

CHINESE WORKERS DISMANTLE TIBETAN STUDY, EVICT PEOPLE

BEIJING: Chinese government workers are dismantling buildings and evicting residents at Larung Gar, one of the world's largest centers of Tibetan Buddhist learning, according to overseas-based Tibetan groups, though a local official said the site was being renovated. London-based Free Tibet said government workers began removing residential buildings and evicting people who live at the academy in western Sichuan province on Thursday morning. Several exile Tibetan groups have said local authorities distributed an order in June to reduce the number of monks and nuns living there by half to 5,000, citing overcrowding concerns.

The order also sought a clear separation between genuine monks and nuns studying at the site and lay people residing there, according to pro-Tibetan groups, which have characterized the government move as an attempt to better manage religious activity in the area. A Serdar County government official said by telephone Thursday that police were not demolishing buildings but rather ren-

ovating them, but gave no further details. The official gave only her surname, Zhang, because she was not authorized to speak to the media. The county's press office was "not reachable" on its telephone line on Friday, according to a recorded message.

One within the iris

Founded in 1980, the academy attracts Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns for short- and long-term study in the religion's more esoteric aspects. They typically stay in a sprawling mountainside settlement made of thousands of log cabins. Government teams previously evicted thousands of monks in 2001, but the site has swelled significantly in the years since. Tsering Tsomo, director of the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Dharamsala, India, said monastery leaders including the abbot Tsultrim Lodro have opted to keep a low media profile while appealing for "restraint and sobriety" among their followers for fear of escalating tensions with

authorities. "The gist of what they (monastery leaders) are calling for is to let the authorities proceed with the partial demolition, as it would only cause loss to some practitioners and their dwellings," Tsering said. "Because the continued survival of the Larung Gar itself is more important."

The expulsions came on the day that China's hand-picked Panchen Lama, the second-highest figure in Tibetan Buddhism, presided over a four-day Buddhist ritual called the Kalachakra initiation at his home monastery in southwestern Tibet. It was the first time the ritual was carried out in Tibet in 50 years and attracted 50,000 Buddhists, according to the official Xinhua news agency. Tibetan groups this week condemned the ceremony as a sham orchestrated by Beijing to assert its authority. China picked its own Panchen Lama in 1995, rejecting a boy chosen by the Dalai Lama, Tibetan Buddhism's highest ranking figure, who lives in exile in India and is regarded by Beijing as a separatist. — AP



XIGAZE: In this Thursday, July 21, 2016 photo released by Xinhua News Agency, Tibetan monks take smartphones pictures during the Kalachakra ritual in Xigaze, southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region. — AP



SHENYANG: In this Thursday, July 21, 2016 photo, a man sits outside of a flooded shop. — AP

FLOODS KILL AT LEAST 154 ACROSS CHINA, LEAVE SCORES MISSING

VILLAGERS COMPLAIN ABOUT LACK OF ANY WARNING

BEIJING: Torrential rains that have swept through China have killed at least 154 people and left 124 missing, officials said yesterday, with most of the casualties reported from a northern province where villagers complained about lack of warning before a deadly flash flood. The rains, which began on Monday, have flooded streams, triggered landslides and destroyed homes across the country. Most of the fatalities were reported in the northern province of Hebei, where the provincial Department of Civil Affairs said 114 people were killed and 111 others were missing.

More than 300,000 people were evacuated in Hebei, and the province made another round of appropriations of tents, blankets, rain boots and generators, the department said. In the Hebei city of Xingtai alone, 25 people were killed and another 13 were missing.

The Xingtai village of Daxian was swamped by a flash flood early Wednesday as residents were asleep. Eight people, including three children, were killed and another was missing in the flood, according to the Xingtai government.

But the tragedy did not surface until Friday, when accounts, purportedly by local residents, began surfacing on Chinese social media of angry villagers blocking roads, accusing the local authorities of failing to notify them in time for evacuation when an upstream reservoir discharged the floodwaters. The online posts - accompanied by photos of drowned victims - also accused local officials of covering up the tragedy by lying about having no deaths in the area. State media later confirmed that a local official had said Wednesday afternoon that the flash flood caused no fatalities.

