



## Release of 11th Panchen Lama

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### Why in News

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Recently, the United States has urged China to release Tibetan Buddhism's 11<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama, who was taken into captivity at the age of six by Chinese authorities.

### Key Points

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- In 1995, a young Tibetan boy **Gedhun Choekyi Nyima** was recognised as the 11<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama, **the second highest spiritual authority in Tibetan Buddhism** after the Dalai Lama.
- Days after his recognition Nyima was detained by Chinese authorities, and became the **world's youngest political prisoner**.
- Thereafter, China appointed its own Panchen Lama, **Gyaltzen Norbu**, who has been described by exiles as a "**stooge of the atheist Chinese Communist Party government**".

The incident threatened the **unique identity of Tibetan Buddhism** and created **religious freedom issues** in Tibet.

- The Dalai Lama has in the past strongly criticised China for meddling in the system of reincarnation of the Dalai Lamas and Panchen Lamas.

### Background

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- Tibet is governed as an **autonomous region of China**. Beijing claims a centuries-old sovereignty over the region, but many Tibetans argue that Tibet was colonised.
- China sent in thousands of troops to enforce its claim on the region in 1950.  
Some areas became the **Tibetan Autonomous Region** and others were incorporated into neighbouring Chinese provinces.
- In 1959, after a failed anti-Chinese uprising, the 14<sup>th</sup> **Dalai Lama fled Tibet and set up a government in exile in India**.

- **China views the Dalai Lama as a separatist threat**, although he has repeatedly stated that his goal is for Tibetan autonomy rather than independence.

## Tibetan Buddhism

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- **Origin:**
  - Buddhism became a major religion of Tibet towards the end of the 8th century CE.
  - The **Tibetan king, Trisong Detsen**, who invited **two Buddhist masters namely, Shantarakshita and Padmasambhava from India to Tibet**. These two masters had helped to translate important Buddhist texts into Tibetan.
    - **Shantarakshita** was the **abbot** of Nalanda in India. He **built the first monastery in Tibet**.
    - **Padmasambhava** was a **mahasiddha** (master of miraculous powers).
- **Geographical Reach:**
  - Tibetan Buddhism is not only found in Tibet, but also across the **Himalayan region from Ladakh to Sikkim, as well as parts of Nepal**.
  - It is the **state religion of the kingdom of Bhutan**.
  - It also spread to **Mongolia and parts of Russia** (Kalmykia, Buryatia and Tuva).
  - **Tara** (Tibetan Sgrol-ma) is a **Buddhist saviour-goddess**, widely popular in **Nepal, Tibet, and Mongolia**.
- **Special Features of Tibetan Buddhism:**
  - Tibetan Buddhism **combines the essential teachings of Mahayana Buddhism with Tantric and Shamanic**, and material from an **ancient Tibetan religion called Bon**.
  - **Relationship between life and death:** A proper understanding of the subject of death and dying is held to be indispensable towards having a fuller, happier life.
  - **Lama:** Lama is a teacher.
  - **Deities:** These deities are not gods, but aspects of enlightened qualities eg; wisdom and compassion. The patron deity of Tibet is **Avalokiteshvara**, the Buddha of Compassion.
  - **Rituals:** Temple ceremonies are often noisy, with brass instruments, cymbals and gongs, and musical and impressive chanting by formally dressed monks.

Source: IE