



CHINA MEDIA BULLETIN

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

Issue No. 60: June 7, 2012

Top Headlines

-  Internet censors cast wide net on 1989 massacre anniversary
-  Google informs Chinese users of blocked search terms
-  China Telecom breached by hackers
-  Rare petition to free Falun Gong practitioner draws harassment, arrest
-  Hong Kong media offer extensive coverage of Tiananmen anniversary

BROADCAST / PRINT MEDIA NEWS

Chinese media silent, activists detained on 1989 massacre date

Unlike media in Hong Kong and other parts of the world, Chinese newspapers remained silent on June 4 about the 23rd anniversary of the government's 1989 crackdown on prodemocracy protesters in Tiananmen Square. The *Beijing News* chose the capital city's extreme weather as the front-page story of the day, while the *People's Daily* and *Shanghai Daily* focused on U.S. defense secretary Leon Panetta's official visit to Vietnam. *China Daily* and provincial papers such as the *Southern Metropolis Daily* covered the Hangzhou funeral of a bus driver who managed to stop his vehicle and calm the passengers after an object flew through the windshield and mortally wounded him. Despite the Communist Party's continued sensitivity over the June 4 crackdown, Chen Xitong, a former Politburo member and Beijing's mayor in 1989, acknowledged in a recently published series of interviews that the bloodshed was a tragedy and that "nobody should have died if it had been handled properly." In the book, entitled *Conversations with Chen Xitong* and released in Hong Kong on May 28, Chen insisted that he played no role in composing an official report that had justified the ruling party's use of deadly force against unarmed protesters and had been attributed to him.

Separately, in an effort to prevent activists from commemorating the anniversary, police detained several people on the eve of June 4. According Hong Kong newspaper *Ming Pao*, on June 3, Shandong Province police raided a gathering in Jinan's Zhongshan Park and destroyed banners that read, "Never forget June 4, vindicate June 4." A netizen in Zhengzhou, Henan Province, was detained for "spreading rumors" on May 31, a day after he left the message "never forget June 4" on a public bulletin board at a local bookstore.

- ***Washington Post* 6/3/2012: [Ex-Beijing mayor backs away from long-standing account of Tiananmen crackdown](#)**
- **BBC 6/4/2012: [China morning round-up: Tiananmen crackdown anniversary](#)**
- ***Ming Pao* 6/4/2012 (in Chinese): [Zhengzhou man detained for putting "do not forget June 4" signs at bookstore](#)**



Guangzhou editor dismissed over online comment

Yu Chen, an editor at Guangzhou-based *Southern Metropolis Daily's* in-depth investigative news desk, was suspended and forced to resign over a comment on the newspaper's microblogging account that mocked the Chinese Communist Party's direct institutional control over the military. The message argued that "if the People's Liberation Army [PLA] is regarded as belonging to the Communist Party, then the people should be able to set up another army!" Critics of the current system have called for the PLA to be "nationalized," or placed under the exclusive authority of state rather than party structures. Yu confirmed the dismissal on June 3 but refused to discuss the details of his departure from one of China's most liberal media outlets. Some accounts of the incident held that Yu had written the remarks himself, while others indicated that, as one of the editors responsible for the account, he had either approved the post or failed to delete it in a timely fashion. Yu is the first Chinese journalist known to have been forced to resign over a microblog comment. As importantly, he is also the first to be dismissed under questionable circumstances since Yang Jian, previously the deputy head of the province's propaganda department, was appointed as party secretary of the newspaper's parent company, Nanfang (Southern) Media Group, in May. The appointment had raised concerns that the liberal family of outlets would be forced to toe the party line more closely (see CMB No. [57](#)). Separately, on May 30, Nanjing-based *Yangtse Evening News* reported that China Central Television (CCTV) anchorman Zhao Pu, who has not been seen on air since he made his own controversial microblog remark in April, was not fired but had been suspended for six months. Zhao had warned on his account that yogurt in China contained industrial-grade gelatin and was not safe to eat (see CMB No. [55](#)).

- **Associated Press 5/30/2012: [Yu Chen, Southern Metropolitan editor, leaves job over anti-government blog comment](#)**
- **IFEX 6/4/2012: [Editor dismissed for online comments](#)**
- ***Want Daily* 6/5/2012: [Guangdong media exec sacked for mocking remarks about PLA](#)**
- ***Yangtse Evening News* 5/30/2012 (in Chinese): [As CCTV denies suspension of anchor Zhao Pu, Chinese media report he is on a six-month backburner](#)**

