

August 22, 1950

**The US Consul General at Calcutta (Derry) to the
Department of State, 'Two Monthly Reports of the
Indian Mission, Lhasa, Made by Hugh Richardson'**

Citation:

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Summary:

Reports of the Indian Mission in Lhasa, Tibet, for the months of May and June 1950.

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TO : Department of State

FROM : CALCUTTA 85 August 22, 1950

2 Enclosures

REF :

SUBJECT : TWO MONTHLY REPORTS OF THE INDIAN MISSION, LHASA, MADE BY
HUGH RICHARDSONFor Dept.
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The enclosures are the monthly reports of the Indian mission in Lhasa for the period ending May 15, 1950 and the period ending June 15, 1950. They were sent from the "Indian Trade Agent, Gyantse, and Officer in Charge, Indian Mission, Lhasa" to the Indian Political Officer in Gangtok, Sikkim. From there they were apparently sent to the Government of India, New Delhi, which, in turn, gave copies to the United Kingdom High Commissioner, Delhi. These particular copies were obtained from a representative of the United Kingdom Deputy High Commissioner's office, Calcutta. This representative requested that knowledge of United States' possession of these reports be carefully withheld from the Indian Government, since such knowledge might interfere with British acquisition of such reports in the future.

While there is not very much new material contained in the enclosures, they will still serve, possibly, to fill some gaps in the knowledge of recent events in Lhasa. The reports cover Lhasa's reaction to British cancellation of visas of the Tibetan Mission to Communist China, and cover reports regarding Chinese army concentrations near Tibetan borders, as received in Lhasa. There is also some news regarding a Tibetan regiment being trained at Lhasa, and the contacts of Herr HARRER (first name unknown), an Austrian, with the Dalai Lama. The attitude of Lhasa toward Gyalo DHONDUP (also written THONDUP) is given. There is a section covering Chinese Communists who are reported to have carried a message to Lhasa from the CPR. "Appeals" made to Tibet by the Peking broadcasting station are noted, along with incidental items on various travelers to Tibet.

An interesting section on the Dalai Lama states that he continues an "unresting search for knowledge", and that his intelligence is well above the ordinary. He is also reported as poring over English papers and taking to pieces and learning the mechanics of such things as cameras and electrical equipment. The report adds that he would like very much to go to a foreign school, but that his contacts with life abroad are likely to be considerably limited by the strict domination of the Regent.

Copy: Amembassy, New Delhi

Charles H. Derry
American Consul General

Enclosures:

- 1/ Indian mission report 5/15/50.
- 2/ Indian mission report 6/15/50.

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Enclosure No. 1 to Despatch 85 from Amconsul, Calcutta, 8/22/50.

(COPY)

From: The Indian Trade Agent, Gyantse, and
Officer in Charge, Indian Mission, Lhasa,
P.O. Gyantse, Tibet.

To : The Political Officer in Sikkim, Gangtok.

Memorandum No. 3(7)-L/50. Dated Lhasa, Tibet, the 15th May 1950.

Monthly Report of the Indian Mission, Lhasa, for
period ending 15th May 1950.

1. EXTERNAL RELATIONS.

A. Relations between Tibet and India.

The Government of India have had to cancel visas for Hongkong issued at Calcutta to the Tibetan Mission to China. It has been explained to the Tibetan Government that this is not due to any obstruction on their part but to the wishes of H.M.G. who require further information (for which they have asked the Tibetan Government) before deciding the question.

The Tibetan Government were informed that sanction had not been given for the sale in India of Chinese dollars intended to provide funds for the Tibetan Government's proposed Missions to the U.K. and the U.S.A., which do not appear to be likely to proceed. This was necessary as the leaders of those Missions, now in Gyantse, wanted to send the dollars down to India in advance. The Tibetan Government have issued necessary orders to the leaders of the Missions.

