



International
Federation
of Journalists
國際記者聯會

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IFJ Press Freedom in China Campaign

June 8 Bulletin

Two months until the Beijing Olympics

To IFJ Asia-Pacific affiliates and friends,

Welcome to IFJ Asia-Pacific's monthly Press Freedom in China Campaign e-bulletin. This bulletin marks two months until the Beijing Olympic Games open on August 8. The next bulletin will be sent on **July 8, 2008** and contributions are most welcome.

To contribute news or information, email ifjchina@ifj-asia.org. To visit the IFJ's China Campaign page, go to www.ifj.org.

Please distribute this bulletin widely among colleagues in the media.

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1. Mixed signs of progress after earthquake

The earthquake that struck Sichuan province on May 12, with a death toll of almost 70,000 and rising, attracted much media coverage. Journalists poured into Sichuan, although some local journalists were encouraged to leave reporting to the state-run Xinhua news agency. Initially foreign journalists had a relatively free hand to interview local people and report on the relief effort, despite isolated incidents of journalists being barred from certain areas on safety grounds. The apparent transparency was in keeping with new freedom of information regulations, which are a positive development but limited by authorities' ability to refuse to provide information on various grounds including divulgence of "state secrets".

Within a week of the disaster, however, the Central Propaganda Department "reminded" Chinese media to focus on positive reports. In one case, live television transmissions from China Central Television (CCTV) were blocked on May 14 without explanation after a local journalist asked a Meteorology Department official about the dissemination of information to the public. During the official three-day mourning from May 19 to 21, *New Travel Weekly*, published in Chongqing, was



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ordered to suspend publishing on May 20 after failing to carry mourning messages in the manner laid out in propaganda directives. The publisher, editor-in-chief and deputy editor were dismissed, and the publication has been suspended indefinitely.

For more information about coverage of the quake, visit the University of Hong Kong's China Media Project at <http://cmp.hku.hk/2008/06/04/1047>

2. IFJ and HKJA take new steps for journalists' safety

In the course of reporting on the earthquake disaster it became apparent that not all journalists were well equipped to handle the unsafe conditions, with some suffering trauma after reporting on the tragedy. The IFJ re-issued its Safety Code of Practice along with supplementary information focused on coverage of the disaster. The materials were distributed in Chinese and English to the Hong Kong Journalists' Association (HKJA) and the Association of Taiwan Journalists (ATJ), both IFJ affiliates, as well as to the Foreign Correspondents' Club of China, the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Hong Kong and the All China Journalists' Association. All organisations were asked to distribute the materials to members and employers.

To view the safety information in Chinese, visit <http://asiapacific.ifj.org/en/pages/open-and-free-towards-a-democratic-media-culture-in-china>

3. Jailing of journalists continues

Qi Chonghuai and He Yanjie, both of *China Legal News*, were sentenced to four and two years in jail respectively by a court in Shandong on May 11 due to their reports detailing alleged corruption by local officials in Shandong. *China Legal News* is a national newspaper owned and controlled by the Ministry of Justice. Qi, 42, has been in detention since June 25, 2007, on charges of blackmail, and has worked in the industry for more than 13 years. Li Xiongbing, Qi's defence lawyer, said the case lacked due process and that local police had beaten Qi repeatedly during his detention.

On May 9, environmental activist and freelance journalist Chen Daojun was detained on suspicion of "inciting subversion of state power". Press freedom organisation PEN reported that Chen was detained during a protest over chemical plants in Pengzhou, 39km from Chengdu, Sichuan province, the site of the May earthquake.

On May 3, freelance writer and social commentator Zhou Yuanzhi was detained in Zhongxiang City, Hubei province, in central China. Zhou was released on May 15 and said he had been warned not to talk about what had happened during his detention. Zhou has written for the Voice of America and for Chinese and international websites. His articles have been critical of China's Government on social and economic issues.

4. Attacks on journalists' employment undermine media freedom

Liu Shui, a veteran journalist and freelance writer, was dropped from a financial magazine in Shenzhen in early May due to articles he wrote in 2006 exposing torture and inhumane conditions in a detention centre in Shenzhen. A source revealed to the IFJ that the magazine planned to recruit Liu as an editor, but Shenzhen police approached the magazine and demanded he not be employed. The police, who reportedly said the order came from the Shenzhen Government, detained Liu for about 10 hours before ordering him to leave Shenzhen as he no longer had work or temporary residence in the city. Liu was a student leader in Lanzhou, Gansu, during the 1989



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Tiananmen Square protests, and has worked as a journalist for Nan Fang Du Shi Bao and Shenzhen Wan Bao. He has been detained four times due to articles relating to government malpractices and for editing *The Truth About June 4th*, a book on the Tiananmen Square "incident". Another writer, Xiong Zhongjun, who writes under the pen name of Chen Yiming, was ordered to leave Shenzhen in April for publishing articles detailing the arrest of more than 1000 activists during anti-Japan demonstrations in 2004. Xiong was previously detained for more than two months on charges of "inciting subversion of state power".

