

NOTE

## AN OLYMPIC-SIZE FARCE

**Shibayan Raha writes :**

China's torch relay finally wrapped up its 4-day propaganda tour of Tibet after stops in Lhasa, Gormo (Ch: Golmud), Kokonor (Ch: Qinghai Hu) and the border town of Xining. The torch was paraded through the capital Lhasa under virtual martial law with armed troops patrolling throughout the city and an unofficial curfew prohibiting people from leaving their houses unless they were among the carefully screened spectators invited to witness selected portions of the relay.

While it lasted only two hours, the Lhasa leg of the torch relay was an Olympic-size farce and China's most disgusting exploitation of the Olympics for propaganda purposes to date.

Dancing Tibetans were on display in front of the Potala Palace and billboards throughout the city called on Tibetans to "Bless the Motherland, Joyfully Greet the Olympics." China's Communist Party Secretary of Tibet Zhang Qingli used the event as a platform to assert China's control over Tibet and verbally attack the Dalai Lama. Chinese authorities arranged for a handful of foreign journalists to visit Lhasa to witness the spectacle. In front of the onlookers and gathered reporters, Zhang took the opportunity at the closing ceremony to say "Tibet's sky will never change and the red flag with five stars will forever flutter high above it," and vowed to "totally smash the splittist schemes of the Dalai Lama clique."

While the journalists allowed in Lhasa during the torch relay were closely monitored and kept on a schedule that one described as a "humiliating experience" designed to keep them "busy and distracted from the real news," their reports are interesting and very telling of the current situation in Lhasa and other Tibetan areas.

One of the most startling reports is from Canadian Geoffrey York, writing about a tour of Sera Monastery, whose monks led the peaceful protests that inspired the nationwide uprising across Tibet. In the article, York writes: "Where are Lhasa's monks? A visit yesterday to the Sera monastery, the second-biggest Buddhist monastery in Tibet, found that its 550 monks had virtually disappeared from sight."

Despite repeated appeals from Tibetan supporters and people of conscience worldwide, the International Olympic Committee did nothing to prevent increased repression by Chinese authorities in Tibet, nor have they taken China to task for its crass politicization of the torch relay. The Olympic Charter forbids "political, religious or racial propaganda" in any Olympic venue. Besides adding to the sufferings of Tibetans, China's torch relay in Tibet was a flagrant violation of the spirit and letter of the regulations and yet the IOC has said nothing. □□□