B. Relations between Tibet and China.

1. The Tibetan Government are firm in their intention to send their Mission to China to Hongkong where they are to make contact with the Chinese Government. They have explained, in reply to an enquiry from the U.K. High Commissioner, that the intention of this mission is to try to secure from the Chinese Government recognition of Tibet's independent status. They said that if the mission were sent for to Peking they would report for further orders to the Tibetan Government. Visas for Hongkong are now awaited. Officials of the Foreign Bureau have expressed informally mild surprise at the delay; and I have explained informally the difficult situation in Hongkong.

This mission seems to be involved in a dangerous task as hopes of getting any concession out of the Chinese Government which will not involve the ultimate absorption of Tibet into China seem forlorn. But it is possible to understand the Tibetan Government's desire to reach a solution which will

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not involve military invasion of Tibet.

2. A report appeared in the British "Intelligence Digest" (De Courcy) that a large Chinese army with Russian advisers was ready in Sinkiang to invade Tibet and had maps based on an aerial survey of Tibet by Russian aircraft last December. The Tibetan Government have had no reports of the presence of any aircraft over Tibet during the winter but are enquiring from their officials in West Tibet.

The route from Khotan or anywhere else in Sinkiang for an invading army appears impracticable and this view is confirmed by a Torgut traveller with some experience of those parts, who had recently reached Lhasa. But the idea cannot be entirely ruled out.

3. Press reports told of the destruction of 10,000 Chinese Nationalist troops in Sinkiang near the borders of Tibet. The Tibetan Government have had no information of this from Chiamdo. The Nationalist troops may have been those in the neighbourhood of Tatsienlu.

4. Geshe Sherab Gyatso (whose death was recently rumoured), one of the leaders of the Provisional Government of Tibet set up by the Communists in Sining, broadcast in Tibetan on 6th May. He said that the Chinese Government wanted a peaceful settlement with Tibet and the Tibetan Government should send representatives to negotiate in Peking at once; otherwise, Chinese armies were ready in Sinkiang, Sining and Kham.

5. The powerful broadcasting station, which the Chinese Government are establishing at Peking is reported to be opening on May 20th to broadcast to Tibet and Mongolia.

6. A party of Torgut refugees, headed by a Prince from Kuldja called Chin Wang Mingyur Tsewang Dorje, or Min Wang, reached Lhasa some weeks ago via East Sinkiang and the Tsaidam. The Prince had decided to escape before the Communists caught him. He has a long history of evading overtures from the Russians, Japanese and the Chinese Nationalist Government. Now he hopes for refuge in India.

C. Relations between Tibet and Nepal.

----- Nil -----

D. Relations between Tibet and the U.K. and the U.S.A.

1. A British subject, Miss Bevan, who is a Theosophist and who applied for and was refused permission to visit Shigatse (where the Theosophists mistakenly believe is a college containing Masters of their faith) is reported to have entered Tibet from north Sikkim, without permission and to have reached Shigatse.

2. The Government of India have permitted a British subject, Mr. Turnbull, who is a student of Hinduism to visit Mount Kailas in West Tibet

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with a party of Indian pilgrims. The agreement of the Tibetan Government is being sought but as I understand unofficially that they do not like the grant of permits by Indian authorities to British subjects for visits to Tibet, this case may bring their objections into the open. As visits to the Gyantse Trade Route are a long accepted practice, the Tibetan Government would not find very good ground to objecting in that connection; but visits to West Tibet are rare.

3. At the request of the Political Officer, the Tibetan Government permitted Mr. Bricker, U.S. Vice Consul in Bombay, to visit Yatung with a British companion. The Tibetan Government, in doing so, stated that they did not normally intend to give permission for foreign visitors to Tibet at the present time.

4. The U.S. Ambassador in India asked the Government of India to transmit through this Mission enquiries about the applications from Mr. Turnbull and Mr. Steele to visit Lhasa; but as the Tibetan Government had already replied, refusing permission, the message was not transmitted.

II. DOMESTIC.

1. A new Tibetan regiment, which is being trained at Lhasa, received its colours from the Regent and Commander in Chief early in May.

