

First Tibetan passport found after 12 yrs

The passport is important as it proves that other countries recognised Tibet

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FIFTY-SIX YEARS ago on the roof of the world—Lhasa—the first Tibetan passport was prepared that was recognised by various nations.

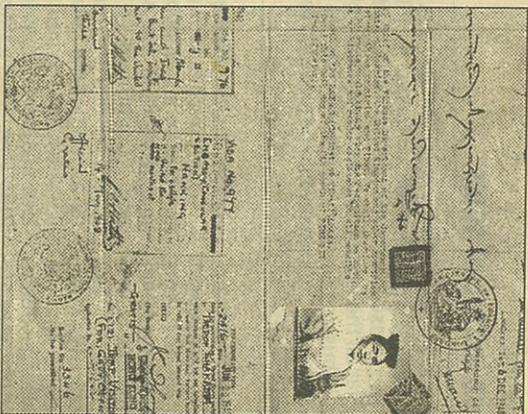
Twelve years ago, the passport that represented a sound affirmation in world opinion of Tibet's de-facto independence and was of immense historical significance, went missing from Kalimpong.

But after all the rigorous search operations, the passport prepared by the Tibetan Government and used by Tsepon Shakabpa, the then Tibet's secretary of finance (1930-1950) was recovered from an antique dealer in Nepal last week.

The passport is now in the safe custody of the Dalai Lama, who received it on March 29 from Friends of Tibet (India)—the spirit behind recovering this document of historical importance for the Tibetans. "We are very happy to get back this passport which is of historical importance for us. This passport is an evidence of Tibet's independence that was also recognised by the countries, which the bearer visited," said Professor Sandhong Rinpoche, Prime Minister of the Tibetan Government-in-exile.

Tsepon Shakabpa, the author of several books, including the "Tibet: A Political History", was the Dalai Lama's official representative in New Delhi until 1966. After his death in 1992 in Kalimpong, the passport went missing. What led to the recovery of his passport is the initiative of the Friends of Tibet (India) who for the past one year have been collecting objects of historical importance belonging to independent Tibet to showcase them in an exhibition called "Story of a nation: Independent, occupied and exiled Tibet".

"Recently, through one of our advisor-supporters Gyeshu Pema Dorje we discovered the passport lying in the hands of an antique dealer in Nepal. Understanding the absolute importance of the document in itself we wanted to buy it. The owner had expressed his willingness to sell it at a lower price if the document is handed over to the Dalai Lama. After a long process of negotiations and confidence building, the owner finally sold the document and other related papers. On March 28 the document made a historic trip to Dharamsala and the following day it was handed over to the Dalai Lama. Thus ended the 12 years of agony," said Tenzin Tsundue, general secretary of the Friends of Tibet.



The passport of Tsepon Shakabpa prepared by the Tibetan Government.

The passport is a big spreadsheet of the traditional Tibetan hand-made paper folded and old looking. It bears stamps of many countries, which granted visas and transit permits to Shakabpa.

Mahatma connection

TSEPON SHAKABPA, in his widely acclaimed and insightful book "Tibet: A Political History", published in 1967, on the importance of passport in question wrote about the Tibetan Delegation members throughout their journey.

In Delhi, the delegation met Viceroy Lord Mounbatten, prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi. "When I presented Mahatma Gandhi a ceremonial scarf, he asked whether the scarf was made in Tibet. When I informed him that the materials for ceremonial scarves were imported, he was very surprised and stressed on the importance of manufacturing in one's own country the goods one uses. This, and other profoundly straightforward advice by the Mahatma, deeply moved all the members of the Tibetan Trade Delegation," said the book.

The passport was issued by the Kashag (Cabinet of Tibet), Lhasa, on 26th day of the 8th month of Fire Pig Year (Tibetan). The date coincides with October 10, 1947. The passport bears official stamps of recognition by countries like India, United Kingdom, United States, Italy, Switzerland and France.