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International Campaign for Tibet

Detentions after peaceful protest in Kham; Tibetans resist government pressure to celebrate Losar

Two young Tibetan women were detained on Thursday (March 5) in Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi), a Tibetan area of Sichuan province (Kham) following a protest, in an atmosphere of increasing tension in the area. The two women, a nun and layperson, staged separate protests in Kardze town, handing out leaflets and calling for the return of the Dalai Lama to Tibet, respect for Tibetans' human rights, religious freedom, and the release of the Panchen Lama and Tibetan prisoners. According to one source some of the leaflets were in Chinese as one of the Tibetan women is a fluent Chinese speaker. The women were detained and their current whereabouts is unknown.

The new protest follows the Tibetan New Year (Losar, which fell on February 25) period, during which many Kardze people did not attend officially orchestrated New Year performances, and held prayer ceremonies instead of celebrations for the New Year festival. A Tibetan source with contacts in the area said: "Days before Losar, local Tibetans in the region spontaneously started a silent boycott of Losar by holding prayers in many villages in Kardze region, such as Tongkor, Jori, Thargyal villages and Kardze itself. Sometimes around 200 people attended the prayers held in each village, and it is said that the prayers that started during Losar are still continuing. The prayers were to mourn for those killed in the months-long protests after March 10 last year as well as boycotting Losar as a silent protest against the way the Government dealt with the protests in Tibet. No local traditions for celebrations such as horse-racing festivals or dance performance by local villagers were held. Some people even worked during the time of Losar, which has never happened in our history before."

Local people carried out these prayers and the decision not to mark Losar by celebrating despite local government attempts to persuade them to perform dances during the holiday. Radio Free Asia on Friday confirmed this information, reporting that, according to one local resident: "On March 2-3, the sixth and seventh days of the Losar period, the authorities in the Kardze area ordered performance groups to tour different towns and villages and present cultural programs to mark Tibetan Losar festivities." The same source added that each group was escorted by People's Armed Police officers and official reporters, travelling in three vehicles, the man said, describing the response by local Tibetans as "very cold." (<http://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/new-year-03052009135920.html>). According to the same RFA report, posters were pasted in the region urging people not to attend the shows. Some performances in smaller towns and villages were cancelled as a result of local people's response. Kardze residents previously reported to RFA that monasteries had rebuffed cash payments from the authorities to finance Losar celebrations.

The two women who protested in separate incidents on March 5 in Kardze have been named by three different sources as Jampa Lhamo, aged 36, and a nun, Pema Yangzom,

who is in her twenties. According to one of the sources, a monk and three other men were also involved in the peaceful protest on March 5, although no details could immediately be confirmed.