

China promotes Buddhist protege

News

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(ENInews)--A young Tibetan appointed by China's Communist government as the second-highest Tibetan spiritual leader has made his first public appearance outside mainland China in a religious conference that has Beijing's approval.

The highlight of the three-day World Buddhist Forum, which concluded in Hong Kong on April 27, was a public speech by Gyaltsen Norbu, whom Beijing has appointed the Buddhist Panchen Lama.

However, the appointment is rejected by the Dalai Lama, the exiled Tibetan spiritual head.

At Norbu's first appearance outside mainland China since his appointment in 1995, the 22-year-old on April 26 read a speech on the teachings of the Buddha, founder of the faith.

"The Chinese government wants to promote the Panchen Lama as the most significant leader of Tibetan Buddhism," the South China Morning Post newspaper quoted a social science professor, Barry Sautman of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, as saying.

Beijing allowed a relic, believed to be part of the Buddha's skull, to be airlifted to Hong Kong for the summit to establish it as a Buddhist gathering of great significance.

However, though it was attended by nearly 1,000 monks and scholars from several Buddhist countries, the Dalai Lama was not invited.

China calls the Nobel Peace Prize laureate a separatist and Chinese President Hu Jintao has blamed him for continued protests in Tibet against Chinese occupation, including a series of self-immolations that have tarnished the image of the Chinese government.

On the day the forum started, the Dalai Lama's supporters ran a signature campaign in Dharamsala, the town in north India where he lives. Campaigners urged the release of a 23-year-old Tibetan, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, whom they regard as the actual Panchen Lama.

Nyima, appointed by the Dalai Lama in 1995, was spirited away soon afterwards by the Chinese authorities. Seventeen years later, his whereabouts remain unknown.

The Dalai Lama and his followers rejected Norbu's appointment, saying the Chinese government cannot intervene in Tibetans' religious tradition. The Panchen Lama is regarded as a divine being who is reincarnated, with the reincarnations recognized by certain signs.