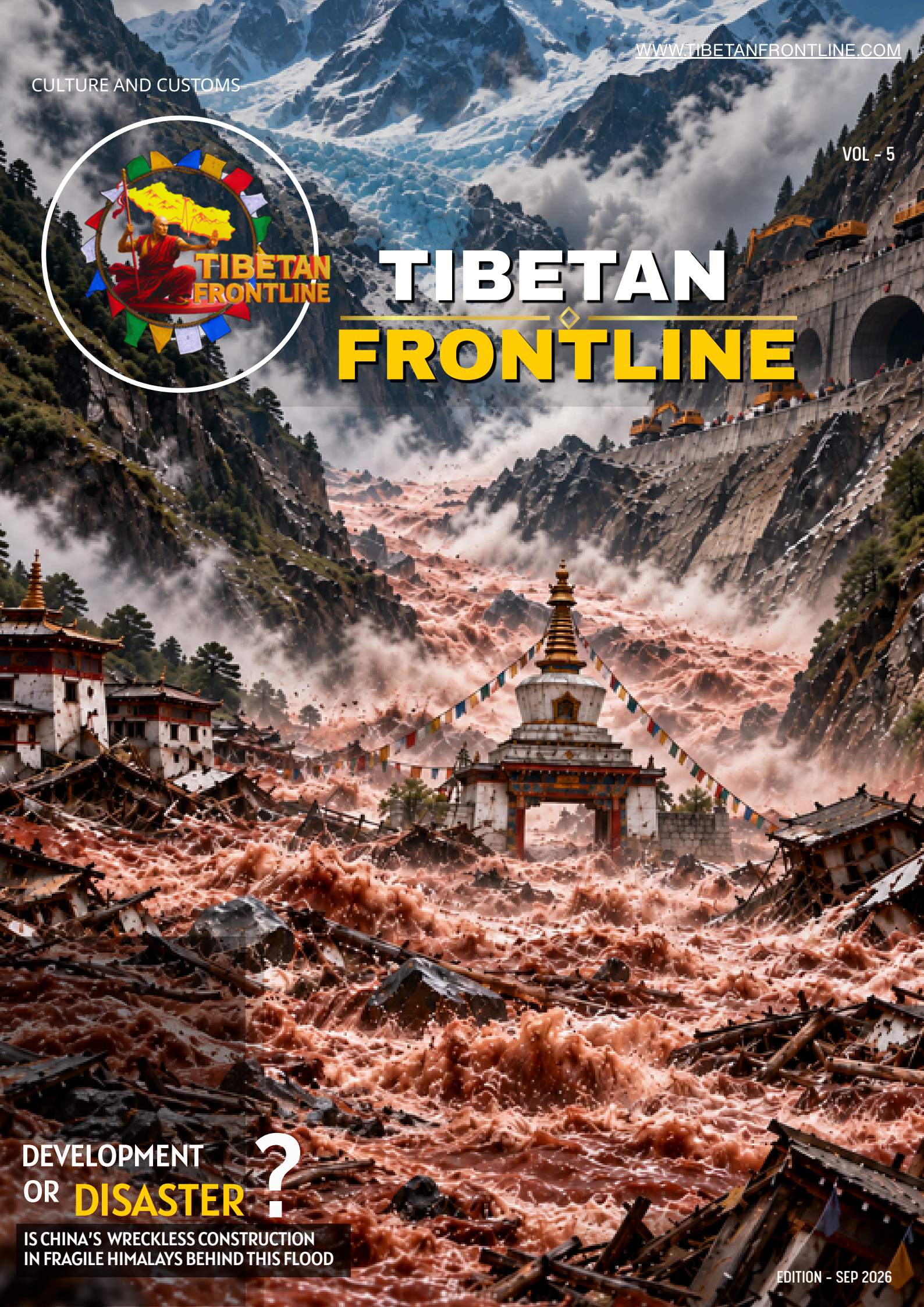


CULTURE AND CUSTOMS

VOL - 5



TIBETAN FRONTLINE



DEVELOPMENT
OR **DISASTER** ?

