



CHINA MEDIA BULLETIN

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

Issue No. 55: April 26, 2012

Top Headlines

-  State media parsed for signs of further party purges
-  CCTV host off air after microblog post on tainted yogurt
-  Communist Party paper's website listed on Shanghai exchange
-  China's propaganda chief on international tour
-  SEC probing Hollywood's China deals for possible bribery

BROADCAST / PRINT MEDIA NEWS

State media parsed for signs of further party purges

On April 20, the *Financial Times* reported on growing chatter inside and outside China that Zhou Yongkang, one of the nine members of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) Politburo Standing Committee and the man in charge of the country's vast security apparatus, could be fighting for his job. He was a reputed supporter of Bo Xilai, the recently purged CCP leader in Chongqing, and there has been mounting speculation that Zhou himself is facing an internal CCP probe (see CMB No. [54](#)). One Hong Kong-based professor went so far as to say that Zhou's departure was "imminent." State-run media failed to address the issue directly, but in a possible bid to counter the rumors through ordinary coverage, they have reported several times on Zhou's official activities, such as a meeting with visiting Cuban Communist Party officials or an inspection tour in Hubei Province. In the most puzzling of Zhou's media appearances, the CCP mouthpiece *People's Daily* published a speech in which he called for the party's legal and security organs to follow the leadership's decisions closely. Some observers interpreted this as a sign that Zhou had "caved" and

was siding with the alleged party faction led by president and CCP general secretary Hu Jintao. However, a close look at the article indicates that the speech was given on March 26—before Bo’s decisive ouster from the Politburo—but only published in late April. This raises the question of whether the piece reflects Zhou’s current position or is a ploy by others in the party to give the appearance of unity.

- **China Media Project 4/23/2012:** [Business as usual for Zhou Yongkang?](#)
 - **Financial Times 4/20/2012:** [Bo fallout threatens China’s security chief](#)
 - **Bloomberg News 4/24/2012:** [China Politburo’s Zhou calls for party loyalty in speech](#)
 - **People’s Daily 4/26/2012 (in Chinese):** [Strengthen political and legal organs to develop new visions](#)
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Ai Weiwei tax appeal hits roadblock, filmmaker’s travel banned

Prominent Chinese artist and blogger Ai Weiwei, known for his outspoken criticism of Communist Party authorities, told Reuters on April 19 that his legal battle over a \$2.4 million tax penalty had encountered a “Catch 22.” Ai’s wife Lu Qing, the legal representative of his art studio, Beijing Fake Cultural Development, had filed a lawsuit against the tax authorities, accusing them of a series of legal violations in their imposition of the fine (see CMB No. [54](#)). However, Beijing’s Chaoyang District Court informed her on April 19 that she would need to produce the studio’s official company seal, which had been confiscated by police during Ai’s months-long arbitrary detention in 2011, to proceed with the suit. Such seals are used in China to stamp all official documents. Ai said his wife would explain the situation and ask the court for a waiver. Meanwhile, Beijing authorities have imposed constraints on another artist, film director Yang Weidong. According to Deutsche Welle, Yang was stopped by police at Beijing International Airport on April 18 to prevent him from “undermining national security.” He was scheduled to attend an art exhibition in the United States. He said police had told him by telephone the day before that he was banned from traveling abroad and conducting interviews on his movie, a documentary about the use of illegal drugs among Chinese athletes.

- **Reuters 4/19/2012:** [China’s Ai Weiwei hits Catch-22 in tax lawsuit](#)
 - **Deutsche Welle 4/18/2012 (in Chinese):** [Beijing independent artist Yang Weidong banned from leaving Beijing](#)
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NEW MEDIA / TECHNOLOGY NEWS



CCTV host off air after microblog post on tainted yogurt

China Central Television (CCTV) anchorman Zhao Pu has not been seen on air since April 9, when he posted a message on his microblog that warned people not to eat yogurt. The post read, “Text message from an investigative reporter: Do not eat yogurt (the thick kind) or jelly, especially children.

Their contents are truly frightening. I won't speak about it in detail." It was forwarded 130,000 times by Chinese netizens before being removed later the same day. A subsequent message posted by *Economic Observer* reporter Zhu Wenqiang, which was also removed later on April 9, said Zhao's remarks pertained to accusations that yogurt and jelly products contained industrial gelatin made from discarded leather shoes. According to the state-run newspaper *China Daily*, some local authorities had since ordered various food companies to stop selling their products, and the affected industries were contemplating a lawsuit. CCTV would not confirm whether Zhao's absence was related to his microblog message, but many netizens speculated that he was in trouble with the authorities. The Chinese government has a history of responding to negative reports on food safety with censorship rather than transparent investigations and clear information for the public; journalists who expose food-safety problems sometimes face punishment or even physical violence (see, inter alia, CMB Nos. [26](#), [30](#), [33](#)).

