



Release of 11th Panchen Lama

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Why in News

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

Key Points

- In 1995, a young Tibetan boy **Gedhun Choekyi Nyima** was recognised as the 11th 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

- 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 14th **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

- **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