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JOINT WARFARE
STUDIES

GL/14/26

CHINA AND DALAI LAMA'S REINCARNATION BY MR VIJAY KRANTI

ORGANISED BY CENJOWS
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The Centre for Joint Warfare Studies hosted Mr Vijay Kranti, a veteran Indian journalist, photographer, and author with over five decades of immersive engagement with Tibet and China, as the opening speaker of its April China-themed lecture series. Drawing on deep cultural knowledge and geopolitical insight, Mr Kranti delivered a wide-ranging analysis of the Tibetan reincarnation tradition, the historical and political significance of the Dalai Lama institution, and China's intensifying efforts to control religious succession in Tibet and what all of this means for India.

In Tibet, reincarnation is not merely a matter of personal faith. It is a structured socio-political institution through which enlightened monks, known as tulkus, are believed to consciously choose rebirth to continue serving living beings. The Dalai Lama lineage, which dates to the 14th century, was formalised when the Mongol king conferred the title on its fifth holder, binding Tibet's spiritual and political identity under a single authority, the Ganden Podrang. The traditional process of identifying reincarnations is deeply rooted in practice: signs left by the previous lama, a child's unprompted recognition of personal belongings, and consultations with oracles. These methods bear no resemblance to what China now seeks to impose.

Beijing's strategy has evolved considerably from vilifying the Dalai Lama to recognising that controlling his succession is essential to legitimising its authority over Tibet. The instruments it has deployed are telling. Order No. 5, enacted in 2007, legally mandates state approval for all reincarnations, effectively handing the Chinese Communist Party authority over Tibetan religious succession. The Golden Urn lottery, a largely ceremonial Manchu-era practice, has been resurrected and weaponised as a political tool. More sweeping still are the cultural assimilation policies pursued under President Xi Jinping, the re-education campaigns, systematic suppression of the Tibetan language, destruction

of religious symbols, and the forced enrolment of Tibetan children in residential schools designed to sever them from their heritage. These measures have been widely characterised as cultural genocide. Yet despite the scale of this effort, China's attempts to install state-approved religious figures, its chosen Panchen Lama and Karmapa, have been met with near-universal rejection by Tibetans, revealing the limits of coercion where legitimacy is absent.

The 14th Dalai Lama has responded with considerable strategic foresight. In 2011, he formally separated his spiritual and political roles, transferring executive authority to the democratically elected Tibetan government-in-exile. The intent was deliberate: to ensure that even if China succeeds in installing a 15th Dalai Lama of its own choosing, that figure will inherit no political authority and command no popular acceptance. The Tibetan government-in-exile continues to hold credible elections among diaspora communities worldwide, a form of democratic legitimacy that China is structurally incapable of replicating within Tibet itself.

Internationally, the Tibetan cause continues to draw meaningful support. The U.S. Tibetan Policy Act and a series of European Parliament resolutions have explicitly opposed Chinese interference in the reincarnation process. For India, however, the issue carries a distinct urgency. Himalayan border communities share deep religious and cultural ties with the Dalai Lama, and a Chinese-engineered succession could have direct consequences for India's border security and regional stability. CENJOWS urged the Indian government to move beyond a reactive posture, recommending that it consider awarding the Dalai Lama the Bharat Ratna to formally elevate his international standing, pursue coordinated soft diplomacy with like-minded nations, including Nepal, and more confidently assert India's identity as the preeminent Buddhist civilisation in the world.

Kranti's closing message was unambiguous: Tibetan resistance is far from exhausted, and China's attempt to manufacture religious legitimacy through political control is likely to deepen, not resolve, the crisis it faces in Tibet. For India, the moment calls not for caution, but for purposeful engagement.