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A Paradigm Shift?

Elections to the Tibetan Government-in-Exile 2011

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Elections to the Tibetan Government-in-Exile 2011

Bhavna Singh

While functioning democracies across the world face numerous challenges in building consensus and maintaining legitimacy, the Tibetan community in exile is an exceptional experiment in democratization of a de-territorialized community. For an entity which does not even fulfill the prerequisites of becoming a state,¹ it has remarkably managed to keep itself intact based on worldwide recognition of its charismatic leader, the Dalai Lama. Since its inception in April 1959, the Tibetan Government-in-exile (TGiE) has continued to work as the de facto government of an 'independent Tibetan nation' which for all practical purposes is not recognized by any country formally. It has provided a sense of identity and representation to not only the Tibetan community in exile but also to those six million Tibetans living inside Tibet.

In view of the unfolding political changes – the 14th Dalai Lama's (Tenzin Gyatso) decision to relinquish political authority and the appointment of Lobsang Sangay as the new Kalon Tripa (Prime minister of the TGiE) – this study examines the likely trajectory of the Tibetan struggle in pursuit

of identity survival. With Lobsang Sangay set to take the official oath and charge of the position of the Kalon Tripa of the 15th Tibetan Parliament administration at the beginning of August 2011, the paper also probes the future challenges for the new leadership and China's reactions to these developments.²

I Political Activism in De-territorialized Spaces

Contesting Chinese notions on Tibet, the TGiE was set up to provide a representative mechanism to the ungrounded citizens of Tibet after the Dalai Lama's escape to India. From its embryonic stage almost fifty years back, the Tibetan movement has emerged as a successful case of activism from exile. It gathered sustenance from various countries over its period of growth which of course, harboured their own agendas to provide support. For instance, the CIA and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) helped publicize the cause of Tibetan resistance in the 1960s and 1980s respectively and India gave support under the rubric of protection of human rights. However, the movement achieved a self-built momentum, especially after the 1990s.

Some significant milestones during its progression have been the promulgation of the Draft Constitution for a future of Tibet by the first Commission of Tibetan People's Deputies in 1963 and the establishment of the Charter for the Tibetans-in-exile drafted by the Assembly of Tibetan People's Deputies (ATPD) in 1991. These developments have facilitated the instituting of the Tibetan Parliament-in-

¹ The Tibetan community in China is spread over a huge expanse of territory starting from the Tibetan Autonomous Region, to the provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan within China. The great geographical spread provisioned for the extrapolation of a Greater Tibet theory in the earlier decades, however, the Chinese government has unremittently refuted these claims. On a parallel scale, the Tibetan expatriates (numbering approximately 1, 45,000) are settled in various parts of India, Nepal and Bhutan as well as other parts of the world. Ancient Tibet is believed to have been constituted by three provinces which were known through the concept of *Cholkha-sum* and this idea continues to influence the Tibetan demand for recognition of greater Tibet. On the other hand, the only territory that the Chinese state recognizes as entirely Tibetan is the Tibetan Autonomous Region.

² The study is based on a field trip from 17 to 22 March 2011 to Dharamshala, the seat of Tibetan Government in exile during the time of the polling for the TGiE elections and the follow up of the results thereafter.

exile, with several ministries and the Kashag (Cabinet) under the stewardship of the Dalai Lama.

The main aim of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) of the Dalai Lama has been to provide for rehabilitation of the Tibetan refugees and restoration of their happiness and well-being.³ And being the foremost representative institution it continues to cater to the persisting stream of refugees filtering through the northern Himalayan ranges.

The TGIE is, however, not by any means either an elaborate bureaucratic or a massive infrastructural set up when compared to modern-day democracies. It comprises 46 members out of which 43 are elected and three are appointed by the Dalai Lama, overseeing seven ministries namely, Home, Education, Security, Finance, Health, Information and International Relations, and Religion and Culture. These are further supplemented by a supreme justice commission, an auditor's office, and a public service commission to aid and abet the functioning of their infant democracy. The entire apparatus is constructed within a reach of three to four kilometers and the establishment operates with an annual budget of approximately Rs.913 million.⁴

³ Central Tibetan administration: Background, The official website of Central Tibetan Administration, Online URL:

<http://www.tibet.net/en/index.php?id=14>

⁴PhurbuThinley, 'Tibetan government tables budget for 2010/2011 in Parliament,' www.phayul.com, 8 March 2010. Online URL: <http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=26824&t=1>. The proposed budget has a total outlay of over 913 million rupees, against the predicted revenue of about 848 million rupees for the fiscal year. Out of the total budget proposed, about 28 per cent of it is allocated on increasing awareness of the issue of Tibet, 28.77 per cent on welfare services, 17 per cent on education, 11.29 per cent on running cost of the administration, 8.70 per cent on health, 3.97 per cent on religion and culture and 2.28 per cent on others.

