

Fifty-eight Years Ago: 31 March 1959 - Dalai Lama Granted Political Asylum in India

[31 March 2017]: Exactly 58 years ago, today, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet, arrived in exile in India from its northern frontier, where he sought political asylum.

His journey, on foot and horse ride, escorted by his bodyguards and Khampa fighters from Tibet, took just over two weeks to reach India from Lhasa, Tibet's capital.

News soon spread around the world after India granted political asylum to the Dalai Lama, leader of the six million Tibetan people.

Tens of thousands of Tibetan refugees followed their leader into exile. Dharamsala, foothills of Himalayas in northern India, is the present seat of the Tibetan Government-in-exile. Today, some 150,000 Tibetan refugees are scattered around the world.

On 10th March 1959, tens of thousands of Tibetans rose up against the Communist China's illegal occupation of Tibet in Lhasa. Earlier this month on the 10th, the Tibetans in exile marked their 58th Anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising Day.

Within weeks of the Dalai Lama's arrival in India, Tibet Society, the first and world's oldest Tibet support group was formed to garner political support for the Tibetan people through advocacy and campaigns in the UN and UK.

ON THIS DAY - 1950 - 2005: [31 March 1959]

Source: http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/march/31/newsid_2788000/2788343.stm

1959: Dalai Lama escapes to India

The spiritual leader of Tibet, the Dalai Lama, has crossed the border into India after an epic 15-day journey on foot from the Tibetan capital, Lhasa, over the Himalayan mountains.

There had been no news of his safety or whereabouts since he left Lhasa on 17 March with an entourage of 20 men, including six Cabinet ministers.

Many thought he had been killed in the fierce Chinese crackdown that followed the Tibetan uprising earlier this month.

Travelling at night

The Dalai Lama had to cross the 500-yard wide Brahmaputra river, and endure the harsh climate and extreme heights of the Himalayas, travelling at night to avoid the Chinese sentry guards.

He finally crossed the Indian border at the Khenzimana Pass, and is now resting at the Towang Monastery, 50 miles inside the Indian border.

It is not known whether the Indian Government will offer him asylum. The government of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru has been heavily criticised internationally for failing to condemn the Chinese crackdown.

Dusk-to-dawn curfew

The Chinese repression of the rebellion in Lhasa is now complete. A dusk-to-dawn curfew has been imposed, and a military commission is now ruling the city.

It is estimated that 2,000 people died during the three days of fighting between the Tibetans and the Chinese army.

In the worst single incident, four days ago, the Chinese army fired about 800 artillery shells into the Dalai Lama's Summer Palace, razing the ancient building to the ground.

The area contained over 300 houses, and thousands of civilians died and were injured in the inferno.

Mass deportations

The tragedy marked the end of the uprising in Lhasa. All fighting-age men who had survived the revolt were deported, and those fleeing the scene reported that Chinese troops burned corpses in the city for 12 hours.

A day later, China announced in an order signed by leader Chou En-lai that a large-scale rebellion had been crushed in Lhasa, although it said the revolt was still continuing outside the capital.

It announced that the Tibetan governing body had been dissolved under martial law, and said the Dalai Lama had been replaced by the Panchen Lama, his pro-Chinese rival, as the nominal head of a committee to set up a Tibetan Autonomous Region within the Chinese People's Republic.

Tibet Society, the world's first Tibet support group, was founded in 1959. Funded by its members, it has been working for over 50 years to seek justice for Tibet through parliamentary lobbying, campaigns and actions. Help keep Tibet alive by joining Tibet Society today. Annual membership £24; Family £36; Life £500.

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