IS CHINA'S WRECKLESS CONSTRUCTION
IN FRAGILE HIMALAYS BEHIND THIS FLOOD

EDITION - SEP 2026

Editor's *Message*

In this edition, we open the doors on Tibetan culture from every side. We trace the history of the Tibetan drum — the heartbeat behind every ritual — and move through the festivals that shape the season: the White Umbrella Ritual, the Yarney Conclusion and the Arya Tara Practice behind us, with the Medicine Buddha Practice and Tsog Offering Day ahead this month. Our team was also on the ground for the Spirit of Tibet 2026 feast in Delhi, that paired serious agenda, cultural performance. Alongside it, we carry the stories that matter most: the devastating Nepal–Tibet flood and the twenty-minute silence that followed,



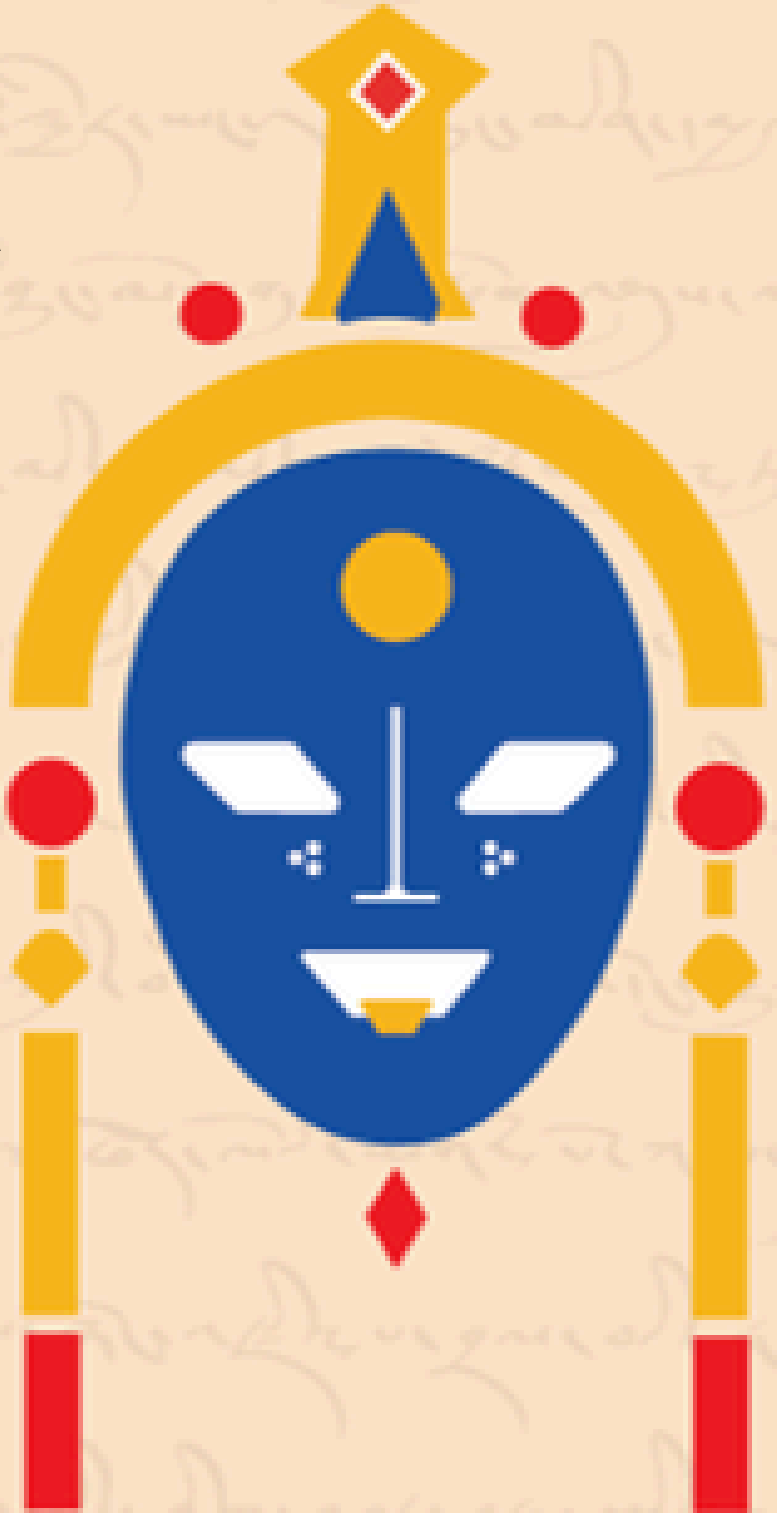
the scientists and diplomats warning about the "third pole," the nuns and nomads holding a culture together at its edges and a culinary landscape you can taste. One thread runs through it all: a people is not a territory, and a faith is not a building. The ice is fragile. The spirit is not.

