

Beijing pressures Nepal to stop Tibetans from fleeing

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(AsiaNews) More than 10,000 people suffer food shortage as a result of a ban on food exports from Tibet to Nepal imposed by Beijing and linked to a move to stop Tibetans from fleeing their homeland. Since August 2006, overland links from Tibet into the northern Nepali district of Mustang have been cut. This has had the effect of exacerbating an already serious food shortage in the area and is affecting a largely Buddhist population that has strong ties to Tibetans. Balananda Basyal, head of the Nepalese Food Corporation depot in the town of Lomanthang in upper Mustang district, said that famine was widespread in the area until the government and international agencies were able to ensure the residents' survival. However, *"with the collapse of the [former royalist] government, aid has stopped. We can only get food from Tibet but now the Chinese ban has caused such shortages that we'll soon start to starve"*. Human rights activist Ram Ekbal Choudhary explained that the Chinese have imposed the ban *"on the excuse that Tibetans use the lorries carrying food to flee their region through Nepal in order to go to India and the Dalai Lama"*. This accusation, he immediately added, *"is ridiculous. There was no need to take drastic measures that endanger the lives of hundreds of people. China has security forces all along the border. Why doesn't it use them to check the lorries?"*.

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