



# IFJ Press Freedom in China Campaign Bulletin June 2014

To IFJ Asia-Pacific affiliates and friends

Welcome to IFJ Asia-Pacific's monthly Press Freedom in China Campaign e-bulletin. The next bulletin will be sent in mid-July 2014, and contributions are most welcome.

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- 1) Crackdown escalates for 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Tiananmen massacre

## 1) Crackdown escalates for 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Tiananmen massacre

Discussion of the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989 has been taboo in China for a quarter of a century, but repression of free speech became even more extreme in the lead-up to the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary on June 4. The Chinese authorities began cracking down in March to prevent journalists exercising their duty to report. At least seven media personnel working for Hong Kong and overseas media outlets were detained, charged or sentenced from early April onward.

a) Xiang Nanfu, 62, a citizen journalist with US-based *boxun.com*, was arrested on May 3 on accusations of making false reports, according to a report by state-owned news agency Xinhua on May 13. Xinhua said Xiang was charged with "picking quarrels and provoking trouble". It cited a report headlined "Human organ harvesting from living; people buried alive" and said the reports had damaged China's reputation. China Central Television broadcast Xiang's confession. Boxun said there was no such report on its website, and added that the site had recently suffered a series of cyber-attacks.

b) Xin Jiang, a Chinese news assistant for Nikkei Inc, the Japan Economic Times News Agency, was taken away from her home by Chongqing police on May 13. She was charged on May 26 with "picking quarrels and stirring up trouble" but the police did not produce any evidence to show Xin had violated any law. According to the IFJ's records, Xin is the first Chinese news assistant charged by police in the past five years.

c) Vivian Wu, a journalist now working as a senior consultant to Internews, a non-governmental media training organization, has been out of contact since May 13, but Beijing police refused to confirm whether she had been detained. It is widely reported that Wu's situation is related to that of detained human rights lawyer Pu Zhiqiang, who was charged by Beijing police with "picking

quarrels and stirring up trouble” after he attended a private gathering on May 3 to commemorate the massacre.

d) Wang Jianmin, aged around 50, the Hong Kong publisher of political magazines *Xin Wei Monthly Magazine* and *Face Magazine*, and Hong Kong editor and publisher Wai Zhongxiao, 39, were charged by Shenzhen police on May 30 with “illegally operating a publication”. The magazines, which focus on reporting internal affairs of Communist Party in China, are printed in Shenzhen for costs reasons.

e) Yao Wentian, also known as Yiu Man-tin, a Hong Kong publisher, was sentenced to 10 years in prison by Shenzhen Intermediate People’s Court on May 7 after he was convicted of “smuggling of ordinary goods”. At the time of his arrest, Yao was preparing to publish a book entitled *Chinese Godfather Xi Jinping* by exiled dissident writer Yu Jie.

f) Gao Yu, 70, an outspoken freelance Chinese journalist, was charged by the Chinese authorities on May 8 with releasing “state secrets” to non-Mainland media outlets. Gao and her son have been missing since April 24. According to Gao’s defence lawyer, her son was accused of the same offence but was allowed out on bail after a month in detention. Although the state-owned news agency Xinhua did not specify the so-called “state secret”, it is widely believed to be “document number 9”, which specifies the seven topics which the Central Government has forbidden people to talk about. These include Western Press Freedom, Western Democracy, and Civil Society.