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CULTURE AND CUSTOMS



TIBETAN DRUM

(DAMARU)

The damaru, a sacred hourglass drum, entered Tibetan Buddhist tradition through Indian tantric influences, traditionally associated with the eighth-century spread of Buddhism. In Tibetan iconography, it symbolizes the union of wisdom and compassion. Its rhythmic sound accompanies prayers and Chöd rituals, helping practitioners cultivate awareness, confront attachment, and contemplate impermanence on the path toward enlightenment.



FESTIVALS AND TRADITIONS

WHITE UMBRELLA RITUAL AND YARNEY CONCLUSION

8-11 SEPTEMBER 2026



Monks perform protective prayers, mantra recitations, and ritual offerings to dispel obstacles, then formally conclude the summer retreat, reaffirming monastic discipline, spiritual purification, and compassion for all beings.

ARYA TARA PRACTICE

Devotees recite Tara's prayers and mantras, make offerings, and dedicate merit to the well-being of all beings, seeking protection from obstacles while cultivating compassion, wisdom, and spiritual liberation.



8, 15 AND 22 SEPTEMBER 2026

MEDICINE BUDDHA PRACTICE

19 SEPTEMBER 2026

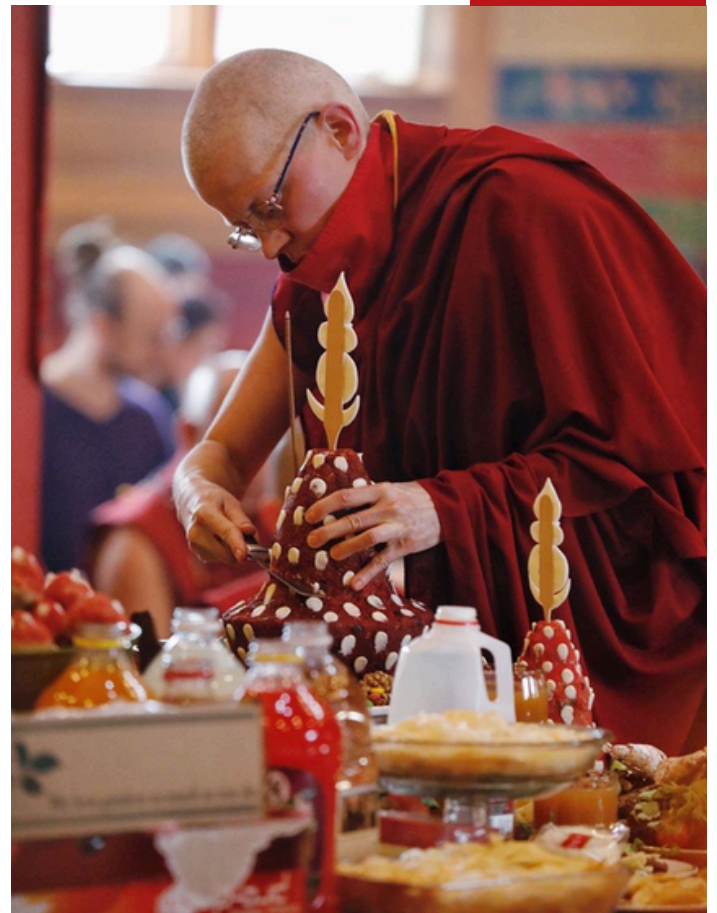


The Medicine Buddha Puja is a Tibetan Buddhist practice dedicated to healing, compassion, and the relief of suffering. At the Garchen Buddhist Institute, Khenpo Tenzin and the institute's lamas will lead the ceremony, including a smoke offering. Devotees recite Medicine Buddha prayers and mantras, dedicate accumulated merit, and pray for the well-being of all sentient beings.

