



CHINA MEDIA BULLETIN

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

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BROADCAST / PRINT MEDIA NEWS

State media lash out at U.S. on Syria policy

Chinese state media responded harshly to a February 24 gathering of diplomats from several dozen countries that have opposed the regime of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad and its violent year-long crackdown on antigovernment protesters (see CMB No. [46](#)). At the so-called Friends of Syria conference, held in Tunisia, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and other envoys criticized China's recent veto of a UN Security Council resolution calling for al-Assad to step down. They also called for immediate humanitarian aid access to besieged areas, and rebuked the Syrian regime's efforts to implement largely cosmetic political reforms amid the violence. An editorial run by China's Xinhua news agency accused the United States and Europe of "hiding a dagger behind a smile," arguing that their humanitarian concerns were a screen for "hegemonic ambitions." On February 27, an editorial in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) mouthpiece *People's Daily* said the United States was displaying "patronizing and egotistical super-arrogance" by "parading as a 'protector' of the Arab peoples" despite its poor record in Iraq. Another party-owned paper, the *Global Times*, defended al-Assad's political reforms, which ostensibly loosened the ruling Baath Party's monopoly on power, despite the fact that the CCP has refused to take similar steps in China.

Chinese state media generally failed to address the nature or scale of the Syrian crackdown, which has reportedly killed over 7,500 people, many of them unarmed civilians. However, in a sign that Beijing was attempting to repair its global standing in the wake of the UN veto, Xinhua on February 29 highlighted new statements by Chinese officials in support of humanitarian aid for Syria.

- *China Digital Times* 2/26/2012: [China hardens position on Syria as West condemns referendum](#)
 - *People's Daily* 2/27/2012 (in Chinese): [The U.S. has no rights to speak for Arab people](#)
 - Huanqiu Net Special Report: [Situation in Syria](#)
 - Xinhua 2/29/2012: [China urges to end violence in Syria in UNHRC](#)
 - Reuters 2/29/2012: [China tells Arab League it backs humanitarian aid for Syria](#)
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Menacing 'one child' propaganda slogans to be curtailed

The Chinese government is attempting to modify the tone of its propaganda messages ahead of a National People's Congress meeting later in March. According to *Shanghai Daily*, authorities have ordered local officials to replace harshly worded slogans aimed at enforcing China's one-child policy, which was introduced in 1979 and has resulted in numerous cases of forced sterilization and abortion. The paper reported on February 27 that the initiative, referred to as a "face-washing project," aimed to replace threatening language—"If you don't receive the tubal ligation surgery by the deadline, your house will be demolished!" and "We would rather scrape your womb than allow you to have a second child!" are among the milder examples—with positive statements that note the benefits of obeying the policy and encourage parents to care for female children. The one-child policy, combined with a cultural preference for boys, has led to a growing gender imbalance in the population. Despite the softened propaganda approach, population controls are still enforced through coercive methods, including occasional forced abortions and sterilizations. Officials who fail to meet birth and sterilization quotas risk disciplinary action, and relatives of unsterilized women or couples with unapproved pregnancies have been subjected to high fines, job dismissal, and detention. Shandong-based activist lawyer Chen Guangcheng, whose lengthy house arrest has inspired online campaigns for his release, was originally jailed for assisting victims of the one-child policy (see CMB No. [48](#)).

- *Guardian* 2/27/2012: [China softens line on single child policy](#)
 - Agence France-Presse 2/28/2012: [Ban on 'nasty' family planning slogans](#)
 - *Shanghai Daily* 2/27/2012: [Gentler reminders to replace ugliness](#)
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NEW MEDIA / TECHNOLOGY NEWS



Online SARS rumor punished with labor-camp term

Police in Baoding City, Hebei Province, sentenced a website administrator to two years at a labor camp on February 26, after he allegedly spread a rumor online that more than 50 patients at a local hospital had been diagnosed with severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). Sentences to “reeducation through labor” are administrative penalties issued by police without recourse to the courts. According to Baoding police, the accused man propagated the rumor in a bid to increase traffic to his website. The Health Ministry issued a statement to clarify that the patients at the hospital were being treated for another, milder type of respiratory infection. As more Chinese internet users rely on discussion forums and microblogs to receive breaking news, the authorities have introduced a series of measures to prevent the spread of rumors on the internet, though information targeted by censors is often politically sensitive rather than false or harmful to the public (see CMB No. 43). Past suppression of health information has exacerbated crises. According to the World Health Organization, SARS was first discovered in Guangdong Province in November 2002, but officials restrained media coverage for three months. The disease eventually spread to other cities and countries and caused some 800 deaths.