- *China Digital Times* 4/24/2012: [Sensitive words: Don't eat the yogurt](#)
- *China Daily* 4/12/2012: [Yogurt and jelly makers worry about blogs' effects](#)
- *Want Daily* 4/22/2012: [CCTV host off-air for 10 days after controversial Weibo post](#)
- *China Digital Times* 4/20/2012 (in Chinese): [Zhao Pu disappears from screen 11 days after gelatin news, netizens speculate firing](#)



Censors pounce on whistleblowing site, Google cloud service

Chinese censors routinely identify and remove sensitive online content quickly, but several examples over the past week have highlighted just how fast such actions are taken. On April 18, the popular microblogging site Sina Weibo launched a whistleblower function called Weibo Expose Platform (Weibo Baoliao Pingtai). Established in collaboration with 70 news outlets in the country, it allowed netizens to make anonymous submissions of news tips and photographs. However, it was taken down within one day, apparently on orders from the government. While Sina did not carry any story mentioning the launch or shuttering of the service, related articles on popular web portals such as Netease and Hexun seemed to have been deleted. In a more typical user experience, David Bandurski of the China Media Project reported that one of his microblog postings—about the ongoing political scandal surrounding ousted Chongqing Communist Party chief Bo Xilai—was deleted within 13 minutes. The removal of the entry, which was accompanied by a screenshot of an English-language article from the *South China Morning Post*, shows that information in foreign languages is also strictly monitored. Finally, on April 24, the U.S. internet firm Google launched its new Drive feature, which enables users to store and share data in “the cloud,” meaning networks of remote web-linked servers. Within hours, it became clear that the service was being blocked in China, though similar services by other international firms, including Microsoft and Apple, remain accessible (see CMB No. [54](#)).

- *China Internet Watch* 4/19/2012: [Sina Weibo launched a platform for news tips submission](#)
- *Tech in Asia* 4/18/2012: [Did Sina just introduce—and then kill—an anonymous news reporting platform?](#)
- *Shanghaiist* 4/19/2012: [Weibo Expose: Whistle-blowers whistle-blown?](#)

- China Media Project 4/23/2012: [‘Your post has been secreted’](#)
 - Wall Street Journal 4/25/2012: [China escalates crackdown on internet amid scandal](#)
 - Register 4/26/2012: [Baidu thrives as Google Drive is blocked in China](#)
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Individual cases reflect diverse censorship tactics

The following were among several individual cases reported by the organization Chinese Human Rights Defenders over the past two weeks. They illustrate the Chinese authorities’ broader practices of punishing politically sensitive online speech, cutting off the communications of activists who are confined even after their formal release from custody, and forcibly suppressing the spread of information about localized protests.

- **Netizen charged for demanding political reform:** Chen Pingfu, a netizen in Lanzhou, Gansu Province, was summoned by police on March 8 for “inciting subversion,” after he published up to 300 articles demanding political reform on his microblog accounts and several internet portals. He was subsequently released in poor health, but the authorities notified him on April 10 that he had been formally charged by the Lanzhou prosecutor’s office.
 - **Rights lawyer’s communications restricted:** On April 10, prosecutors in Beihai City, Guangxi Province, rejected human rights lawyer Yang Zaixin’s application to use communication devices while being held under residential surveillance. Yang is currently banned from having access to mobile telephones and laptop computers. He had been detained in June 2011 on “suspicion of forging evidence,” and although he was discharged from custody on March 15, he has since been living in a secret location designated by the government.
 - **Beijing petitioners detained over photography:** Three petitioners from Hubei Province were detained by plainclothes police after taking photographs in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square on April 10. According to their friend, surnamed Jin, who had accompanied them to the square, they caught the police’s attention when one of them attempted to take a picture of her petition material. Jin escaped from the scene, but the other three were detained and are now missing.
 - CHRD 4/16/2012 (in Chinese): [Gansu netizen faces indictment for ‘inciting subversion’ for inciting subversion for posts on microblogs and blogs](#)
 - CHRD 4/12/2012 (in Chinese): [Beihai lawyer Yang Zaixin barred from using computer and cellphone while under residential surveillance in a designated location](#)
 - CHRD 4/12/2012 (in Chinese): [Three Hubei petitioners taken away for photographing in Tiananmen Square, whereabouts unknown](#)
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Businesswoman's death sentence rejected after online outcry