NEW MEDIA / TECHNOLOGY NEWS



Internet censors cast wide net on 1989 massacre anniversary

The 23rd anniversary of the June 4 Tiananmen Square massacre has intensified the cat-and-mouse game between Chinese netizens and internet censors, particularly on the immensely popular microblogging platforms. Though the 1989 crackdown is always a sensitive topic, the breadth of censorship around June 4 was extreme. The microblogging site Sina Weibo removed a candle icon, typically used to commemorate noteworthy deaths, from its set of emoticons two days before the anniversary. On the day itself, Sina blocked searches for “Tiananmen Square,” including relevant tourist information; keywords such as “square” and “today” in both Chinese and English; and the numbers 4, 6, 8, 9, 23, and 35 (netizens sometimes use “May 35” to avoid censorship of “June 4”). The search engine Baidu also reportedly increased censorship of some related terms. Clever arrangements of Chinese characters that resemble tanks crushing a man were similarly thwarted. To sidestep the censorship, some Weibo users began circulating lines from a Tang Dynasty poem about the pain of bidding goodbye. Queries for “Shanghai Composite” and “stock market” returned a message on Sina Weibo that said results could not be displayed, after the Shanghai stock index on June 3 dropped by 64.89 points, uncannily matching the date June 4, 1989. Several netizens hailed the bizarre coincidence and called it a “miracle.” Meanwhile, on the U.S.-based microblogging service Twitter, which is blocked in China but regularly accessed by activists via circumvention tools, there was a flurry of posts, comments, and remembrance. The messages included the names and details of over 200 people known to have been killed in the massacre, and several rare photographs of the square that were reportedly taken by soldiers at the time.

- *Seeing Red in China* 6/4/2012: [Today, June 4th](#)
- *Bloomberg News* 6/4/2012: [Tiananmen date match bars searches for China stock index](#)
- *China Digital Times* 6/3/2012: [Weibo removes candle icon ahead of Tiananmen anniversary](#)
- *China Digital Times* 6/3/2012: [Sensitive words: The Tiananmen edition \(update\)](#)
- *Wall Street Journal* 6/4/2012: [China’s online firefighters snuff discussion on Tiananmen anniversary](#)



Officials denounce U.S. diplomats’ releases of air-quality data

Clearly referring to the United States, the Chinese government demanded on June 5 that foreign embassies and consulates in China stop releasing their own air-quality assessments, which use stricter standards than the official Chinese reports. The U.S. embassy in Beijing has been providing such data since 2008; the U.S. consulate in Guangzhou followed suit in 2011, as did the Shanghai consulate in May (see CMB No. [58](#)). All of the U.S. assessments are released via the microblogging service Twitter, which is blocked in China but accessible with circumvention tools. In a June 5 news conference, China’s vice minister for environmental protection, Wu Xiaoqing, said it was a mistake

for consulates in China to designate air quality as “hazardous” based on their own standards and from a single location. He claimed that the assessments violated the spirit of the Vienna Conventions on Diplomatic and Consular Affairs, which call for diplomats to respect local laws and refrain from interference in domestic matters. At a second press conference on June 6, Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Weimin reiterated China’s objections, saying, “This type of information should not be released to the public...especially over the internet.” Responding to the complaints, a U.S. State Department spokesman denied that the service violated international conventions, and said his government would not object to air-quality assessments by foreign embassies in the United States. In an indirect critique of the Chinese government’s position, the Communist Party–owned English-language newspaper *Global Times* reported on June 7 that many internet users “have sided with foreign embassies” due to the official readings’ lack of credibility. One netizen skewered the government’s arguments, suggesting that Chinese state television “should stop running global weather forecasts so China doesn’t interfere in other countries’ internal affairs.”

- *New York Times* 6/5/2012: [China asks embassies to stop measuring air pollution](#)
- *Xinhua* 6/5/2012: [Foreign embassies’ air data issuing inaccurate, unlawful: official](#)
- *Global Times* 6/7/2012: [Govt repeats call for US to cease issuing air data](#)
- Wuliucun 6/6/2012 (in Chinese): [Netizen discussion on official claim of American interference in Chinese internal affairs through air pollution monitoring](#)



Google informs Chinese users of blocked search terms

U.S. technology giant Google announced on May 31 that it had added a function to notify users in mainland China when a search term is censored by the Chinese government. In a blog post, Google said netizens had complained that its search engine for Chinese users was “inconsistent and unreliable.” In 2010, Google shut down its China-based search site to avoid requirements that it censor results according to government orders, and instead redirected mainland users to its site in Hong Kong. While this site does not censor its own results, China’s “Great Firewall” filtering system apparently disrupts service for mainland users when they enter a term flagged by censors as taboo. A demonstration video posted on Google’s blog shows that typing certain queries causes an error message and a minute-long disconnection from the search page. The company reviewed the 350,000 most popular search queries in China, and the website now features a drop-down box that indicates whether a specific Chinese character would prompt an interruption. Netizens soon circulated a list of 456 banned terms compiled via Google searches, which included the surnames of several senior members of the Chinese Communist Party. The blocking has caused great inconvenience, as the same characters carry different meanings in various contexts. Though Google’s move made China’s online censorship somewhat more transparent, an analyst said it arrived too late, because most Chinese users had already turned to competing search engines like the homegrown market leader Baidu, which complies with party censorship directives.