Foreign journalists also suffered harassment and threats by police which hindered their work. According to the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of China, some reporters were harassed for reporting on “sensitive” subjects. Beijing Police summoned a number of journalists to their office and, while videoing the meeting, lectured them about reporting on topics related to the Tiananmen Square anniversary and warned them of serious consequences if they disobeyed. The FCCC said it was the first time since the Chinese Jasmine Revolution in 2011 that the Police Bureau had summoned a large number of journalists to be lectured. The FCCC condemned the increasing harassment and intimidation of overseas media and their local staff by Chinese authorities. It cited the case of a French broadcaster who was harassed, accused and threatened by Beijing police. On June 4, journalists showed a photo of “Tank Man”, an unknown citizen who stood in front of a column of tanks on Chang An Avenue on June 5, 1989, to people on the street in Beijing’s Sanlitun district. The reporters complained that when they tried to interview people, the police stopped them from reporting and took them to the police station. The police videotaped the interrogation and searched a journalist’s handbag against her will. An officer accused the journalists of breaching a law, without specifying which law, and said: “It’s not a matter of law. It’s a matter of culture. The culture is above the law.” The officer also said: “You were speaking about a sensitive topic. You know that the topic is sensitive and the government doesn’t want people to speak about it.” The police confiscated the journalists’ press cards and ordered them to report to the police station the next day. When they did so, police accused them of causing a “disturbance of public order”. They were required to admit that they had done something “very sensitive” which could cause “disturbance” and to promise it would not happen in future. When they left with their press cards, the police threatened that if they breached the law again, their press cards and working visas would be cancelled.

The Chinese authorities became very concerned about a movement called “Return to Tiananmen Square” which was initiated by a group of activists. Many activists, artists, prominent celebrities and scholars were either detained, put under house arrest or forced to vacate their apartments. They included Ding Zilin, a prominent member of the Tiananmen Square Mothers



group of families who were bereaved by the massacre. It was reported that on May 3, when Ding was preparing to leave her home town in Jiangsu province on May 6, police asked her not to go back to her Beijing apartment. Bao Tong, former Director of the Office of Political Reform of the Central Committee, was also forced to vacate his apartment. His son said the demand was quite unusual. Bao was also the Policy Secretary of Zhao Ziyang, the reformist General Secretary of the Communist Party from 1987 until 1989, when he was ousted in the aftermath of the massacre. Hu Jia, a prominent activist, was put under house arrest with several security agents surrounding his apartment. Artist Chen Guang was detained by police on May 7 after he performed an art piece on April 29 in which he used red ink to write the years from 1989 onwards on a white wall in his studio in Songzhuang, in the eastern part of Beijing. Gao Jian, a Chinese Australian and former soldier of the People's Liberation Army, was taken away by police from his studio near Songzhuang on June 1. According to *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Gao's friend Melanie Wang said Gao had told her that he would be detained for 15 days, but no reason for his detention was given. It is widely believed his detention was related to his recent art work showing Tiananmen Square covered in meat. Prominent human rights lawyer Teng Biao, a lecturer at China University of Political Science and Law who is currently a visiting scholar at Hong Kong Chinese University, was warned by his employer and by Chinese security agents not to attend the candlelit vigil held at Hong Kong's Victoria Park on June 4.

On June 1, Beijing local government claimed that it would mobilize 100,000 people to act as informers and 850,000 volunteers to form a "safety network" to prevent anything happening in Beijing. On June 3, the government suddenly announced that several exits from Muxidi and Tiananmen Square subway stations would be closed until further notice. Many police cars were either parked or patrolling near the Tiananmen Square and Muxidi. Hong Kong Radio Television reported that many policemen were patrolling on the street. The officers checked identifications and took photos of all journalists and asked them to leave, because they deemed all journalists to be working. Muxidi is one of the places where the army opened fire at midnight on June 3. Many people died, including the son of Ding Zilin, who is now a prominent member of Tiananmen Square Mothers.

Security measures were also imposed to stifle free expression on the internet. GreatFire.org reported that the major services of search giant Google.com were blocked in China. These included the search engine, images, translation and email service. Though a Google spokesperson denied there were any technical problems, Mainland people complained that they had serious difficulties in accessing their email accounts. Six members of the central committee of the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China complained that their personal email accounts had been infiltrated since April. Some received 50 junk emails within 15 minutes. Many website operators said they were warned not to speak of June 4 or of recent violent events in Xinjiang Province. Many WeChat account holders also complained that their accounts were either forcibly shut down or hacked by unknown people. All messages related to June 4 were completely blocked. On the eve of June 4, some weibo microblog users complained that they were forbidden to use the "candle" icon to express their feelings.

