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TIN News Update / August 9, 1991

Trogawa Disappearance believed held in prison

A Tibetan refugee who disappeared whilst visiting his family in Tibet last year is now reported to be in a prison in Shigatse.

The disappearance of the missing man, Dega Trogawa, was reported in a TIN Disappearance Report on May 4, 1991. He now turns out to have been under detention in Nyari Prison, Shigatse since December 1990, according to a separate report from Tibet received in early June 1991.

Dega Trogawa, who had lived in exile in India since 1982, was arrested by police from the Lhasa Public Security Bureau at Narthang, near Shigatse, according to the most recent report, supplied by unofficial sources in Tibet. He is believed to have been detained at 5am on 11th or 12th December 1990.

Dega Trogawa, also known as Dechen Gawa, was on his way back to India after a visit to see his family in the southern Tibetan town of Gyantse. He had arrived in Lhasa on 9th October 1990. On 4th December 1990 he left the capital to begin his journey towards the border, stopping for a week in Shigatse.

An alternative report gives the date of Dega Trogawa's disappearance as shortly after February 25th 1991. All reports agree that the missing man was detained after leaving Shigatse on his way in a vehicle to the Nepal-Tibet border. They also confirm that he is reported to be held in a prison at Shigatse.

There are between five and six other Tibetan exiles held in the same detention centre in Nyari, according to the report. All had returned to Tibet for short visits. Their names are not known.

Dega Trogawa was born around 1935 in Tro Tralung, near Gyante, in what was then known as the Tsang district of Tibet. His father was Rimzhi Trogawa, an aristocrat who was serving under Lhalu Tsewang Dorje in the eastern Tibetan town of Chamdo at the time of the Chinese invasion of 1950. Rimzhi Trogawa is referred to by Robert Ford, a British radio operator working for the Tibetans in Chamdo at the time, in his book "Captured in Tibet".

Dega Trogawa spent 20 years in prison or in labour camps after the Chinese took over the Tibetan administration in 1959. He was released in 1979 and escaped to India about 3 years later. He is said by close associates in India to have been extensively involved in religious practices since his arrival in India and not to have taken any part in political activities since his youth.

In early 1990 he applied for permission from the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi to visit Tibet in order to see members of his family still living there. He is said to have received an assurance from the Embassy that there were no charges outstanding against him.

Relatives and close associates in India have issued statements saying that Dega Trogawa had no involvement in political activities or criminal activities of any kind since his arrival in India in about 1982, and say that he returned to Tibet last year for personal reasons only in order to visit his family. As of July 1991 the family in India had still heard no

official news of the whereabouts of the missing man.

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Copy of First Report: Disappearance Report/ May 4, 1991

Tibetan Exile Disappears on Return Journey to Tibet

TIN has received a report of the disappearance of a Tibetan exile who had returned to Tibet to meet his son. The exile, a former pro-independence activist, has not been heard of since December last year.

Dega Trogawa, aged 58, has not returned from a trip to Gyantse in Southern Tibet, where he had gone to meet his son, Norbu Dradul. Mr Trogawa left his relatives in India at the end of October 1990 after obtaining the appropriate visa from the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi.

Later Mr Trogawa wrote from Tibet to his brothers in India, telling them that he would return to India by 10th December 1990. The brothers, Dr Trogawa Rimpoche and Tashi Trogawa of Darjeeling, North East India, reported on 7th April that they have not heard any news of Dega since receiving that letter.

"He was in very good health at the time he left", says Dr Trogawa, who is a well-known Tibetan doctor and lama, "But since then we have not had any news about him".

Some travellers from Lhasa later told Dega's family in India that Dega had been arrested whilst travelling with two other people in Southern Tibet. The travellers said the three people had been in a private car on the road from Lhatse to Tingri, a Tibetan town near the Nepali border, when they were arrested. This report of the arrest is unconfirmed.

Dr Trogawa Rimpoche and Tashi Rimpoche have issued an appeal to international organisations to intervene to protect their brother, whom they believe is held in custody by the Chinese authorities. "We are extremely worried that he might be kept in terrible conditions in jail, and urge your organisation to appeal for the safety of his life and for his early release", says Dr Trogawa.

Dega Trogawa had lived in exile in India since he escaped from Tibet in 1982. He had spent 20 years in prison for his active support of Tibetan independence, and had been released in 1979.

A recent photograph of Dega Trogawa is available from TIN. It shows a middle-aged man in traditional Tibetan dress, with braided hair and a distinctive grey beard, unusual among Tibetans. -- end --