

Tibetans to buy their lone 'official' passport

Tibetans in India have collected half a million rupees to buy what is being described as independent Tibet's first and only surviving passport.



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SHIMLA: Tibetans in India have collected half a million rupees to buy what is being described as independent Tibet's first and only surviving passport.

The independent Tibetan government in Lhasa had issued the passport to a top Tibetan diplomatic official, who then got visas from Western countries including Britain, the US, France and Switzerland.

The passport still bears stamps of these countries, said Tenzing Tsundue, general secretary of

the Friends of Tibet, an NGO based in the northern Indian town of Dharamsala where the Dalai Lama's government-in-exile is based.

The passport and visas had been issued to Tsepon Shakabpa, then finance secretary (1930-50) to the Tibetan government. Chinese troops overran the region later, forcing the Dalai Lama to flee to India in 1959.

Shakabpa wrote several books, including "Tibet: A Political History." He was the Dalai Lama's official representative in New Delhi until 1966.

"We have collected Rs500,000 from Tibetan refugees in India. The money will be paid by draft to Nepal's Pemachuding monastery that paid in advance to the antique dealer in Kathmandu who had come in its possession," Tsundue said in Dharamsala.

"Finding this passport is significant as it is an important historical record which shows that several countries did recognise Tibet as an independent country and issued visas," said Lobsang Tsultrin, an official of the Tibetan government-in-exile, which however is not recognised by any country. It was the cabinet of Tibet that issued the prized passport at Lhasa Oct 10, 1947. "It has been slightly damaged," said Tsultrin.

The document was lost from the home of Shakabpa after his death in Kalimpong town in Bengal. Somehow, the passport made its way to Nepal.

The Friends of Tibet, who for two years have been collecting objects of historical importance to the erstwhile independent Tibet, recovered the passport in Nepal from an antique dealer.

All that they have collected so far will be shown at an exhibition called "Story of a Nation: Independent, Occupied and Exiled Tibet."

Similar Tibetan passports were reportedly given to four other Tibetans, but only Shakabpa's exists - a solid evidence of Tibet's independence.