## **2) Eight charged, six media outlets closed after "fake" news campaign**

*Jinghua Newspaper*, which is controlled by the Beijing Propaganda Department, reported on May 21 that eight out of 11 suspects had been charged after a campaign against "fake" news. The State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of China (SAPPRFT) and other departments and offices launched the nationwide campaign in 2013 to "prevent extortion by news reporting and contain the spread of fake news". Two media outlets were forced to shut down because they were allegedly "fake media outlets". The SAPPRFT said it had

received more than 400 complaints. After the investigation, 216 newspapers were accused of violating regulations, four publishing companies had their licences cancelled, and six media outlets were forced to shut down. Some 14,000 press cards were cancelled because the journalists holding them were allegedly involved in fake news reporting.

### **3) Tencent journalist sacked after discussing censorship with US Secretary of State**

On May 23, Zhang Jialong, a journalist with popular listed online company Tencent, was sacked for allegedly “leaking business secrets and other confidential and sensitive information”. He had been suspended from work on May 20. Zhang said in his blog that he believed his termination was decided by Tencent on the instigation of the propaganda authorities, including the Central Propaganda Department. He said a possible reason for his dismissal was that he disclosed online a restrictive order issued by the propaganda department. He said another likely cause was that he expressed concern about internet censorship in China when he met with the US Secretary State, John Kerry, on February 15. The meeting occurred while Secretary Kerry was visiting China, and included press freedom activists Wang Keqin, Ma Xiaolin and Wang Chong. The following day, the propaganda authorities forbade all media to publish any reports about Secretary Kerry’s meeting with “four prominent Chinese social media bloggers to talk about internet freedom”. Though Zhang faced tremendous pressure, he was not afraid to tell the truth. On April 16, he said in an article published on the website of *Foreign Policy* magazine that the number of media personnel and bloggers in detention had increased since President Xi Jinping was appointed. Zhang wrote: “Xi Jinping and his administrative are labeled as rivals of freedom of speech.”

### **4) Mainland journalist attacked; pressured to disclose source**

According to media reports, Man Da, a journalist with *Chutian Metropolis Daily*, was attacked on May 18 by a group of six men while trying to investigate allegations against Zhong Qibin, the head of the Village Committee in Hongshan district. Man was investigating reports that Zhong may have breached Communist Party rules by planning to hold a birthday party for his 10-week-old son. Man was reportedly detained and attacked by the six men, who wanted him to disclose the source of the information that had led him to investigate Zhong. Man was slapped, kicked and punched by the men for an hour, causing multiple injuries all over his body. One of the attackers was reported to have said to Da: “Don’t dare think you can leave if you are not telling us who the informer is.” Following the attack, Hongshan District Police detained the six men and they were each punished with 10 to 15 days of administrative detention.

### **5) Chinese netizens blocked online**

On May 26, the State Council Information Office, one of the key offices censoring online messages, released a Human Rights White Paper entitled *Progress of China’s Human Rights in 2013*. In the report, the office said that, every day, Chinese netizens post and forward 250 million microblog messages and more than 20 billion WeChat and other instant messages. However, the report did not admit that thousands of microblog messages were blocked and account holders of microblog and WeChat were suspended without any reason being given. The report also did not admit that many people received administrative detention and were charged with crimes after they posted messages. In Zhejiang Province, seven people were punished with five to 10 days’ administrative detention on accusations of spreading rumours about the deaths of civilians during the May 10 protest against a planned installation of an incinerator in Hangzhou City. Under the current law, police can detain anyone without going through any legal process. At the same time, the State Internet Information Office announced that the Chinese



government is to start cyber security vetting of major IT products and services for use by national security and public interests. According to a report by state-owned news agency Xinhua on May 22, the office said that ensuring IT technologies and cyberspace are “safe and under control” is vital to China’s national security and economic and social development, as well as to people’s legitimate rights and interests. Within a week, the office announced another campaign to target all mobile phones and instant communication services such as WeChat in order to prevent the spreading of rumors and any anti-government movements. With the government stifling freedom of expression, the online service providers are assisting the government to achieve its goal. Tencent, which provides the WeChat service, announced that it will limit each account to a network of 5000 people.

