



Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama speaks during his visit to the Children in Crossfire charity in Londonderry, Northern Ireland last year.

Picture: REUTERS

Why let China dictate our lives?

THE Chobe River, which forms part of the border between Botswana and Namibia, finally loses its identity when it flows into the mighty Zambezi near the Kazangula ferry. But before it does, it flows around an island which the Namibians call Kasikili and the Batswana call Sedudu.

The island is tiny – about five square kilometres. It is also fluvial – in the rainy season, it is submerged. No one lives there.

But some time between 1989 (when apartheid South Africa withdrew from the Caprivi Strip) and 1991 (when Namibia became independent), Botswana troops hoisted the country's flag on the island.

Thanks to diplomatic intervention on the part of Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe in his capacity as head of the frontline states, a war between Namibia and Botswana was averted.

The dispute was referred to the International Court of Justice, which in 1999 ruled in favour of Botswana but gave Namibia permission to travel unimpeded around the island.

Sedudu is still unoccupied. If you can see the logic in two

Surely we South Africans should be free to invite whomever we choose into our homes? And that includes the Dalai Lama, writes **Kanthan Pillay**

countries being prepared to go to war over a submerged island where no one is ever likely to live, you will be able to understand why China feels so strongly about Tibet, an arid, harsh land with an average population density of less than two people per square kilometre.

So it doesn't matter whether one believes the legend dating to 400BC that the first Tibetan king, Nyatri Tsenpo, descended from a one-footed creature called the Theurang, and that he had webbed fingers and a tongue so large it could cover his face.

What is true is that Tibet was ruled by China as a protectorate from 1642 until 1911 when China's Qing dynasty fell.

This provided a window of opportunity for the then Dalai Lama to return from exile and proclaim independence.

Tibet was effectively independent until 1950 when chairman Mao sent in the People's Liberation Army to reimpose China's rule.

China under Mao Zedong (or Tse-tung) agreed to allow Tibet's social structures to remain in place, but began a process of democratisation.

The Chinese abolished slavery and serfdom, and began educating the masses. (Schools under the Dalai Lama had been the preserve of the elite.)

The CIA began funding a guerrilla army to fight the

Chinese, as well as fronting a lobby group for Tibetan independence called the American Society for a Free Asia, headed by a brother of the Dalai Lama.

The Americans also funded an intelligence operation, headed by another brother of the Dalai Lama. They provided military training and support camps in Nepal, and provided airlifts for paratroopers.

The Dalai Lama fled into exile in India and established a government in exile. Having been soundly defeated militarily, he now became an advocate of passive resistance, leading to his being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989.

With the halo of Nobel laureate, it's easy to forget that the Dalai Lama led a feudal empire and received military backing from the CIA to destabilise the People's Republic of China.

Neither Nelson Mandela nor FW de Klerk were men of peace until peace was negotiated. Barack Obama is also a Nobel laureate, but the Islamic State knows that Obama is no pacifist.

But none of this has anything to do with whether the Dalai Lama should be granted a visa to enter South Africa.



His Holiness the Dalai Lama greets Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu in Cape Town in 1996.

Picture: REUTERS

We are a sovereign nation and under president Mandela made it clear to the rest of the world we would not allow anyone to dictate who was welcome to visit us.

Fidel Castro, Muammar Gaddafi and Mohamed Suharto were welcomed into our land even

though the West disapproved. The Dalai Lama himself visited our country in 1996 when he met Mandela. He visited again in 1999 and in 2004 under the Mbeki administration.

But in March 2009 he was refused a visa, nominally to avoid

Tibetan politics intruding on the 2010 World Cup. He has not been allowed back since.

His friend and fellow Nobel laureate, Desmond Tutu, is outraged. Tutu had invited the Dalai Lama to attend his 80th birthday party in 2011, but could not have him there. Now an opportunity to again get together has been denied.

So forget our relationship with China and our engagement with Brics (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) (both of which I support). Forget my belief that Tibet is better off under China than it was under the Dalai Lama.

Surely we, as South Africans, should be free to invite whomever we choose into our home? Surely Tutu, as our most visible symbol of conscience, has earned the right to entertain his friend?

And, if there is a compelling national interest in keeping one man out of our country, President Jacob Zuma, as the head of our household, needs to tell us why?

What would Madiba do? We already know the answer.

● *Kanthan Pillay is MD of the Yired group of companies and chief executive officer of 99.2YFM. He wrote this in his personal capacity.*

Dalai Lama reaches across faiths with calls for peace, tolerance

IT'S easy to be cynical these days. Easy, when representatives of India's nine largest faiths gather in a Delhi hotel, to shrug. We've all seen these calls for peace and tolerance before, says that dark, sceptical voice, but what good do they do?

One person who most certainly does not appear cynical is the man who brought them all together – Bahaists, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jains, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs and Zoroastrians alike – the Dalai Lama.

At 79, the Tibetan Buddhist leader may these days walk a little more stiffly, but his mind, and his humour, are as supple as ever: "Followers of all spiritual

India has 1 000-year-old faiths and a history as a non-violent country, the Dalai Lama told **Andrew Buncombe** as representatives of the country's nine largest faiths gather in Delhi

traditions try in their own way to overcome the suffering that afflicts beings in the world and bring about their happiness," he told delegates. "However, it would be better if we worked together."

The Tibetan leader said he had been trying to convene a gathering of different faiths since the early 1960s. Over the years, he had come to know more and more people, and his confidence had grown.

"Now I can convene a symposium because of these relationships," he told me at an afternoon break for tea. "India has 1 000-year-old religions and a history as a non-violent country."

The 14th Dalai Lama, whose given name is Tenzin Gyatso, has lived in India since 1959, when he fled Tibet amid a crackdown by China and established a government-in-exile in the hills at Dharamshala.

At the time he was a naive, inexperienced leader, who believed the rest of the world would recognise Tibet as an independent nation.

The US, UK and India all declined, though India gave refuge

to hundreds of thousands of Tibetans.

Since then, the Dalai Lama has become used to such realpolitik. Convinced that his role as a political leader was actually hindering negotiations with China, he gave up that formal position in 2011.

Since then he has continued to promote the cause of "meaningful autonomy" for the Tibetan people, rather than outright independence – his middle way approach.

He has also tried to prevent the authorities in Beijing from seizing on the issue of his succession as a way of creating splits.

He has long believed one of the ways Beijing does this is by getting

involved in the reincarnation selection process of senior Buddhist monks. This month he repeated his claim that he may not be reborn at all, a comment that sparked outrage from China.

He had previously said his successor could be a woman, or even that Tibetans could hold a referendum to decide whether there should be a 15th Dalai Lama.

He said he started planning the peace conference two years ago and that it was not a reaction to any specific events.

"Eventually I hope the Indian government will organise a national conference of religious leaders," he said. "I think India is the only place, with all the world's

major religions, where they could come together."

More than a decade ago, the Dalai Lama allowed some of his monks to collaborate with a US scientist, Richard Davidson, as part of an investigation into whether meditation could alter the physiology of the brain. The results were not conclusive.

But he believes, passionately, that meditation and what he called "Indian psychology" could improve society.

"India should pay more attention to ancient knowledge. It should not be considered religion," he enthused. "And these things should not be for the museum." – The Independent