



Tibet activist in fair condition at Hub hospital

Author: Stephanie Schorow and Jules Crittenden

Date: Sep 2, 1999

Free Tibet activist Daja Meston, back home from imprisonment in China, was in fair condition at Brigham and Women's Hospital yesterday.

The Newton man was critically injured when he fell three stories in an alleged escape attempt, Chinese officials have said. Some of his friends doubt that, believing he may have been beaten, but Meston, also known as Wangchuk, has not commented. "I have been through hell for two weeks," he told a friend, Carl Williams, who traveled with Meston from China.

Meston, 29, was met late last night by about 40 friends when he arrived at the hospital after a medical evacuation flight from Hong Kong. As he was wheeled in, he smiled but said nothing.

His wife, Phuntsok, sobbing, said simply, "Thank you so much," as onlookers covered her shoulders with white scarves - a Tibetan welcoming custom.

Williams said he doubts Meston will speak about what caused his injuries, citing his concern about interpreter Tsering Dorjee, a Chinese citizen who is believed to be still in Chinese custody.

Meston, Dorjee and an Australian companion were arrested two weeks ago on suspicion of spying, after Chinese officials said they were caught in a restricted area.

They were investigating a controversial Chinese irrigation project in Qinghai province, that Tibetan activists say is intended to bring in ethnic Chinese farmers to the traditionally Tibetan area.

After his arrest, Meston suffered a lacerated liver, a ruptured spleen, several broken vertebrae, and both of his heels were shattered.

Gordon Fellman, a professor at Brandeis University, Meston's alma mater, talked briefly with Meston at the hospital. "He's weak, but he's going to make it. He's not going to talk about (his injuries) for a while," Fellman said. "It was pretty awful, whatever it was."

Fellman and other friends said they doubt the Chinese version of events, believing Meston would be unlikely to risk death trying to escape. But Williams said, "We have no reason to believe it is not true . . . we just don't know."

Friends said Meston had traveled to the Qinghai province after assurances by the Chinese the area was open for inspection. The Chinese are hoping to get \$40 million in loans from the World Bank for the project.

Williams said he and Phuntsok Meston were constantly followed and videotaped by Chinese officials, when in the Qinghai hospital.

But Williams credited Chinese doctors with saving Meston's life by operating on him immediately without waiting for official authorization. Williams also said Meston told him he voluntarily signed a confession admitting to being in a restricted area without the proper visa.

"He agreed to the events but not that it is a crime," Williams said. "He did sign the confession - I would not say under duress."

Williams said Meston's flight and medical bills could run \$200,000 or more. So far, only \$11,000 in donations have been received.

Checks can be made to the Bank Information Center/Daja Meston, and sent to Bank Information Center, 733 15th Street NW Suite 1126, Washington, D.C., 20005.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.