



# CHINA MEDIA BULLETIN

*A weekly update of press freedom and censorship news  
related to the People's Republic of China*

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## Headlines

-  State media push anticorruption line in Bo Xilai case
-  Unexplained outage briefly severs China from global internet
-  To curb online discussion of Bo Xilai, censors ban 'tomato'
-  Activist warns of mounting China-Africa media ties
-  Next 'Iron Man' film to be a Chinese coproduction

## BROADCAST / PRINT MEDIA NEWS

### **State media push anticorruption line in Bo Xilai case**

Over the past week, China's state-run media have made an unusually strong push to control public perceptions of the scandal surrounding ousted Chongqing Communist Party chief Bo Xilai, but without releasing any new details on the case (see CMB No. [53](#)). A series of prominently placed commentaries have sought to drive home the idea that Bo's removal and related disciplinary and criminal investigations illustrate the party's adherence to the rule of law and commitment to combat corruption in its own ranks. On April 13, propaganda authorities instructed daily newspapers across China to publish an editorial on the scandal by the party mouthpiece *People's Daily* on their front pages. The University of Hong Kong's China Media Project confirmed the directive, which was highly unusual even for China's robust propaganda apparatus. On April 16, Premier Wen Jiabao, seen as one of the main officials arguing for Bo's removal, published an article in the conservative party journal *Qiushi* in which he called for stronger enforcement to hold officials accountable for corruption. The *People's Daily* article and the Wen piece used almost identical phrases, claiming that

China is “a nation of rule of law and that the dignity and authority of the law cannot be trampled.” It remains unclear how convincing such statements are to ordinary citizens. While there is growing evidence that Bo and his relatives engaged in corrupt practices, the case against him appears to be more a result of political infighting than the impartial pursuit of justice. There is now speculation among overseas Chinese news sites and foreign media that Zhou Yongkang, China’s security chief and Bo’s backer on the Politburo Standing Committee, may be under investigation within the Communist Party. Joseph Cheng of the Contemporary China Research Center at the City University of Hong Kong says that such selective enforcement only bolsters “the perception that all cadres are corrupt and all corruption investigations are political.”

- **China Media Project 4/13/2012:** [And your lead story today will be...](#)
  - **People’s Daily 4/13/2012:** [Observation of Party discipline and national laws](#)
  - **Qiushi 4/16/2012:** [Premier Wen vows greater anti-corruption resolve](#)
  - **Huffington Post 4/19/2012:** [Zhou Yongkang, China security chief, investigated as Bo Xilai scandal expands](#)
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## **Prizes for environmental journalism awarded**

On April 10, the international environmentalist group ChinaDialogue and Britain’s *Guardian* newspaper awarded prizes to more than 20 Chinese journalists at the third annual China Environmental Press Awards in Beijing. The recipients’ investigative articles, covering topics ranging from water pollution to the destruction of forests, helped raise public awareness and government accountability on environmental issues in the country. Feng Jie of *Southern Weekend*, a Guangzhou-based paper known for outspoken journalism, was named journalist of the year. Her in-depth reports on a massive June 2011 oil spill revealed the mismanagement that caused the disaster (see CMB No. [29](#)). This year’s awards also highlighted the growing importance of social media by adding a category for “best citizen journalist.” The winner was Liu Futang, a 65-year-old retired forestry official who had written about forest destruction on his microblog. “The local media hasn’t written a single word, but I’ve posted 40 articles that have been followed up by newspapers and TV from across the country,” Liu said. Participants at the ceremony said media censorship is still the biggest problem faced by Chinese journalists. Though the central government allows commercialized subsidiaries of state and Communist Party media entities to attract readers and advertisers with investigative reports, especially on localized issues, it keeps a tight grip on topics with national political implications.