- **Reuters 2/27/2012:** [China sends man to labor camp for SARS rumor](#)
- **Shanghai Daily 2/28/2012:** [Re-education for SARS rumor man](#)
- **South China Morning Post 2/28/2012:** [Sars story lands website boss in labour camp](#)



Restive village’s communications restricted

As residents of the Guangdong Province village of Wukan prepare to elect new leaders, having successfully ejected their former officials in December 2011 for allegedly stealing communal land (see CMB No. 46), citizens protesting over similar problems in the Zhejiang Province village of Panhe have met with greater obstacles. According to U.S.-based McClatchy Newspapers, authorities in Panhe have arrested protest organizers and younger villagers who were using the internet to advance their cause. Residents were also reportedly forced to post online comments claiming that the dispute with local officials had been resolved. A protest leader told McClatchy that police had been monitoring telephone conversations in the area. “The officials told us not to send text messages or get on the internet to talk about this situation,” he said. In addition to the use of new media, the Wukan villagers had benefited from international media coverage, but some foreign journalists attempting to report in Panhe have been assaulted and removed (see CMB No. 48). Meanwhile, in a sign that Guangdong authorities were seeking to prevent a repetition of the Wukan case, on February 20 the provincial government announced plans to build a team of 10,000 “public opinion guides” this year. Prominent Guangzhou-based blogger Ye Du said the decision was aimed at curbing dissent among rural residents, as many of them have begun to use the internet and microblogs to disseminate information about their grievances.

- McClatchy 2/26/2012: [Out of the public eye, China cracks down on another protesting village](#)
 - Radio Free Asia 2/24/2012: [After Wukan, 'opinion makers' wanted](#)
 - *Guangzhou Daily* 2/21/2012 (in Chinese): [Ten thousand "public opinion guides" to be recruited from worker union](#)
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Late Communist leader, long purged, reappears online

Former Chinese Communist Party general secretary Zhao Ziyang, who was purged after expressing sympathy with Tiananmen Square prodemocracy protesters in 1989 and died in 2005, has been “resurrected” on Baidu Baike, an online encyclopedia owned by Chinese search-engine giant Baidu. Zhao’s name had long been blocked on the internet, but netizens discovered on February 20 that Baidu searches for him were returning results, and his Baike profile page reportedly received over two million hits. On the page, Zhao is described as a “proletarian revolutionary” who made “contributions to the party and to the people.” However, Beijing Renmin University professor Zhang Ming told the *South China Morning Post* that the website’s praise “does not represent official acknowledgment.” Mentions of Zhao remain censored on the popular microblogging platform Sina Weibo. Searches by *China Media Bulletin* editors on WeiboScope, a database run by the University of Hong Kong that compiles deleted Weibo items, found posts that mentioned his reemergence on Baidu as well as his contributions to China’s economic reforms, indicating that the resurrection of his reputation in the eyes of China’s censors remains incomplete. Zhao was kept under house arrest from 1989 until death, after his support for the Tiananmen student protesters placed him at odds with paramount leader Deng Xiaoping and hard-liners in the Politburo.

- *South China Morning Post* 2/22/2012: [A resurrection of sorts for disgraced Zhao](#)
 - [WeiboScope Search](#)
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Microblog highlights: Nanjing denial, NPC critics, women’s toilet protests

The following are a selection of topics that have recently provoked discussion and censorship in China’s active microblogosphere:

- **Nanjing massacre denial:** Chinese netizens were outraged after Takashi Kawamura, mayor of the Japanese city of Nagoya, cast doubt on the 1937 Nanjing Massacre, in which occupying Japanese troops killed vast numbers of Chinese civilians. On February 20, Kawamura told a group of visitors from Nanjing that the massacre “probably never happened.” One user on the popular Chinese microblogging platform Sina Weibo said Kawamura should tour the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall. However, others criticized Liu Zhiwei, who led the Nanjing delegation, for failing to challenge Kawamura’s remarks on the spot. “All the ghosts of the Nanjing Massacre are going to come knocking on Liu Zhiwei’s door,” one wrote.