TSOG OFFERING DAY

21 SEP 2026

Tsog Offering Day is an important tantric observance in Tibetan Buddhism. Practitioners prepare and offer consecrated food and drink, recite prayers, and share offerings as part of their spiritual commitments. The ritual is associated with generosity, purification, and the accumulation of merit and wisdom. The Tibetan Buddhist Society lists this date for students observing Vajrayogini practice commitments.



SPIRIT OF TIBET

Celebrating Culture and Compassion

DAY 01

CIVILIZATIONAL CONNECTIONS



HORIZONS

03 SEP 2026

INDIA & TIBET: A LIVING BOND



India–Tibet ties shaped the opening day

SACRED OPENING

Gyudmed and Gyuto monks performed Sangsol prayers

LEADERSHIP

Penpa Tsering and Pema Khandu affirmed Tibet's identity and Himalayan ties

STRATEGIC HORIZONS

Experts including Shivshankar Menon, Omair Ahmad and Prof. Milap Chand Sharma examined Tibet's importance to India.

CULTURE & MEMORY

Vijay Kranti's book launch, exhibitions and TIPA's Namthar concluded the day.



WISDOM FOR THE
MODERN WORLD



WITHIN

04 SEP 2026

PHILOSOPHY, MEDITATION &
WELL-BEING



Tibetan wisdom and holistic well-being shaped the second day

Modern Meditation

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche shared practical techniques for reducing anxiety and building emotional resilience.

Universal Responsibility

Ven. Prof. Samdhong Rinpoche connected Nalanda philosophy with contemporary environmental and social challenges.

Meaningful Life

Ven. Geshe Lhakdor-la emphasized compassion, ethical living and inner contentment.

Tibetan Healing

Men-Tsee-Khang doctors introduced Sowa-Rigpa through workshops and pulse-diagnosis consultations.



STORIES, IDENTITY & IMPERMANENCE



05 SEP 2026

THE FEMALE GAZE & RITUAL CLOSURE



Contemporary Tibetan voices and sacred traditions defined the final day.

Women Shaping Memory

Prof. Swati Chawla, Tsering Yangzom Lama and Kunsang Kyirong explored exile, cinema, family memory and Tibetan identity

A Community Sustained

Representative Jigme Tsering thanked India and New Delhi for supporting the Tibetan community

Ritual Closure

Monks dissolved the Avalokiteshvara Sand Mandala, symbolising impermanence, before sharing its blessed sand with the audience and environment



“Created grain by grain.
Released in a moment.”

Home Again



The Dalai Lama Returns to Dharamshala

After more than two months in the high desert of Ladakh, His Holiness the Dalai Lama came home on Friday. His convoy moved slowly through streets lined with thousands — Tibetans and local Indians alike — who had waited for a glimpse of the 90-year-old leader returning to his residence.

A Himalayan Summer

The visit, from June 28 to September 4, followed a familiar rhythm. Each year the Dalai Lama trades Dharamshala's punishing monsoon for the clear air of Leh, carrying his teachings into the wider Himalayan region. This year the sojourn also gave him space to recover after knee treatment in Delhi.

His days in Ladakh were anything but quiet. Over 49 days of public audiences, he received 21,572 people — a staggering figure for a nonagenarian, and a measure of the devotion he still commands.

A Portrait of Coexistence

Perhaps the most telling moment was a Long-Life Prayer at the Kalachakra Teaching Ground, offered jointly by Ladakh's Buddhist associations alongside its Muslim communities — Anjuman Imamia and Anjuman Moin-ul-Islam — and its Christian community. In an age of fracture, it was a quiet portrait of the interfaith harmony the Dalai Lama has spent a lifetime urging.



Frail in Body, Undimmed in Purpose

His return caps a season of close attention to his health. He underwent left-knee surgery in Delhi this June, a year after a right-knee replacement in New York and months of therapy. Yet mobility challenges have not slowed his calendar. He continues to teach and grant audiences, at times crossing to the Main Temple by golf cart and the steadying arms of his aides.

The body ages; the mission does not. At 90, the Dalai Lama remains, unmistakably, at work.

DEMOCRACY

IN
EXILE



TIBET'S
UNBROKEN
VOICE

On 2 September 1960, a community forced into exile began a democratic journey that refused to let displacement erase its political identity. More than six decades later, Tibetan Democracy Day stands as a reminder of resilience, self-governance, and the struggle to preserve a nation's identity under intense pressure.

