

## **HARVARD ACADEMIC INHERITS DALAI LAMA'S POLITICAL ROLE**



### **By MARGHERITA STANCATI . THE WALL STREET JOURNAL**

APRIL 28/2011. NEW DELHI. Lobsang Sangay, a Harvard-educated academic, has been elected prime minister of Tibet's government in exile, according to results released Wednesday.

Mr. Sangay's election as prime minister, or Kalon Tripa, by Tibet's exiled community came after the Dalai Lama said last month he would retire from politics. The Dalai Lama's political responsibilities will largely shift to the prime minister, giving Mr. Sangay an unprecedented role in Tibetan exile politics.

"It's humbling and also an honor and a privilege that Tibetans have entrusted their hope and aspirations in me, and I will do the best in my capacity to live up to the expectations of Tibetans," Mr. Sangay said in an interview.

China considers Tibet to have been an integral part of its territory for hundreds of years, while the Dalai Lama, who has been running an India-based government-in-exile and a peaceful campaign for greater autonomy within China, says it had been a de facto independent state for centuries until the Chinese Communist takeover in 1951.

Mr. Sangay, who was widely expected to win the elections, was elected with 55% of the vote. The other two candidates, Tenzin Namgyal Tethong and Tashi Wangdi, got 37% and 8% of the vote, respectively.

About 50,000 Tibetans in exile, or 59% of eligible voters, cast their votes in the last round of elections, which took place March 20.

The youngest of the three candidates, Mr. Sangay attracted wide support from Tibetan youth living in exile.

Mr. Sangay, who was born in a Tibetan refugee settlement in India's hill station of Darjeeling in 1968, is a senior fellow at Harvard Law School, where he focused his studies on Tibet's exiled government and international law.

In line with the broader policy framework of the Tibetan government in exile, Mr. Sangay said his top priority as prime minister will be to "end the suffering of Tibetans inside Tibet, to have the Chinese government recognize the identity and dignity of Tibetans and to find a peaceful way to address the issue of Tibet."

Mr. Sangay, who during his time at Harvard has engaged regularly with Chinese scholars, says he hopes to promote greater exchange with Chinese academia.

"I would like to continue the dialogue at the people level and if the Chinese government is willing, also at the government level," he said.

In a statement, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Wednesday: "The so-called 'Tibet government in exile' is an illegal political organization established by the Dalai Lama to engage in 'Tibet independence' separatist activities. The world does not recognize this state whatsoever."

The Chinese government has long seen the Dalai Lama as a political schemer, and Mr. Sangay's election is unlikely to revive hopes for dialogue. A recent opinion piece in the English edition of China's state-run People's Daily Online headlined "Terrorist poised to rule 'Tibetan government-in-exile' " likened a group in which Mr. Sangay was active, the Tibetan Youth Congress, to al Qaeda, saying it directly planned violent protests in Tibet in May 2008.

Mr. Sangay, who has been living in the U.S. for the past 16 years, is expected to move to Dharamsala, the Indian Himalayan town where the Tibetan government in exile is based, before he officially takes office in August.

Mr. Sangay will be the third Kalon Tripa to come to power since the office of a directly elected prime minister was introduced in 2001 as part of the Dalai Lama's push toward a more democratic political system.

Until the Dalai Lama announced he would relinquish his political duties, the office of prime minister was largely administrative.

Although the Tibetan parliament in exile initially resisted the Nobel Peace Prize winner's political retirement, its members agreed to amend the constitution to allow him to step down. The constitutional changes, which break a 370-year-old tradition, are expected to be finalized next month. The Dalai Lama will retain his role as spiritual leader for Tibetan Buddhists.

"This was not necessarily a welcome change but an inevitable change," said Penpa Tsering, who serves as speaker of the parliament in exile.

Mr. Sangay said he was inspired by the Dalai Lama's vision of a "secular, democratic, Tibetan society."

In the streets of Dharamsala, people seemed to be warming to the idea of a political leadership without the 75-year-old Dalai Lama.

"We are proving we are a democracy," said Tenzin Kumphele, a 22-year-old Buddhist monk who has lived in Dharamsala for seven years.

Many hope that the Dalai Lama's political retirement may help the Tibetan cause in the long run, making the transition of power smoother after his death.



"It's good for Tibetans," said Lhazom Tsering, 32, who works at Dharamsala's Tibetan Women's Association. "Tibetans should take more responsibility and learn to rule themselves."

There are an estimated 150,000 Tibetans living in exile.

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