

China clampdown in Tibet

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'Strike hard' drive ahead of politically sensitive anniversary sees 81 detained

BEIJING: China's police have launched a security sweep in Tibet's capital Lhasa, ahead of the politically sensitive anniversary of a crushed uprising against Chinese rule 50 years ago.

The Public Security Bureau of Lhasa launched a 'strike hard' campaign against crime on Jan 18, with raids on numerous residential areas, rented rooms, hotels, guesthouses, Internet cafes and bars, the Tibetan Daily said in a report in the China Tibet News this week.

Police investigated a total of 8,424 people. By last Saturday, the authorities had detained 51 people for unspecified criminal activities, and taken in another 30 people for robbery, prostitution and theft, according to the report dated Sunday.

Two people were being held because 'reactionary music' was found in their cellphones, the report said.

The report did not say whether those detained were Tibetan, from the dominant Han Chinese group or from other ethnic minorities.

The 'strike hard' campaigns are crackdowns where normal arrest and prosecution procedures are usually waived to maximise the numbers detained. Though they normally focus on criminals, people suspected of anti-government activities are also targeted in places such as Tibet and the restive north-west region of Xinjiang.

The China Tibet News said this particular 'strike hard' campaign was launched 'to create a good social environment for the Spring Festival (Chinese New Year) and the Tibetan New Year in 2009'.

But rights group International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) said the crackdown seemed to be intended to intimidate Tibetans in the build-up to sensitive anniversaries, including the 50th anniversary of a crushed uprising against Chinese rule on March 10, 1959, which led to Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama's exile to India.

The move also came ahead of the Tibetan New Year, which begins on Feb 25 this year, and the anniversary of an anti-government protest on March 14 last year which sparked a major military crackdown by the Chinese government.

The Chinese authorities have been preparing for the possibility of more unrest in Tibet since the March riots in Lhasa last year - the biggest anti-government protest among Tibetans in decades.

'The authorities fear further unrest following the wave of protests that swept across the plateau last year' during these periods, the ICT said.

China has denounced the Dalai Lama as a 'splittist' and has blamed his 'clique' for orchestrating the riots last March.

But the Tibetan leader has said he seeks not independence but 'genuine autonomy' within China for Tibetan areas in the country's south-west.

In a controversial move last week, Tibet's Communist Party-controlled legislature voted to create a holiday called the 'Serf Liberation Day' to mark China's defeat of the 1959 independence uprising.

The Communist Party says the holiday, which will fall on March 28, marks the end of a system of feudal oppression.

But Tibetan groups in exile have criticised the new holiday as an attempt to rewrite history, which is irresponsible and provocative.

P.S.

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http://www.straitstimes.com/Breaking%2BNews/Asia/Story/STIStory_331705.html