

Tibetan Who Self-Immolated Dies on Way to Hospital

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A Tibetan herdsman who self-immolated in protest against Chinese rule at a town center in Sichuan province has died and his remains have been secretly cremated by the authorities, an ex-Tibetan political prisoner living in exile in India said Thursday. Konchok Tseten, a 30-year-old father of two, died on the way to a hospital after police bundled him away late Tuesday from the site of the self-immolation at Ngaba county's Meruma township center in the Ngaba (in Chinese, Aba) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Lhamo Kyab told RFA's Tibetan Service, quoting a local source.

The source, a relative of Tseten's wife, had received the information from Chinese authorities on Wednesday, Kyab said.

"Yesterday, a relative of the wife of Konchok Tseten was informed by some representatives of the police and paramilitary that he had died," he said. "His in-laws were handed over some ashes of his cremated body without any detailed explanation," he said. "They have to assume that the remains were from the cremation of Konchok Tseten, as they did not witness it."

Police also told them that he had died on the way to a hospital in neighboring Barkham (Ma'erkang) county. Local residents had clashed Tuesday with police in their failed attempt to stop security forces from taking the severely injured Tseten away from the self-immolation site, according to sources quoting eyewitnesses. The whereabouts of Tseten's wife and several of his relatives who were detained following the clashes are not known, Kyab said.

Some of Tseten's relatives traveling from neighboring Qinghai province to Meruma have also faced restrictions following the self-immolation, the 124th since Tibetans launched burning protests in 2009 calling for Tibetan freedom and for the return to Tibet of spiritual leader the Dalai Lama, who fled into exile in 1959 following a failed national uprising against Chinese rule.

Security clampdown

Chinese authorities have also launched a security clampdown in the areas around the self-immolation site. "All the Tibetan stores and restaurants in Meruma town were ordered to be closed, and many mobile phones were confiscated from the locals," a Tibetan with contacts in the region told RFA on Wednesday. The Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), the Tibetan government in exile based in Dharamsala, said that the self-immolations are driven by the frustration of Tibetans over increasing "repression" by the Chinese authorities. "Tibetans inside Tibet are living under heavy repression," said Tashi Phuntsok, a CTA spokesman in a statement on its website.

"There is a total clampdown on any conventional means to express their grievances. These conditions have led to the growing number of self-immolations inside Tibet. We implore Chinese leadership to address the grievances of Tibetans immediately," he said.

"Political repression, cultural assimilation, social discrimination, economic marginalization, environmental destruction and lack of religious freedom are the primary factors driving Tibetans to self-immolation."