2. It is understood that Herr Harrer, one of the Austrian refugees now employed by the Tibetan Government has been meeting the Dalai Lama, probably in connection with a cinema room which Herr Harrer is making at Norbu Lingka. I am told that Herr Harrer claims to have had long general conversations with the Dalai Lama. This will be checked; but if it is true, the Regent and his entourage are likely to object as they do not want the Dalai Lama to have private talks with outsiders until he comes of age.

3. Ngapho Shape, Commissioner-designate of Kham, who has served before in that area, is conscious of the dangers from bad administration and official exactions there and he is planning to improve things by asking for adequate allowances for the staff which he will take with him and whom he intends to choose only from reliable officials of his acquaintance. He also has ideas of improving the economic status of the Khampas.

4. It is reported that a few cases of smallpox have occurred but this needs confirmation. Vaccine asked for from India about 6 weeks ago has not yet arrived and the Tibetan Government are anxious.

5. Gyalo Dhondup, an elder brother of the Dalai Lama who returned from China last year, and who was believed to be anxious to get back to China with the Tibetan Mission, is reported to be hesitating to do so as he fears the Tibetan Government will be angry with him. His family has been anxious for him to return to Lhasa but he has kept putting this off and is now causing them trouble by constant demands for large sums of money.

III. ECONOMIC AFFAIRS.

----- Nil -----

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IV. PRESS.

----- Nil -----

V. PERSONAL AND SOCIAL.

Professor V. V. Gokhale, Officer on Special Duty, left Lhasa on 12th May on the termination of his appointment. During his stay he acquired an insight into Tibetan affairs and also pursued valuable studies in Tibetan and found a few old Sanskrit manuscripts.

The Foreign Bureau and some other friends attended farewell parties for Professor Gokhale. A number of Tibetan officials paid farewell calls.

VI. MISCELLANEOUS.

1. An Abbot of Sera monastery has been attending the Mission hospital regularly for treatment. It is, I think, the first occasion on which a high dignitary of one of the great monasteries has done this.

2. The Dalai Lama moved to his summer residence at Norbu Lingka on 4th May.

Sd/- H. E. Richardson,
Indian Trade Agent, Gyantse &
Officer in Charge, Indian Mission, Lhasa.

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Enclosure No. 2 to Despatch 85 from Amconsul, Calcutta, 8/22/50.

(COPY)

From: The Indian Trade Agent, Gyantse, and
Officer in Charge, Indian Mission, Lhasa.
P.O. Gyantse, Tibet.

To : The Political Officer in Sikdim, Gangtok.

Memorandum No. 3(7)-L/50. Dated Lhasa, Tibet, the 15th June, 1950.

MONTHLY REPORT OF THE INDIAN MISSION, LHASA,
FOR PERIOD ENDING 15TH JUNE 1950

1. EXTERNAL RELATIONS.

A. Relations between Tibet and India.

The delay by the British Government in coming to a decision about the grant of visas for Hongkong has had repercussions on Indo-Tibetan relations. The members of the Mission refused a request from the Government of India to surrender for cancellation the official visas for Hongkong granted to them at Calcutta owing to a misunderstanding; and, although the Mission were instructed by the Tibetan Government not to try to travel on those visas, two members are reported to have attempted to enter an aircraft bound for Hongkong from Calcutta. They were prevented from doing so by local officials. A member of the Mission made an ambiguous statement to an A.I.R. correspondent in Calcutta to the effect that outside influences were preventing the Mission from making contact with the Chinese Government. In view of the incident about the attempted departure of members of the Mission from Calcutta such a statement would certainly be interpreted to India's disadvantage. Before this incident I had fully explained to the Tibetan Government that the Government of India have no responsibility for the delay in the granting of visas and are sympathetic about the difficulties of the mission. I think the position is well enough understood by the Tibetan Government but may be misunderstood by others. The Tibetan Mission are in a difficult position as they are being constantly urged by their Government to make contact with the Chinese Government. It is, however, rumoured in Lhasa that some of the members may be glad of the delay as they are afraid of going to China whither they are sure to be summoned. Others want to get at least to Hong Kong hoping in part to satisfy their government and perhaps to be able from there to stave off the further trip to Peking. These are only Lhasa rumours but may have some truth in them. The leaders of the Mission proceeded to Delhi to see whether they could get a decision there, about their visas. The Tibetan Government have been asked by the Government of India through the Indian Mission Lhasa to repeat the instructions to their mission not to attempt to travel on the visas issued at Calcutta; and I have made it clear to the Tibetan Foreign Bureau