Consequently, the political community is a close-knit unit where the same set of people engage in myriad tasks. But, at operational levels the government has very limited powers. Its security forces can make no arrests; its tax office faces constraints in levying taxes and enforcing payments. And most significantly, its foreign affairs department has failed to establish formal diplomatic relations with any country.⁵ The current elections thus reflect an attempt to restructure their administration and overcome the shortcomings that have been observed since its inception.

The main reason for this restructuring of the political apparatus is that the Tibetan Charter does not allow a person to be re-elected beyond two successive terms as the Kalon Tripa and the current incumbent, Samdhong Rinponche has completed his two terms. Moreover, so far, the virtual authority of the Kalon Tripa has remained under the canopy of the spiritual guidance from Dalai Lama. However, this setup cannot be sustained any longer as he is getting old and so now there is a need to nurture younger leaders to carry forward the cause of Tibet. The 2011 elections therefore, mark a critical juncture in the Tibetans political history in terms of democratic maturity as well as their struggle for self-determination.

II

The Election - Kalon Tripa and the Kashag

A total of 40 regional chapters in six countries and three continents voted on 20 March 2011 with an almost 80,000 registered electorate (actual voting amounted to approx. 50,000 in the final round).⁶ The Chinese authorities for their

⁵ Tim Johnson, *Tragedy in Crimson: How the Dalai Lama Conquered the World but Lost the Battle with China*, Nation books, New York, 2011, p.127.

⁶ In India these constituencies included: Ladakh (J & K); Dharamsala, Bir, Dalhousie, Shimla, Poanta Sahib, PandohTashiling, Puruwala, Manali (H.P.),

part continued to dismiss the elections as being hardly close to democracy and dubbed them only “skin deep.” The authorities claimed that the National Democratic Party of the Tibet (NDPT) was “only [a] political party of the Dalai clique” and therefore the elections were premeditated through an already selected list of candidates.⁷ It is quite ironical for the Communist Party of China (CPC) to disparage the Tibetan elections when it conducts its own elections this way.

In a rebuttal to the Chinese claim, the TGiE pointed out that “those familiar with the rituals of electioneering in exile would also know about the conspicuous absence of public hustings and competing political parties that are the central characteristic of elections in democratic countries.” The incumbent Kalon Tripa, Samdhong Rinpoche defended the Tibetan polity as being “a partyless democracy.” Despite China’s cunning response and prophecies of the elections being doomed, the elections took place smoothly.

So, for the purpose of an objective analysis, one should remember that if China can boast of a democracy with Chinese characteristics, it is unwarranted to

Delhi, Nainital, Clementown, Deokiyaling, Herbertpur, Haridwar, Mussorie, Rajpur (Uttarakhand), Phuntsokling (Orissa), Bhandara (Maharashtra), Mainpat (Madya Pradesh), Darjeeling, Kalimpong (West Bengal), Tenzin Gang, Miao, Tezu (Arunachal Pradesh), Shillong (Meghalaya), Gangtok, Ravangla (Sikkim), and Bylakuppe, Hunsur, Mundgod, Kollegal (Karnataka). Similarly, the Tibetan exiles in several constituencies in Nepal (Kathmandu, Pokhara, Tashipalkhiel, Pokhara, Tashiling), the US (New York and New Jersey, Minnesota), Canada (Ontario) and Europe (Switzerland, London) also surged forward to elect their representatives. A total of 11030 approx. people casted their votes in Dharamshala.

⁷Dhondup Gyalpo, ‘Chinese Slandering of the Tibetan elections,’ *Tibetan Bulletin*, Vol. 14, Issue No.3. Online URL: <http://www.tibet.net/en/tibbull.php?bullart=1024&bullvolume=14&bullissue=3>

denigrate the Tibetan efforts as futile or superficial. While the primary focus of the elections was on the post of the Prime Minister, the 15th Tibetan elections have brought a large number of younger members into Parliament.