- **National People's Congress:** A string of Sina Weibo posts by users with over 100,000 followers that criticized an upcoming session of the National People's Congress (NPC), China's rubber-stamp legislature, have been removed by censors. The deleted posts are preserved by the University of Hong Kong's WeiboScope database. In one case, the popular Chinese poet Ye Kuangzheng reposted a comment that referred to the NPC as "the world's best-known 'great meeting of cheerleaders.'" Another was by law professor He Bing, who said the NPC is "wasting the wealth of the people" and should be drastically reduced in size. Separately, a deleted item by Hu Xijin, editor in chief of the Communist Party-owned *Global Times*, called for public participation in Communist Party oversight mechanisms, even it was "very tiring." Hu has about 1.78 million followers on Sina Weibo. User comments that responded to Hu's post were also deleted. One said of the push for improved public oversight, "They can begin by not deleting [Weibo] posts."
- **Toilet protests:** Microblog posts on a multicity protest campaign dubbed "Occupy Men's Toilets" have been censored. The series of protests, organized by a young woman in Guangzhou, called for an increase in the number of public restrooms for women. They were partly inspired by similar demonstrations in Taiwan and Hong Kong in the 1990s, as well as recent reports that Hong Kong may pass regulations requiring more women's than men's toilets in future construction projects. They also drew comparisons to the six-month-old U.S. social justice movement known as Occupy Wall Street (see CMB No. [38](#)). Chinese authorities have been vigilant for any signs of social unrest since the 2011 Arab Spring and ahead of a Communist Party leadership transition scheduled for the fall.
 - *Wall Street Journal* 2/23/2012: [Chinese outraged by denial of Nanjing](#)
 - China Media Project 2/28/2012: [Criticism of China's National People's Congress](#)
 - China Media Project 2/27/2012: [Cutting down the National People's Congress](#)
 - China Media Project 2/28/2012: [Public participation for effecting monitoring of the CCP](#)
 - *Financial Times* 2/28/2012: [Chinese toilet campaign falls foul of censors](#)



Crackdown on 'illegal information' completed

State-run Xinhua news agency reported on February 22 that China's Ministry of Public Security had shut down 7,846 websites that were allegedly involved in "illegal commercial activities." The result was part of a nationwide crackdown on "online black markets" initiated in November last year (see CMB No. [41](#)), targeting illegal exchanges of weapons, personal information, and wiretapping devices. The ministry also announced that it had removed 1.2 million online postings of "harmful information," including on popular web portals like Baidu, Sohu, and Tianya. Using vague definitions of "illegal online activities," the Chinese authorities frequently shut down politically sensitive websites during what are publicly described as campaigns against crime or obscenity on the internet. A lack of transparency surrounding which websites were actually shut down in the current campaign makes it difficult to confirm the nature of information being targeted in this case.

- Penn Olson 2/22/2012: [Chinese police crack down on cybercrime, Tianya, Sohu, Baidu BBS services implicated](#)
 - Xinhua 2/21/2012 (in Chinese): [Public security investigates 1075 internet companies for violations of regulations](#)
 - ZDNet 2/23/2012: [China shuts 7,846 black market sites](#)
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Despite block, Chinese firms advertise on Facebook

The *South China Morning Post* reported on February 26 that thousands of mainland Chinese companies are actively advertising on the U.S.-based social-networking website Facebook, despite the fact that the site is blocked in China (see CMB No. [46](#)). According to the paper, the Beijing-based online advertising firm AdSage has helped Chinese companies create Facebook accounts and manage their advertisements on the site. AdSage chief executive Tang Zhaohui said that most of his clients were involved in the gaming, education, and tourism industries and were seeking to reach audiences outside China. One of them could be among the largest advertisers on Facebook worldwide, Tang said. AdSage media manager Chen Tingting admitted that his company's relationship with a blocked site was "still a sensitive issue," and that his clients wanted to "keep a low profile." Tang argued that the growing de facto business links with Chinese firms could help Facebook formally enter the market. "They can't do marketing out in the open, but they frequently visit big advertisers in private with us," he said.