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that statements and actions such as those of their Mission only play into the hands of the Communist propagandists, which is sheer stupidity as India is the only country giving active help to Tibet.

B. Relations between Tibet and China.

1. Chinese Government troops have occupied at least one place on the Tibetan side of the de facto frontier which had the guarantee of a local agreement between Tibetan and Chinese officials in 1932. The place, Damdo, is some three days north of Chamdo but cannot be exactly identified. Fifty Chinese troops arrived there suddenly about the end of May and captured the Tibetan Government's wireless set which was established there, with the two operators who were recruited about a year ago by the Tibetan Government from Darjeeling and Sikkim. There were no Tibetan troops at Damdo.

2. Another frontier incident occurred at Yakalo on the Mekong where Tibetan troops were attacked by six or seven hundred Chinese troops who were repulsed with the loss of twenty men. Tibetan losses were an N.C.O. It has not been established whether the attackers were Chinese Government troops or Nationalist remnants.

3. The Tibetan Government's Mission which is to establish contact with the Chinese Government is still held up in India. Pressure is being put on the Tibetan Government by the Chinese to make contact quickly. Chinese broadcasts from Peking have urged this, and messages are probably being received through other channels.

4. One series of such messages was brought to Lhasa by a party from Sining who arrived early in June disguised as traders. They are headed ostensibly by a Kansu-born resident of Sining who was formerly a petty official under Ma Pu-feng and was persuaded by the Communists to take messages to Lhasa. His companions are two Khampas, one of whom from Litang is the real leader of the party. They brought letters for the Regent, and for three Tibetan officials which they delivered through the Tse Yiktsang 'Ecclesiastical Office'. The letters urged the Tibetan Government and Tibetan officials to come to an agreement with the Chinese Government without hostilities and to send a delegation to Peking without delay and also warned them against listening to advice from foreign governments. The party also brought a wireless set which was not detected at the check post at Nag-chukha. When summoned to the Foreign Bureau, they volunteered that they had brought this set and said they would not use it without the Tibetan Government's permission. They said they had orders to inform the Tibetan Government about this and to obey their instructions in all respects, and that they would go back to Sining if ordered. They sang the praises of the Communist regime and denied all reports that it aimed at suppressing monasteries of religion; and they said that the Tibetans would be allowed to govern themselves. When the Foreign Secretaries pointed out that this was contrary to ordinary communist teaching, the messengers admitted that the programme they mentioned was 'for a start'.

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After leaving these men to their own devices for over a week, the Tibetan Government have sealed the wireless set and have appointed a minor official to superintend the movements of the party. The party also brought a number of firearms including automatic weapons, which the Tibetan Government have bought in order to prevent them getting into private hands.

It is not impossible that their ready admission of having brought a wireless set was a blind and that they had other sets which they have distributed to agents.

5. The letters mentioned above were submitted to the National Assembly who decided that negotiations should be undertaken with the Chinese Government but that if the negotiations failed Tibet must fight. It was decided to send the Communist messengers back to Sining with a non-committal reply. It may be suspected that the kind-hearted propaganda of the communist agents is likely to have the effect of dividing Tibetan opinion, for there may be many people less sceptical than the Tibetan Foreign Secretaries.

6. The anxiety of the Chinese Government to avoid hostilities perhaps indicates some regard for world opinion about Tibet and it is possible that the Chinese Government have apprehensions about Indian reactions to an armed invasion.