When thousands of Tibetans crossed the Himalayas after the upheaval of 1959 and the 14th Dalai Lama's departure from Tibet, they carried little material wealth — but they carried their culture, faith, and determination. Rather than let their political voice fade, Tibetan leaders built democratic institutions in exile. That day, the first elected representatives took their oath in India, founding the system that would grow into today's Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile and Central Tibetan Administration. In 2011, the Dalai Lama transferred his remaining political authority to elected leaders, deepening the democratic principle.

This experiment abroad stands against a very different reality at home. Inside Tibet, communities live under heavy surveillance and tight control, with lasting concerns over religious freedom, language, and cultural expression. Where Tibetans in exile hold elections and debate their future openly, many inside Tibet cannot.



Tibetan Democracy Day is therefore more than a celebration of an institution. It is proof that a displaced people can still organise, elect leaders, and protect their voice. It carries both pride and concern — pride that a scattered community built a functioning democracy thousands of kilometres from home, and concern for the freedoms still contested within Tibet.



Ultimately, it is a story of survival: a people who chose elections over silence, and identity over erasure.



WHILE A NUN IS



EDUCATED

For nearly four decades, the Tibetan Nuns Project (TNP) has empowered Tibetan Buddhist women through education, religious training, and institutional support — while helping preserve Tibetan Buddhist culture itself. What began in 1987 as a response to the struggles of nuns arriving in India has grown into a long-term mission: to open doors for women who once had little access to advanced religious learning.

A CULTURE LIVES



Many nuns reached India in the late 1980s with few resources and little formal education, yet a fierce determination to continue their spiritual paths. For generations, however, they had been denied the scholarship offered to monks — a barrier that kept women from the highest levels of Buddhist study and leadership. The project set out to change this, treating education not as charity but as a path to independence, dignity, and leadership, helping nuns become scholars, teachers, and mentors.

Today, TNP supports more than 900 nuns across seven nunneries in northern India, alongside communities in Kinnaur, Spiti, Ladakh, and Zaskar. It provides food, shelter, clothing, and healthcare so nuns can focus on their studies. Its landmark achievement is opening the path to the Geshema degree — one of the tradition's highest scholarly honours — proving women can master years of rigorous philosophy and debate. Through institutions like Dolma Ling and Shugsep, and the annual Jang Gonchoe debates, the project builds foundations meant to last.



TIBETAN NUNS PROJECT



At its heart is a simple idea: less than a dollar a day can sustain a nun's education — and through her, an entire chain of knowledge.

Because when a nun is educated, a woman gains opportunity. When she becomes a teacher, knowledge survives. And when that knowledge reaches the next generation, a culture continues to live.



BUILDING FAST ON ICE

THE GYIRONG-RASUMA CORRIDOR



AFTER THE FLOOD

The High Himalaya is not empty ground waiting for a port or a highway. It is ice, steep rock, and a river that falls into Nepal within a few kilometres. On 26 August 2026 that river rose without a local storm. A surge from the Lhende Khola on the Tibetan side entered the Bhote Koshi near Rasuwagadhi and ran through Syabrubesi, Trishuli, Bidur and Muglin. The best scientific reading so far is an ice-rock collapse that blocked the channel and then broke through. That does not erase a second fact: this corridor has been treated for years as a construction belt, rebuilt after each flood.

A CORRIDOR ASSEMBLED PROJECT BY PROJECT

Gyirong Port is the hinge. A modest crossing in the 1990s, it was expanded after the 2015 earthquake damaged Zhangmu to the east. Beijing poured money into inspection halls, logistics yards and a wider Friendship

Highway. Freight jumped 583 per cent in 2016, to 104,500 tons; by 2017 it was an international port, and by 2020 trade had passed one billion yuan. The port sits near a river confluence — convenient for trucks, and exactly where floodwater gains speed toward Nepal.



Around it, plans call for a Border Economic Cooperation Zone, a 220 kV power line along the same valley, and a Gyirong–Kathmandu railway still at feasibility stage. Each scheme follows the river; each adds cuts, fill and towers to slopes that already shed ice and debris. The bridges tell it in shorter cycles: the Friendship and Rasuwagadhi spans have been built, washed out and rebuilt. A July 2025 flood destroyed the port bridge; a 91-metre Bailey span replaced it, still listed among bilateral works when the August surge arrived.



