

PRAYERS from Kopan

Ani Jangsem, manager of Kopan's ani gumpa in Nepal, relates the activities of the Tibetans in Kathmandu:

After the intensity of demonstrations and reprisals in Tibet which followed the historic week in March, the Tibetan community in Nepal began daily prayers at the Stupa Tibetan Regional Office in Jorpati which is close to the Boudhanath stupa.

Prayers have been and are still being recited every day from 9.00 A.M. till 5.00 P.M. – OM MANI PADME HUM for those killed in Tibet – both Chinese and Tibetan, monks, nuns and lay people; the accumulation of 100 million Twenty-One Taras Praises for the accomplishment of His Holiness' wishes for Tibet; and Guru Rinpoche mantra and Hayagriva practice for the Tibetan cause generally and specifically for prisoners to be released from jails.

These practices are being done according to advice from the Tibetan Government in Exile and attended by up to 2,000 and sometimes 3,000 people. Before the school year began for the monastery and nunnery, everyone was attending, but as these days there are classes, each day just some representatives attend.

In Kathmandu, at the United Nations office and at the Chinese embassy, demonstrations are held every day, with the exception of the week of Nepalese elections when the Tibetan community supported the commitment of creating a peaceful environment in the country for the election process. These demonstrations have been attended by 300-500 monks, nuns and lay people, with 200-250 arrested each day – most of whom are released after nightfall!

Some would-be demonstrators have even been arrested as they move around the city in public transport, even if they are not actually going to demonstrate, as police have orders to collect potential demonstrators beforehand.

Beginning April 13, a continuous hunger strike began on a street nearby to Swyambunath Stupa, where on a rotation basis fifty people at a time fast for twenty-four hours.

Previously, outside the United Nations office in Jawalakel, ten people began a hunger strike that was joined

by many more. This continued for the two weeks of the worst period of violence in Tibet.

Also outside the Boudhanath stupa gate, twelve people began a hunger strike which was joined by others, but was eventually disturbed by local "thugs" who made it impossible to continue day and night.

Three times at the regional office in Jorpati, and once at the ani gumpa, all-night recitation of the Twenty-One Taras Praises occurred, whereby the numbers recited were added to the regional office's total. During the Nepal election week, when no street demonstrations took place, men mostly shaved their heads as a continuation of the protest, while women chose to wear a black *chuba* (traditional Tibetan dress) and white t-shirt. A black armband was also a common protest sign which continues, even in the monasteries as monks and nuns follow their daily schedules.

Sunday April 13 saw a special all-day Prayer Day which was followed not only in Nepal but in the different Tibetan communities in India [and other parts of the world]. Many prayers including Tara puja and tsog were performed, and more than 2,000 people attended in Nepal alone. On the day of the Olympic torch relay in Paris, speeches were given by the French ambassador to Nepal and other French government officials to the daily prayer group at the Stupa Tibetan Regional Office, listened to by more than 3,000 people, whose response was often emotional as the dignitaries gave their support to the Tibetan cause.

The arrival of the Olympic torch in Delhi, India, as close as it will come to Nepal, gave impetus to the demonstrations at the two Kathmandu locations where large numbers of monks, nuns and lay people expressed their common concerns and frustrations and consequently, as usual, they were duly arrested and/or escorted to hospital if their injuries needed medical attention. ❁

Dictated to Ani Tenzin Namdrol.