Drowned children

Some of the accompanying photos showed images of apparently drowned children lying in mud, their bodies swollen and their skin pale. In another photo, local villagers and an official knelt before each other, with state media reporting that the official was trying to console the grieving family members. Although removed from social media yesterday morning - apparently by censors - the posts had already caused a national uproar, with members of the public demanding accountability from local authorities. Chinese journalists rushed to the village Friday night and reported on the disaster.

In response, local authorities started to release casualty figures and offered explanations late Friday. Yesterday night, Xingtai Mayor Dong Xiaoyu made a public apology and bowed at a news con-

ference for the mishandling of the flash flood. He said that the danger of the flood was underestimated, and that local officials erred in failing to confirm and report casualties in a timely and accurate fashion. He promised a thorough investigation and to hold negligent officials responsible.

Authorities blamed extraordinary rainfall and a failure of a river levee near the village for the sudden water surge. Local media reported that the river channel is particularly narrow near the village of Daxian and has been blocked by pipes from a heating utility, as well as mud. Qiu Wenshuang, a vice mayor of Xingtai, said yesterday that the flood was sudden and that the village was already flooded when officials arrived there to evacuate residents on Wednesday morning, according to state media reports. — AFP

ANGER ERUPTS OVER GOVT HANDLING OF CHINA FLOOD

BEIJING: Anger erupted yesterday over floods in northern China left more than 100 people dead or missing, with media and internet users accusing officials of negligence. Torrential rain has lashed northern China this week, and a flashflood near the city of Xingtai in Hebei province, which left nine dead and 11 missing, has become a focus of the public's dissatisfaction with the government's response to the disaster.

Angry villagers have blamed local officials for failing to warn them of the impending deluge, with Hebei Satellite TV showing one resident saying water had reached chest-level before an alarm was raised. Photos of the aftermath showed telephone poles toppled and homes completely collapsed, and debris submerged in a tide of brown mud. Local deputy Communist party secretary Wang Qingfei drew ire for earlier comments that there had been "no casualties" in the flood, the Beijing News said. A video of him kneeling before distraught, wailing relatives who lost family members was spread on social media, showing three distraught women clutching at his arm while asking how many had died.

Other online footage showed locals clashing with phalanxes of police, with one video showing police lining up to form a road blockade that the person filming

claimed was intended to stop residents from travelling to Beijing to report the incident. Public skepticism towards officials is common following disasters in China, as authorities seek to control information and their lack of openness can raise doubts about their trustworthiness. It remained unclear whether the flood, which struck early Wednesday while villagers slept, was the result of the levee of a nearby river breaking, a release of water from a local reservoir, or a combination of the two, the Beijing News said.

"Not to notify villagers about the Xingtai flood wasn't just an abandonment of the officials' duty-it was essentially manslaughter," wrote one incensed user of China's Twitter-like Sina Weibo microblog yesterday. Between Monday and Friday evening, rainstorms left 36 people dead and 77 missing across Hebei, with 230,000 people relocated and more than 29,000 homes collapsed, the province's civil affairs department said on an official social media account. Flooding is not uncommon during the summer monsoon season in northern China, but rains have been unusually heavy across the country this summer. Heavy downpours have already wreaked havoc in central and southern China, flooding several major cities and causing over 200 deaths, state media has said. — AFP

MH370 MYSTERY SPURS EFFORTS TO IMPROVE AIRCRAFT TRACKING

HONG KONG: As investigators prepare to wind down the Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 search after more than two fruitless years, the airline industry is still working to raise safety standards to prevent another plane from going missing. The disappearance of the Boeing 777-200, which went missing March 8, 2014 with 239 people aboard, left families of the crew and passengers in limbo. The unsolved mystery also spurred airlines and aircraft makers to devise better ways to track flights, locate wreckage and retrieve data from flight data recorders, or "black boxes."