Collective action by Chinese netizens yielded a concession from the authorities on April 20, when the Supreme People's Court overturned the death sentence of former millionaire businesswoman Wu Ying, sending the case back to Zhejiang Province People's High Court for resentencing (see CMB No. [48](#)). Wu's supporters had launched a campaign on the popular microblogging site Sina Weibo after she was sentenced to death in December 2009 for "fraudulent fundraising." The offense involved raising money through illegal lending networks and then misusing the borrowed funds. Critics of the prosecution have argued that the lending networks were long widely tolerated, and that the government was unfairly making an example of Wu as it sought to curb uncontrolled lending and speculation in the economy at large. The case also fueled a debate about the death penalty, which can be imposed for a variety of crimes other than murder in China (see CMB No. [50](#)). Public outrage over Wu's treatment reached the ears of Premier Wen Jiabao, who said during a March press conference that the Supreme People's Court was taking a "cautious approach" to the case. Among those who hailed the court's decision was Hu Xijin, editor in chief of the Communist Party-owned newspaper *Global Times*. "This is a victory for internet public opinion in China," he wrote, adding that in his view, the death penalty should not be imposed for nonfatal crimes.

- *Wall Street Journal* 4/20/2012: [Power of public opinion? Death rejected for tycoon](#)
- *New York Times* 4/20/2012: [Chinese court overturns a young tycoon's death sentence](#)
- *Associated Press* 4/20/2012: [Chinese supreme court overturns tycoon Wu Ying's death sentence](#)



Communist Party paper's website listed on Shanghai exchange

People's Daily Online, the website of the Chinese Communist Party mouthpiece *People's Daily*, raised 1.38 billion yuan (\$219 million) on April 20 in an initial public offering (IPO) on the Shanghai Stock Exchange. Its sister newspaper *Global Times* reported that the funds would be used to "acquire companies, upgrade technology, as well as strengthen its editorial team and mobile internet platforms." As the Chinese government pursues a global media expansion strategy, other state-run internet news portals—including that of the official news agency Xinhua—are reportedly planning their own listings. *People's Daily* still owns about 80 percent of the online unit's stock, and other major shareholders include state-owned telecommunications firms. The heavily censored and propaganda-focused website is not among the most popular in China, ranking 50th as of August 2011. Nevertheless, the IPO reaped nearly triple the intended funds, giving the site a market capitalization of about \$876 million, almost as much as the *New York Times*' \$943 million.

- *Financial Times* 4/20/2012: [People's Daily website IPO raises \\$219m](#)
- *Businessweek* 4/19/2012: [People's Daily Site raises \\$222 million in enlarged IPO](#)
- *Reuters* 4/20/2012: [Investors flock to Shanghai IPO of People's Daily news portal](#)
- *People's Daily* 4/18/2012: [People's Daily Online sets IPO price](#)

TIBET

Singer detained for separatist lyrics

A Tibetan singer named Lo Lo was reportedly detained by Chinese authorities on April 19 in Yushu Prefecture, Qinghai Province, after he released an album with songs that call for Tibet's independence (see CMB No. [52](#)). The album, *Raise the Flag of Tibet, Sons of the Snow*, also includes lyrics demanding the return of Tibet's exiled spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, and the "reunion of the Tibetan people." The Chinese government has arrested scores of intellectuals and cultural figures in Tibetan regions since 2008. The campaign has intensified in the past year, as roughly 30 Tibetan protesters have set themselves on fire amid a cycle of security clampdowns and demonstrations (see CMB No. [53](#)).

- **Radio Free Asia 4/23/2012: [Tibetan singer detained](#)**
 - **Phayul 4/23/2012: [Tibetan singer arrested over 'independence' song](#)**
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BEYOND CHINA

U.S.-based Chinese news site hacked

Boxun, a U.S.-based Chinese dissident news site that has become an important source of uncensored information on the scandal surrounding ousted Chongqing Communist Party chief Bo Xilai, was rendered inaccessible for much of April 19 as a result of massive denial-of-service attacks. According to Boxun founder Watson Meng, who is based in Durham, North Carolina, the site was likely disrupted by hackers working for the Chinese government. The site's host, Name.com, said it had received an anonymous e-mail message demanding that it close Boxun's account. The news site was restored after Name.com helped Meng transfer it to another registrar. Boxun, which receives much of its information from readers in a form of citizen journalism, was founded in 2000 and became better known in early 2011 after it posted the first online calls for a protest-driven Jasmine Revolution in China. China-based users are able to reach it using circumvention tools. The site's unusually accurate reports on the murky Bo scandal have led to speculation that certain factions of the Chinese Communist Party are feeding it inside information, but Meng told the *Financial Times* that whatever the possible motives of Boxun's sources, "If we think it is true, we just report it."

