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Swiss police stop Tibetan from self immolating, detain 32 during Chinese president's visit

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People protest for a free Tibet and against the arrival of China's President Xi Jinping in Bern, Switzerland, on Sunday. | (Photo courtesy: ANTHONY ANEX / KEYSTONE VIA AP)

(TibetanReview.net, Jan17, 2017) – Police in Swiss capital Bern have on Jan 15 prevented a Tibetan man from self-immolating while detaining 32 people as they protested against visiting Chinese President Xi Jinping. The detainees, including Tibetans and Swiss people, were later released, reported the AP Jan 15, citing Police spokesman Christoph Gnaegi.

The report said security officials prevented a man who had doused himself with a flammable liquid from setting himself on fire on the sidelines of a demonstration around midday. One report said the man was in his 20s.

The report cited Gnaegi as saying no disruptions were caused by peaceful protesters who took part in a morning protest, but that some people afterward had caused minor problems leading to the police action.

The 32 people were reported to have been detained by Bern police for refusing identity checks and other disruptions as part of their deployment to secure Xi's visit. Of them, 14 were detained near the Swiss parliament building in the afternoon as they continued to protest past the time restriction, waving posters saying "Free Tibet" and "Don't Deal With Killers", *Reuters* Jan 15 cited the association of Tibetan Youth in Europe as saying.

Bern Police had permitted just two hours of protest for Tibetans at a site which was blocks away from the Swiss Parliament building, requiring them to wrap it all up just before the arrival of the Chinese president. Most of the protesters left before noon as agreed with Bern municipal security, the report cited Tenzin Nyingbu, president of the Tibetan Community in Switzerland & Liechtenstein, as saying.

Organizers put the number of protesters, which included Tibetan exiles and Swiss supporters, at between 700 and 800, although the local *ATS* news agency was reported to have put that figure at 400. The Tibetans carried Tibetan national flags as they demonstrated.

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Some waved a banner saying “No Trade With Murderers” and demanded independence for Tibet, reported *thelocal.ch* Jan 16. This report cited Bern police as saying the 32 were detained for protesting outside the agreed zone and resisting being relocated.

Xi kicked off a four-day visit to Switzerland, the first by a Chinese leader after 1999. The visit includes stops to UN institutions in Geneva, the International Olympic Committee headquarters in Lausanne, and the World Economic Forum in Davos. Xi will be the first Chinese president to address the World Economic Forum, an annual gathering of political, business and cultural elite.

Swiss president Doris Leuthard hosted for Xi and his wife, Peng Liyuan, and others in the Chinese delegation a dinner in Bern.

China is Switzerland’s biggest commercial partner in Asia. In 2014, the two countries inked a free-trade pact that helped boost bilateral trade volumes to 31 billion Swiss francs (\$30.7 billion, 28.8 billion euros) in 2015.

Switzerland has Europe’s largest Tibetan community, with the organization representing exiled Tibetans having 3,500 members and a few thousand more with Tibetan roots believed to be living in the country.

Tibet’s exiled spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, has paid many visits to Switzerland, the last time in Oct 2016. Although he was not received by anyone from the federal government last year, he did meet with members of the Swiss cabinet during previous visits in 2005, 2001 and a couple times in the 1990s, noted *swissinfo.ch/eng* Jan 15. China accuses the Dalai Lama of seeking Tibet’s independence and hurls vile epithets at him, although he only seeks genuine implementation of China’s existing law on autonomy for ethnic minority regions.

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