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 FM AMEMBASSY BEIJING
 TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7536
 INFO AMEMBASSY DHAKA
 AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
 AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
 AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
 AMEMBASSY TOKYO
 AMCONSUL HONG KONG
 AIT TAIPEI
 AMCONSUL GUANGZHOU POUCH
 AMCONSUL SHANGHAI POUCH
 AMCONSUL SHENYANG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIJING 17486

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR
 TAGS: PINT, SHUM, CH
 SUBJECT: TIBET:A MODEST RELIGIOUS REVIVAL

1. (C) - ENTIRE TEXT.

2. SUMMARY: EMBOFFS WHO VISITED TIBET FROM SEPTEMBER 3 TO SEPTEMBER 11 FOUND THAT, UNDER GOVERNMENT PATRONAGE AND AFTER YEARS OF OPPRESSION, RELIGIOUS ACTIVITY IN TIBET IS ONCE AGAIN WIDESPREAD. ACCORDING TO THE CHINESE AUTHORITIES, SOME 75 TIBETAN BUDDHIST MONASTERIES HAVE BEEN RESTORED AND REOPENED AND ANOTHER 125 ARE UNDER REPAIR (OUT OF AN ORIGINAL 2700). SOME, LIKE THE GREAT GADAN MONASTERY, WERE SO BADLY SACKED IN THE PAST THAT

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THEY MAY TAKE DECADES TO RESTORE. EMBOFFS WERE NOT ALLOWED TO TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE LHASA REGION BUT A FOREIGNER WHO DID REPORTED THAT IN RURAL REGIONS MONASTERIES THAT ONCE EXISTED HAVE NOT YET BEEN REOPENED. ONLY A FRACTION

OF THE PRE-1959 LAMAS SEEM TO HAVE RETURNED TO MONASTIC LIFE, BUT MORE ARE BEING TRAINED AT THE GOVERNMENT-FUNDED BUDDHIST INSTITUTE NEAR LHASA. TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS FAITH AMONG ORDINARY TIBETANS APPEARS TO BE VERY STRONG, JUDGING FROM THE CROWDS AT LHASA MONASTERIES. TWO MOSQUES HAVE ALSO REOPENED IN LHASA, FOR THE ESTIMATED 1500-PERSON MOSLEM COMMUNITY. THE CELEBRATION OF A RECENT ISLAMIC FESTIVAL WAS FEATURED PROMINENTLY ON LHASA TV.

THE RELIGIOUS REVIVAL REFLECTS THE BEIJING GOVERNMENT'S REALIZATION THAT TRADITIONAL CULTURE AND RELIGION IN TIBET HAVE PROVEN RESISTANT TO HAN CHINESE ATTEMPTS TO SUPPRESS THEM, AND THAT TOLERATION OF RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES MAY AMELIORATE RESENTMENT OF CHINESE RULE. THE GOVERNMENT ALSO HOPES ITS RELIGIOUS MEASURES WILL HELP TO ATTRACT THE DALAI LAMA TO RETURN TO CHINA. TOLERATION HAS ITS LIMITS, HOWEVER. GOVERNMENT POLICY IS ALSO DESIGNED TO ENSURE THAT THE LAMAS WILL NOT BE RESTORED TO THEIR FORMER THEOCRATIC POSITION OF TEMPORAL AS WELL AS SPIRITUAL POWER.END SUMMARY.

3. FOLLOWING PARTY SECRETARY HU YAOBANG'S VISIT TO TIBET IN 1980 AND THE PARTY SECRETARIAT'S WORK CONFERENCE ON TIBET EARLIER THIS YEAR, CHINESE POLICY IN TIBET - AS ELSEWHERE IN THE COUNTRY - IS TO PROMOTE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND PROTECT NORMAL RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES. TIBET PARTY FIRST SECRETARY YIN FATANG LAID OUT GROUND RULES IN HIS MAY ADDRESS TO THE REGIONAL PARTY PLENUM: PROTECT ACTIVITIES OF BELIEVERS AND MONKS, REPAIR TEMPLES, GIVE

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FULL PLAY TO THE ROLE OF THE BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION, SUPPORT RELIGIOUS PERSONAGES IN DEVELOPING SOCIAL SERVICES, AND STRENGTHEN PARTY LEADERSHIP OVER RELIGIOUS WORK (FBIS HONG KONG 180400Z MAY 84). EMBASSY OFFICERS WHO VISITED TIBET FROM SEPTEMBER 3 TO SEPTEMBER 11 SAW THE RESULTS - A LIMITED RELIGIOUS RENAISSANCE AND A SLOW RECOVERY FROM THE DAYS, BOTH BEFORE AND DURING THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION, WHEN MONASTERIES WERE DESTROYED AND MONKS SENT TO LABOR CAMPS.

