

Indian monks call for democracy in Burma; praise the Dalai Lama

Hinayana, Mahayana Buddhists sects should unite to fight for the people's cause: Monk



Myanmar monks join hands with the masses to protest injustice in Burma
Courtesy Google Images

AKANSHA PRADEEP

The Buddhist monks in Bylekuppe are happy about the pro-democracy movement started by the monks in Burma.

Myanmar better known as Burma has been under military rule since 1962. The current military junta formed in 1988 does not agree with the establishment of democracy in the country. It cancelled the democratic elections of 1990, which was won by a party led by Daw Aung San Sui Kyi. Aung San Sui Kyi has been under house arrest since then. In mid August the government decided to raise fuel prices that led to street protests, which was soon joined by the country's Buddhist monks. The situation worsened when the monks demanded the release of pro-democracy leader Aung San Sui Kyi. Myanmar's military government has sealed the country's contact with outside world pushing it into poverty and repression.

The Buddhist monks, being the highest

moral authority in Burmese culture, are against the military rule and are representative of the people.

Pema Namgyal, a Buddhist monk and translator in the Namdroling monastery (Golden pagoda) in Bylekuppe said that they are happy to know that the monks in Burma are protesting against military rule. He said they should help the people and should follow the teachings of Lord Buddha.

He added that the Dalai Lama has called for the two sects of Buddhism to unite. The Hinayana sect, the one in Bylekuppe, is usually called the 'lower vehicle' while the Mahayana sect of Burma is known as the 'higher vehicle'. Lama Namgyal said that such classifications promote discord, and the Hinayana monks of India should support their brethren in Burma.

The Burmese revolution would intensify if the two sects of Buddhism (Hinayana and Mahayana sects) unite and collectively support the pro-democracy movement in Burma, he said.

Indian monks rejoice as America honours the Dalai Lama

GAYATHRI VAIDYANATHAN

The Dalai Lama himself was surprised when he received the gold medal from the United States Congress, said Buddhist monk Pema Namgyal at Bylekuppe's Namdroling monastery. It is a good thing though, he continued, he deserves the honor as much as he deserved the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize.

His Holiness, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama received the Congressional Gold Medal for his advocacy of peace, human rights and non-violence worldwide on October 17, 2007. President Bush called him a "universal symbol of peace and tolerance, a shepherd of the faithful and a keeper of the flame for his people".

China reacted vehemently to the award, asking the United States to not interfere in its "internal affairs" regarding Tibet.

After the awards ceremony, the Dalai Lama met the President privately.

Tibetan Lama Pema Namgyal who is a translator at the monastery, said that even as Bush's presidency enters its final stretch, he wants to align himself with human rights and religious freedom to counteract his bitter legacy of Iraq.

The Lama laughed at China's comments that the medal would "seriously [wound] the feelings of the Chinese people". Despite China's influence, Tibet is still Buddhist, he said, and China does not know or consider the feelings of the Tibetans.

The founder of Tibetan Buddhism, Guru Padmasambhava said that the religion will never leave Tibet and so it never will, he stated emphatically. It would be best for Tibet if the Dalai Lama returns there as both the spiritual and political head, although the younger generation has become



Newspaper clippings of the Dalai Lama are displayed prominently at the Namdroling monastery By author

materialistic, he said.

China invaded Tibet in 1951 and imposed its communist rule. The Dalai Lama has lived in exile in Dharamsala, India since 1959. Since then he has been advocating for an autonomous Tibet.

The second largest Tibetan settlement outside Tibet lies in Bylekuppe, Karnataka. Around 7000 monks live there. Their happiness at the Dalai Lama's award was prominently displayed at the entrance of the monastery guest house with a banner proclaiming "we pay our heartiest felicitations to His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama...on being conferred highest civilian honour with US Congressional Gold Medal award in recognition of his effort to resolve Tibetan issue through non-violence struggles and spreading message of peace and religious harmony in the world"

Withdrawal blues hit the United States

General Petraeus offers an out as US electorate, Iraqi people clamour for US withdrawal from Iraq

GAYATHRI VAIDYANATHAN

There are many excellent reasons for the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq. Bush is hesitant though; he prefers his successor deal with the mess his legacy leaves behind.

April 9, 2003 saw the United States occupy Baghdad in operation "Iraqi Freedom". Alleging that Iraq possessed Weapons of Mass Destruction and that Saddam Hussain had ties with the Al Qaeda, George Bush orchestrated the invasion of Iraq. Images of American troops pulling down a statue of Saddam to the jubilation of the Iraqis flashed worldwide, making us believe, for a minute, that the invasion was warranted.

Four years down the road, Iraq is in shambles. In 2006, the number of Iraqi casualties at the hands of the Americans was estimated (controversially) at 655,000 by the reputable British medical journal The Lancet. The country is at the

brink of civil war, with the Shia, Sunni and Kurds all battling for control of Baghdad. Iraq's economy, though booming, has been opened up by the US, allowing 100% foreign ownership. Oil production has been privatized. Iraq is in America's hands. Withdrawal just might help restore some amount of sovereignty to the Iraqis, although the Americans would be foolish to permit this given the billions of dollars they have spent on the war.

The most important reason would be that the Iraqi people want the foreign occupiers to leave. So do the electorate in the United States, as numerous polls have shown. The US commander in Iraq General Petraeus has opened a way out.

On September 10, 2007, Petraeus delivered a much-awaited report on the condition of Iraq in front of the US congress. A 30,000-troop surge ordered by George Bush in March 2007 has worked, he said. Iraq is less violent than before and years

down the line, there might even be a light at the end of the tunnel.



Gen. Petraeus and Ryan C. Crocker, the American ambassador to Iraq, at the Congress. Petraeus said that violence in Iraq has lessened since March.

Courtesy Google Images

All are excellent reasons for withdrawal. However, there is one lone cowboy in the United States and he does not want withdrawal from Iraq on his watch.

Kurds complicate Iraqi withdrawal

US in trouble as it extends friendship to Kurds and Turks

POOJA GAUTAM

The Washington Post reported recently that 12 Turkish soldiers

The Iraqi Kurds have become important in the post-Saddam era. They have their own troops, the Peshmerga, thought to contain 50,000 to 100,000 fighters; they control the oil city of Kirkuk; and they are the primary supporters of the US invasion of Iraq.

If the United States wants a long-term presence in the region, the Kurds are its partners.

Complications arise however because the US and Turkey share a good bilateral relationship. America cannot support the Kurds without annoying Iraq's neighbour. Turkey fully expects the US to help them contain the Kurdish insurgency.

The White House has already isolated the separatist Kurds from citizen Kurds working towards a unified Iraq. At the same time, it has asked the Turkish government not to invade northern Iraq, one of the few stable regions in the nation.

The United States now has a delicate balancing act as it juggles the Kurds and the Turks in the midst of its withdrawal woes in Iraq.

died in an ambush by Kurdish militants from Iraq. The Kurds in Turkey are fighting the Turkish government for autonomy, with help from the Kurds in Iraq.