibetan counties ordered that WeChat and other communications be closely monitored. In Ngaba, a region that has seen widespread and persistent resistance, Jonang Monastery was put under heavy surveillance and the sale of petrol was banned in its vicinity as a measure to prevent self-immolation protests. Kumbum Monastery, famed for the sculptures that its residents make out of yak butter during the Losar period, was also the scene of massive police and military deployments.



Chinese police doing a spot security check in Tibet. March 2019.

Tibetans imprisoned following prayers for Panchen Lama

Two Tibetans were imprisoned in Sershul County in eastern Tibet in early May following a gathering by locals to mark the Panchen Lama's 30th birthday.

In late April, a 20-year-old man named Wangchen gathered with three friends on a hill near to Sershul Monastery, where they carried out rituals and prayers for the missing Panchen Lama. The group called for the release of the Panchen Lama, who has been missing since 1995, and for him and the exiled Dalai Lama to one day be reunited in Tibet.

As the group returned home they were arrested. Wangchen and two others, Lobsanga and Youten were subsequently detained. Their families were prevented from seeing them or even discussing the arrests with others. When Wangchen's aunt, Dolkar, shared the news of his arrest, she too was charged.

On 8 May, Wangchen was found guilty of leading "a conspicuous protest in public against the law of the land" and sentenced to four and a half years in prison. Dolkar was found guilty of "causing social instability" by disclosing information of the arrest and was sentenced to one year and three months in prison. Youten and Lobsang were released, although both were ordered to pay fines of 15,000 yuan and undergo political re-education.



Dolkar and Wangchen.

Action

Dolkar and Wangchen's current whereabouts are unknown. We have launched a campaign calling for their release, which you can find at: freetibet.org/take-action-dolkar-and-wangchen. You can also phone us for materials to help you send a letter to the Chinese authorities by post.



L-R: Government officials visit two sisters who pledged loyalty to the Chinese state in a letter to Xi Jinping; Thangka depicting President Xi as part of the Hundred Thangkas Project.

A picture of repression

The CCP's attempts to erase the Dalai Lama from Tibet.

Nothing has defined Tibet's unique identity, nor Tibetans' resistance to the occupation, more than Tibetan Buddhism. For decades, the bravery of Tibet's monks and nuns and the international advocacy of the Dalai Lama have been a thorn in the side of the ruling Chinese Communist Party. The Party demands loyalty and, over the years, has tried and repeatedly failed to force Tibetan Buddhists into obedience and even stamp their religion out altogether.

A key part of this crackdown is a policy of trying to discredit or marginalise Tibetan Buddhist leaders. The story of the Panchen Lama, abducted as a young boy and missing for 24 years, can be found earlier in this magazine, while readers are likely to be familiar with the CCP's fierce attacks on the Dalai Lama. The most prominent and respected representative of Tibetan Buddhism has been labelled a "terrorist", been likened to Saddam Hussein and been accused of "making a mockery" of Buddhism by various Chinese authorities. Tibetans who express support for him have been arrested and his portrait has been banned in monasteries, public places like shops and the home.

This year, the CCP took its efforts to erase the Dalai Lama from Tibet to another level. In January, local authorities began to order Tibetans to put shrines to Xi Jinping and other Communist Party leaders inside their homes. Traditional worship was turned on its head with authorities telling Tibetans to prostrate themselves in front of the images, in an act of deference and respect that would usually only

be reserved for Buddhist figures. Authorities even threatened to withdraw aid from those Tibetans dependent on government subsidies if they failed to replace the images of holy Lamas. The CCP may be avowedly atheist but, in occupied Tibet, it seems that Party leaders must be treated as deities.

These attacks on Tibetans' religious freedom go right to the top. For many years the CCP has sought to take control over religion in Tibet, but there has been a notable spike in these efforts since October 2017. This was when Xi Jinping, in his opening address to the 19th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, asserted that Chinese culture had to be revitalised, that "erroneous" ideologies had to be rejected and that religion would have to be "Chinese in orientation". Since then, thousands of CCP personnel have been dispatched to Tibet's monasteries, towns and villages to educate Tibetans about this vision of religion. There have been new restrictions on monasteries, with some banned from teaching Tibetan classes to their local communities and others subjected to exams in which residents are required to answer questions on Chinese laws and Xi Jinping's views on socialism.