- ***Financial Times* 4/22/2012: [Chinese censors hamstring by US site](#)**
 - ***Washington Post* 4/21/2012: [US website covering Bo scandal is attacked](#)**
 - **Associated Press 4/23/2012: [Hacker attack underlines web role in China scandal](#)**
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China's propaganda chief on international tour

In recent weeks, Li Changchun, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) propaganda chief and a Politburo Standing Committee member, has gone on a world tour. On April 15, he stopped by the 41st annual London Book Fair, whose organizers were widely criticized for spotlighting Beijing's roster of officially approved Chinese authors (see CMB No. [54](#)). Four days later, Li traveled to Ottawa, Canada. According to the *Globe and Mail*, the Canadian government did not notify local media outlets about the visit so as to avoid criticism. While Chinese state-run television stations and newspapers provided intensive coverage of Li's meeting with Canadian prime minister Stephen Harper on April 19, the prime minister's office only informed the Canadian press after the fact, sending out a photograph of the meeting later in the evening. Li signed a Chinese-Canadian agreement on cultural cooperation, and attended the opening ceremony of a state-sponsored Confucius Institute at Ottawa's Carleton University, which had previously stirred controversy. Li is closely associated with the Confucius Institute program, and has referred to it as an "important part of China's overseas propaganda setup" (see CMB No. [47](#)). On April 22 he arrived in Bogota, Colombia, where he met Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos and signed a series of agreements on cultural and economic cooperation. Under Li's leadership, the CCP's Propaganda Department disseminates directives to Chinese media nationwide, instructing them on propaganda items to promote and sensitive topics to be excised, including police brutality, public health problems, corruption, and environmental pollution (see, inter alia, CMB Nos. [15](#), [50](#)).

- *Globe and Mail* 4/20/2012: [Harper quietly holds face-to-face talks with Chinese propaganda chief](#)
- *Xinhua* 4/19/2012: [Senior CPC official arrives in Canada for visit](#)
- *China Daily* 4/23/2012: [CPC official hails China-Colombia relations](#)



Taiwan cable merger delayed as regulators quit

The review process for Want Want Broadband's proposal to purchase China Network Systems (CNS), Taiwan's second-largest cable television provider, has been further delayed after the resignation of two members of the National Communications Commission (NCC), the country's media regulator. The departure of the two, who cited personal reasons, left the commission with only two experts on the case, as three others had previously withdrawn from participating without providing a clear explanation. The NCC needs at least four members to make a decision. At a briefing held on April 23 before Taiwanese lawmakers, NCC chairperson Su Herng claimed that the resignations would not impact the process, though the commission had previously been scheduled to complete its review by the end of 2011 (see CMB No. [38](#)). Despite an official invitation, Want Want president Tsai Eng-meng did not attend the meeting. Reuters reported that the deal had hit a "fresh obstacle" after Tsai, who owns a large number of print and digital media outlets in Taiwan and is known for his pro-China stance, told the *Washington Post* in January that he hoped China and Taiwan would unify quickly. Regardless of Tsai's comments, evaluating the deal was likely to take time and cause controversy because of the importance of CNS and concerns about the

concentration of media ownership. Taiwan is rated Free, and China is rated Not Free, in Freedom House's 2011 *Freedom of the Press* index.

- *Taipei Times* 4/24/2012: [Resignations will not impact CNS review](#)
- Reuters 4/6/2012: [\\$2.4 bln Taiwan TV sale hits China obstacle](#)
- Broadcasting Corporation of China 4/23/2012 (in Chinese): [Su Heng: Commissioners resigned for personal reasons, not related to CNS deal](#)



SEC probing Hollywood's China deals for possible bribery

The U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) is investigating at least five major American movie studios for their business activities in China. According to Reuters, the SEC has sent letters in the past two months to companies including News Corporation's 20th Century Fox, Disney, and DreamWorks Animation, seeking information about possible violations of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA), which bars U.S. companies and individuals from paying bribes to foreign officials. Since 2002, the U.S. government has brought more FCPA enforcement actions related to China than to any other country in the world, with the exception of Nigeria. Hollywood studios have been stepping up their involvement in the growing Chinese market through a series of partnerships and coproduction agreements with Chinese firms, including state-owned entities (see CMB No. [54](#)). During a five-day trip to China, leading film director James Cameron—best known for the movies *Avatar* and *Titanic*—told Reuters on April 22 that he was exploring the possibility of his own coproduction, but needed to identify any content restrictions that might be imposed and weigh them against the economic incentives.

- Reuters 4/24/2012: [Exclusive: SEC probes movie studios over dealings in China](#)
- *Businessweek* 4/10/2012: [Disney partners with Tencent, China Group for animation](#)
- Reuters 4/22/2012: [James Cameron eyes co-production projects in China](#)

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

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