

Dalai Lama may name successor before death: report

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TOKYO, Japan - Tibet's spiritual leader the Dalai Lama said he is open to naming his successor before he dies, going against centuries of tradition but ensuring that China does not interfere.

"If the Tibetan people want to keep the Dalai Lama system, one of the possibilities I have been considering with my aides is to select the next Dalai Lama while I'm alive," he told Japan's Sankei Shimbun in an interview published Tuesday.

The options would include electing the successor "democratically" from among high-ranking Tibetan Buddhist monks or naming the successor himself, the Dalai Lama said.

"If China selected my successor after my death, the people of Tibet would not support him as there would be no Tibetan heart in him," he said.

The Dalai Lama, a Nobel laureate with a wide global following, keeps a rigorous schedule at age 72, but Tibetans have increasingly voiced worries about what happens when he dies.

China, which sent troops into Tibet in 1950, recently issued rules that Tibetan living Buddhas needed permission from the officially atheist government to be reincarnated.

In 1995, China detained a six-year-old boy the Dalai Lama had picked for the second-most important figure of Panchen Lama. China picked its own Panchen Lama who has been paraded around to promote Beijing's rule in Tibet.

The current Dalai Lama, who is the 14th, was born as Tenzin Gyatso to a farming family. Legend holds that when he was two years old, a search party received signs he was the Dalai Lama's reincarnation and confirmed his identity after he identified prayer beads and other relics of a previous Dalai Lama.

The Dalai Lama fled to India in 1959 amid a failed uprising against Chinese rule. Beijing has denounced his frequent travels overseas including his current trip to Japan, saying he should focus on religion rather than politics.

"I am already half-retired politically and in the position of supreme advisor to the exiled government. Decision making on political matters is already out of my hands," the Dalai Lama said in the interview.

He denies Beijing's charges he is a separatist, saying he is seeking greater autonomy for Tibet under Chinese rule.