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## CHINA TODAY UPDATES: March 2010

9 items

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### **Child mortality highlights China's urban-rural divide**

**Thu, Mar 25 2010**

HONG KONG (Reuters) - Children born in rural China are three to six times more likely to die before they turn 5 than those in the cities, a study found, highlighting the wide gulf in healthcare provision for the rich and poor in China.

Pneumonia, birth asphyxia, and pre-term birth complications were the leading causes of death in children under 5, the researchers said in a paper published on Friday in the Lancet.

Led by Igor Rudan at the Croatian Center for Global Health in Split, Croatia, the researchers searched public databases containing information from 1990 to 2008, including 206 long-term studies on causes of death in children under 5.

According to the paper, child mortality rates dived 71 percent from 64.6 to 18.5 per 1,000 livebirths from 1990 to 2008, but the disparity between child health in the booming cities compared with the poor countryside remained stark.

"The progress toward reduction of the child mortality rate in China is strongly determined by the degree of socioeconomic development," they wrote.

The Chinese government says it has been working to address this inequity since 2003, putting in place a modest healthcare insurance system that it hopes will help the poorest meet basic medical needs.

In 2009, Beijing launched a new reform, pledging \$123 billion over the next three years to provide universal and affordable basic healthcare for its 1.3 billion population.

In an interview with Reuters last week, Chinese Health Minister Chen Zhu said the insurance program has been extended to much of the population.

"Now we are a 1.33 billion-population, and 1.23 billion are covered. Some 100 million are not covered, these are migrants, elderly people and children in cities and people in small enterprises," Chen said.

"I hope that next year, a part of these 100 million people who are still uninsured.... will be brought in."

Under China's "hukou" household registration system, hundreds of millions of migrants from the countryside are unable to obtain residency status that would give them access to healthcare, education or legal protection in the cities where they settle.

(Reporting by Tan Ee Lyn; Editing by Alex Richardson)

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### **Story from BBC NEWS:**

**<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/asia-pacific/8582233.stm>**

**Published: 2010/03/23 11:14:25 GMT**

### **China slams Google censoring move**

China has said Google's move to stop censoring search results is "totally wrong" and accused it of breaking a promise made when it launched in China.

The US giant is redirecting users in mainland China to its unrestricted Hong Kong site, although Chinese firewalls mean results still come back censored.

Beijing said the decision should not affect ties with Washington.

Google threatened to leave the Chinese market completely this year after cyber attacks were traced back to China.

Google's move effectively to shut its mainland Chinese search service, google.cn, is a major blow to China's international image, the BBC's Damian Grammaticas reports from Beijing.

It means one of the world's most prominent corporations is saying it is no longer willing to co-operate in China's censorship of the internet, our correspondent says.

China has moved to further limit free speech on the web - Google's own websites and the e-mail accounts of human rights activists recently came under cyber attack.

The White House said it was "disappointed" that Google and China had not been able to resolve their differences.

'Politicisation of commercial issues'

A BBC search of google.cn on Tuesday using the word "Tiananmen" brought up results but the words "Dalai Lama" returned messages like "problem loading page" and "the connection was reset".

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#### GOOGLE IN CHINA

- # 2000: A Chinese-language interface is developed for the google.com website
- # 2006: Launch of China-based google.cn search page with censored results
- # Mar-Jun 2009: China blocks access to Google's YouTube site; access to other Google online services is denied to users
- # Jan 2010: Jan 2010 Google announces it is no longer willing to censor searches in China and may pull out of the country
- # Feb 2010: Hacking attacks on Google are traced to mainland China
- # March 2010: Google says it will re-route searches to its Hong Kong-based site

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Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Qin Gang told reporters that Google's move was an isolated act by a commercial company and should not affect China-US ties "unless politicised" by others.

The government would handle the Google case "according to the law", he added.

Earlier an official in the Chinese government office which oversees the internet said: "Google has violated its written promise it made when entering the Chinese market by stopping filtering its searching service and blaming China in insinuation for alleged hacker attacks.

"This is totally wrong. We're uncompromisingly opposed to the politicisation of commercial issues, and express our discontent and indignation to Google for its unreasonable accusations and conducts," the unnamed official was quoted as saying by Chinese state news agency Xinhua.

Chen Yafei, a Chinese information technology specialist, told Reuters that Google should have accepted Chinese regulation if it wanted to operate in the country.

