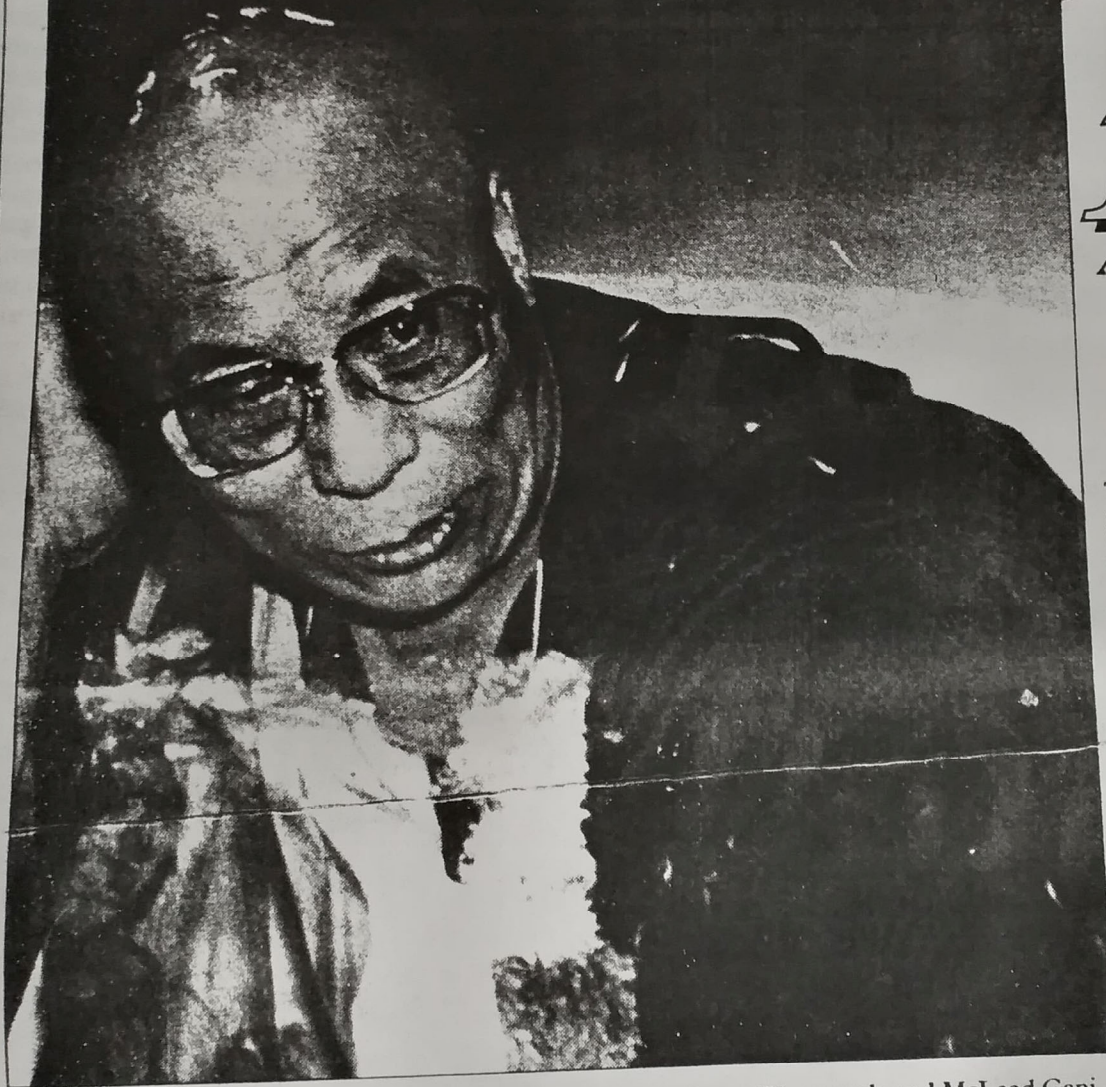


Pontiff of peace



By VITUSHA OBEROI

LAUGHTER COMES easily to the Dalai Lama; genuine, unselfconscious mirth of the innocent.

Rich, loud guffaws reverberate in the elaborate room where he sits meeting visitors after his

Tenzin Gyatso, son of a Tibetan peasant, was all of two years old when the high Lamas decreed him the reincarnation of the 13th Dalai Lama, the Buddha of compassion.

At the age of 16, he assumed full political power as the 14th Dalai Lama, even as Tibet was

Dharamsala and McLeod Ganj, the Indian refuges for many of the Tibetans, including the Dalai Lama. Thirty-seven years of hope sits uneasily on many, and the Dalai Lama, as he prepares to enter his 60th year on July 6, is acutely aware of it.

The younger lot of his tribe are impatiently crying out for an

As the world prepares to celebrate his sixtieth birthday later this week, up in his mountain retreat, the Dalai Lama contends with new stirrings in the struggle for Tibetan freedom.

Tibetan people, there will be no abandonment of the non-violent principle," the Dalai Lama asserts.

"My middle way of approach has so far failed to either start negotiations with China or improve conditions in Tibet. This does not mean that in the future, too, it will fail. Sooner or later, there will be a change," the Dalai Lama says.

"In the last 50 years, the middle way has brought more sympathy from the international community and various governments. Even within China, there is more voice and concern about the situation in Tibet.

"This I consider to be the positive result of my middle path, which is the only realistic approach to the problem," he says.

The Dalai Lama himself is full of hope that a settlement will soon be reached on Tibet. His optimism, he says, is based on the collapse of the communist, totalitarian regimes in Europe.

"The Berlin Wall collapsed and the former Soviet Union is no more. Today, despite economic difficulties and chaotic

Buddha Dharma cannot survive, and hence the hope that next year will see an end to Chinese domination in Tibet.

"The Tibetan freedom need not necessarily be complete independence. What we are looking for is cultural freedom, a middle way. Some kind of genuine self-rule for the people," the Dalai Lama said.

While he acknowledges the contribution of India to the Tibetan cause every step of the way, the Dalai Lama feels India does not always take the correct stand on Tibet.

"This country, due to its relations with Tibet, has a special feeling for us. But, sometimes, that feeling does not come out. Sometimes, I feel the government of India's policy on China and Tibet is an over-cautious approach.

"I feel India can do a lot more, at least on the issues of human rights violations and cultural genocide. Overall, Indian leaders and the public should have more confidence, on the basis of the awareness of India's potential," he says.

But was that not the case with most countries, including