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Beleaguered monks stand defiant

Chinese forces lock down Tibetan monasteries

By MARY-ANNE TOY
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BEIJING

MONKS across the greater Tibetan region of western China have been locked inside their quarters by thousands of Chinese security forces under the threat of jail or worse. But when a foreign photographer evades police checkpoints and gains access to two small monasteries in western China, at least 10 Tibetan monks volunteer their testimony.

Monk Dolkar Jampa says they were confined to their quarters even before they heard about the protests by other monks in Lhasa, which began on March 10 and spread to neighbouring provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan.

"We want independence of Tibet," he says. "Even if the Chinese kill us all, we would still want independence of Tibet."

Monk Chetsang Sakya says he is afraid. "The Chinese Communist Party always harassed us. Sporadically, the police raids the monastery and takes somebody out for custody. But this — never."

The small town surrounding the monastery is heavy with police patrols, armed soldiers control all entry points and most of the Chinese-owned businesses are shuttered. But inside the centuries-old monastery, banned portraits of exiled spiritual leader the Dalai Lama, are defiantly displayed in prayer rooms. Some monks decline to speak, others are eager to let the world know how they feel.

Monk Gyaltsen Surkhang says Chinese government harassment never lets up. "The situation is worse than five years ago. Each time that we speak we have to be careful," he says.

Monk Chodak says: "We don't have freedom, we don't have power."

Monk Tenzing Andrugstshang says they long for the day that the Dalai Lama can "come home" and Tibetans will have their "our own country".

At another small monastery a police camera has been installed in a prayer room to prevent any political gatherings. Monks here are too afraid to speak, let alone be photographed. The monks at the other monastery who agreed to be identified did so on the basis that our report is not published within China. *The Age* is not posting their pictures online.

Assumed names have been used and the locations of both monasteries kept secret in an effort to provide the monks with some protection from retaliation. If they are punished, there are few outsiders to bear witness, because the foreign photographer who took these pictures and recorded their testimony, Servais Mont, was arrested and evicted from the area.

Yesterday, police arrived at the photographer's home in a Chinese city to question him.

Meanwhile, a diplomat from the Australian embassy in Beijing yesterday flew to Lhasa as part of a delegation of foreign diplomats after Foreign Minister Stephen Smith called on China to allow outside observers into Tibet.

A senior Chinese Government official said yesterday that Beijing would not punish the group of Tibetan monks who disrupted a Government-organised foreign media tour of Lhasa.

About 30 monks from the Jokhang Temple shoved their way into a briefing and told reporters the Government was lying about recent unrest. These monks will not be punished, Xinhua quoted Baema Chilai, vice-chairman of the Chinese-controlled Tibet Autonomous Region, as saying.

"But what they said is not true. They were attempting to mislead the world's opinion," he said.

With REUTERS



Clockwise from top: Gyaltsen Surkhang, Dolkar Jampa, Chodak, Tenzing Andrugstshang.



Monks stand on the walls of their monastery in the greater Tibetan region of western China.

PICTURE: SERVAIS MONT

One Australian and the perils of the torch relay



MARY-ANNE TOY
BEIJING

DI HENRY is determined that two years' work planning Beijing's Olympic torch relay should run as smoothly as possible, while activist groups have been drawing up their own plans to disrupt China's "Journey of Harmony".

Ms Henry and her team of four other Australians have been working with hundreds of Chinese colleagues arranging the longest, most challenging relay in history, in the face of activists representing issues from Tibet to Burma to Sudan's Darfur refugees and human rights issues within China.

Last Monday's lighting of the Beijing torch at Olympia in Greece at which three activists unfurled a banner showing the Olympic rings replaced by handcuffs was just a taste of disruptions to come, activists have warned.

Ms Henry, whose company Maxxam International was in charge of the torch relay at the Games in Sydney and Athens, and has organised other relays including the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne and Manchester, was in Olympia on Monday but like many of those present didn't see the protest.

Chinese media also censored the footage and did not refer to the protest for two days, when a government spokesman described it as "shameful".

Ms Henry has agreed to talk with *The Age* on the condition that we stay away from the touchy subject of protests, though it's difficult to ignore the elephant in the room.

In any torch relay there are a "million variables" and things can go wrong, she says. At Olympia they were worried that the sun would not come out to light the mirror that gives the torch its first spark, the mother flame.