"Any company entering China should abide by Chinese laws," he said. "Chinese internet users will have no regrets if Google withdraws."

Edward Yu, chief executive of Analysys International, a Beijing-based research firm specialising in technology issues, said he did not believe Google's rerouting was sustainable.

"The thing that makes the government unhappy is this kind of gesture," he said. "They may set up barriers against Google."

Young Chinese professionals working in Beijing's main IT hub, Zhongguancun, expressed a mixture of regret, anger and surprise on Tuesday at Google's decision.

"I think it was inevitable though," Chen Wen, 28, told Reuters. "The government was never going to compromise on filtering. China needs this company. It's a great loss for the country."

You Chuanbo, 25, predicted the government would "just end up blocking access to all of Google".

Valued market

In Beijing, some passers-by laid flowers outside Google's offices to thank the company for standing up for its principles.

Robert Mahoney, deputy director of the Committee to Protect Journalists, welcomed Google's decision saying that the CPJ hoped it would "ramp up pressure on the Chinese government to allow its citizens to access the news and information they need".

Rebecca MacKinnon of Princeton University's Center for Information Technology Policy said Google was playing the role of "the little boy who pointed out that the Emperor has no clothes" by making more Chinese people aware of censorship.

Announcing the decision, Google's chief legal officer, David Drummond, said that providing uncensored searches through the Hong Kong-based google.com.hk website was "entirely legal" and would "meaningfully increase access to information for people in China".

The company said it would maintain a research and development and sales presence in China, where about 700 of its 20,000 employees are based.

Google spokeswoman Marsha Wang told AFP news agency she had no information about job losses or a possible transfer of staff to Hong Kong offices, saying only that "adjustments" could be made "according to business demand".

Google is not the biggest search provider in China and its mainland Chinese operation accounts for just a fraction of the firm's total sales, but business analysts say the company is taking a long-term gamble as the Chinese internet search market is growing by 40% a year.

It risks losing market share, revenue and staff to rivals which include market leader Baidu, up-and-comer Tencent and US heavyweight Microsoft, Reuters notes in a commentary.

Tom Online Inc, an internet company owned by Hong Kong's richest man, the billionaire Li Ka-shing, has stopped using Google's search engine in protest, it said, against Google's lack of compliance with Chinese regulations.

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## Net produces new generation of China activists

**ABC 7 News - posted 03/19/10 11:23 am**

**Written By ANITA CHANG**

BEIJING - Lin Xiuying believes her daughter bled to death after being gang-raped two years ago by a group of thugs that had ties to the police in their southern Chinese town. For more than a year, the illiterate mother appealed to various government departments in Fujian province's Mingqin county, pleading for someone to take a closer look at the death of 25-year-old Yan Xiaoling that police blamed on an ectopic pregnancy.

Lin, 50, was sobbing outside a government office last summer when she met self-taught legal expert Fan Yanqiong. Fan took down the details of the case from Lin and then posted them online. Two others, You Jingyou and Wu Huaying, spoke to the mother and posted their video interview online.

On Friday, the three were in court awaiting a verdict on charges of making false accusations, which carries a sentence of up to three years in jail.

It is the latest example of Chinese Internet users being targeted for their budding grass-roots activism - ordinary people spreading the word about grievances from every corner of the country with postings on Twitter, microblogs and other Web sites.

"Netizens are using the Internet to talk about injustice," said Liu Xiaoyuan, You's lawyer. "But local officials just use their public power to suppress them."

Dozens of bloggers showed up outside Mawei District People's Court on Friday in Fuzhou city where the verdict was to be announced, tweeting constantly and posting photos from the scene online. They reportedly were met by more than 100 uniformed and plainclothes police. The case was indefinitely postponed.

China blocks online materials it deems to be harmful or pornographic, which frequently includes information that contradicts the views of the ruling Communist Party. Such restrictions prompted Internet giant Google to announce in January that it may close China-based Google.cn because it no longer wanted to cooperate with Beijing's Internet censorship.

But there is a vibrant community of tech-savvy users who can easily hop over the "Great Firewall" that blocks access to sites like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. They are a minority of the 384 million people online in China but among the most vocal: young, educated, liberal-minded and unafraid of questioning the Communist government.

Twitter in particular has been harnessed by Chinese users who revel in having a forum where they can speak freely about politically sensitive matters - in 140 characters or less, of course.