4. OF THE 2700 MONASTERIES THAT BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION OFFICIALS ESTIMATE EXISTED IN TIBET DURING THE 1950'S (AND ALL OF WHICH WERE CLOSED DURING THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION), SEVENTY-FIVE HAVE REOPENED AND ANOTHER 125 ARE IN THE PROCESS OF RENOVATION. NEPALESE CONSUL

GENERAL IN LHASA WHO TRAVELS THROUGHOUT TIBET, REPORTS THAT THE MONASTERIES THAT ONCE DOTTED THE RURAL AREAS HAVE NOT BEEN REOPENED. THE POTOLA PALACE, JOKHANG TEMPLE, AND TWO OUT OF LHASA'S THREE GREAT MONASTERIES ARE IN REGULAR OPERATION, ALTHOUGH WITH FRACTIONS OF THE NUMBER OF MONKS WHO ONCE RAN THEM. THE THIRD MONASTERY, GADAN, WAS SACKED, ALLEGEDLY BY RED GUARDS, DURING THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION AND WILL REPORTEDLY TAKE DECADES TO RESTORE TO ITS FORMER GRANDEUR.

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5. AT DREPUNG MONASTERY, AN ELDERLY MONK SAID THAT THE NUMBER OF MONKS THERE HAD BEEN REDUCED TO 380 (FROM AN EARLIER FIGURE OF 10,000), WITH SIXTEEN NEW, YOUNG MONKS INDUCTED THIS YEAR. HE GAVE A FLAVOR FOR THE SUPPRESSION OF THE PAST DECADES BY DESCRIBING HIS TWENTY-TWO YEARS IN PRISON: "I WAS WITH THE DALAI LAMA IN 1959 (WHEN HE FLED TO INDIA). THE CHINESE FIRED ON THE MONKS. AFTERWARD I WAS IN PRISON. PEOPLE DIED EVERY DAY FROM

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 03 BEIJING 17486

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STARVATION. WE ATE INSECTS. YOU (ADDRESSING THE HAN CHINESE GUIDE) KILLED A LOT OF US." NOW THAT HE HAS COME BACK TO THE MONASTERY, HE WAS ASKED, ARE RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES RETURNING TO NORMAL? "ALMOST (CHABUDUO)," HE REPLIED WISTFULLY.

6. THE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION AND ABBOT OF SERA MONASTERY, LHUNZHUB TABKYAI, DESCRIBED THE CURRENT STATE OF BUDDHISM IN TIBET. HE SAID THERE WERE NOW SOME 3,000 MONKS IN MONASTERIES, ALTHOUGH THERE WERE
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OTHERS WHO HAD NOT RE-ENTERED THE INSTITUTIONS. NEW MONKS ARE BEING RECRUITED, AND OLD ONES RETURNING TO THE FOLD. HE ESTIMATED THAT THERE ARE ALMOST 1,000 MORE PRACTICING NOW THAN ONE YEAR AGO. THE NEW GOVERNMENT-FUNDED BUDDHIST INSTITUTE NEAR LHASA NOW HAS 120 STUDENTS, WHO ARE ALREADY MONKS BUT ARE GETTING ADVANCED TRAINING OR MAKING UP FOR A LACK OF TRAINING DURING THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION. THESE MONKS WILL GO BACK TO THEIR VILLAGES AFTER GRADUATION. HE SAID HE DIDN'T EXPECT ALL 2700 FORMER MONASTERIES TO BE REOPENED, BUT "THOSE THE PEOPLE WANT RESTORED WILL BE." HE SAID ONE LARGE NUNNERY IN LHASA HAD BEEN RESTORED; OTHERS HAD NOT BEEN. TABKYAI EXPRESSED HIMSELF SATISFIED WITH CURRENT GOVERNMENT POLICIES, AND THE CURRENT CONSTITUTION GUARANTEEING FREEDOM OF RELIGION. HIS ONLY CAVEAT, HE SAID, WAS THAT HE HOPED THE CURRENT POLICIES WOULD BE CONTINUED. (THIS ECHOES WHAT THE HEAD OF THE BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION TOLD VISITING PARTY SECRETARIAT MEMBER HU QILI IN AUGUST, ACCORDING TO THE NEPALI CONSUL GENERAL (IN PARAPHRASE):