- *South China Morning Post* 2/26/2012: [Firms ignore ban and run Facebook ads](#)
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TIBET



Comedian detained, media blackout continues

Athar, a popular Tibetan comedian, was detained in Lithang County, Sichuan Province, in early February by police who claimed to be acting on orders from "higher levels." According to Tibetan exile parliament member Andrug Tseten, Athar had planned to release a DVD that was critical of the Chinese authorities. Before his arrest, he sent a short recorded message to a friend, instructing him to disseminate it if he were detained. In the message, the comedian calls for solidarity among Tibetans and says the region has gone down a "wrong path." Authorities told Athar's relatives that he was taken by a unit that specializes in dealing with individuals involved in "serious political matters." There is no information about Athar's current situation. Reporters Without Borders has said that in addition to a media blackout in Tibetan areas, Beijing has organized a "disinformation campaign" through state-run news outlets. The official Chinese site China Tibet Online claimed on February 16 that the French newspaper *Courrier International* had conducted research in Tibet, found little support for greater autonomy, and produced an article entitled "Dalai Clique Intends to Undermine the Unity of China." In fact, *Courrier International*, which carries translated articles from

international newspapers, had merely republished a piece from the Chinese Communist Party's *Global Times*, and attributed it accordingly.

- **Radio Free Asia 2/24/2012:** [Tibetan comedian detained](#)
- **Reporters Without Borders 3/1/2012:** [Authorities tighten grip, isolating Tibet even more from the outside world](#)
- **China Digital Times 2/24/2012:** [Party chief and foreign media visit Tibetan areas](#)
- **Courier International 2/21/2012 (in French):** [Courier International hijacked by Chinese propaganda](#)



Top blogger confined, barred from accepting award

Prominent Tibetan writer and blogger Woeser wrote on her Twitter microblog account that the Beijing police had stationed officers at her apartment building on February 29 to prevent her from leaving to accept an international award on March 1. She had planned to go to the Dutch ambassador's residence to attend a dinner and ceremony for an award from the Prince Claus Fund. The prize is given annually to individuals and organizations for "outstanding achievements in the field of culture and development." Woeser said the police could not tell her how long they would be restricting her movements. Her husband and friends were also warned not to attend the ceremony. Prince Claus Fund director Christa Meindersma said in a written statement that Woeser's confinement by the authorities was an illustration of "the importance of her voice." Woeser frequently publishes articles that are critical of the Chinese government's policies in Tibet, as well as updates on what is happening on the ground. Many news outlets rely on her microblog posts as a reliable source on the situation in the region.

- **New York Times 3/1/2012:** [Tibetan writer says China is blocking her from award](#)
- **Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development:** [Blogger Tsering Woeser not allowed to accept Prince Claus Award](#)

BEYOND CHINA



Chinese agents harass CNN crew in Nepal

On February 22, the American news outlet CNN reported that its journalists were harassed, apparently by Chinese security agents, as they tried to record footage inside Nepal near the Chinese border for a piece on the treatment of Tibetan refugees in the country. The Nepalese border police had warned CNN staff that their cameras would be damaged by Chinese personnel, whom the Nepalese guards did not stop from crossing the border. "We were approached by several men in plain clothes, who put their hands over the camera," wrote CNN reporter Sara Snider. "The men

were speaking Chinese to one another and were clearly on the Nepalese side of the border.” The same men later followed the crew deep into a Nepalese village, as they tried to conduct interviews with local residents. China’s influence in Nepal has grown rapidly in recent years, along with its aid payments and infrastructural connections to the small country. And in a parallel development, since 2008, the Nepalese authorities have become harsher in their treatment of local Tibetans, who have sought refuge in the country for decades, with some reportedly facing arrests and beatings.