- **ChinaDialogue 4/11/2012:** [China’s best green journalists](#)
  - **Guardian 4/1/1/2012:** [Citizen journalism triumphs at China environmental press awards](#)
  - **China Digital Times 4/12/2012:** [Award ceremony honors China’s green journalists](#)
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## NEW MEDIA / TECHNOLOGY NEWS



### Unexplained outage briefly severs China from global internet

Internet users inside China found themselves unable to connect to foreign websites for more than two hours on April 12, while users elsewhere said Chinese sites such as the search engine Baidu were inaccessible. Though the cutoff was initially thought to be a technical glitch caused by an earthquake near Indonesia, several analysts said domestic traffic should have been affected as well, prompting speculation that the outage was related to China's state-imposed censorship system, the so-called Great Firewall. A diagnosis by American web performance company CloudFlare found that while traffic on the networks of China Telecom and China Unicom plummeted during the two-hour outage, data continued flowing on smaller networks and for certain types of traffic, indicating that the problem was not a severed cable. Analysts and internet users proposed a number of possible explanations for what appeared to be a manmade disruption, though some posts on the topic were themselves deleted. One senior executive in the industry told Britain's *Telegraph* newspaper that the Chinese authorities were likely testing a mechanism for cutting off internet access in a crisis situation, essentially a "great switch to turn off the internet." A firm from Shandong claimed that the supposed testing was in fact related to a "gateway regulation function" that will come into effect for the 18th Communist Party Congress scheduled for October. Another theory, proposed by the Beijing-based Data Center of China Internet, was that the Great Firewall was being upgraded, and that "additions to the blocked list have caused a number of IP addresses to be accidentally included." Indeed, according to an April 17 *Foreign Policy* article, reports since the outage indicate that "the overall level of website-blocking has noticeably increased."

- *Telegraph* 4/12/2012: [China cuts off internet access in bid to exert control](#)
- *Washington Times* 4/12/2012: [Chinese are walled from web for 2 hours](#)
- *Wall Street Journal* 4/12/2012: [Mystery blocks put China internet on edge](#)
- *Wall Street Journal* 4/13/2012: [New clarity on China internet outage](#)
- *Foreign Policy* 4/17/2012: [The not-so-great firewall of China](#)



### To curb online discussion of Bo Xilai, censors ban 'tomato'

Chinese netizens continue to flock to news websites based in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and elsewhere in search of uncensored information on the scandal surrounding ousted Chongqing Communist Party chief Bo Xilai (see above, CMB No. [53](#)). Many have even translated English-language articles into Chinese and posted them on the popular Chinese microblogging platform Sina Weibo. Topics of discussion among netizens range from the extravagant lifestyle of Bo's son, Bo Guagua, at private schools abroad, to the nature of the personal relationship between Bo's wife, Gu Kailai, and British businessman Neil Heywood, whose murder she has been accused of ordering. Many users have created puns and hints to get around censorship on the story. For example, because "Bo" means "thin" in Chinese, netizens nicknamed him the "not-thick-governor." In mainland Mandarin, the word for "tomato" sounds the same as the phrase "western red city" when spoken aloud, leading

“tomato” to become a subtle reference to both Chongqing and Bo himself, as he had promoted leftist, neo-Maoist propaganda themes while in power there. According to tests by *China Digital Times*, even such code words were being blocked on Weibo as of April 10, despite the potential for collateral damage. In an example of how Chinese censorship can backfire, former CNN correspondent Rebecca MacKinnon recounted in an April 17 *Foreign Policy* article how Sina Weibo, in compliance with government orders to block all posts containing Bo’s name, had inadvertently censored the state-run Xinhua news agency’s official announcement that he had been stripped of his party leadership positions. Meanwhile, the authorities’ broader efforts to control online “rumors” have moved forward. On April 12, Xinhua reported that more than 210,000 online posts had been deleted and 42 websites shut down since mid-March as part of the antirumor campaign.

- MSNBC 4/17/2012: [Scandal sends China’s netizens into a feeding frenzy](#)
- *Foreign Policy* 4/17/2012: [The not-so-great firewall of China](#)
- IFEX 4/13/2012: [Internet crackdown on Bo Xilai rumors continues](#)
- Committee to Protect Journalists 4/11/2012: [Chinese censors target tomatoes amid Bo Xilai scandal](#)



## Messaging ban imposed after Chongqing protests

Two days after thousands of demonstrators clashed with police in Chongqing’s Wansheng district on April 11, the authorities reportedly imposed a ban on protests, leafleting, and distribution of information via mobile-telephone text message or internet-based instant message. The protests, which began on April 10, were tied to economic problems in the district, but they coincided with the announcement that former Chongqing Communist Party chief Bo Xilai had been removed from his positions in the party’s national leadership structures (see above, CMB No. [53](#)). The Bo case and related signs of party infighting have heightened the government’s sensitivity to the threat of public unrest. In the wake of the protests, keywords such as “Chongqing,” “Wansheng,” and “Qijiang”—a county that had recently absorbed Wansheng district, worsening its economic problems—were reportedly blocked on popular microblogging sites, but netizens were able to circulate photographs of the demonstrations and police violence.

