

The Dalai Lama celebrates 90th birthday, plans to reincarnate

By Sheikh Saaliq
The Associated Press

DHARAMSHALA, India — The Dalai Lama has often called himself a simple monk, but millions of his Tibetan Buddhist followers have worshipped him for decades as a near deity.

They also see him as the face of Tibet’s aspirations for greater autonomy, but have for years wrestled with the idea that he might be the last person to hold the role.

He put that speculation to rest last week, just days before he turned 90 according to the Gregorian calendar. There will be a successor after his death, he announced, and the Dalai Lama’s office will lead the search and recognize a successor in accordance with past tradition.

The decision is consequential for most Tibetans, who have struggled for decades to keep their identity alive — in Tibet or outside in exile — and rallied behind the Dalai Lama for that cause. It could also irk China, which insists that it alone has the authority to approve the next religious leader, a move seen as Beijing’s efforts to strengthen its control over Tibet’s overwhelmingly Buddhist population.

“Simple Buddhist monk” hailed as a god-king

Recognized worldwide in his red robes and wide smile, the Dalai Lama describes himself as a “simple Buddhist monk.” But he is also worshipped as living manifestations of Chenrezig, the Buddhist god of compassion, and is the 14th person to hold the title of the Dalai Lama in a tradition stretching back 500 years.

As a village boy, Tenzin Gyatso was thrust onto the Tibetan throne to become

the Dalai Lama — a god-king to his people — in 1937. Soon after, Chinese troops swept into his homeland in the 1950s and crushed a failed uprising. He escaped with thousands of his followers to India and established a government in exile.

Since then, the Dalai Lama has spent more than seven decades in exile, living an austere monastic life in regal isolation in the tiny, Himalayan town of Dharamshala. He has also jetted from capital to capital to try to force the aspirations of his tiny community onto the world agenda, uniting and mobilizing Tibetans inside and outside China.

The face of Tibet’s struggle for autonomy

Tibetans in exile say they were effectively independent for centuries, and accuse China of trying to wipe out Tibet’s Buddhist culture and language, and encouraging Chinese to move there from other parts of the country. Beijing insists Tibet is a part of China.

While many Tibetans seek full independence, the Dalai Lama has long said that he seeks only substantial autonomy and identity for Tibetan people. He has advocated for a nonviolent “Middle Way” for autonomy and religious freedom for Tibetan people through peaceful means.

Beijing, however, accuses him of making efforts to wrest Tibet’s control away from China and inciting rebellion among Tibetans. In the past, Chinese leaders have called him a “wolf in monk’s robes” and the “scum of Buddhism.”

In 1989, the Nobel Peace Prize committee honored him “for his consistent resistance to the use of violence in his people’s struggle.” In 2011, he relinquished his role as head of the self-

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Hungry wild elephant raids grocery store in Thailand for snacks

BANGKOK (AP) — A hungry wild elephant caused havoc in a grocery store in Thailand when he strolled in from a nearby national park and helped himself to food on the shelves.

Videos of the incident showed the huge male elephant, known as Plai Biang Lek, briefly stopping in front of the shop, located next to a main road near the Khao Yai National Park in northeastern Thailand, before ducking his whole body inside.

The elephant stopped in front of the shop’s counter, calmly snatching and chomping snacks, and did not flinch as national park workers tried to shoo him away.

The elephant later backed out of the shop still holding a bag of snacks with his trunk. He left little damage behind, except mud tracks on the floor and the ceiling of the shop.

In a video posted on social media, Kamploy Kakaew, the shop owner, appeared amused as she described the moment the elephant rifled through her shop. She said he ate about nine bags of sweet rice crackers, a sandwich, and some dried bananas she



SNACK ATTACK. A hungry wild elephant caused havoc at a grocery store in Nakhon Ratchasima province, Thailand, when he strolled in from a nearby national park and helped himself to food on the shelves. The elephant stopped in front of the shop’s counter, calmly snatching and chomping snacks. (Kanokporn Sriboon via AP)

had bought that morning. snacks.

Kamploy said the elephant left without hurting anyone after getting his

Danai Sookkanthachat, a volunteer park worker

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