

Just a week to go for the Tibetan New Year 2137 the usual festive mood and hasty preparations for the biggest Tibetan festival is somewhat missing here in exile where the Dalai Lama and his Tibetan followers have lived since 1959, the year that saw Tibet's fall into Chinese hands.

The past two years have seen the Tibetan New Year minus the grandeur and festivities as Tibetans in Tibet and exile in unison had forgone celebrations and festivities to mourn those killed in the Chinese government's crackdown on Tibetans following the widespread protests across Tibet in 2008.

This year too, the Tibetan New Year once again has bound the Tibetans in exile and those under occupation in a united campaign to utilize the festival as a tool to highlight the Tibetan people's suffering under Chinese rule and aspirations of the Tibetans.

Reports have emerged from Tibet of Tibetans in various parts of Tibet once again vowing to skip all festivities in mourning of the dead Tibetans and to mark their respects and solidarity for those imprisoned.

The Chinese authorities are said to be deliberately encouraging Tibetans to celebrate the New Year with pomp and festivity in Ngaba, in some cases even agreeing to incur all expenses for celebrations or giving out gifts and special presents to encourage celebrations.

In October 2009, China has executed Lobsang Gyaltsen, 27, Penkyi, 21, Loyak, 25, and an unidentified Tibetan for taking part in protests in 2008.

In exile, organizations like Students for Free Tibet are marking the New Year in a different way. The student group launched a campaign called "I am a Tibetan" for this *losar* which they call "a time for change, hope, and renewal." Because we are Tibetan, we will speak Tibetan language, wear Tibetan dress, and observe Tibetan customs, thus strengthening our identity and our spirit, it said.

"On this day, we celebrate our history, our culture, our religion, and our future - because our history is great, our culture beautiful, our religion profound, and - in spite of our present suffering - our future is bright," says the Organization on its Website. The NGO has asked Tibetans and supporters around the world to light butter lamps and candles on their altars and windows on February 14th to "honor the courage of the Tibetan people in Tibet who continue to resist the Chinese government's illegal occupation of their homeland."

A somewhat similar expression has also been witnessed on the Internet with videos, poems, and images emerging from Tibet that indicate "a strong assertion of Tibetan-ness in Tibetan and Chinese language cyberspace". According to highpeakspureearth.com, a website that makes writings in Tibetan and Chinese languages from Tibet and China available for English readers there has been a notable increase in "online activity by Tibetan netizens about being Tibetan and Tibetan identity."

Meanwhile, the exile Tibetan government Thursday issued a circular to its officials and staff that there would be only customary religious ceremonies and no celebrations to mark the *losar*. The decision has been made taking into consideration the "continuing repression in Tibet and the suffering of the Tibetan people inside Tibet." The Tibetan cabinet's secretariat has appealed to all the concerned departments and offices of the administration "not to organise any lavish and pompous celebrations such as hosting feasts, dance parties and lighting firecrackers."