



CHINA MEDIA BULLETIN

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

Issue No. 66: July 26, 2012

Top Headlines

-  Secrecy surrounds party conclaves ahead of leadership change
-  'China Daily' sells front page to Louis Vuitton
-  Beijing flood criticism erupts online amid media controls
-  Disowning Beijing's UN veto, netizens back Syrian rebels
-  Taiwan regulator grants conditional approval for media merger

PHOTO OF THE WEEK: CHINA DAILY FRONT PAGE FOR SALE



Credit: [Danwei](#)

BROADCAST / PRINT MEDIA NEWS



Secrecy surrounds party conclaves ahead of leadership change

As the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) prepares for its crucial 18th Congress in the fall, behind-the-scenes wrangling and decision making is gaining momentum, with insiders predicting that most key leadership changes will be decided behind closed doors in the coming weeks, well in advance of the congress itself. While some discussion will take place in Beijing, rounds of informal negotiations are expected to take place in the beach town of Beidaihe outside the capital, where retired CCP elders and some current leaders are known to vacation in private villas each summer. The tightly guarded and opaque process has forced Chinese media and citizens to read between the lines of publicly available information in an effort to anticipate potential changes. These include the possibility that the CCP's nine-member Politburo Standing Committee—China's top decision-making body—will be reduced back to its pre-2002 format of seven members, with the powerful portfolios of propaganda and public security demoted to the 25-member Politburo. Meanwhile, amid factional fighting behind the scenes, top leaders have made an extra push in state-run media in recent weeks to present a unified image. The official Xinhua news agency highlighted a July 17 speech by domestic security chief Zhou Yongkang at a national conference on stability, in a possible bid to counter reports of a growing sense among other senior CCP cadres that he and the internal security apparatus he oversees have become too powerful. Newspapers' front pages also emphasized a July 23 speech by President Hu Jintao, in which he stressed party unity and the continuation of the CCP's policies into the future during a meeting attended by the other eight members of the Standing Committee. Nevertheless, news reflecting the party's internal splits continues to emerge. On July 19, a list of the Beijing municipality's representatives to the party congress was published. Notably missing were two figures linked to the faction that includes Zhou and former leader Jiang Zemin: former Beijing party secretary Liu Qi and Mei Ninghua, who oversees the *Beijing Daily*, which ran an editorial in March that indirectly questioned Hu's authority (see CMB No. [53](#)).

- *Wall Street Journal* 7/19/2012: [China's security chief still on the job?](#)
- *People's Daily* 7/18/2012 (in Chinese): [In national television and telephone conference, Zhou Yongkang stresses firm confidence in scientific approach of handling challenges for maintaining social stability](#)
- *Epoch Times* 7/24/2012: [Former Beijing party secretary left off list for party congress](#)
- *South China Morning Post* 7/25/2012: [Talks plot path for next decade](#)
- *New York Times* 7/21/2012: [China's Communist elders take backroom intrigue beachside](#)
- BBC 7/24/2012: [China president Hu Jintao in unity call](#)



Censors curb coverage of train crash anniversary

According to the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), on the eve of the July 23 anniversary of a deadly high-speed rail accident in Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, that killed some 40 people last year, an official directive reportedly banned all independent news coverage of the event (see CMB No. [31](#)). The accident and an attempted cover-up by the authorities at the time had stirred public

outrage, especially online, and the government was apparently keen to avoid any renewed anger. One Chinese reporter told IFJ that several newspapers had already ordered their staff to ignore the anniversary. However, state-run newspapers did carry some coverage. An article by *Global Times* on July 19 focused on the stories of individual survivors and rescuers, including one who complained that no one had been jailed for the wreck. *China Daily* ran a more upbeat article on July 23, describing the recovery of a young girl who was injured and orphaned by the accident. Topics related to the train crash appeared to be censored on the popular Sina Weibo microblogging site. The University of Hong Kong's China Media Project reported that one such post, by a business executive with 1.56 million followers, was deleted on July 20. The blogger wrote, "Can such a huge price in human lives be forgotten and harmonized? Can this be borne by a handful of people like [former railway minister] Liu Zhijun?"