This religious coercion is worrying, but it has its limits. Official state media may show photos of Tibetan families smiling in their homes in front of these CCP shrines or adorning these portraits with khatas and Tibetan snacks. CCP leaders can boast that they can control how Tibetans practice religion in their monasteries and in their homes. But the CCP cannot control what Tibetans really think, just as state propaganda cannot capture Tibetans' true feelings. For that, we must look to the protests inside Tibet and the condemnation of the CCP by Tibetans around the world who are free to speak. The CCP, the Chinese security forces and the other authorities that run Tibet as a prison can force Tibetans to go through the motions of praising Xi Jinping, but cannot expect to convert them.



Pah-La: Controversy and complexity

He bribed his way into Tibet, broke into a high security prison in Lhasa, hacked a Chinese police server, and came face to face with intelligence agents from the People's Republic of China. The playwright Abhishek Majumdar dedicated years to researching his two and a half hour production Pah-La.

Based on the 2008 uprising in Tibet and the ensuing repression, Pah-La came to the Royal Court Theatre in London on 3 April.

Free Tibet saw the play and interviewed Majumdar. He spoke about his ideas behind the story and the research that went into bringing it to the stage.

Pah-La opens in a Buddhist monastery with a nun called Deshar who becomes the central character. Shortly afterwards you're introduced to the other main part, a senior and brutal soldier called Deng.

The play feels beautifully simple, tense, exciting and easy to follow. But underneath runs a current of political, spiritual and human complexity that is impressive for a two and a half hour piece of theatre. You leave feeling you have witnessed a nuanced commentary on the most important aspects of the situation in Tibet, and even on the human condition itself.

It starts with characters that seem to be clearly defined as good or evil, and strips them back through their circumstances and suffering until you see the humanity in all of them, rather than a stereotypical nun or a Chinese army officer that you might come to expect or have seen at first. It shows the army officer can also

suffer from what the system asks him to do, and that non-violent Tibetans can still be driven to aggression despite their ideals.

The play first attracted controversy in 2018, when it was dropped from the Royal Court's listings under UK and Chinese government pressure. Majumdar himself has also come under fire for his breaking of boundaries, with people from both China and Tibet criticising him and the play. Nevertheless, Majumdar has strived to achieve balance through his detailed research.

Majumdar began focusing on Tibet because he was interested in it as a last bastion of large-scale non-violent resistance. He learnt about the 2008 protests and quickly escalated his research, bribing his way onto the train to Lhasa. From there he made contact with two underground proto-revolutionary groups who are working in Tibet to overthrow the current regime, and began gathering information. At one point, he broke into a high security prison, something that could have resulted in a lifetime sentence had he been caught.

During the making of Pah-La, the playwright met with the Dalai Lama for nearly an hour and asked the religious leader sensitive questions about Tibet. "He was actually very happy about those questions," Majumdar said. "He was answering them and he said to me: 'you have to be very critical of me. You know I'm not God. You're a writer, write truthfully. Be brave.'"

Pah-La is bravely researched and written, and a bold statement on the situation in Tibet and the worldwide struggle for non-violence in the 21st century.

A bold statement on the situation in Tibet and the worldwide struggle for non-violence in the 21st century.

Letters



FRANCOIS DE HALLEUX

If you have a question or comment that you would like to see published in the next magazine, do get in touch with us by email at letters@freetibet.org, over the phone on 020 7324 4605 or by post to:
Letters, Free Tibet,
28 Charles Square,
London N1 6HT.

Please note we cannot guarantee publication of each letter we receive. Thank you!

Hello, I was wondering if you could advise me... I am looking to visit Tibet on an organised tour and I was just wondering if you had any particular recommendations for any that are more supportive towards Tibet, for example, by using Tibetan guides or funding communities?