## **6) Police delay release of information about brutal murder case**

Under the Regulations on Open Government Information, local government has a duty to release information to the public and answer all queries in a speedy manner. On May 28, a brutal murder occurred in Zhaoyuan, Shandong Province. A woman was beaten to death by six assailants in a McDonald’s outlet after she refused to give them her cell phone number. According to Mainland media reports, the six people were members of a religious cult called the Church of Almighty God. Local police did not release information about the case until a video of the attack had been circulating on the internet for three days. Zhaoyuan police said releasing the information could affect the investigation, so they had to wait until the Public Security Bureau confirmed the case was related to a religious cult. Another case that threw doubt on a local government’s commitment to the regulations occurred on May 22 in Yunan Province. According to state-owned news agency Xinhua, the Jinan Civil Service Bureau organized a press conference to respond to media queries about why 22 out of 23 people scored zero in a civil service examination. The officer did not answer any questions, but merely said the bureau “is investigating”. As a result, conference took only 1 minute and 35 seconds.

## **7) Censorship escalates in Xinjiang**

After a number of deadly incidents in Beijing, Yunan Province and Xinjiang Province, the Communist Party Chief in Xinjiang, Zhang Chunxian, on May 26 declared “a people’s war” against terrorism. Zhang said a campaign to “safeguard stability and resolutely prevent malignant violence and terrorist attacks” would be implemented in Xinjiang, in particular after 39 people died and 94 were injured in an explosion involving two vehicles on May 22. The Xinjiang authorities escalated censorship on all online platforms and instant message communication channels, as well as videos. The Xinjiang authorities claimed they had cracked down on 2229 web links since March 31. According to a report by *Global Times* on May 12, the authorities arrested 232 people who had circulated videos promoting terrorism through the internet and on portable devices. Among those arrested, 71 were in criminal detention, 107 were under administrative detention, and 34 people connected to 17 cases had been prosecuted. According to the report, the authorities said webpages, microblogs and internet chat rooms were being used more frequently to spread extremist ideology that could lead to terrorist actions. Therefore the government banned the use of all these channels, as well as cell phones, computers, portable storage devices, and mobile instant-message applications such WeChat to download, save, or spread terror-related videos. At the same time, hundreds of people were jailed after speedy trials in Xinjiang without any independent journalists attending the hearings to verify whether they were given due process of law. All the suspects were accused of spreading videos that incited violence, organizing and taking part in terrorist activities, advocating ethnic hatred, or illegally manufacturing firearms.



### **8) Independent reporting absent on South China Sea dispute**

The tensions between China and Vietnam in the South China Sea escalated, but no independent reports were published on the Mainland. On May 11, hundreds of Vietnamese citizens protested in the Vietnamese capital, Hanoi, against China's actions in South China Sea. However no Chinese media, including state-owned news agency Xinhua, reported the demonstration. The media merely repeated the statement of the Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying, who said: "The Chinese side is always opposed to one or two countries' attempts to use the South Sea issue to harm the overall friendship and cooperation between China and ASEAN."

### **9) One in four foreign journalists pressured by Chinese authorities**

The Foreign Correspondents' Club of China's annual survey, released in May, said 99 per cent of respondents think reporting conditions in China do not meet international standards, and 80 per cent feel conditions have stayed the same or deteriorated in the past year – a rise of 10 percentage points since the May 2013 survey. Half of the survey respondents with Chinese assistants said their assistants had been harassed or intimidated at least once; this figure was up from 35 per cent in the 2013 survey. One out of four respondents said the Chinese authorities had put pressure on editors at headquarters in their home country over news coverage. The top concerns included interference, harassment and physical violence by authorities against foreign media during the reporting process; attempts by authorities to pre-empt and discourage coverage of sensitive subjects; intimidation and harassment of sources; restrictions on journalists' movements in Tibetan-inhabited areas and Xinjiang; pressure directed to editors and managers at headquarters outside of China; and cyber-harassment and blocking of websites.

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If you have information on a press freedom violation or matters relating to media freedom and journalists' rights in China, contact staff at IFJ Asia-Pacific so that action can be taken. To contribute to this bulletin, email [ifjchina@ifj-asia.org](mailto:ifjchina@ifj-asia.org)

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