Authorities said Friday that they'll suspend the hunt after they finish scouring more than 100,000 square kilometers (38,610 square miles) of seabed in the Indian Ocean later this year. Earlier this year, the International Civil Aviation Organization, spurred by MH370, moved to tighten up safety standards. ICAO, a United Nations agency that sets global aviation standards, approved a requirement for all airlines flying over open ocean to report their position every 15 minutes, which will take effect November 2018. Until now, pilots have typically done this every half hour.

I've got you in my sights

In another move that could help searchers locate crashes, planes in "distress" will have to automatically report their position and other critical information at least every minute. However, only planes built

on or after Jan 1, 2021 will be required to have this capability. Minute-by-minute reports would help searchers zero in on a search area of about 100 square miles. The agency also strengthened standards for the flight data recorders that investigators use to piece together what has happened in aviation disasters.

Beginning in 2018, the ICAO will require that flight data recorders be equipped with underwater locator beacons that can last at least 90 days. MH370's beacon was designed to last 30 days. The agency will also require new aircraft designs approved as of 2021 to include a way to retrieve the recorders or their information before they sink to the seabed. One possibility is an ejection system, another is relaying the data via satellite to ground stations. But deployment of such new systems could take a decade because of the lag between aircraft designs and certifications.

As for Malaysia Airlines, the disaster forced it to carry out a sweeping restructuring that analysts said was needed to keep the state-owned carrier afloat after it was shunned by travelers and teetering on the brink of bankruptcy. A new CEO, Christoph Mueller, cut unprofitable routes, grounded jets and axed 6,000 workers from Malaysia's bloated workforce in a \$1.7 billion overhaul that helped the company turn a monthly profit in February, its first in years. But in a sign of lingering turmoil at the company, Mueller abruptly resigned in April. — AP

PHILIPPINES REVIEWING 'CRAZY' CLIMATE PLEDGES, SAYS DUTERTE

MANILA: The Philippines is reviewing its "crazy" commitment to severely cut greenhouse-gas emissions in the Paris climate deal, new President Rodrigo Duterte has warned. The government of predecessor Benigno Aquino had pledged to the United Nations to cut the Asian country's emissions by 70 percent by 2030 from 2000 levels if it got support from developed nations to convert to clean technologies.

"I have misgivings about this Paris (climate deal)... The problem is these industrialized countries have reached their destination," Duterte said in a series of speeches during a visit to the southern island of Mindanao on Friday. The international deal aimed at curbing emissions was signed in Paris in December last

year, but only 19 countries including France and island-states threatened by rising sea levels have so far ratified the agreement. It cannot become effective until 55 countries accounting for 55 percent of global greenhouse-gas emissions have fully approved it.

"There is no treaty to honor. We have not signed the treaty," Duterte said, according to transcripts of his comments released by the presidential palace Saturday. Duterte, who was elected to a six-year term in May, also said poor countries such as the Philippines should be allowed to pursue industrialization to improve the lives of their people. "My plan is to put up industrial zones everywhere," said Duterte, with China an "easy market" for such a move. "If you will not allow us to reach parity, you are already

there and we are still here, then I'm saying that's crazy. I will not agree to that."

Duterte said the treaty restrictions would be difficult to implement and the legislature was already reviewing the document. The previous government had said the reductions were conditional on sufficient financial resources, technology development and transfer being made available to Manila. The Paris pact calls for capping global warming at well below two degrees Celsius, and 1.5 Celsius if possible, compared with pre-industrial levels. The accord-which could enter into force later this year, far sooner than expected-sets ambitious goals for capping global warming and funneling trillions of dollars to poor countries facing an onslaught from climate damage. — AFP



In this March 22, 2014 file photo, flight officer Rayan Gharazeddine on board a Royal Australian Air Force AP-3C Orion, searches for the missing Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 in southern Indian Ocean, Australia. — AP