XIAOKANG VILLAGES AND THE HIGH GROUND

Since 2017, China has built more than 600 Xiaokang border settlements across 21 counties in Tibet, including Shigatse, which contains Gyirong. In glacial country that logic has a cost: hill-cutting strips cover, changes drainage and loads weak slopes, so meltwater runs faster and more people stand in the path. Nepal has already asked China to halt a safety wall near the Bhote Koshi, fearing it would alter natural flow.



WHAT "BLIND CONSTRUCTION" MEANS HERE

"Blind construction" is not the claim that one crane caused the collapse. It is building at speed in a catchment known for ice avalanches and outburst floods, with little public accounting of slope risk — then restoring the same works after the river removes them. The Himalaya is not stable. Ice is thinning. The Lhende–Bhote Koshi has now flooded twice in fourteen months. The ice failed first; the corridor had already been prepared to receive it.



THE ROOF OF THE WORLD IS

CRACKING

LOBSANG SANGAY'S WARNING FOR TIBET



When a glacier collapsed on the Tibet–Nepal border this year, the floodwater reached a Chinese immigration post some twenty minutes later. That gap, argues Dr. Lobsang Sangay, was time enough to sound an alarm that never came. Speaking on the ANI Podcast with Smita Prakash, the former Sikyong (President) of the Central Tibetan Administration turned a single disaster into a sweeping warning about water, power, and identity on the Tibetan plateau.

A FLOOD, THEN SILENCE

Sangay alleges Beijing could have warned downstream Nepal but stayed quiet, then cut internet access within a day to "control the narrative." He disputes the official toll of a few dozen, estimating several hundred missing on the Tibetan side alone, and says journalists and scientists are barred from assessing the site.



THE PLATEAU'S WATER BOMB

The plateau feeds rivers on which roughly 1.2 billion people depend. With more than 2,000 glacial lakes along the border — dozens at high risk of bursting — Sangay warns that from 2030 glaciers will melt faster than they can replenish. Tibet's crisis, he stresses, is no longer China's alone.



THE BRAHMAPUTRA FLASHPOINT

He links China's estimated 300 dams to rising seismic stress, and calls the planned 60,000 MW mega-dam on the Brahmaputra a weapon India should fear — built, he claims, to power AI data centres, with the capacity to flood or starve India's northeast at will.



ERASING AN IDENTITY

Sangay points to a new "ethnic unity law" mandating Chinese-medium schooling from kindergarten, alongside the sinicization of monasteries, as evidence of deliberate cultural erasure. Article 63, he warns, extends "transnational repression" even to foreign critics.



THE BATTLE OVER THE DALAI LAMA

On the Dalai Lama, who turns 91, Sangay insists the next reincarnation will be born outside China — leaving, he predicts, "a fake one and the real one," with faith deciding which the world follows.

A WAGER ON CHINA'S DECLINE

Yet he closes on hope. Citing China's shrinking share of the world economy, mounting debt, and demographic collapse, Sangay believes Beijing has "peaked." His "5-50" outlook, framed in 2015, foresees a weakened China by 2065 — and urges Tibetans to preserve their language, raise families, and educate a generation ready to reclaim its future.



SOURCE: THE ANI PODCAST WITH SMITA PRAKASH, FEATURING DR. LOBSANG SANGAY, FORMER SIKYONG OF THE CENTRAL TIBETAN ADMINISTRATION.



THEY ARE THE
CULPRIT

THEY ARE THE
MONSTER

AN ASSAM ENVIRONMENTALIST'S RECKONING WITH CHINA

He did not reach for diplomatic language. At Spirit of Tibet 2026, veteran Assam naturalist Soumyadeep Datta-founder of the four-decade grassroots movement Nature's Beckon-named what the region is often too polite to say aloud: that the slow ruin of the Himalaya has an author, and its name is the Chinese state.

A SACRED ECOLOGY UNDER SIEGE

Datta began with reverence. Tibetan Buddhism, he argued, is an ecology as much as a faith- a worldview that treats her rivers, her glaciers, her snow peaks and her lakes as sacred trusts. This is the world's most fragile and most blessed ecosystem, he said, and that is exactly what makes its destruction unforgivable.