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YOU ARE A YOUNG MAN; THEREFORE WE HOPE YOU CAN CONTINUE THESE POLICIES, RATHER THAN THE ONES OF THE OLD PEOPLE IN THE PAST.)

7. MONKS ARE ALSO APPEARING IN OTHER AREAS OF LIFE OUTSIDE THE MONASTERIES. WITH THE NEW EMPHASIS ON TIBETAN CULTURE, SOME WILL BE TEACHING TRADITIONAL MEDICINE WHEN THE NEW UNIVERSITY IN LHASA OPENS NEXT YEAR. OTHERS ARE SETTING UP LOCAL BUDDHIST ASSOCIATIONS AROUND THE REGION OR, UNDER THE RUBRIC OF "PATRIOTIC PERSONAGES," ARE BEING RECRUITED TO SERVE IN ADVISORY POSITIONS IN EXPANDED PEOPLE'S POLITICAL CONSULTATIVE CONFERENCES. NINE SENIOR MONKS HAVE BEEN INVITED TO VISIT NEPAL IN OCTOBER TO MEET THEIR COUNTERPARTS

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THERE, IN WHAT THE NEPALIS BELIEVE IS THE FIRST OFFICIALLY-SANCTIONED TIBETAN RELIGIOUS VISIT ABROAD, AT LEAST, SINCE 1959.

8. WHILE THE TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS HIERARCHY OF TIBET IS CLEARLY BEING PERMITTED NEW BREATHING ROOM COMPARED WITH THE DAYS WHEN ITS MEMBERS WERE REVILED AND THROWN INTO PRISON, SUCH REHABILITATION HAS ITS LIMITS. THE LAMAS ARE EXPECTED TO ACCEPT THE CURRENT POLITICAL ORDER AND THE PRIMACY OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY. THERE WILL BE NO RETURN TO THE FORMER TIBETAN THEOCRACY HEADED BY THE DALAI AND PANCHEN LAMAS. THE OFFICIAL POSITION, AS OUTLINED TO EMBOFFS BY AN OFFICIAL OF THE TIBET CONSULTATIVE CONFERENCE, IS THAT THE DALAI AND PANCHEM LAMAS ARE THE HIGHEST RELIGIOUS PERSONAGES IN TIBET, ROLES CONFIRMED EVEN BY PAST EMPERORS. TIBETANS HAVE GREAT RESPECT FOR THEM AND WOULD WELCOME THE RETURN OF THE DALAI LAMA AS PART OF THE RESTORATION OF NATIONAL UNITY. THE DALAI LAMA MADE ERRORS IN LEAVING TIBET AND IN HARMING NATIONAL UNITY FROM ABROAD, BUT HE IS WELCOME TO RETURN TO WORK FOR UNITY. THE POSITION RECENTLY ARTICULATED BY PARTY SECRETARY HU YAOBANG IN HIS INTERVIEW WITH YOMIURI (BEIJING 16653) MADES IT CLEAR THAT THE DALAI LAMA COULD NOT RETURN TO LIVE IN TIBET AND WOULD HAVE ONLY SPIRITUAL, NOT SECULAR, RESPONSIBILITY. BY CONTRAST, A NUMBER OF CHINESE-SPEAKING MONKS AND SHOP-KEEPERS SELLING PHOTOS OF THE DALAI LAMA IN THE BAZAAR, EXPRESSED A MUCH LESS EQUIVOCAL VIEWSCLEARLY WELCOMING THE PROSPECT OF A VISIT. SHOULD THE DALAI LAMA WISH TO AND BE PERMITTED TO COME BACK TO TIBET, HE WOULD BE