- Radio Free Asia 4/13/2012: [Chongqing bans messages, gatherings](#)
- Associated Press 4/11/2012: [Protesters clash with riot police in Chinese city](#)

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## HONG KONG



## Journalists decry police rules on protest coverage

On April 15, journalists in Hong Kong criticized police restrictions on their efforts to cover a commemoration of the Tiananmen Square massacre held that day near the central government’s

liaison office. The police initially allowed only crews from four television stations to enter a small designated media zone in front of the building, saying they had to “strike a balance between public order and facilitating the media’s needs.” Some newspaper and radio reporters ultimately entered the restricted zone in defiance of police instructions. Hong Kong Journalists’ Association chairwoman Mak Ying-ting rejected the practice of designating media zones and choosing who could enter them. She said reporters in Hong Kong are capable of working out among themselves where to do their reporting, adding, “Do the police think of themselves as the chief news editor of Hong Kong?” The incident drew special attention due to perceptions that police have increased restrictions on the coverage of protests outside the liaison office over the past year. That in turn would suggest growing pressure from Beijing on Hong Kong’s government and relatively free media environment (see CMB No. [52](#)).

- **IFJ 4/16/2012: [IFJ urges Hong Kong police to end discrimination and harassment of media](#)**
- ***South China Morning Post* 4/16/2012: [Police accused of ‘media discrimination’ at rally](#)**

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## **BEYOND CHINA**



### **Google founder says China threatens the web**

In an interview with Britain’s *Guardian* newspaper published on April 15, Sergey Brin, cofounder of U.S. technology giant Google, admitted that he had underestimated the ability of authorities in countries like China to censor the internet. He said five years ago that he did not believe China or any country could effectively restrict the internet for long, but told the paper that he had since been proven wrong. According to Brin, governments in China, Iran, and Saudi Arabia are among the “very powerful forces” currently threatening the internet as a place to freely exchange information. He said other contributing factors included antipiracy measures backed by the entertainment industry and the rise of self-contained online environments controlled by individual companies, like Apple and Facebook. In January 2010, Google stopped censoring its search results for China-based users and began redirecting them to its uncensored search engine in Hong Kong. While that move caused friction with the authorities, the company’s president of Asia-Pacific operations, Daniel Alegre, said in January 2012 that Google had since managed to “thrive” in the Chinese market by focusing on products that are “non-sensitive” to the Chinese government, such as its advertising services and mobile-telephone operating system (see CMB No. [45](#)).

- ***Guardian* 4/15/2012: [Web freedom faces greatest threat ever, warns Google's Sergey Brin](#)**
- ***Wired* 4/16/2012: [Google co-founder: China, Apple, Facebook threaten the ‘open web’](#)**
- ***Time* 4/16/2012: [Axis of suppression: China, Facebook and Iran, says Google’s Sergey Brin](#)**



## China censorship casts pall over London book fair

The 41st annual London Book Fair opened on April 16 amid criticism over the organizers' decision to spotlight authors selected in cooperation with the Chinese government, despite its repressive censorship policies and frequent jailing of writers (see CMB No. [51](#)). Protests organized by Tibetan, Chinese, and Uighur rights groups reportedly caused Liu Binjie, head of China's General Administration of Press and Publication (GAPP), to cancel his appearance at a scheduled press conference. As the book fair features a large group of government-approved authors and publishers from China, the literary rights group Independent Chinese PEN Center said it would set up a separate booth for several exiled Chinese writers, including London-based author Ma Jian and poet Zhang Rong. The Chinese authorities are known for interfering in overseas cultural forums abroad in an attempt to exclude critical individuals and content. According to the *Epoch Times*, an international newspaper operated by practitioners of the Falun Gong spiritual group, the Chinese consulate in Houston, Texas, recently contacted organizers of the Palm Beach International Film Festival in Florida, warning them about a "harmful" documentary film on the persecution of Falun Gong adherents and other human rights abuses in China. The festival organizers apparently rebuffed any suggestion that the film, *Free China: The Courage to Believe*, be pulled from the lineup. In 2010, a Chinese delegation withdrew from the Tokyo International Film Festival over objections on how the Taiwan cohort would be introduced, and two Chinese films were pulled from the Palm Springs International Film Festival after Chinese consular officials failed to block the screening of a documentary on Tibet and the Dalai Lama.