The Kalon Tripa (or Prime Minister): The three candidates (Lobsang Sangay, Tenzin Tethong Namgyal and Tashi Wangdi) who emerged as prime contenders for the post of the Kalon Tripa after the preliminary round on 3 October 2010 came from similar backgrounds and espoused similar ideals for the future of Tibet.

The prime contender Lobsang Sangay, previously elected as the youngest executive member of the Tibetan Youth Congress (CENTREX) in 1992, gained prominence as an expert on international law, democratic constitutionalism, and conflict resolution.⁸

Tenzin Namgyal Tethong, his primary opponent, a distinguished fellow at the Tibetan Studies Initiative, Stanford University was a founding member and President of the Dalai Lama Foundation and served as an advisor to the local Tibetan Community Center project. While Tashi Wangdi, another contender for the post, was a Representative of the Dalai Lama to Europe.

Thus, the most significant factor differentiating and influencing the mandate of common Tibetans was the candidate’s ability to convince them about their exceptional commitment to guide the people of Tibet in achieving their goal.⁹ In this regard, Lobsang Sangay emerged as the most preferred candidate primarily because of two reasons: first, given his expertise in

⁸ Profile of the candidates availed from the web, Kalon Tripa 2011: Change and Choice- A necessity, Home page, Online URL: www.kalontripa.org

⁹ Interview with Tenzin Dhardon, Research and Media Officer, Tibetan’s Women Association, Office Building, McLeodganj, Dharamshala, 18 March 2011.

international law, which he has acquired as a research fellow at the East Asian Legal Program at Harvard Law School and second, his entry into Tibetan politics at a much younger age as compared to others. It seemed more appropriate for the Tibetans to choose a younger leader who will continue to represent the Tibetan agenda internationally for a substantial length of time was more beneficial for a community as compared to training someone who might exit from the political scenario at a comparatively earlier time.¹⁰

Further on, many Tibetans were able to associate more with Sangay's personal warmth, oratory, and strong leadership skills, believing him to be capable of bringing a clear vision that will be bold and vibrant enough to seize the interest and imagination of the youngsters within China.

There is also perhaps a tendency amongst the Tibetans to ape and compete with the Chinese political structure and since the Chinese Communist Party's Politburo is largely becoming dominated by legal experts and technocrats, the Tibetans have raised a leader with a similar profile as their frontrunner. Another major reason for Sangay's success is being attributed to his connections with the Chinese mainland; he has spoken in hundreds of seminars around the world and debated with renowned Chinese scholars and is well aware of contemporary Chinese politics and legal issues. He is seen as representing the Tibetans' stand in China and his technology-savvy practices assist him in reaching out to local Tibetans. All these factors helped him in accomplishing a clear mandate with 27,051 votes, a 55 per cent majority.

The Kashag(Cabinet)–The elections to the council of ministers were devoid of the excitement surrounding the KalonTripa's

¹⁰Interview with LobsangWangyal, media activist and organizer of the *Miss Tibet pageant*, Tennor Restaurant, Mcleodganj, Dharamshala, 19 March 2011.

appointment and the Speaker's election was to be delayed as late as end of May. Nonetheless, the cabinet of 15th Tibetan Parliament in exile boasts of an overwhelming number of promising candidates, especially from Dharamshala. The break-up of the representation amongst the various provinces and sects is as follows: U-Tsang, Do-toe and Do-med, the three traditional provinces of Tibet, elect 10 members each including two women members for each province, while the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism and the traditional Bon faith elect two members each. Three members are elected by Tibetans in the West: two from Europe and one from North America. In addition, the Dalai Lama has the discretion to nominate or not nominate one to three members.¹¹

The government however, operates with a miniscule budget, which begs the question – where do these candidates get the money for their election expenses from? On interacting with some local Tibetans it came to light that many of the candidates make arrangements with the local business house especially food joints, which agree to provide both the money and the space for campaigning of the candidates in lieu of publicity for their brand.¹² Lobsang Wangyal estimated that the cost of posters and media coverage for Lobsang Sangay ranged from anywhere between Rs.10,000-Rs.12,000, which he said was modest and manageable. For those who are unable to get support locally, it is a matter of individual and personal investment and depends on their own capacity.

