EQUAL RITES: TIBETAN NUNS SEEK MATCHING STATUS

SERTAR: With a shaved head, flowing burgundy robes and religious devotion, Xinde Shijiamouni has all the trappings of a Tibetan Buddhist monk. But her serenity is troubled because as a nun, she cannot reach the same clerical status as a man. In harsh terrain and relative isolation, Tibetan culture has long been patriarchal, many monks view their calls for equality as heresy.

But many senior monks view their calls with suspicion, deeming gender equality as a “Western concept”. “If you look at Buddhist literature, you can see both genders should be equal,” said Xinde Shijiamouni-whose name is a pseudonym meaning “The Heart of the Buddha”. “But many on the outside don’t understand the dharma, and many on the inside choose to ignore it.” More than 10,000 women have chosen to enter monastic life in the past 20 years, according to researchers the stark gender inequality in Tibetan society contributes to many nun’s choice to take the cloth. Arranged marriages, domestic abuse and conflict with mothers-in-law all contribute to the decision to become a nun, said Nicola Schneider, of the East Asian Civilisations Research Centre in Paris, who has done extensive field work in Tibetan nunneries. “Aside from the religious aspect of working for karma and having a better reincarnation, another reason women become nuns that is not very openly talked about is that life as a Tibetan laywoman is hard,” she said.

Women do most of the work in rural and pastoral families, who make up more than 90 percent of Tibetans, she added. As well as their theoretical discussions, the Larung Gar nuns have an outreach program for laywomen in surrounding areas on female health issues. “All religions teach compassion and helping others, we’re helping women to improve their health,” said one nun. “That’s not a controversial issue.” Palmo, a professor of Tibetan literature at Northwest University for Nationalities who does outreach work with rural women, believes the nuns will have an impact.—AFP

FUKUSHIMA MISTAKES LINGER AS JAPAN MARKS 5TH ANNIVERSARY

FUKUSHIMA: The complacency and cozy relationships blamed for the Fukushima nuclear accident are still a problem in Japan, experts warn, even as the country faces the probability of another earthquake and tsunami that could dwarf the 2011 catastrophe. Today marks the fifth anniversary of the natural disaster that claimed about 18,500 lives, flattened coastal communities, and set off the worst atomic crisis in a generation.

But, as officials vow to prevent a repeat, some critics say Tokyo’s push to restart switched-off nuclear reactors is proof that the lessons of the tragedy have not been learned. And many question whether Japan has done enough to tackle some of the key causes of the accident that unfolded on March 11, 2011 - an ill-fated belief in the nation’s disaster prevention system and the failure to be properly prepared.

“Japanese government-business and industry are still very strong, it’s a legacy of government-led development when the country was under-developed” after World War II, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has made bringing nuclear power back on line a priority for the nation looking to re-emerge as a global economic powerhouse.

Japan’s entire stable of reactors was shuttered in the aftermath of the disaster, when a huge undersea quake sent a tsunami smashing into the coast, swamping the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant and sparking meltdowns.—AFP

CHINA URGES DIPLOMATS, UN TO Boycott Dalai Lama in Geneva

GENEVA: China has written to diplomats and UN officials urging them not to attend a Geneva event today where the Dalai Lama will speak, reasserting that it opposes his appearance at all venues due to his “separatist activities”. Reuters reported in October that China is waging a campaign of intimidation, obstruction and harassment that Western diplomats and activists say is aimed at silencing criticism of its human rights record at the United Nations.

In a letter seen by Reuters yesterday, China’s diplomatic mission in Geneva raised objections about the presence of Tibet’s exiled spiritual leader on the panel of Nobel laureates, being held at the Geneva Graduate Institute. “Inviting the 14th Dalai Lama to the aforementioned event violates the sovereignty and territorial integrity of China, in contravention of the purposes and principles of the U.N. Charter,” China said. China is the only country to recognize the Dalai Lama as the leader of the Tibetan people, a position that remains deeply controversial in Beijing.

No delegation is making a formal complaint about China at the four-week session but there has been criticism recently of its mass arrests of lawyers, including from the United States. A joint statement critical of China, sponsored by about a dozen countries including the United States, is to be read out at the forum among midday (1200 GMT), the US mission’s spokesman in Geneva said. He declined to comment on China’s request for a boycott, saying: “I refer you to Chinese authorities for their views. We do not comment on the substance of our diplomatic exchanges.”

Philippe Bourrin, director of the Geneva institute, said that “pressures are being applied from various sides” but the event would not be cancelled. “This is a question of freedom of expression and academic freedom to organize an event,” he said. “It is not an event on Tibet, it is not on a politically sensitive subject, it is territorial issues, but on the role of civil society in promoting human rights,” he said. UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Kate Gilmore, the panel’s moderator, is believed to be one of the first senior UN officials to meet the Dalai Lama. The event, which also features Nobel laureates and relevant International Organizations not to attend the above-mentioned event, nor meet the 14th Dalai Lama and his clique. “The Dalai Lama, who won the Nobel Peace Price in 1989, fled into exile in India in 1959 after an abortive uprising against Communist rule. China views him as a separatist, but the monk says he only wants genuine autonomy for his Himalayan homeland.

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