- Associated Press 4/16/2012: [London Book Fair's focus on China irks activists](#)
- Deutsche Welle 4/14/2012 (in Chinese): [Why aren't China's independent writers at the London Book Fair](#)
- *Guardian* 4/13/2012: [Is the London Book Fair supporting Chinese censorship?](#)
- English PEN 4/13/2012: [PEN urges discussion of Chinese literature and censorship at London book fair](#)
- *Epoch Times* 4/18/2012: [Chinese consulate warns film festival on 'harmful' offering](#)
- *New York Times* 1/8/2010: [China and Tibet skirmish at a film festival](#)
- Bloomberg 10/24/2010: [China leaves Tokyo film festival in Taiwan dispute, Global Times reports](#)



## Activist warns of mounting China-Africa media ties

In a *New York Times* opinion article published on April 15, Mohamed Keita, the Africa advocacy coordinator for the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), argued that an "insidious attack" on press freedom is under way in Africa as China works with local governments to curb critical reporting (see CMB No. [44](#)). He warned that Beijing's increasingly generous support for media and information infrastructure in the region has helped African leaders reshape the media landscape, allowing them to block critical websites and enhance progovernment news outlets. China's state-run Xinhua news agency has created more than 20 bureaus in Africa, and China has provided training to more than 200 African government press officers in the past eight years. Keita highlighted Ethiopia

and Rwanda as particularly worrisome cases. Authorities in both countries have rapidly intensified cooperation with Beijing while simultaneously cracking down on critical journalists and filtering dissident news sites, resulting in a dearth of information about humanitarian and conflict-related issues. On April 21, Politburo Standing Committee member and propaganda chief Li Changchun met with Chinese and African media officials in Nairobi to discuss ways to increase collaboration and counteract what he said were misleading Western news reports. An accompanying Xinhua article claimed that dominant Western media outlets portrayed both China and Africa in a negative light. In another recent sign of Chinese media outreach in the region, senior Chinese officials joined South African counterparts for the March 30 opening of a Pretoria office by ChinAfrica Media and Publishing, a Chinese state-sponsored print media company headquartered in Johannesburg.

- *New York Times* 4/15/2012: [Africa's free press problem](#)
- Xinhua 4/22/2012: [China-Africa media cooperation—a joint force for truth](#)
- ChinAfrica 3/31/2012: [Beijing Review launches China's first Africa-oriented print media company in South Africa](#)



## Next 'Iron Man' film to be a Chinese coproduction

U.S.-based media giant Disney announced on April 15 that it plans to coproduce the superhero-themed action film *Iron Man 3* in China with Beijing-based Dynamic Marketing Group (DMG) Entertainment. According to DMG chairman Peter Xiao, the company will invest 1 billion yuan (\$158 million) in the movie's production and distribution in the Chinese market. In the first quarter of 2012, China overtook Japan to become the world's second-biggest box office market after the United States. Foreign films coproduced in China are not subject to a 34-film limit on the number of foreign movies allowed in Chinese theaters each year (see CMB No. [48](#)). DMG has close ties to state-run China Film Group, the country's largest studio and monopoly importer. The company collaborated with China Film Group on *The Beginning of the Great Revival* (also known as *The Founding of a Party*), a state-subsidized 2011 propaganda epic about the origins of the Chinese Communist Party (see CMB No. [30](#)).

- *Businessweek* 4/16/2012: [Walt Disney to co-produce Iron Man 3 in China with DMG](#)
- *Los Angeles Times* 4/16/2012: [Disney, DMG team up to make 'Iron Man 3' a Chinese co-production](#)

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For additional information on human rights and free expression in China, see:  
[\*Freedom in the World 2012\*](#)  
[\*Freedom on the Net 2011\*](#)  
[\*Freedom of the Press 2011\*](#)

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