

WORLD NEWS

# Dalai Lama Signals No Need for Successor

By Niharika Mandhana

NEW DELHI—The Dalai Lama has suggested he may not have a successor, casting uncertainty on the choice of the next Tibetan spiritual leader, a subject of dispute between the Tibetan exile community and the Chinese government.

In an interview with German newspaper Welt am Sonntag, the Dalai Lama said he didn't think Tibetans needed a Dalai Lama anymore. "If a weak Dalai Lama comes along, then it will just disgrace the Dalai Lama," he said.

The 79-year-old Dalai Lama, who fled to India after a failed uprising against Chinese Communist rule in 1959, has indicated in the past that he could be the last in his line of highly revered spiritual leaders in the Tibetan community.

Tibetan exiles worry that Beijing, which has faced unrest from China's Tibetan minority, will push its own choice of successor after the Dalai Lama's death.

The Dalai Lama's remarks weren't categorical or conclusive and Robert Barnett, a Columbia University Tibet specialist, said the comments

seemed more in line with a cultural tradition "whereby all lamas are expected to demonstrate diffidence about the question of their return as a kind of humility."

"The convention is that they are only able to return if their followers pray intently for them to do so," Mr. Barnett said.

Tenzin Taklha, a spokesman for the Dalai Lama, said the religious leader's latest comments represent his personal views on reincarnation and that a "final decision will be made by the Tibetan people."

The question of succession—which is traditionally decided through a centuries-old mystical process used to identify the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama—has become increasingly politicized.

China, which views the Dalai Lama as a separatist, has asserted its authority over the selection of reincarnated senior lamas, although the country's ruling Communist Party is officially atheist.

If the traditional selection process is followed in Tibetan parts of China, it would be controlled by the Chinese government.

The Dalai Lama has in the past



The Dalai Lama speaking at a Sino-Tibetan conference in Hamburg last month.

Dalai Lama's authority, which they don't want."

For years, experts have talked about the possibility of two competing Dalai Lamas—one chosen by Tibetans in exile, who are desperate for leadership of the kind that the current Dalai Lama has offered, and another by Chinese officials as they move to exercise greater control over Tibetan spiritual and political life.

In a statement in 2011, the current Dalai Lama said that when he reached around 90 years of age, he would consult with spiritual leaders and other Tibetans to "re-evaluate whether the institution of the Dalai Lama should continue or not." He said he would spell out clear instructions by which his successor would be chosen.

The current Dalai Lama—who is the 14th of his line—was born into a farming family in eastern Tibet, and was identified at the age of two after he passed certain tests, including identifying the 13th Dalai Lama's belongings, such as prayer beads.

Tibetans fear that a leadership vacuum after the Dalai Lama's death could hamper their movement and cause it to fragment.

spoken about breaking from the traditional process to find his successor outside Tibet and, perhaps, to nominate one himself during his lifetime.

Mr. Barnett said the Dalai Lama's remarks appear to be an attempt "to put pressure on the Chinese to come to a resolution on the question of Tibet."

Mr. Barnett also said that if the

Dalai Lama made a definitive statement ending the centuries-old tradition of having a Dalai Lama, it could put the Chinese in a difficult position.

"If they defy the Dalai Lama's pronouncement and declare a Dalai Lama, Tibetans won't accept the person they appoint," Mr. Barnett said. "And if they don't appoint one, they will be seen as acting on the



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