**Tibetans Protest in Northwest China**
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BEIJING — Thousands of Tibetans took to the streets of a city in China’s northwest Qinghai Province on Saturday after the death of a farmer who set himself on fire at a Buddhist religious site, according to Tibetan exile groups. It was the second large protest in Qinghai this week.

The gathering at the Rongwo Gonchen Monastery in Tongren, said to exceed 6,000 people, according to activist groups, was the biggest public protest in China’s traditionally Tibetan areas in recent years and a sign that the spate of self-immolations and demonstrations were spreading beyond the northern wedge of Sichuan Province where most of the unrest — and many of the previous 28 self-immolations — has taken place since last March.

Free Tibet, a group based in London, said it was the most significant act of defiance against the Chinese government since 2008, when rioting in Lhasa, the capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region, shook the Communist Party leadership and prompted a crackdown in the remote high-altitude plateau that is home to five million ethnic Tibetans.

On Friday, at least 1,000 people protested at a government building in Tongde County, not far from Tongren.

“What we’re seeing is unprecedented, with more and more people willing to take significant risks,” said Stephanie Brigden, director of Free Tibet.

The Saturday protest in Tongren, or Rebkong in Tibetan, was prompted by the death of Sonam Thargyal, a 44-year-old father of three who reportedly drank some kerosene, poured the rest over his body and then set himself on fire near a Tibetan cultural center, according to Free Tibet and another organization, the Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy. Mr. Thargyal died at the scene, the groups said.

According to Free Tibet, Mr. Thargyal was a friend of Jamyang Palden, a monk in his 30s who was critically injured Wednesday after setting himself on fire in the same county.

Soon after Mr. Thargyal’s death, Buddhist monks carried his body to the monastery. Before long, thousands of people, alerted by cellphone and word of mouth, began pouring into Dolma Square, the exile groups said. Many in the crowd of monks and other Tibetans shouted slogans demanding freedom and calling for the return of the Dalai Lama, the exiled Tibetan leader.

Hundreds of paramilitary police officers arrived at the scene but withdrew after a brief confrontation with the crowd, the groups said. A man who answered the phone at Tongren’s Public Security Bureau on Saturday night hung up when asked about the protests.

A third self-immolation this week occurred Friday evening in the town of Aba, in Sichuan Province, when a monk from Kirti Monastery, Lobsang Tsultrim, set himself on fire outside a government building, according to Radio Free Asia and Free Tibet.

Chinese security officers quickly extinguished the flames and beat the monk before throwing him onto the back of an open truck, said Radio Free Asia, citing two exiled monks with contacts at the embattled monastery.

At Friday’s demonstration in Tongde County, marchers demanded the release of 50 monks seized a day earlier by the police after they raised a Tibetan flag and banners extolling the Dalai Lama.

Radio Free Asia said that paramilitary police officers surrounded the protesters as they gathered at a government building but that they did not try to stop the march.

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