GUARANTEED A TUMULTUOUS WELCOME SURPASSING THE OUTPOURING OF ENTHUSIASM THAT GREETED THE PANCHEN LAMA ON HIS VISIT IN 1982. AND THAT FACT, OF COURSE, ENTERS INTO CHINESE

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CALCULATIONS OF WHETHER OR NOT, AND UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS, HE WOULD BE ALLOWED TO RETURN TO LHASA. THE CHINESE CLEARLY DO NOT WANT TO APPEAR TO BE SOLICITING HIS RETURN, AND WOULD PROBABLY TOLERATE A VISIT ONLY UNDER STRICT GUIDELINES. SO FAR THE DALAI LAMA HAS PLACED CONTRARY CONDITIONS ON ANY VISIT (I.E. MINIMAL INTERFERENCE FROM BEIJING). OFFICIALS IN LHASA APPEAR JUSTIFIED IN THEIR EXPECTATION THAT THEY WILL NOT BE SEEING HIM THERE SOON. BUT THE RESULTS OF A SCHEDULED VISIT

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TO CHINA BY THREE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE DALAI LAMA SHOULD PROVIDE A CLEARER INDICATION OF THE BOUNDARIES OF FLEXIBILITY ON BOTH SIDES.

9. ISLAM, A DISTINCTLY MINORITY RELIGION IN TIBET, HAS ALSO BENEFITTED FROM THE LIBERALIZED POLICIES, BUT APPARENTLY ONLY IN LHASA. TWO MOSQUES REOPENED IN THE CITY IN 1982 AFTER BEING CLOSED DURING THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION. ACCORDING TO AN IMAM AT ONE OF THEM, THOSE ARE THE ONLY TWO OPEN IN THE REGION. THE IMAM SAID THERE WERE ABOUT 1500 MOSLEMS IN LHASA, OF WHOM 300 REGULARLY ATTEND THE FRIDAY SERVICES. HE SAID HE HAD BEEN REHABILITATED IN 1979 AND RETURNED FROM THE COUNTRY-SIDE. AS AN INDICATION OF OFFICIAL APPROBATION, TIBET TV SHOWED LENGTHY SEGMENTS ON SUCCEEDING NIGHTS OF THE CELEBRATION OF ID-AL-AZHAR TWO WEEKS AGO.

10. COMMENT: RELIGIOUS LIBERALIZATION, LIKE OTHER REFORMS (SEPTEL), WAS WELCOMED BY THE CHINESE-SPEAKING TIBETANS TO WHOM EMBOFFS SPOKE. THE MANY WHO SUFFERED UNDER THE OLD, POST-1959 POLICIES UNDOUBTEDLY HAVE DOUBTS ABOUT THE STAYING POWER OF PRESENT DIRECTIVES FROM BEIJING. BUT SO FAR THEY ARE HELPING TO IMPLEMENT THEM BECAUSE THEY TOO HAVE AN INTEREST IN REVIVING TRADITIONAL TIBETAN CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES. THE LAMAS ARE A SMALL FRACTION OF THEIR FORMER NUMBERS BUT EXPRESS CONFIDENCE THAT THEY CAN RECRUIT NEW DEVOUT TIBETAN BUDDHISTS TO THE FOLD (EMBOFFS SAW YOUNG NOVICES IN SEVERAL LHASA-AREA MONASTERIES). TIBETAN BUDDHISM SUFFERED MUCH PHYSICAL DAMAGE AFTER 1959 AND IS PROBABLY LOSING SOME SUPPORT AMONG YOUNG,

ANIZED TIBETANS.

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RELIGION, HOWEVER, IS SO INEXTRICABLY BOUND UP WITH TIBETAN LIFE THAT THE GREAT MAJORITY OF TIBETANS APPEAR TO REMAIN COMMITTED TO THEIR FAITH, A FACT THE CHINESE HAVE RECOGNIZED AND -- FOR THE TIME BEING AT LEAST -- ACCEPTED AS INEVITABLE. HUMMEL

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