



Clockwise from left: The *chemar* box, which is decorated with colorful ornaments and filled with roasted barley and barley flour, is an important part of the New Year celebrations. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY A group of Tibetans stand on a street in Lhasa's Chengguan district, offering New Year wishes to their neighbors and friends. PALDEN NYIMA / CHINA DAILY A retailer sells new year snacks at a stall in Lhasa. PALDEN NYIMA / CHINA DAILY

New Year celebration, Lhasa style

Spring Festival and Tibet's 'Losar' fell on same day this year, making the festivities bigger than usual. Palden Nyima reports

Due to the coincidence that the traditional Spring Festival and the Tibetan New Year Losar were celebrated on the same day — Feb. 5 — the festive atmosphere in the Tibet autonomous region was more joyful than usual.

Two weeks ahead, the festive atmosphere could be felt in every corner of Lhasa, the autonomous region's capital city.

A week before the festival, red lanterns were hanging on trees alongside the streets and in the parks. On display along both sides of the city's Tsesongthang Road were local products such as yak meat, butter, *chemar* boxes and cheese decorated with lucky Tibetan cultural patterns.

Stalls in the alleys around the ancient Barkhor Street were selling a variety of New Year goods, and business was brisk as people completed their last-minute shopping.

The busiest and most crowded shopping sites were the stores selling dried fruits, butter, cheese, *khasai* pastries, the pilgrimage paths of the city's Jokhang and Ramoche temples, and the fruit and vegetable markets.

As is true everywhere in China, Spring Festival is an occasion for family gatherings and reunions.

For instance, Pema Yangjin, a native of Lhasa, spent time with her family during the Spring Festival period.

Pema Yangjin studies at the Suzhou Medical Vocational School in Suzhou in East China's Jiangsu province. She was not able to return for New Year celebrations in the last two years. This year, she made it home.

Two weeks before the festival, she assisted her uncle Dawa in his retail business.

Dawa's stall was selling Tibetan New Year furnishings, such as decorative sheep's heads and "tseta" butter sculpture, as well as food ingredients including chilli pepper powder.

Standing hours to assist her uncle was not an easy task, but she said the job was worthwhile as she learned business skills and was happy to see smiles from people with whom she had conversations.

As the New Year's Day was approaching, she said she was excited and could not wait for the day to come.

After returning home every evening, she helped her family with New Year preparations.

Like most of her fellow Tibetans, her family filled the *chemar* box with roasted barley and barley flour, placed a sheep's head and other delicacies on the offering table, filled the plates with candies, dried fruits and yak jerky.

Her family also prepared new Tibetan dresses and prayer flags.

The *chemar* is a wooden box divided into two parts, filled with roasted barley and barley flour respectively, the two sides are plugged with the ears of barley and *tseta* butter sculptures.

The *chemar* symbolizes longevity, a good harvest and luck, she said.

"We would place the sheep's head on the offering table. As the sheep head resembles a white conch, it symbolizes wealth, harmony and compassion," Pema Yangjin said with a smile.

The 23-year-old said Tibetans were very particular with New Year decorations and furnishings, such as the decorative *tseta* in the *chemar* box.



Residents in Lhasa perform *guozhuang*, an artform featuring singing and dancing, during the New Year celebration. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Tibetans in Lhasa treat their guests with delicious food during Losar. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



A Tibetan student, who studies at a middle school in Jinan, celebrates the New Year with a local family. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Local residents tour one of the parks in Lhasa, which is decorated with lanterns. PALDEN NYIMA / CHINA DAILY

The *chemar* was made of wood in the past, but now it is completely made of butter.

The patterns on the butter sculpture are all made with butter and pigment. The patterns include the Four

The quantity and quality of New Year goods have increased in recent years along with the prosperity of Tibetan families. During this year's celebration, Pema Yangjin's family fried various kinds of *khasai* pastries, purchased more New Year goods, and the atmosphere of the festival became even more prevalent than usual, she said.

"In the previous New Year holidays, I would spend most of my time hanging out with friends. This year, I spent most of the time with my family, and worshipping temples with parents was the most fun thing for me," she said.

According to Pema Yangjin, she also traveled to Tibet's Damshung county with her family to visit their relatives during the New Year holiday.

"It was more meaningful to spend part of the New Year on the remote grassland. My relatives are very hospitable, and enjoying the hot spring with friends was also a lot of fun," Pema Yangjin said.

The Tibetan New Year Losar typically lasts for 15 days. Apart from spending part of the time visiting several monasteries with her family, Pema Yangjin's family invited other relatives to her home for gatherings, and her relatives also invited her family to their homes for parties.

Gatherings

During every gathering, people wear their best and newest Tibetan dresses. Each of them brought a gift box filled with dried fruits, candies, chocolate and yak jerky, and they offered the snacks to each other.

The adults played Tibetan dice, cards and mahjong, while the kids played various games.

After people felt slightly drunk from sipping cups of barley wine and beer, they began to dance and sing, and the gatherings would not end until dusk fell.

"I missed the company of my family and relatives while I spent my New Year in the school in Jiangsu in the past two years, and I ate at restaurants. This year, I spent my New Year at home, so we cooked most of the dishes ourselves, and I liked the homemade food more than eating outside," she said.

Thanks to the overall social progress in the autonomous region, Tibetans not only celebrate the Losar by visiting each other, exchanging gifts and giving lucky greetings, but elders also present red envelopes containing cash to the youngsters.

"Presenting the red envelopes has become a tradition today. Although I have not received many red envelopes, I am very satisfied, I consider it a blessing," Pema Yangjin said, adding that she wished herself, as well as others, all the best in the new year.

Besides the red envelopes, Pema Yangjin also received a special gift — a teddy bear from her younger sister Tenzin Yangzom.

"Tenzin Yangzom told me the bear would accompany me just like she was with me, I was overwhelmed," she said excitedly.

Tibetan culture is an important component of the Chinese traditional culture, and the Spring Festival and the Tibetan New Year Losar have gradually become major festivals celebrated by various ethnic groups throughout the autonomous region.



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STUDENT FROM LHASA

Harmony Animals, Dharma Wheel and the Longevity Old Man, and they all carry different lucky meanings.

"As one of the key decorations on the *chemar* box, *tseta* represents all things going well, and good luck in the new year," she said.