¹¹ For details on Election Commission see: Election Commission, About CTA, [www.tibet.net,Online](http://www.tibet.net/Online) URL: <http://www.tibet.net/en/index.php?id=245>

¹² In a conversation, Tenzin Tsundue, a renowned poet and activist in the Tibetan community shed light on the growing interdependence and negotiations between the popular cafes and their clientele for the purpose of fighting together for a common aim. This way the two (entrepreneurs and activists) mutually help each other in furthering their particular agendas.

The TGiE however, relies on more formal means of support and substantiates most of its funds from the Privy Purse of the Dalai Lama by and large, which in turn is continuously refurbished by donations from abroad. This also raises the question of what kind of wealth sharing system might come into place when the Dalai Lama hands over the reins of the Tibetan community in-exile to the new KalonTripa, since many of the activities in the Tibetan government often depend on the Dalai Lama's private assistance.

III The 2011 Election: A Synoptic Assessment

A multitude of factors converge to make the 2011 election a transformative milestone in Tibetan history. First, the Dalai Lama announced about 10 days before the elections that he would be relinquishing all his political responsibilities and continue to guide the Tibetan's only as a spiritual leader. The Dalai Lama had repeatedly argued for the need for political change previously and reiterated this in his statement in March 2011 saying, "the essence of a democratic system is the assumption of political responsibility by elected leaders for the popular good" and maintained that even the continuation of the Dalai Lama is for the people to decide.¹³ He also insisted that the title of the present institution of the GadenPhodrang¹⁴ headed by the Dalai Lama be changed.¹⁵ Given the

¹³ Translated version of the Dalai Lama's letter addressed to the members of the Fourteenth Assembly of the Tibetan People's Deputies, dated 11 March 2011, procured from the main office of the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile.

¹⁴GadenPhodrang means the Dalai Lama is the spiritual as well as temporal authority and the authority of the institution was informally devolved 10 years back with the election of the first head of the state SamdhongRinponche as the KalonTripa.

¹⁵ In his statement the Dalai Lama stated, "My intention to devolve political authority derives neither from a wish to shirk responsibility nor because I am disheartened. On the contrary, I wish

fact that since the Fifth Dalai Lama's founding of the GadenPhodrang Government of Tibet in 1642, successive Dalai Lama's had operated as both the spiritual and temporal leaders of Tibet; the Dalai Lama's decision thus marks a formal end to the institution itself.

Second, in terms of the nature of power, the election symbolized the transfer of power from a charismatic leader to a legal-rational set up (contextualized within Weber's theory of authority). The election also symbolized the recognition of the political maturity of the Tibetan community in general deriving from the 50 years of their existence in exile and marking 20 years of adoption of the charter. In sync with the Dalai Lama's strong wish to introduce appropriate modern reforms in accordance with the changing times and an increased urgency due to his ascending age, the Draft Constitution for a future of Tibet (1963) and the Charter for the Tibetans-in-exile (1991) have been currently referred for amendment.

Most Tibetans believe that the elections will augur a new era of reassertion of Tibetan identity through voicing grievances and staging protests. This also suggested immense pressure on the nominees and the electorate in the run-up to the vote in deciding to assign huge responsibility on a single individual, on someone who was not born in Tibet (TAR).¹⁶

Third, even in terms of the methods employed to garner support, the elections marked a radical change. There was increased communication between the Tibetans in TAR and those in exile through websites like the QQ

to devolve authority solely for the benefit of the Tibetan people in the long run. It is extremely important that we ensure the continuity of our exile Tibetan administration and our struggle until the issue of Tibet has been successfully resolved."

¹⁶Interview with Tenzin Dhardon, Research and Media Officer, Tibetan's Women Association, Mcleodganj.Dharamshala, 18 March 2011.

(<http://www.qq.com/>). And the youngsters in exile seemed highly inspired by the internet revolutions in the other parts of the world that had been instigated by social networking portals like Facebook and Twitter. According to Lobsang Wangyal, a popular figure in the Tibetan community several Tibetans inside the TAR responded with great alacrity to the election procedure and made their opinions known through the medium of internet.¹⁷

Fourth, massive propaganda and image projection was elicited locally by the three contestants for the post of the Kalon Tripa. Posters with arguments and counter-arguments could be seen all over the streets and the sense of competition was fierce. All three candidates reached out to their audiences through internet communication which was a major achievement for them. Lobsang Wangyal also attested to the political calumny and negative campaigning that was resorted to from all the three sides given the fierce competition between the candidates.¹⁸

Fifth, the elections actually brought to fore the various succession issues in both the political and spiritual establishments. While the Tibetans celebrated the Losar (Tibetan New Year) on 5-6 March 2011 and anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising on 10 March, the election atmosphere remained clouded by various controversies such as the Karmapa scandal. This related to the recovery of huge amounts of currency from the Karmapa's office.¹⁹ The next section explores the views

¹⁷ It is interesting to note that a call from Dharamshala to China costs merely Re.1 given the frequency of usage and very few instances of intercepting or espionage were cited by the localites during the course of interviews.

