

**Letter from Jawaharlal Nehru
to President Rajendra Prasad: On Tibet¹**

March 30, 1959

My dear Rajendra Babu,

Thank you for your letter of the 29th March.

It is true that much has happened in Tibet since your departure from India.²

I spoke twice in the Lok Sabha on this subject; once about ten days ago and today.³ The news in papers is of three kinds:

1. Some brief information which we have given and which we have obtained from our Consulate General in Lhasa. This is limited, but reliable in so far as it goes.

2. Chinese Government statements which appeared in the Press yesterday.

3. Brief reports and rumours coming from Kalimpong and sometimes Hong Kong.

As for No. 2, that represents the Chinese Government's version and viewpoint. It is important because that gives us an insight into their approach. Of course, that approach is necessarily one-sided and the facts they give need not all be true.

As for No. 3, there is hardly any single reference in these rumours which can be verified and some of them are patently untrue.

¹ Letter

² President Rajendra Prasad had returned on 27 March 1959 from his 12-day trip to Indo-China

³ See item 197

We are thus in a difficult position even in so far as facts are concerned. Gradually, no doubt, we shall know more of them. The difficulty is greater still from other points of view. The position of Tibet has been, for a long time past, that of an autonomous region of the Chinese State. One may assume that for various reasons there has been a revolt against Chinese domination. A kind of revolt started nearly three years ago in the Eastern borders of Tibet among the Khampas. This has been going on now for all this period in the shape of guerilla activities, Recently what happened was that the Tibetan Armed Forces, which are relatively small in numbers and very feeble as a military force, rebelled in Lhasa itself and were backed by the Tibetan local government. For a few days the Chinese did not take any major step. But then they came down with a heavy hand and crushed the revolt and made large numbers of people prisoners. In Lhasa, therefore, it may be that the revolt has been suppressed, but the Khampa revolt probably continues over areas in Eastern and South-Eastern Tibet.

There should be no question of our suppressing our conscience or doing anything patently wrong for fear of consequences. But it is not at all clear first what the full facts are and secondly what we can do about them. A step that we may take might actually injure the interests of the Tibetans. It is clear that we cannot take military measures. At the most we can express our opinion in more or less forcible language. Such an opinion on the part of Government should be based on a knowledge of facts and a full consideration of what other steps might follow. Obviously, it may have far-reaching consequences. We cannot merely be swept away by rumours and sentimental consideration which rightly affect us.

As a matter of fact, enough indication has already been given about our deep concern in what happens in Tibet and a kind of passive disapproval. Our newspapers have written, of course, fairly strongly on the subject. A government has to move more cautiously.

The Chinese Government have published some letters purporting to have been written by the Dalai Lama. If these letters were really written by him, then it does give a different colour to the picture.⁴ Perhaps they were not written by him. We shall have to wait and find out.

We do not yet know where the Dalai Lama is.

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru

⁴ On 28 March, the Chinese Government released the correspondence between the Dalai Lama and the Chinese Representative in Lhasa, General Tan Kuan-san [Tan Guansan], 16 March 1959. However, the Dalai Lama has recorded that there had been such an exchange of letters. See *My Land and My People. The Autobiography of His Holiness the Dalai Lama*, edited by David Howarth.