"With the help of new technology, it's become quite common and convenient for citizens to exercise their right of supervising the government. It's always hard to publish articles in traditional media and it's much easier to do so on the Internet," said Zhou Ze, a law professor at China Youth University for Political Science who has spoken out about detentions related to online comments.

Those arrested or detained for trying to help Lin are just the latest to be punished for their activism.

Wang Shuai was detained in Shanghai after speaking out online about land confiscation in his hometown in central China's Henan province. Wu Baoquan was sentenced to 1 1/2 years in jail for criticizing - also online - a land compensation plan in his Inner Mongolian village.

But there have been a few victories, too.

Authorities dropped charges against a man in the eastern province of Shandong who was detained after accusing his local Communist Party secretary of corruption. An unpopular garbage incinerator project in the southern city of Guangzhou has been put on hold. A karaoke bar waitress went unpunished after fatally stabbing a drunk government official who cornered her and demanded sex. Each case got strong attention from Chinese citizens online as details spread through blogs and forums.

Guo Baofeng, who works as a translator in the southern city of Xiamen, was among those taken away by police after posting a video interview of Lin on an overseas Web site. He became famous among Chinese netizens for sending Twitter updates while in police custody.

"Pls help me, I grasp the phone during police sleep," and "i have been arrested by Mawei police, SOS," he tweeted in English from his cell phone, avoiding Chinese characters that take longer to input. Guo was released from detention after about three weeks, though he is still under police monitoring.

Lin, the mother, does not have a deep understanding of the Internet or its workings, but knows that it is helping to keep her daughter's case in the public eye. Poor and uneducated, she can do little other than try to support those who helped spread the word of her plight by attending their court hearings.

"The authorities take advantage of us because I'm illiterate and have no money or family connections," she said. "Thankfully there are reporters and citizens helping me. They've helped so much and I hope they can keep helping us."

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Video of Lin Xiuying talking about her daughter's death (in Chinese):  
<http://news.boxun.com/news/gb/china/2009/06/200906261220.shtml>

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## China Radio International (CRI) - English Service

### Learning about China's Greatest Teacher at the Confucius Temple

**2010-03-19 14:12:54    CRIENGLISH.com    Web Editor: Duan Xuelian**

Certainly, if you are interested in knowing what makes the Chinese tick — or indeed some of China's neighbours — you would be wise to study a little about Confucius, a man who lived 500 years before the time of Christ.

By Mary King

Confucius is China's greatest philosopher. His teachings have not only strongly influenced Chinese culture, but also the cultures of Korea, Japan and Vietnam. Certainly, if you are interested in knowing what makes the Chinese tick — or indeed some of China's neighbours — you would be wise to study a little about Confucius, a man who lived 500 years before the time of Christ.

Confucius is known as Kong Zi in China, meaning Master Kong. He is said to have been born in 551 BC in the state of Lu, which is modern-day Shandong Province. Confucius was born into a warrior family. His father Shulianghe was in fact a famous warrior who fought in two major battles and even owned a fiefdom.

However, Confucius lost his father at the age of three, and then his mother took him and left the fiefdom because, as a concubine, she wanted to avoid being mistreated by Shulianghe's formal wife. From then on, Confucius was raised in poverty, but with the encouragement of his mother he studied hard.

His mother died when he was just 17, and then at the age of 20 Confucius married a woman from the Song state. His wife loved him very much, but Confucius left his family to travel. He wished to pursue his ideals and spread his teachings. His philosophy focused on the importance of study and betterment of the self.

Confucius emphasized strong family loyalty, ancestor worship, respect for elders, as well as respect for authority and government. He stressed the importance of benevolence and honesty, and one of his greatest teachings was "only do unto others that which you would want done to yourself".

Although Confucianism is often followed like a religion by many Chinese, there is much debate over whether the teachings constitute a religion or a philosophy. However, Confucius temples do exist in China, as well as other parts of the world. If you are curious about China's greatest philosopher you should visit the Temple of Confucius in the heart of Beijing.

The temple is situated on Guozijian Street inside Anding Gate, and is the place where people paid homage to Confucius during the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties, so from 1271 through to 1911.

The Temple of Confucius was initially built in 1302 and additions were made during the Ming and Qing dynasties. It covers an area of 22,000 square meters, making it the second largest Confucius temple in China. The largest temple dedicated to China's greatest thinker and educationalist of ancient times is situated in Confucius's hometown in Qufu, Shandong Province.