5. IFJ and HKJA press for Hu Jia's release

On May 12 the IFJ and the HKJA submitted a petition signed by 1518 people and 17 organisations to China's Minister of Justice, Wu Aiyng, with copies to Premier Wen Jia Bao and the Liaison Office of the Central Government in Hong Kong, demanding the release of Hu Jia. Hu was sentenced on April 3 to three-and-a-half years' jail and one year's denial of political rights on charges of "inciting subversion to state power", for articles and interviews critical of China's Government. Hu, a long-time human rights activist, suffers poor health and his family has told the IFJ that his condition is deteriorating.

6. Sing Pao wobbles as staff concerns grow

The Chinese-language newspaper *Sing Pao Daily News* in Hong Kong almost closed in April. *Sing Pao* has a long history of failing to pay staff wages and contributions on time, and the Mandatory Provident Fund Schemes Authority had given it 21 days to pay outstanding provident fund contributions for staff. Sing Pao eventually paid HK\$4.9 million in unpaid contributions. The newspaper has faced financial problems since mid-2004 after mainland Chinese interests took over the publication. In April 2006, more than 20 journalists, including a senior editor, took sick leave in protest at non-payment of wages and provident fund contributions. In 2007, industrial action was averted after the newspaper pledged to settle back-pay. In August 2007, a magistrate fined the paper HK\$156,000 for offences involving the late payment of wages and annual leave, and in March 2008, it was fined HK\$112,000 for similar offences. In April 2008, businessman Carson Yeung extended an interest-free loan to the paper's parent company, Hong Kong-listed SMI Publishing, but it is unclear whether the loan will ensure timely payments to journalists.

7. Hong Kong judge delivers victory for RTHK

On May 8 Justice Michael Hartmann, of the Hong Kong High Court, quashed a January 2007 ruling by the Hong Kong Broadcasting Authority (BA) which had found that the Government-owned broadcaster RTHK's television program *Gay Lovers* could have the effect of promoting acceptance of homosexual marriage. The judge said the BA had misunderstood the broadcaster's code of practice, and added that its ruling could create an "impermissible restriction on freedom of speech". However, the judge also found that the BA does have the statutory power to monitor RTHK's programs. The program was originally broadcast in July 2006.

8. Hong Kong Lawyer spikes article on Tibet

The editorial board of the Law Society of Hong Kong voted in April not to publish an article by senior Hong Kong lawyer Paul Harris but declined to give reasons. The piece, about the legal arguments for Tibetan independence, was written for the society's journal, *Hong Kong Lawyer*. In the article, Harris argued that Tibet's case for self-determination was "infinitely stronger" than Kosovo's and that autonomy would be the best solution, although this seemed unlikely under



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current circumstances. Harris also said “unless real autonomy is offered, self-determination in Tibet is bound to mean independence”. The chair of the editorial board, Cecilia Wong, said a vote was taken not to publish the article in the May edition but declined to give reasons. Speaking after the decision, Harris told Reuters, “There is a growing atmosphere of unwillingness to allow activities, publications, publicity for points of view that the mainland disapproves of.”

9. Second Chinese journalist wins Golden Pen

Chinese journalist Li Changqing was awarded the World Association of Newspapers (WAN) Golden Pen of Freedom on June 2. Li, the former deputy news editor of Fuzhou Daily, was not allowed to leave China for the ceremony in Sweden after serving a three-year jail sentence for “fabricating and spreading false information” following his report on an outbreak of dengue fever in 2004. The report followed condemnation of China for suppressing the SARS outbreak. Li was released from prison in February. His wife, Bao Dinling, and daughter were also blocked from leaving China. In his acceptance speech, Li said that “in China, being a journalist is full of risks. To be a good journalist, one not only needs wisdom, but even more, moral courage.” Last year the Golden Pen was awarded to Chinese journalist Shi Tao, who has served four years of a 10-year sentence for using his Yahoo mail account to pass on information about media bans on reporting the 1989 Tiananmen Square anniversary.

10. New Olympic guidelines raise fears of journalists being barred

The Beijing Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (BOCOG) issued guidelines this week governing the six classes of foreign citizens who will be barred from entering China for the Games. While generally unremarkable, two classes in particular are of concern to the IFJ. The guidelines suggest that those suspected of planning acts of “subversion” or “those who are suspected might engage in any acts that threaten the security or interests of China” will be barred from entering the country. In the context of Chinese journalists frequently being jailed for “inciting subversion of state power”, the guidelines raise fears that journalists could be barred in anticipation of their reporting.

If you have information on a press freedom violation or matters relating to media freedom and journalists’ rights in China, contact staff at IFJ Asia-Pacific so that action can be taken. To contribute to this bulletin, email ifjchina@ifj-asia.org.

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