7. The Dalai Lama's elder brother, Gyalo Dhondup (see Foreign's memorandum No. D-2957-NEF/50, dated the 25th May 1950) is reported to have arrived in Formosa via Manila. He had no permission from the Tibetan Government or his family to undertake the journey and his action will embarrass the Tibetan Government in their relations with the Chinese Government.

8. The new Peking broadcasting station has been putting out programmes in Tibetan three times a week since May 20th. Constant appeals are being made to the Tibetans to come to a peaceful settlement with China and the benefits of the Communist regime are expounded. There is no open threatening at present, but the threats are latent in references to the power and unity of the Chinese Government.

C. Relations between Tibet and Nepal.

----- Nil -----

D. Relations between Tibet and the U.K. and the U.S.A.

The delay in granting or refusing visas for Hong Kong to the Tibetan Mission for China is not understood by the Tibetan Government, and is a cause of considerable feeling. I have explained as my personal opinion that the British Government who have not yet come to an arrangement with the Chinese Government about the exchange of representatives, may well have reason to examine carefully any proposal for contact between Tibetan and Chinese Government official representatives on British territory. The Tibetan Mission met the High Commissioner for the U.K. in New Delhi and the latter sent a message to the Tibetan Government regretting the delays

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and suggesting that it might be more convenient for the Tibetan Government to conduct their negotiations with the Chinese Ambassador in New Delhi. However reasonable this suggestion - which had previously met with a lukewarm reception - may be, it is not likely to allay suspicions in the naturally suspicious minds of the Tibetan Government that obstructions are being raised to direct contact between Tibet and Peking. They are slow to realize that there can be any other point of view but their own. The most unfortunate consequence of the delay in reaching decision is that it gives an opportunity for Communist propaganda in which the Government of India is likely to be accused as much as the British Government.

Miss Bevan (see Political Officer's in Sikkim telegram No. 305/P dated the 1st June, 1950) was sent back to India by the same route by which she entered Tibet after a short stay in Shigatse. The Tibetan Government have so far not mentioned the matter.

The Tibetan Government have agreed, without comment, to the visit to West Tibet by Mr. Turnbull (see my telegram No. 43 dated the 16th May 1950). Peking radio put out a statement that the U.S. Government were shipping arms to Tibet via India. The Government of India have contradicted this.

II. DOMESTIC.

1. It has now been decided to send Ngapho Shape to Kham with only two assistants, to act as Additional Commissioner in Kham with Lhalu Shape who had been instructed to stay on because of the increasingly difficult situations. It seems unlikely that the Commissioners will get on well together and the arrangement does not seem very wise.

2. Ragashar Shape, Defence Minister, accompanied by the lay Commander-in-Chief will proceed to Nagchukha on 20th June in order to be in close touch with the frontier posts.

III. ECONOMIC AFFAIRS.

1. News of Chinese military action in Kham caused the exchange rate to rise rapidly for a few days. When it appeared that the action was on a very small scale the rate dropped again, but not to the level at which the rise had started. There is still a downward tendency.

2. Rain has fallen early this year which promises well for crops and livestock.

IV. PRESS.

----- Nil -----

V. PERSONAL AND SOCIAL.

----- Nil -----

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VI. MISCELLANEOUS.

The Dalai Lama is continuing to show his unrelenting search for knowledge. His intelligence is well above the ordinary. After dealing with his Tibetan studies, he pores over English papers, questions for hours Herr Harrer the Austrian refugee now in Tibetan employment who has become a habitue of Norbu Lingka, and spends the evenings taking to pieces and learning about the mechanism of his cine cameras, electrical equipment and the like. His great desire, but one never likely fulfilled, is to go to a foreign school. Mere amusement is of no interest to him and he will not see any of the more frivolous of his cinema films more than once. His judgement is reported to be remarkably mature but he has no opportunity of affecting the course of events as his minority is strictly enforced by the Regent.

Sd/- H. E. Richardson,
Indian Trade Agent, Gyantse, &
Officer in Charge, Indian Mission, Lhasa.

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