THE CONVENIENT ALIBI

His sharpest charge was aimed at a phrase everyone finds comfortable. "Climate change," Datta warned, has become China's alibi — a way to recast the aggressor as a fellow victim. "We are the victim of climate change — very easy," he said, mimicking the excuse. The damage, he insisted, is deliberate: "Already they have done the damage."



A SHARED STAKE

Datta warned that this is not China's problem alone — India and Tibet drink from the same rivers and cannot stay in a "safe position." The crisis, he argued, is political, not merely environmental, and demands that India and the Tibetan people stand together and act — because until they do, nothing changes.

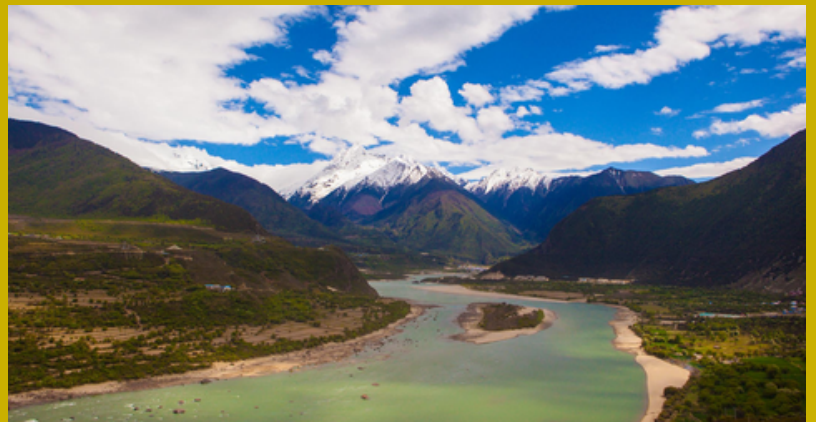


SOURCE: REMARKS BY ENVIRONMENTALIST SOUMYADEEP DATTA (NATURE'S BECKON, ASSAM) AT THE ENVIRONMENT PANEL OF SPIRIT OF TIBET 2026.



WE DON'T KNOW ANYTHING

Again and again he returned to one chilling refrain: "We don't know anything." Data is withheld, information shut down, and the world left blind while it suffers downstream. "They have done it. We all suffer," he said. His demand was not sympathy but assurance and data — transparency China refuses to give.



THE WEAPON HE TRUSTS

Yet he ended not in despair but strategy. Funding never flows to "climate change," he noted — it flows through people. Having built wildlife sanctuaries through public participation, his method is plain: convince the people, and they convince their MPs, who raise it in the right forum. "We are the activists — we will do it on our own ground."

TIBET

THE HINGE CHINA CANNOT ERASE



At Spirit of Tibet 2026, veteran diplomat and former National Security Adviser Shivshankar Menon delivered a quietly devastating verdict on China's occupation of Tibet — a lecture that stripped Beijing's claims down to their historical bones.



A BORDER WRITTEN IN BARBED WIRE

Menon, whose own childhood was spent in Lhasa, reminded the audience that India and China shared no common border until China invaded Tibet in 1950. What was once a peaceful, customary frontier became "the world's largest boundary dispute" — an "open wound in barbed wire" that did not exist before Beijing arrived.

HISTORY BEIJING WOULD RATHER FORGET

He dismantled China's ownership narrative point by point. For most of history, Chinese authority in Tibet was "non-existent or intermittent." When Tibet appealed to imperial China for help, Beijing replied it was "not our problem." Even the 1951 agreement spoke of Tibetans "returning to the family" — an admission, Menon noted dryly, that Tibet had been separate and free all along. The claims made today, he argued, are "modern myths" manufactured to serve a nationalist state.



THE MUSEUM OF A LIVING CULTURE

Most cutting was his portrait of China's assimilation drive: the new ethnic-unity law, Tibetan language replaced by Chinese in schools, monasteries and even reincarnation placed under Party control. Beijing, he said, has reduced minorities to "theatre" — dressed up, performed, then gutted of meaning. And the "very idea that a group of atheists can decide the reincarnation" of the Dalai Lama, he added, is simply absurd.