- **International Federation of Journalists 7/19/2012:** [Chinese authorities ban reporting of train crash anniversary](#)
- **Wall Street Journal 7/20/2012:** [A year after the Wenzhou train crash, burying continues](#)
- **Global Times 7/19/2012:** [Trained the wrong way](#)
- **China Daily 7/23/2012:** [Moving on, from surviving to living](#)
- **China Media Project 7/20/2012:** [Post on upcoming high-speed rail crash anniversary deleted](#)



Activists great and small face arbitrary punishments

The following are some recent examples of the Chinese government's efforts to silence dissent by both high-profile figures and ordinary grassroots activists, often using trumped-up charges or underhanded tactics:

- **Dissident artist's tax case:** On July 20, Beijing's Chaoyang district court rejected prominent Chinese artist and blogger Ai Weiwei's appeal of a 15 million yuan (\$2.4 million) tax penalty against his studio company (see CMB No. [62](#)). Ai was barred from the court for the announcement of the verdict, and diplomats and journalists were also turned away. Ai's wife, Lu Qing, and the couple's lawyer, Pu Zhiqiang, were present for the ruling. Pu told reporters that the authorities had prevented him from seeing any of the original evidence and violated his client's right to appeal. The verdict was seen as part of a coordinated campaign to punish Ai's criticism of the Chinese Communist Party and its policies. In an interview with the *Daily Beast*, Ai said that while the court's decision was not a surprise, "we're always surprised that this nation can function when the judicial system is so corrupt and justice is so hard to reach."
- **Falun Gong literature:** Radio Free Asia reported on July 20 that three Falun Gong practitioners in Sichuan Province had been detained since April 27 for "using a heretical organization to subvert the law," a vague and circular legal provision—especially strange for an officially atheist regime—that is routinely invoked to send Falun Gong practitioners to prison for up to 18 years. The lawyer who represented them said the three women were

being held in Chengdu Detention Center pending a police investigation. They had apparently been found shipping books and discs containing Falun Gong–related material.

- **Activist’s labor camp term:** Xiao Yong, a microblogger and civil rights activist based in Guangzhou, has been sentenced to two years in a labor camp. In telephone calls to friends on July 20, he said he was ostensibly being punished for buying three stolen motorbikes three years earlier, but his friends wrote in microblog posts that he had long since returned the bikes and was not prosecuted at the time. They claimed that he was actually being penalized for his activism, which had included online calls for a fair investigation into labor rights activist Li Wangyang’s suspicious death in June (see CMB No. [65](#)), as well as an April protest in favor of political reform and asset declarations by top officials. Guangzhou-based rights lawyer Tang Jingling told the *South China Morning Post* that Xiao’s sentence was also part of a general clampdown on dissidents ahead of the 18th Communist Party Congress scheduled for the fall.
- **Mainlanders’ sentences for Hong Kong protest:** Relatives of two petitioners in Jiangxi Province, Song Ningsheng and Zeng Jiuzi, told Radio Free Asia on July 24 that they had been sentenced to a year in labor camp by Jiangxi authorities, having joined an “illegal” mass protest in Hong Kong on July 1 (see CMB No. [64](#)). The two had reportedly been monitored while in Hong Kong by Jiangxi security officials, including one who allegedly posed as a journalist with the Hong Kong newspaper *Apple Daily*.
- ***Daily Beast* 7/20/2012:** [Ai Weiwei, tax evasion appeal rejected, but I ‘morally’ won the case](#)
- **Radio Free Asia 7/20/2012 (in Chinese):** [Three Chengdu-based Falun Gong members detained for distribution of flyers](#)
- ***South China Morning Post* 7/21/2012:** [Guangzhou rights activist gets two years in labor camp on trumped up charges after speaking up re Li suicide case](#)
- **Radio Free Asia 7/24/2012:** [Labor camp for Hong Kong protesters](#)



‘China Daily’ sells front page to Louis Vuitton

French luxury brand Louis Vuitton took over the front page of state-run newspaper *China Daily*’s July 19 issue with a full-page advertisement. Other than three small news headlines along the header, the entire page was dedicated to the fashion house’s ad for a megastore in Shanghai that opened on July 21. For most privately owned news outlets, an editorial decision like this would have been unthinkable. However, because it depends more on generous government support than credibility with the public, *China Daily* was able to disregard potential criticism from its readers. The full-page ad generated heated discussion on the popular microblogging platform Sina Weibo. One user sarcastically questioned why the paper needed such ad purchases, writing, “I thought the Central Propaganda Department provided enough [funding]!” The paper’s decision also highlighted the awkward relationship between Communist Party rule and an increasingly wealthy elite that has embraced luxury brands, fueling public frustrations over the income gap and official corruption (see, inter alia, CMB Nos. [34](#), [50](#)). On July 22, the *New York Times* reported that global fashion magazines have expanded their distribution across mainland China despite having to grapple with low-level corruption and regulatory barriers, such