- *China Digital Times* 6/4/2012: [Sensitive words: The Google files](#)
- *PC World* 6/1/2012: [Google now highlights censored search terms for users in China](#)
- *Google* 5/31/2012: [Better search in mainland China](#)
- *CPJ* 6/5/2012: [Google gives Chinese web users glimpse into censorship](#)



China Telecom breached by hackers

The internet hacker group SwaggSec announced on June 3 that it had broken into the database of the state-owned China Telecom Corporation, and claimed to have obtained millions of user names and passwords, including those of 900 administrators. SwaggSec said the company had eventually identified the breach, but neglected to make a public statement or change its passwords. While China Telecom confirmed on June 5 that there had been an attack on its systems, a company spokesman asserted that the stolen data had “little value,” and that similar hacking attempts occurred “almost daily.” A Chinese internet security expert told *South China Morning Post* that the company was probably not seriously compromised. However, he acknowledged that China’s internet was vulnerable, as many business owners and government officials lacked the skills and awareness needed to defend themselves against cyberattacks (see CMB Nos. [53](#), [56](#)).

- *South China Morning Post* 6/6/2012: [Hackers hit top internet provider, steal passwords](#)
- CNET 6/3/2012: [Hackers claim breach of China Telecom, Warner Bros.](#)
- IDG News Service 6/3/2012: [‘SwaggSec’ claims hack of China Telecom, Warner Bros.](#)



Rare petition to free Falun Gong practitioner draws harassment, arrest

According to a May 31 Amnesty International alert, Wang Xiaodong, a high school teacher in Hebei Province, has been held in Botou City Detention Center since February, after police entered his home without a warrant and found compact discs with information about the Communist Party’s persecution of the Falun Gong spiritual movement. In a rare move on one of the most censored topics in China, about 300 of Wang’s fellow residents in Zhouguangtun village subsequently signed a document with their full names and thumb prints to call for his release. In April, Wang’s family began to distribute copies of the petition after the local Public Security Bureau refused to accept it. Security officials then began a campaign to compel the signatories to recant. Wang’s sister Wang Junling, who posted an open letter on the case on the internet, was detained on May 26. However, state prosecutors have reportedly returned Wang Xiaodong’s case to local police due to a lack of evidence. The petition and open letter have reportedly been discussed by senior Chinese officials amid indications that some leaders have questioned the current Communist Party policy of persecuting Falun Gong. Public appeals tend to carry more weight in China when supporters defy the risk of arrest and sign their names. A number of other pro-Falun Gong petitions have been signed by residents in various locations over the past year, but in this instance, the document was also stamped and authenticated by village officials. Separately, Agence France-Presse reported on May 24 that the lead authors of a recent open letter urging the removal of Zhou Yongkang, China’s internal security chief, have been interrogated by police. The letter was signed by 16 retired Communist Party members from Yunnan Province and posted online early last month (see CMB No. [58](#)).

- Amnesty International 3/31/2012: [China: Falun Gong practitioners at risk of torture](#)
 - *Epoch Times* 5/28/2012: [Villagers rallying to defense of friend are persecuted by party](#)
 - *Epoch Times* 5/31/2012: [Chinese lawyers support Falun Gong in 'Brave 300' case](#)
 - Falun Dafa Information Center 5/28/2012: [300 villagers sign petition calling for release of Falun Gong practitioner](#)
 - Agence France-Presse 5/24/2012: [China police interrogate party members over letter](#)
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XINJIANG



Uighur boy dies in custody after detention for religious lessons

According to Radio Free Asia, an 11-year-old Uighur boy named Mirzahid died in police custody after being arrested on May 20 for taking Islamic prayer lessons at an illegal home school in the Xinjiang city of Korla. Police told his mother that he had committed suicide, but his body reportedly showed signs of torture and strangulation. They instructed her to bury the body immediately and refrain from speaking about the case. Meanwhile, a report in official Chinese media said Mirzahid had died as the result of a beating by his Koran instructor. The Chinese authorities tightly restrict religious literature, practice, and instruction among Xinjiang's ethnic Uighur residents, who are predominantly Muslim. Lacking sufficient legal alternatives, many Uighurs risk imprisonment by taking unauthorized religious classes in secret locations and circulating underground religious texts.