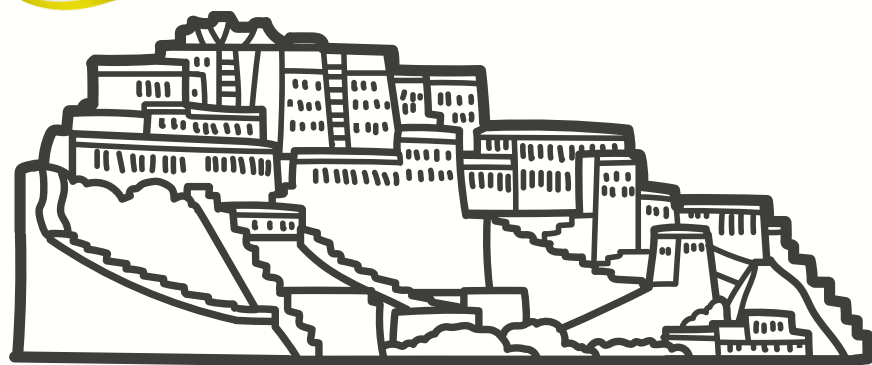


WHAT BEIJING UNDERESTIMATES

Yet Menon's conclusion was defiantly hopeful. Tibetan identity has survived where others vanished — proof, he suggested, that state power is temporary and "presentism" a trap. Nothing about China's dominance is permanent. The task now is to keep Tibet's culture and idea alive until the balance shifts.



SOURCE: LECTURE BY AMBASSADOR SHIVSHANKAR MENON AT SPIRIT OF TIBET 2026, CHAIRED BY SHERAB WOESER OF THE TIBET FUND.



GUARDIANS OF THE

GRASSLAND

Two Tibetan herders have won the Rangeland Restoration Awards 2026, a global honour recognising their fight to heal degraded grasslands and keep Tibet's nomadic culture alive. Declared under the UN's International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists, the awards drew 90 entries from 26 countries and honoured just 20 practitioners worldwide.

REVIVING THE ALPINE MEADOWS



TWO TIBETANS HONOURED FOR SAVING A WAY OF LIFE

Trachung Palzang, from Dzoge County in Ngawa, returned home in 2010 to confront the erosion of his family's grazing lands. Blending traditional herding wisdom with modern ecology, he founded a grassland restoration cooperative in 2013. His community-led work has revived roughly 933 hectares of alpine grassland and peat wetland, benefiting more than 1,200 people and supporting over 230 wildlife species. His model has since been copied by more than ten organisations.

TEACHING THE NOMAD'S KNOWLEDGE

Hashu Karma Choshas, from Drido County in Yushu, is a nomadic educator and cultural custodian. His Polar Nomadic School — pairing ecological learning with traditional knowledge — has reached over 5,000 students and herders. A recognised bearer of Shengto-style black-tent craftsmanship, he has restored some 333 hectares of grassland near the headwaters of the Yangtze, guarding both water sources and heritage.



A RECOGNITION AGAINST THE ODDS



The awards land at a precarious moment. Across the plateau, Tibetan pastoralists face intensifying pressure as roads, dams, mines and reservoirs — built in the name of development — swallow ancestral grazing grounds. Under Chinese policies, many nomads have been fenced out of seasonal pastures and pushed into fixed settlements, fragmenting the land and straining the transmission of Tibetan language and knowledge.

Against that backdrop, the two men's recognition is more than an environmental accolade — it is quiet proof that Tibet's nomadic spirit endures.

THE CULINARY CULTURAL LANDSCAPE



SHA PHALEY

(Tibetan Meat-Filled Bread) is a traditional Tibetan dish made by enclosing seasoned meat, often yak or beef, in a thin layer of dough and frying it until golden. Cherished for generations, it is a hearty food associated with family kitchens, hospitality, and the cold Himalayan climate. Its crisp exterior and warm, savoury filling make it a beloved part of Tibet's culinary heritage, carrying the flavours of pastoral life into Tibetan homes and communities today.

ACROSS THE ROOF OF THE WORLD



NAMTSO LAKE



JOKHANG TEMPLE



TASHILHUNPO MONASTERY

TIBETAN FRONTLINE



PRESERVE TIBETAN CULTURE

TRANSLATED BY -
TENZIN MINLAY

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