¹⁸ Interview with Lobsang Wangyal, Media activist and Organizer of the *Miss Tibet pageant*, Tendor Restaurant, Mcleodganj, Dharamshala, 19 March 2011.

¹⁹ For detailed information please refer to the IPCS article- Pre-election flare-ups for the Tibetan

and expectations of the Tibetan Youth in exile and how they perceive this change.

IV The Youth: Active and Aspiring

The Tibetan youth community exhibits immense political activism through vibrant participation. Several organizations like the Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC) and the Tibetan Women's Association (TWA) have huge sections of young people who are as dedicated to the cause of the Tibetan identity as political leaders. However, in comparison to the glorified image projected by the political leadership, this huge section of young pioneers hold a much more pessimistic picture of the Tibetan future. They are divided into several groups with different aspirations and different concerns.

While one section remains highly disenchanted with the Dalai Lama's 'middle way approach,' believing it has failed to bear significant fruit but continues to pay lip service to it, another section concentrates on day-to-day affairs. There is yet another totally apolitical stream in the population mostly comprised of monks who believe nothing but meditation to be their only 'karma' (responsibility). Tibetan youth meanwhile, makes increasing use of the media to air their grievances and there is a huge media-frenzy in the community given the need for creating awareness about the Tibetan issue. To this end, several cultural groups like the TIPA (Tibetan Academy of Performing Arts) and musicians are seeking to make their presence felt.

One of the prominent examples is the 'JJI Exile brothers', a Tibetan musical group which has taken to singing as a medium of expression of their grievances. The group has composed several songs in the Tibetan language to promote the dying use of their mother tongue and also in Hindi to express gratitude to their host country. The danger

community: allegations and rebuttal by Bhavna Singh, Article no. 3339, 4 March 2011.

of losing their culture and identity was also mentioned by Tsering Youdon, who represents the Amdo prefecture in the Standing Committee of the Parliament. She stated that the Tibetan language is generally pursued in the Tibetan schools with English being introduced only from the sixth grade. And though there is a remarkable literacy rate of almost around 90 per cent amongst the Tibetans, there are no higher institutions/universities for the community. This becomes a substantial hurdle in preserving their language, identity and culture leading to its abysmal state.²⁰

Another issue of serious concern amongst the Tibetan youth is that despite the high level of literacy, most Tibetans are employed in very low-profile jobs like in the health care industry as nurses or in the education sector. They face a huge dilemma since employment requires the usage of English as a primary language which in turn means a compromise with Tibetan language propagation. Thus, the conservation of their language and culture is challenged by the needs of modern-day industries.

Among those who associate actively with the Tibetan political agendas allegorical references to Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and the like are quite apparent. Most of the Tibetans associate their struggle with that of the Indian national struggle, the Irish struggle and similar experiences world over. Simultaneously, the radical faction is balanced out by a more mature group which while aspiring to gain independence for the motherland is inclined to non-violence when they realize the fact of China's growing economic might and how alienated they are internationally.²¹

²⁰Interview with Tsering Youdon, Member of the Standing Committee/Gangchen Kyishong, representing Amdo Prefecture, Dharamshala, 20 March 2011.

²¹Interview with Tenzin Dhardon, Research and Media Officer, Tibetan's Women Association, Mcleodganj, Dharamshala, 18 March 2011.

There is also a substantial section of the community who voice their eagerness to work hand in hand with the Chinese people to develop mutual understanding about the situation of the Tibetans in exile, which they believe is a more pragmatic approach given the fact that they ultimately want to go back to the TAR. This stand however has led to a breach between the local Indians mostly Kashmiris and Himachalis, who live in the eternal fear that such sections may turn out to be Chinese agents. Lack of proper knowledge and misinterpretation of facts might be the basis of such claims.