- Radio Free Asia 6/4/2012: [Death in detention draws denigration](#)
 - World Uyghur Congress 6/4/2012: [WUC condemns death of Uyghur youth in detention](#)
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HONG KONG



Media offer extensive coverage of Tiananmen anniversary

In contrast to mainland China, where the media were essentially silent on the topic, the June 4 anniversary of the 1989 crackdown on prodemocracy protests in Beijing's Tiananmen Square was widely discussed among news outlets in Hong Kong. Local newspapers, including the *South China Morning Post*, the *Standard*, and the *Ming Pao Daily News*, reported a record turnout for the annual vigil in the territory's Victoria Park. *Apple Daily* devoted its entire front page to a photograph of the gathering, under the headline "This Is Our Conscience." According to organizers of the event, about 180,000 people showed up to commemorate the victims of the crackdown. Participants chanted slogans calling for the release of political activists and a "democratic China." Fang Zheng, a former Tiananmen protester who had his legs amputated after being run over by tank, thanked the crowd

for “twenty-three years of support.” In a video message, former Tiananmen student leader Wang Dan said it was “worth persisting” in the effort to bring democracy to China, citing recent democratic progress in Burma after decades of repression. Hong Kong media also reported on thwarted efforts to mark the anniversary in mainland China, where police quickly arrested any activists who gathered in public.

- *South China Morning Post* 6/5/2012: [Record turnout for June 4 vigil](#)
- CNN 6/5/2012: [Record crowds attend Hong Kong Tiananmen vigil](#)
- *New York Times* 6/5/2012: [Blacking out 180,000 candles](#)
- BBC 6/4/2012: [China morning round-up: Tiananmen crackdown anniversary](#)

BEYOND CHINA



Taiwan and China media officials discuss closer ties

At a media summit held on June 2 in the Chinese city of Tianjin, several high-level participants said Taiwanese and Chinese media outlets should be allowed to open offices and station correspondents in each other’s territory for extended periods of time. Fan Liqing, a spokeswoman for China’s Taiwan Affairs Office, said at the forum that the current practice of sending journalists across the Taiwan Strait for three-month rotations prevented in-depth reporting and long-term observation (see CMB No. 50). Huang Ching-lung, president of Taiwan’s *Want Daily*, complained that residents in each market were still unable to receive television programs or newspapers from the other, but Chen Kuo-hsiang, chairman of Taiwan’s official Central News Agency, said distributing Taiwanese news media content in China might not be feasible under current conditions. Instead, he suggested that Taiwanese and Chinese outlets establish jointly run, online media operations that would be acceptable to both sides. Amid concern over Beijing’s influence on the Taiwanese news environment, on May 27, a group of 10 media experts in Taiwan issued a joint statement opposing Want Want Broadband’s bid to purchase China Network Systems (CNS), Taiwan’s second-largest cable television provider. They raised concerns that the purchase would threaten media diversity and that Want Want Broadband is a subsidiary of the media conglomerate Want Want Group, which is known to have friendly relations with the Chinese government. The bid has been under review by the National Communications Commission (NCC) for 16 months (see CMB No. 55). China was rated Not Free and Taiwan was rated Free in Freedom House’s *Freedom of the Press 2012* report.

- Central News Agency 6/2/2012: [Taiwanese media calls for setting up offices on each side of strait](#)
- *Taipei Times* 6/3/2012: [Media heads call for offices across the Taiwan Strait](#)
- *Taipei Times* 5/27/2012: [Experts opposed to Want Want merger](#)
- Taiwan Media Watch 5/25/2012 (in Chinese): [Press release: Joint statement opposing Want Want Broadband's bid](#)

NOTABLE ANALYSIS



Chart measures daily Chinese microblog censorship in 2012

Chi-Chu Tschang, a student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Sloan School of Management and the former China correspondent for *Businessweek* magazine, has created a project that shows patterns in the censorship of posts on the popular Chinese microblogging site Sina Weibo. Based on archives dated from January 28 to May 20 that were compiled by the University of Hong Kong's WeiboScope Search, a site that preserves posts removed by Weibo administrators, the project found that the highest volume of deletion took place on March 8, the day rumors began to spread about the impending ouster of Chongqing Communist Party chief Bo Xilai. March 18 marked another peak day, as netizens speculated on the identity of the driver responsible for a deadly Ferrari car crash in Beijing; he was assumed to be the child of a wealthy or powerful family (see CMB No. [51](#)). In general, spikes in the number of deletions seemed to correspond to major news developments. According to the findings, the time it took for a Weibo post to be removed ranged from four minutes to over four months, and the best time to evade censors was on Saturday or late Friday evening. "Maybe censors want to take time off on weekends as well," Tschang said.

- *Wall Street Journal* 6/1/2012: [Charting China's social media censorship](#)
- Nieman Journalism Lab 5/30/2012: [Reverse engineering Chinese censorship: When and why are controversial tweets deleted?](#)

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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