

# Protesters set themselves on fire near temple popular with tourists in Tibet capital

Since January, demonstrations have erupted across the Tibetan areas of China. For more than a year now, Tibetans have been setting themselves on fire as a form of protest against Chinese rule, the latest being a father of three. A warning, this report from our International editor Lindsey Hilsum does contain very distressing images.

By msnbc.com news services

Two men engulfed themselves in flames outside a temple popular with tourists in Lhasa – the first time such protests at Chinese rule have reached the tightly-guarded Tibetan capital.

The self-immolations are thought to be the first in Lhasa and the second inside Tibet, the BBC reported Monday.

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One of the men died and the other was hospitalized after they set themselves on fire Sunday outside the Jokhang Temple, the official Xinhua News Agency said.

At least 34 Tibetans have set themselves on fire since March 2011 in protest against China's six-decade rule over Tibet, according to Tibetan rights groups. At least 24 have died, Reuters reported.

A growing number of Tibetans is protesting regularly against Chinese rule, demanding an end to what they say is relentless repression by Beijing. NBC News' Adrienne Mong has more on the latest -- including rare footage of monks demonstrating in Qinghai Province.

China has branded the self-immolators "terrorists" and criminals and has blamed exiled Tibetans and the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, for inciting them.

Beijing considers the Dalai Lama, who fled into exile in India in 1959 after an abortive uprising against Chinese rule, a separatist. The Dalai Lama says he merely seeks greater autonomy for his Himalayan homeland.



Harish Tyagi / EPA

See images of the life of Tenzin Gyatso, the 14 Dalai Lama and exiled spiritual leader of Tibet's Buddhists.

China says Tibet has always been part of its territory, but many Tibetans say the Himalayan region was virtually independent for centuries until Chinese troops invaded in the 1950s.

Protests have become rare in remote Tibet and Lhasa in particular because of tight police security that has blanketed the area since anti-government riots erupted in Lhasa in 2008, the Associated Press reported.

Chinese authorities have confirmed some of the self-immolations over the past year but not all.

The twin immolations in the heart of Tibetan capital are certain to embarrass the region's communist leadership, who have pledged to make social stability and ethnic unity top priorities. That mandate is especially pressing this year as China prepares for a once-a-decade leadership transition in the fall and doesn't want the occasion undermined.

Tibet's spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, talks to TODAY's Ann Curry about his conversation with President Obama and his thoughts about the spirit of American resilience.

U.S.-funded radio broadcaster Voice of America said the two men worked at a Lhasa restaurant called Nyima Ling. It identified one of the men as 19-year-old Dorjee Tseten but was unable to give the name or age of the other.

"This was the first time it has happened in Lhasa — and right in the middle of Lhasa," said Tenzin Tsundue, a Tibetan poet and one of the most prominent activists living in India.

*Reuters and The Associated Press contributed to this report.*