Unmistakably, the youth is divided into several streams some of them verging on the brink of violent assertion, others utilizing a more soft-power approach, and yet others being politically insensitive to their surroundings. And in the similar vein, they have different expectations from the post-elections scenario. On the one hand many believe that once the Dalai Lama has handed over the political reins he might actually be allowed to visit Tibet, but such a possibility seems rather bleak. On the other hand the Tibetan community expects the new leader to bring about substantive changes in the status of the Tibetan exiles by making the issue more and more prominent in the international arena and resorting to legal ways for this purpose.²² A consensus is slowly emerging that the ultimate goal of the Tibetans would be to return to the motherland with the least amount of discomfiture for people on either side of the boundary once the human rights situation is taken care of.

V

Future: Reunion or Reassertion?

While speculation abounds as to who will be the next Dalai Lama – whether it will be a male or female; or whether there will be a Dalai Lama at all – there is no definite

²²Interview with Tenzin Dhardon, Research and Media Officer, Tibetan's Women Association, Mcleodganj, Dharamshala, 18 March 2011.

answer within the Tibetan community. On the one hand, they are sure that China will try to re-enact the spectacle that was witnessed in the case of the Panchen Lama, on the other hand they are scared about losing the cultural heritage that has been vested with the institution of the Dalai Lama. A prophecy made by the 13th Dalai Lama about the end of the institution has been conveniently ignored or rather deliberately kept in abeyance to avoid speculation and panic.²³ Another question troubling the Tibetan community is whether Lobsang Sangay will be able to maintain the momentum of Tibetan struggle built by the Dalai Lama on the basis of his charismatic appeal.

So far Tibetan exiles are basing their expectations on what unfolds in the Chinese territories in the near future. In an exercise in 2009, a group of China analysts developed three possible scenarios for China's future: Scenario I – “fragmentation of China” – where escalating social demands will chip away at the Communist Party's legitimacy; Scenario II – “China as a strong state” with the Party sustaining high economic growth all decade, and Scenario III – “China with partial democracy” where the party will retain great political power but only after opening up the political

²³ A slide in the Tibet Museum in McLeodganj, Dharamshala talks of a prophecy by the 13th Dalai Lama who said before dying: “Very soon in this land (with a harmonious blend of religion and politics) deceptive acts may occur from without and within. At that time, if we do not dare to protect our territory, our spiritual personalities including the Victorious Father and Son (Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama) may be exterminated without trace, the property and authority of our Lakangs (residences of reincarnated lamas) and monks may be taken away. Moreover, our political system, developed by the Three Great Dharma Kings (Tri Songtsen Gampo, Tri Songdetsen and Tri Ralpachen) will vanish without anything remaining. The property of all people, high and low, will be seized and the people forced to become slaves. All living beings will have to endure endless days of suffering and will be stricken with fear. Such a time will come.”

system because of its failure to meet rising economic expectations and to combat corruption.²⁴ In the case of both Scenario I and Scenario III, the Tibetans might be able to gain substantive leverage against the Chinese authorities. But if Scenario II remains the case, then any political bargaining might prove counterproductive.

China's obstinacy is evident in its immediate shift of verbal targeting from the Dalai Lama to the new Kalon Tripa. The Chinese government has often labeled the Dalai Lama as a *splittist*, made personal attacks on him and insisted that he cease all his separatist activities. Taking this into cognizance, the shift of authority from the Dalai Lama to the new Kalon Tripa was meant to keep such criticism at bay for the new individual and allowing him a free hand in operations. However, China was quick to reconfigure its center of attention and align its policy deviating from personal attack of the Dalai Lama to the leader of Tibetan affairs regardless of who or what he is. An article in the *People's Daily*, equated Lobsang Sangay to a “terrorist” for once serving as an executive member in the pro-independence group the Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC), even before the poll results were declared.²⁵

Lobsang Sangay observes that such attacks are “not helpful in creating a conducive atmosphere for peaceful dialogue” and that it demoralizes the TGIE which has been trying to engage China in nine rounds of talks since 2001.²⁶ He himself conceded that much of Tibet's future will depend on

²⁴ Tim Johnson, op. cit, pp. 296-297.

