

Local Tibetans beaten following three more self-immolations in Tibet

Date : August 15, 2012

UPDATE AUGUST 15, 2012: *Tashi, who self-immolated on August 13, has passed away. According to the Kirti monks in exile in India, it is not clear whether his remains were handed over to his family. Local people visited monasteries to say prayers and make offerings yesterday (August 14) and shops and restaurants in Ngaba were closed.*

The condition of the Tibetan who was beaten severely by armed police and seen afterwards with his head bleeding is not known. Radio Free Asia reported one Tibetan source as saying that he had died after the beating.

Local Tibetans were severely beaten by police in a Tibetan area of Sichuan province following two self-immolations on August 13 and one on August 10.

Local people who gathered at the scene of the self-immolations, shouting slogans of protest, were confronted by police carrying sticks studded with nails. According to Kanyag Tsering and Lobsang Yeshe, Tibetan monks from Kirti monastery in Dharamsala, India, the police began beating the protesters indiscriminately and made some arrests. "One person was covered in blood after being hit in the head with the spiked clubs, but nothing more is known of his situation. Security forces were then deployed throughout the county town in large numbers," they said.

Information about the self-immolations, also conveyed through the monks from Kirti monastery in Dharamsala, is as follows: Early in the evening of August 13, a 21-year old Tibetan named Tashi from the Soruma pastoral area in Choejema township, and a Tibetan monk called Lungtok, aged about 20, set fire to themselves in an enclosure that housed a prayer wheel on the monastery's perimeter. They emerged shouting protest slogans on the Ngaba street leading from Kirti monastery to the town referred to as 'Heroes Road' by locals since the first self-immolation in Tibet took place here in February, 2009.

As Lungtok approached the junction with the central street, a group of policemen surrounded him, extinguished the flames, and took him away. It is unclear whether he was still alive at that time. Both men were taken initially to the county hospital, and then within half an hour they were taken to the Ngaba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture hospital in Barkham (Chinese: Ma'erkang). Tibetan sources report that their burns were so severe that there was little hope of survival, and according to information received today, Lungtok passed away.

Lungtok is the son of Richung, who passed away some time ago, and his mother's name is Lumo. He studied at the Kirti monastery (traditional) medical college, and Tashi was his classmate when he was a monk (before Tashi disrobed in 2011). At that day's morning assembly of the medical college, Lungtok had distributed a yuan to every monk on behalf of the Tibetans who set fire to themselves since February, 2009, and offered prayers dedicated to them.

On August 10, a young Tibetan layperson called Chopa set himself on fire in Me'urama township, Ngaba, shouting words of protest against the Chinese government, according to the same sources. Within minutes, security personnel extinguished the flames and took him away. It was not clear whether he was still alive, but Tibetans in exile described the flames as "fierce" and doubted he would survive. Since then, the Kirti monks in exile have received confirmation that he died soon before reaching hospital in Barkham. His body was immediately cremated by the authorities.

Following the self-immolation, armed troops began to converge upon Me'urama township in Ngaba county and the situation is believed to be tense.

Chopa had been among the leaders of a candlelight march in Me'urama township on January 23, during the lunar new year. He had been forced to go into hiding to avoid arrest afterwards.