I know that it is controversial to visit the country in its current political state but I feel on balance that supporting the economy there and raising awareness of people's plight through visiting and bringing back stories would be positive. I want if possible to use Tibetan run businesses wherever I can.

Thanks in advance for your help.

Thanks for getting in touch. We do not advocate one way or the other whether people should go to Tibet, although we are happy to present the arguments for and against so that supporters can be informed and make up their own minds. On the one hand we have supporters who have been on an organised tour and said that they learned a lot about Tibet, that it was a good opportunity to meet Tibetans and that, if they spent their money carefully, they could support Tibetans. Others have stated that they are opposed to going because they feel that the occupation will prevent them from seeing the real Tibet and that any Tibetans they meet will be unable to speak freely.

We cannot give specific advice on which tour companies to use given how many different companies there are and the fact that things can change quickly in Tibet. However, on our website we do provide some advice to people going to Tibet on how visitors can avoid putting themselves or Tibetans at risk while travelling: freetibet.org/about/travel-guide

I have been a supporter of Free Tibet for a long time, with increasing concern and irritation on behalf of the people of Tibet.

I recently wrote to my MP about Tibet, using the postcard from your most recent magazine, and received a rather standard reply. I do not consider that the UK government are taking the situation seriously, although quite what they can do in the face of China's activities, I know not.

I wish you continued good luck with your campaigns.

Thank you for getting involved in the action and letting us know how it went. We know from the feedback we received that lots of supporters either wrote letters or sent emails to their MPs. While many of you did receive standard replies, others felt that their MPs had expressed some interest in Tibet and that they could come around to being supportive of the cause. Even if you receive a disappointing response, the act of reminding your MP about Tibet and making it clear that they have constituents who care about it and its people is a useful one.

མེ་ཚེ།

Free Tibet are delighted to welcome our new Mi Tse (life long) supporters:
Patrick Lane
Barak Zen
Brian Beesley

Find out more about becoming a *Mi Tse* supporter at secure.freetibet.org/join-for-life



MATT MING

Earlier this year, we stitched a personalised prayer flag in memory of Geoff Coles which was hung by the Tibet Watch team near the Dalai Lama's temple in Dharamsala. Below is Geoff's friend Pete's message of thanks. Call our Fundraising Manager, Josey, on 020 7324 4614 or visit justgiving.com/tibetwatch to find out more about having a loved one remembered in this way.

Hello Josey,
I have just shared your message with Geoff's son, Gerry, and all who contributed to this wonderful offering.

Everyone is so thrilled and touched. The experience and views of Geoff's flag flying proudly has been everything and more than any of us could have imagined for in showing Gerry our support.

Thank you for making his and our lives a little beautiful today and for as long as Geoff's flag is flying.

If we can support in any way further please let us know and I'll share the word.

Thank you Josey, and our best to all who helped make this happen in memory of a simple yet amazing man.

Warmest regards,
Pete and friends xo



Financial year in review

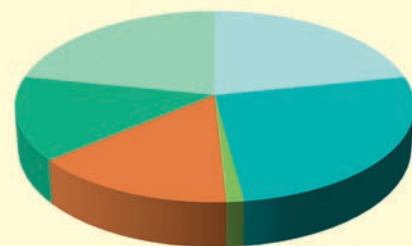
The below charts show how Free Tibet's income was raised, and how this was spent, during the 2018/19 financial year. As a not-for-profit campaigning organisation, we rely almost entirely on donations from you, our supporters. Regular giving makes up the bulk of income, with one-off donations and profit from merchandise sales also significant.


Thank you, as ever, for your support.

Income



Expenditure





Give Tibet's
children the
best possible
chance to
grow up free

Please consider
leaving us a gift
in your will.

For more information
please contact us on
020 7324 4605 or at
legacy@freetibet.org

free
TIBET

www.freetibet.org

 [/freetibetorg](https://www.facebook.com/freetibetorg)

 [@freetibetorg](https://twitter.com/freetibetorg)