

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

INFORMATION REPORT

CONFIDENTIAL/SECURITY

Date: 24 July 1953

COUNTRY China/Tibet/India

SUBJECT1. Trade Between Ladakh, Sinkiang and Tibet

2. Chinese Communists in Tibet

1. The Tibetan traders who visit Leh (N 34-10, E 77-35) are from the Chang Tang area, an arid plateau region in northern Tibet, bounded on the north by the Kunlun Mountains and on the south by Trans-Himalayan Mountains. These traders follow the Chushul (N 33-36, E 78-39) route from Tibet to Leh. Border check posts on this route are at Chushul and Koyul (N 32-53, E 79-12).

2. Tibetan traders carry tea, incense and veils for sale in Leh; on their return they carry dried fruit, soap, cigarettes and sugar. Traders from Leh carry wheat flour, barley and eggs to Tibet, and return with wool and silver coins.

3. From Leh to Sinkiang there are two main caravan routes:

a. A well-traveled caravan route runs east from Leh to Shyok (N 34-11, E 78-08) from where it follows a river valley almost due north through Yargulak (N 34-40, E 78-13) to Murgu (N 35-03, E 77-57). Between Leh and Shyok it crosses the Soltak Pass, where the trail is narrow and difficult. This pass is closed to ponies for three months

during the winter on account of heavy snowfall. Beyond Shyok, the last inhabited camp on this trail in Indian territory, the route crosses and recrosses the river as it goes north, and during the summer floods these crossings are passable only to camels. In places the trail is only wide enough to permit the passage of one animal at a time. Between Shyok and Murgo the country traversed is wild and uninhabited. The border check post is at Shyok.

b. The other main route out of Leh leads almost due north, through Khardung Pass (N 34-17, e 77-39), Khalsar (N 34-31, E 77-41), Tiggur (N 34-39, E 77-36) and Panamik (N 34-47, E 77-33), turns west over Saser Pass (17,480 feet) (N 35-02, E 77-44), and joins the Shyok route at Murgo. The trail from Leh to Khardung Pass is steep and rocky, and the pass, which is covered with perpetual ice and snow, is closed for two weeks in the winter because of snow and blizzards. This region is uninhabited. Beyond Khardung Pass the trail slopes downward and is easier to traverse, and from Khalsar through Tiggur to Panamik is comparatively easy. There are scattered homes, barley fields and villages along the route between Khalsar and Panamik. From Panamik the trail rises steadily to Karaul Pass and on up to Saser Pass, which is covered with perpetual ice and snow. In places the trail in this section is not more than two or three yards wide. Panamik is a border check post.

4. From Murgo, the point at which the two routes from Leh meet, the main trail is the Central Asian trading route which leads over Depsang Plain and Larakoram Pass (18,290 feet) (N 35-30, E 77-50) to Malik Shah. One of the most difficult parts of the route is from Murgo to Lizil Yar, where the trail is narrow and treacherous. Depsang Plain is covered with from three to five feet of snow, and in winter a strong wind blows constantly. Beyond

Karakoram Pass the trail is wider and less difficult, and the last nine miles before Malik Shah lead through a flat valley about four miles wide.

5. From Malik Shah northward, there are two main routes: the continuation of the Central Asian trading route to Khotan (N 37-07, E 79-55), and another leading to Karghalik (N 37-54, E 77-26).

a. The Khotan route continues almost due north over Sugat Pass (17,610 feet) (N 36-12, E 77-58) via Sugat Karaul, Shahidulla Mazar (N 36-38, E 78-28) (16,650 feet), Tam Karaul, and Sanju Bazar (N 37-10, E 78-30) to Guma (N 37-38, E 78-19), where it meets the main road from Kashgar (N 39-29, E 75-58) to Khotan. The trail north from Malik Shah (N35-59, E78-02) (15,200 feet) to Sugat Pass is easier to climb and less steep than the descent from Sugat Pass on the other side. As the trail nears Sugat Karaul, an uninhabited place often used as a resting place for caravans, it widens and becomes easier. The ascent to Sanju Dawan begins north of Shahidulla Mazar, and beyond the pass the trail slopes downward through Sanju Bazar to Guma, which has an altitude of 4,050 feet.

b. The Karghalik route from Malik Shah leads in a northwesterly direction through Khapalung (N 36-08, E 77-45) and Qualanoldi (N 36-27, E 77-16), then turns almost due north through Yangi Dawan (N 36-32, E 77-12) and Tapa Dawan, Ak Masjid (N 37-06, E 77-08) and Kokyar (N 37-23, E 77-15) to Karghalik, where it meets the main road from Kashgar to Khotan. From Malik Shah to Kulanoldi the trail is wide and easy to traverse, crossing and recrossing a river. Beyond Kulanoldi the trail ascends over Yangi Dawan (11,750 feet), through Kuda¹, and over Tapa Dawan (N 37-04, E 77-07) (13,580 feet) to Ak Masjid, where it begins the descent to Karghalik, which has an altitude of

¹ Kuda Mazar (N 36-52, E 77-04) is a shrine.

4,430 feet. The last part of the route, from Kokyar to Karghalik, goes through an agricultural area with scattered villages.

6. Along the routes from Leh to Sinkiang there are camps or rude stone shelters for the protection of travelers against blizzards. Water, firewood and forage are available at a few places, but for some portions of the journey oaravans must carry forage for their animals during the winter. There have been no reports or evidences of work to improve these trails.²

7. The only Chinese in northwestern Tibet are the Chinese Communist troops, seven or eight hundred of whom are stationed along the Tibet-Ladakh border.³ These troops include some former Nationalist soldiers. They first appeared in northwestern Tibet in 1951, having come from the Khotan area in Sinkiang.

8. There were in the spring of 1953 no evidences or rumors of the construction of airfields in Rudog (N 33-27, E 79-42), although the terrain in that area is suitable for such construction. There was a military radio station in Rudog, as in every military district in Sinkiang.

9. There was general discontent among the Tibetans as a result of the Chinese Communist occupation. The Chinese were in complete control of trade and business, but as of spring 1953 no land reforms had been carried out in Tibet.

² Chinese Communist troops in Tibet were talking of the construction of roads between Sinkiang and Ladakh.

³ Also reported on the troops in this area.