as the need to work through local government-linked publishing firms. When magazines such as *Elle* were first introduced to the country in the 1980s, they were required to hire a representative of the Chinese Communist Party to sit in on editorial meetings. The industry is now considered relatively free of potential censorship obstacles, and it benefits from a large market of high-spending young women. But according to the *Times*, publishers are aware that this market could dwindle as China's economic growth slows (see CMB No. [62](#)).

- Danwei 7/19/2012: [Front page of the China Daily for sale](#)
- *Beijing Cream* 7/20/2012: [Got a pretty penny? The China Daily front page can be yours](#)
- Sina Weibo (in Chinese): [Search results on 'LV + China Daily'](#)
- *New York Times* 7/22/2012: [The stylish side of China](#)

NEW MEDIA / TECHNOLOGY NEWS



Beijing flood criticism erupts online amid media controls

Beijing was struck by intense rainfall and flooding on July 21 that left at least 37 people dead, and the authorities immediately imposed controls on news and online opinion related to the storm. According to *China Digital Times*, the capital city's propaganda department issued a list of directives to local media outlets, instructing them to stress "the power of human compassion over the elements" in their news coverage. Local television stations indeed focused on heroic stories of people helping one another. The *Beijing Daily* quoted Mayor Guo Jinlong as he praised the media for "correctly leading the public opinion" and "boosting morale." The propaganda department also ordered members of the Communist Youth League to coordinate positive information in their commentaries, forum posts, and articles. Nevertheless, dissenting voices and criticism emerged online. Staffers at the liberal-minded *Southern Weekend*, angry that eight pages of reporting on the floods were pulled from the paper's July 26 edition, posted images of the censored pages on the Sina Weibo microblogging service, though their posts were reportedly deleted en masse. Many Beijing residents took to microblogs to complain about official rescue efforts and the city's drainage systems. They were further outraged when the Beijing government solicited public donations for disaster relief on its official microblog; tens of thousands of critical responses were deleted on July 24. As residents questioned the city government's handling of the disaster, Xinhua news agency reported on July 25 that Mayor Guo had resigned. However, the move appeared to be in keeping with his planned promotion to Beijing party secretary, which would likely mean a seat on the central party's Politburo. Among the flood-related search terms that were banned on Weibo as of July 26 were "mayor," "secretary + resign," and the name of the new acting mayor, Wang Anshun.

- *China Digital Times* 7/20/2012: [Directives from the ministry of truth: Beijing floods](#)
- China Media Project 7/24/2012: [Sarcastic post on handling of floods deleted from Weibo](#)
- Agence France-Presse 7/24/2012: [China censors coverage of deadly Beijing floods](#)
- Associated Press 7/25/2012: [Guo Jinlong, Beijing mayor, set for promotion amid flood scandal](#)

- *China Digital Times* 7/26/2012: [Beijing flood stories cut from ‘Southern Weekend’](#)
 - *China Digital Times* 7/26/2012: [Sensitive words: Beijing flood](#)
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Disowning Beijing’s UN veto, netizens back Syrian rebels

Many Chinese netizens objected after their government joined Russia on July 19 in vetoing a UN Security Council resolution that aimed to use economic sanctions to end the civil war in Syria. Chinese state media in February had defended Beijing for its decision to veto a similar measure that urged Syrian president Bashar al-Assad to step down (see CMB No. [46](#)). On the popular microblogging site Sina Weibo, several users clarified that the government did not represent the Chinese people and expressed hope that the “Syrian people will understand.” Amid active discussion over Syria’s future, a posting made almost a year ago by prominent economist Han Zhiguo was deleted on July 20 from his Weibo account, which has nearly four million followers. Referring to the collapse of authoritarian regimes in places like Iraq, Egypt, and Libya, he wrote, “Do not underestimate the force of the people. It is difficult to maintain public opinion in the midst of intense repression, and the demands of the people cannot be deceived, disrespected or neglected!” A day before the Chinese government vetoed the resolution, UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon joined an online chat with Chinese netizens during his three-day visit to the country. While responding to over 16,000 questions submitted by Weibo users, Ban urged China to play an active role in resolving the Syria issue. Updates on the hour-long conversation were posted on the United Nations’ Weibo account, which now has more than two million followers. On July 19, the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) announced in its latest statistical report that the number of internet users in China had grown to 538 million as of June this year, with a slight majority accessing the web from mobile devices (see CMB No. [44](#)).