²⁵ Li Hongmei, Terrorist set to rule Tibetan Government-in-exile, 22 March 2011, people's Daily Online, Online URL: <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90002/96417/7326988.html>

²⁶ Kalsang Rinchen, Tibetan PM elect asks India to include Tibet as “core issue” with China, 23 May 2011, Online URL: <http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?article=Tibetan+PM+elect+asks+India+to+include+Tibet+as+%22core+issue%22+with+China&id=29569>

circumstantial developments²⁷ and thus that the Tibetans will have to adopt a wait and watch as well as prepare in the meantime. He further stated that he would adopt a track-II diplomacy approach to reach out to Chinese academics, businessmen, dissidents and lay people to help them develop a better understanding of the issue of Tibet and that this bottom-up strategy would help in influencing the Chinese government.²⁸

One of the major challenges that Lobsang faces is convincing the Indian government to take a clear stand on the Tibet issue. Towards this end, he has made an appeal to the Indian government to make Tibet a 'core issue' in the talks between India and China.²⁹ The second major challenge relates to his claim of making it possible for the Dalai Lama to return to Tibet once in his lifetime by giving a positive shape to the deliberations between the two sides. The possibility of such an arrangement has been made worse by China's unchanged stance on Dalai Lama. Governor Padma Choling (TAR) told reporters at a briefing in Beijing that "the door is always open" for the Dalai Lama's return but only if he meets China's preconditions.³⁰

Though one might argue that the spread of Buddhism in China demonstrates how despite lack of political progress, the Dalai Lama is winning the spiritual war against the Chinese, such an argument is rather

unsubstantiated. Recent reports suggest that there is a heavy crackdown on Tibetan Buddhist monasteries when they are found to be indulging in activities which go against the interests of the state. The recent squelching of the Kirti Monastery in Ngaba area of northeastern Tibet validates China's intent of giving no clemency to religious or cultural institutions.

Despite the fact that China is facing consecutive defiance from different regions within its territory, no efforts have been made by the peoples in these regions to build networks/connect with the other movements for preservation of their culture and autonomy in China. This is either because not much thought has been given to the idea or because it is being avoided to differentiate the Tibetans' peaceful and non-violent struggle from the violent struggle of the Uyghurs, for example.

Though some informal empathy exists, most activists from these regions know each other through regular seminars and conferences held in and out of mainland China.³¹ This in essence is the biggest challenge for the new Tibetan leadership – to maintain the non-violent nature of their struggle. Once the Tibetan youth resorts to arms, the struggle will reach its dead end through loss of international support as well by giving the Chinese a reason to clamp down on them with still greater violence.

In sum, Samdhong Rinponche's reservations on conducting massive, visible electioneering in an exile situation have been steered in the background since the elections took place without any significant untoward incident from the Chinese side. The Dalai Lama continues to maintain that the Tibetan people's needs, as set out in the Memorandum, can be met within the framework and spirit of the Constitution and its principles on autonomy and that

²⁷ Interview with Dr. Lobsang Sangay, Nominee Candidate for KalonTripa, Mcleodganj, Dharamshala, 21 March 2011.

²⁸ Interview with Dr. Lobsang Sangay, Nominee Candidate for KalonTripa, Mcleodganj, Dharamshala, 21 March 2011.

²⁹ Kalsang Rinchen, Opcit.

³⁰ That is, he must accept Tibet is an inalienable part of China and recognize Taiwan as a province of China. See 'China: Stance on Dalai Lama same post retirement,' 19 May 2011, www.phayul.com. Online

[URL:http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?article=China%3a+Stance+on+Dalai+Lama+same+post+retirement&id=29559](http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?article=China%3a+Stance+on+Dalai+Lama+same+post+retirement&id=29559).

³¹ Interview with Dr. Lobsang Sangay, Nominee Candidate for Kalontripa, Mcleodganj, Dharamshala, 21 March 2011.

these proposals do not contravene or conflict with the 'three adherences' as stipulated by Beijing – the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party; socialism with Chinese characteristics; and Regional National Autonomy system.³² Amendments to the charter have begun with Lobsang Sangay set to take the oath on 14 August 2011. But whether or not the Dalai Lama's political successor will be able to pierce China's steel hardy framework on Tibet and squeeze out any tangible gains remains to be seen.

Select Readings:

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³²Note on the Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan People, Tibetan Bulletin, Vol. 14, Issue No. 2, 2010 Online URI: <http://www.tibet.net/en/tibbull.php?bullart=1009&bullvolume=14&bullissue=2>