"By a miracle the sun came out, but it took 45 seconds, which is a long time to be holding your breath," Ms Henry says on a brief trip back to Beijing, before jetting off with the Olympic torch on Monday to the first of the international stops in Almaty, Kazakhstan, before the gruelling 97-day Chinese route.

Although this is the most ambitious relay since its debut at the 1936 Berlin Olympics — 130 days and 137,000 kilometres including taking the flame to the top of Mount Everest — Ms Henry says the Sydney Olympics relay was in some respects harder.

"Because it was your first one. It's your home town and the politics and pressure were enormous," she said.

"Opinion of the Olympics was at an all time low before the relay ... it was seen as a disaster because it was over-budget, but the torch relay turned it around whereas here (in China) they have fantastic support from the whole country."

"This country is clamouring for the torch relay."

The politics of the Beijing Olympics is something she has little to do with, she says. Jiang Xiaoyu, executive vice-president of the Beijing Olympic Organising Committee, raised the prospect last week that should there be protests, organisers could "change the route or cancel the relay in some cities". London and San Francisco are expected to attract the biggest protests.

Asked about this, Ms Henry said there was always a possibility of last-minute changes, pointing out that the Manchester baton relay vehicles were shot at in Northern Ireland in 2002 and she was mid-air with the Sydney torch in 2000 when told they could not land in Fiji because there was a coup.

Matt Whitaker, of the London-based Free Tibet Campaign, said the British capital

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theage.com.au
■ Watch the Tibetan monks' protest.

Manners the target as 'smile squadron' takes to the subways of Tokyo

A crack team of senior citizens will try to stem deteriorating train etiquette. Justin Norrie reports.

I'VE been grapple-tackled by Rugby League props, and laid out by some of the stiffest shirt-fronts in amateur AFL. But none of those jolts compared to the textbook hip-and-shoulder I got from a little old Japanese lady at Shinjuku train station last week.

It's tough getting on a peak-hour train at the world's busiest transport hub at the best of

times. It's impossible when a punchy 80-year-old with a low centre of gravity and giant shoulder pads gets loose in the crowd.

According to a recent poll by national broadsheet *The Asahi Shimbun*, the Japanese think manners across their country have deteriorated to delinquent levels. The Japanese might be

exaggerating the problem, but I think they're onto something.

Nine out of 10 people quizzed by the *Asahi* felt that their countrymen — typically regarded by the rest of us as the most polite people on earth — turn into brutes the moment a train pulls into a station.

They're especially concerned that wayward youth, enchanted by degenerate Western culture, are more likely than ever to make mobile calls and listen to booming MP3 players on trains, often while applying make-up

and swinging umbrellas. And they are fed up with the way commuters lunge at carriage doors in the frantic rush for a few hopelessly small seats.

Transport officials at Yokohama, a coastal city an hour south of Tokyo, are so alarmed at the direction things are taking that they've recruited an elite team of the city's finest senior citizens, who they'll send into the subways from Monday to restore the peace.

The 11 "manner upgraders" from the Smile-Manner Squad-

ron will wear bright green uniforms, possibly to stun young culprits into submission before shifting them from their seats for older passengers, typically little old women with giant shoulder pads. Should that fail, younger bodyguards will be on hand to straighten things out.

The latest outpouring over degenerating standards is an echo of some serious huffing and puffing four years ago when Tokyo's City Hall declared to its members that "a decline in manners, together with rude

behaviour, is rampant. The fact that many people turn a blind eye to rude behaviour leads to a decline in social standards and contributes to an environment that induces crime."

In a panic, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government hastily called a summit of the country's foremost authorities on "proper behaviour", and gave it a snappy title: the Study Group Relating to the Prevention of Behaviour that Causes Discomfort among Numerous People in Public Places.

Among the worst infractions, it found, were crying in public, carrying big bags, using too much perfume and practising golf swings with an umbrella.

With the exception perhaps of the last misdemeanour, the list seemed to be largely aimed at younger generations.

It's all a ridiculous overreaction, says Toshio Inoue, a 21-year-old Tokyo student who has lost track of the number of train trips when his shoulder has become a pillow for drooling, drunken salarymen in the

latter years of their careers: "I think old people say young people are rude because we don't tolerate their rudeness."

Junko Kurogi, a 28-year-old magazine editor, concurs. "Sure, there are bad-mannered young people around, but I think there are many more rude old people in Japan," claims Ms Kurogi, who makes it her mission to stop old women from wandering breezily to the front of queues or shoulder-barging people out of the way when getting on trains.

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