- *Washington Post* 7/20/2012: [As Syria conflict rages, China hews to ‘non-interference’ principle](#)
 - *China Media Project* 7/20/2012: [Old Weibo post pulled after new Syria decision](#)
 - *Tea Leaf Nation* 7/22/2012: [Chinese netizens to embattled Syrians: We support you, even if our government does not](#)
 - *Voice of America* 7/18/2012: [Ban Ki-moon talks with Chinese internet users](#)
 - *PC Magazine* 7/19/2012: [Chinese web users hit 538 million](#)
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TIBET

Beijing steps up propaganda, airs anti-Dalai Lama film overseas

During a July 17–21 visit to Nyingchi and Lhasa in Tibet, Chinese Communist Party propaganda chief Li Changchun vowed to intensify the fight against “separatism” in the region. According to the official Xinhua news agency, he pushed for an education campaign to reinforce the effort, and called for an expansion of state television and radio networks to reach Tibetans in rural areas (see CMB No. [65](#)). At the headquarters of the state-run *Tibet Daily* and its affiliated website in Lhasa, Li also stressed the need to reach international audiences, asking staff to “introduce a real and changing

Tibet to the whole world.” As part of government attempts to shape world opinion on recent self-immolations by Tibetans protesting Chinese rule, state broadcaster China Central Television (CCTV) aired a documentary on May 7 on its overseas Chinese-language station. The documentary, entitled *The Dalai Clique and the Self-Immolation Event*, attempts to discredit the protesters and accuses Tibet’s exiled spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, of instigating unrest in the region, though he has been careful in his public comments to neither endorse nor condemn the acts of protest. The program has aired twice on CCTV’s English, French, Spanish, Arabic, and Russian stations, but prominent Beijing-based Tibetan writer and blogger Woesser noted that it was not broadcast to ordinary viewers in China. She said Chinese officials prevented the domestic audience from seeing the self-immolation footage partly in order to avoid provoking “the several millions of Tibetans living in Tibet and with them also the much-feared Uyghurs and Mongolians.” The film is not available on CCTV’s website, presumably for the same reason. It has appeared on YouTube, though that site is blocked in China.

- **Phayul 7/23/2012: [Intensify fight against separatism in Tibet: China’s propaganda chief](#)**
- ***China Digital Times* 7/18/2012: [Woesser: CCTV’s explanation for self-immolations](#)**
- **Associated Press 5/16/2012: [China TV blames Dalai Lama for Tibet immolations](#)**
- ***People’s Daily* 7/23/2012: [Senior CPC official stresses ethnic unity, Tibet development](#)**

BEYOND CHINA



Taiwan regulator grants conditional approval for media merger

Taiwan’s National Communications Commission (NCC) on July 25 conditionally approved Want Want Broadband’s proposal to purchase China Network Systems (CNS), the country’s second-largest cable provider. Want Want Broadband is a subsidiary of the Want Want Group conglomerate, which is known for its friendly relations with the Chinese government and state-run media outlets (see CMB No. [55](#)). The NCC said it would give its final approval after Want Want chairman Tsai Eng-meng comes up with a plan to ensure the editorial independence of his television news assets. A Want Want representative told Reuters that the group would need to evaluate whether the regulator’s conditions were achievable. Amid concerns about Tsai’s political stance and his influence over Taiwan’s media landscape, the proposed merger has been under review for more than a year and a half. In October 2011, lawmaker Hsieh Kuo-liang of the ruling Nationalist Party (KMT) sued *New Talk* reporter Lin Chauyi for criminal defamation, after he wrote an article implying that Hsieh had pressed the NCC to expedite its review (see CMB No. [38](#)). On July 24, the Taipei district prosecutor’s office issued a final ruling in Lin’s favor.

- **Dow Jones Newswires 7/25/2012: [Want Want chairman gets conditional OK to buy Taiwan network](#)**
- **Reuters 7/26/2012: [MBK Taiwan TV buyer unsure if deal conditions achievable](#)**
- ***New Talk* 7/24/2012 (in Chinese): [Hsieh Kuo-liang lost ‘New Talk’ lawsuit](#)**