- **CNN 2/22/2012: [Is China pushing Nepal to crack down on Tibetans?](#)**
 - ***China Digital Times* 2/24/2012: [Chinese obstruct CNN crew in Nepal](#)**
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With site unblocked, Chinese swarm Obama’s Google+ page

Chinese netizens began flocking to U.S. president Barack Obama’s account on the social-networking site Google+ on February 20, when they found that the service was suddenly accessible without the use of circumvention tools (see CMB No. [31](#)). Most comments left on the page were sarcastic or humorous, including some that ridiculed Chinese censorship or requested U.S. residency permits. Jeremy Goldkorn, founder of the China media website Danwei, said the flood of traffic and comments simply indicated Chinese users’ enjoyment of the novelty of posting to a major leader’s social-networking page, something that was unavailable in their own country. It was not necessarily representative of Chinese public opinion, he cautioned. However, a number of users made more serious statements, for example asking Obama to help free activist lawyer Chen Guangcheng, who has been under house arrest in Shandong Province since 2010. There were some reports that other blocked U.S. sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, were temporarily available to many Chinese users on February 27. The reasons behind the breaches in China’s so-called Great Firewall were not immediately clear.

- **Associated Press 2/27/2012: [Chinese flood Barack Obama’s Google Plus page—because they can](#)**
 - **Voice of America 2/27/2012: [Chinese Internet users flood Obama’s Google Plus web page](#)**
 - **Tea Leaf Nation 2/27/2012: [Facebook, Youtube and Twitter temporarily unblocked in China](#)**
 - ***Global Times* 2/28/2012: [Chinese web users ‘occupy’ Obama’s Google Plus](#)**
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Ai Weiwei protests Beijing mayor’s Taiwan visit

To protest a visit to Taiwan by Beijing mayor Guo Jinlong, prominent Chinese artist and blogger Ai Weiwei wrote on his Twitter microblog account on February 17 that he had rejected a collaboration project with the Taipei Fine Arts Museum (TFAM). The museum, which is run by the Taipei city government, was planning to publish a catalog featuring Ai’s artwork after it finished hosting his solo exhibition, “Absent,” on January 29 (see CMB No. [39](#)). The name of the show was a reference

to the travel ban imposed on Ai by the Chinese authorities, which had prevented him from attending the opening. Noting Guo's history of persecuting dissidents in China, including Tibetans and Falun Gong practitioners, Ai criticized Taiwan for also being "absent" in the defense of its own democratic values. Guo was the first mayor of Beijing to ever visit Taiwan. He and his 500-strong delegation were received by three city mayors, including Taipei's Hau Lung-bin, during a February 16–21 cultural exchange trip.

- NTDTV 2/21/2012 (in Chinese): [Ai Weiwei ends collaboration with Taipei in protest of Beijing mayor visit](#)
- Newtalk 2/21/2012 (in Chinese): [Ai Weiwei terminates Taipei collaboration in protest of human rights bandit visit](#)



***Washington Post* criticized over Xi Jinping 'interview'**

The *Washington Post* was criticized on February 24 by its ombudsman, Patrick Pexton, for granting Beijing too much control over a published "interview" with Chinese vice president Xi Jinping. On February 13, the day Xi arrived for an official visit to Washington, the *Post* printed a transcript that consisted only of Xi's written remarks. The paper had submitted questions in writing, but the answers received in response were accompanied by new questions; Chinese officials had "modified, deleted, and added questions to" the original list. To avoid taking responsibility for questions it did not ask, the *Post* ran Xi's answers without any questions; it later published a correction to explain the situation. "In publishing the transcript, which was more press release or propaganda than news, The *Post* set a bad precedent with the authoritarian government in Beijing," Pexton said. Despite its dearth of newsworthy content, the transcript amounted to Xi's only public statement during the tightly choreographed trip (see CMB No. [48](#)). Pexton said the *Post*, like other foreign media outlets, had a complicated relationship with Chinese authorities. It has reported aggressively on rights abuses in the country, and struggled to secure visas for its correspondents. At the same time, he said, it receives advertising funds from Beijing by printing "China Watch," a monthly supplement produced by state-run *China Daily*. The *China Media Bulletin* has noted similar paid inserts in papers such as the *Boston Globe* and Taiwan's *China Post* (see CMB Nos. [19](#) and [40](#)).

- *Washington Post* 2/24/2012: [Caving to China's demands](#)
- *China Digital Times* 2/25/2012: [Washington Post 'caving to China's demands?'](#)

For additional information on human rights and free expression in China, see:
[Freedom on the Net 2011](#)
[Freedom in the World 2011](#)
[Freedom of the Press 2010](#)

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