The Confucius Temple in Beijing consists of four courtyards and includes two special gates and halls. There is "Gate of the First Teacher" and "Gate of Great Accomplishment", and the two famous halls are "Hall of Great Accomplishment" and "Worship Hall".

The "Hall of Great Accomplishment" is the main building in the temple. This is where memorial ceremonies for Confucius were often held. If you go inside the temple you will find almost 200 stone tablets positioned on either side of the front courtyard, containing close to 52,000 names of the advanced scholars of the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties. The temple also contains stone tablets recording the names of many generations of scholars who passed the Imperial Examination.

The Imperial Examination determined who would be qualified to enter the state's bureaucracy. The system was founded during the Sui Dynasty, in 605, and lasted for 1,300 years, until its abolition near the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1912.

Theoretically, any male adult in China, regardless of wealth or social status, had the opportunity to become a high-ranking official if he could pass the imperial examination. Although, some men from poor backgrounds did pass the examination and go on to win top positions within the government, most of the candidates who took the examinations were from the aristocracy.

Over the centuries, the Imperial Examination system was supported by some emperors but abolished by others. The exam, however, thrived under the Ming and Qing dynasties. And for a short period women were allowed to sit the examination too. That was during the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, so between 1851 to 1864, when Hong Xiuquan, the Christian convert and self-proclaimed brother of Jesus Christ, took control of a large part of China. Although Qing Forces managed to crush the uprising, the Qing Dynasty collapsed in 1911.

Afterwards, Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the leader of the newly risen Republic of China, developed an examination system that was similar to the Imperial Examination. It was known as the Examination Yuan, but this new system failed to survive the upheavals in China between World War I and World War II.

The Kuomintang administration revived the Examination Yuan in 1947, after the defeat of Japan, and this examination system continues to this day in Taiwan. It is all that survives of the ancient Imperial Examination system.

At the Confucius Temple you can visit a museum area to learn more about the Imperial Examination. You can see the throne where the great masters once sat to give their teachings, and within the grounds there are various pavilions and ancient trees to see.

Certainly take a closer look at the 700-year-old cypress tree that is known as the "Touch Evil Cypress". This tree is associated with an ancient legend about a corrupt official who lived during the Ming Dynasty.

Apparently, the official, who was named Yan Song, came to the temple one day to worship Confucius on behalf of the emperor. It is said that as he passed by the cypress, one of the tree's branches took his hat off. Since Yan Song was a despised official, people came to the conclusion that the old tree could distinguish between good and evil people and after that the tree became known as Chu Jian Bai, or "Touch Evil Cypress".

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## **The Times**

**March 19, 2010**

### **Success of secret two-child policy could force Chinese rethink on family planning**

**Jane Macartney**

A secret experiment allowing families in a rural Chinese county to have two children could herald the beginning of a social revolution after years of the notorious one-child-only rule.

It has emerged that, 25 years ago, Beijing secretly authorised a pilot project in Yicheng county, 560 miles (900km) southwest of the capital, in which families would be allowed to have a maximum of two children if they adhered to certain conditions.

Details of the experiment were reported for the first time in the Southern Weekend newspaper in Guangzhou — and the results are sure to call into question the viability of the official family planning policy.

According to the paper, the population of the county has grown over the 25-year period of the scheme by 20.7 per cent, which is nearly five percentage points lower than the national average, despite families being allowed two children. The experiment also appears to have redressed the imbalance between male and female births in China: the national average is 118 males to every 100 females, but in Yicheng the ratio was in line with the natural norm at 106 to 100.

Given China's growing population imbalance as a result of its low fertility rate — which is expected to cause the working age population to peak in 2015 and plunge by 2050 — and the unexpected results of the experiment, it is no surprise that influential voices have welcomed the findings.

Liang Zhongtang, who designed the programme, believes that the draconian one-child policy has served its purpose. “Under natural conditions, with no family planning policy, the birthrate would drop faster than with strict restrictions,” he said. Zou Xuejin, of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, has also called for a relaxation of the official family planning policy.

One official who was involved with the project in Yicheng spoke of his nervousness at the start of the programme in 1985. “We were anxious that, because the one-child policy had already been in place for five years, the experiment would run out of control,” he said. “We went from house to house to explain the policy and, in fact, it went quite smoothly.”

The Yicheng experiment has its origins in the late 1970s, when Deng Xiaoping instituted the one-child policy, at a time when some academics in China wanted to set up test areas. Since then, the authorities have exempted millions of families from the one-child rule, notably farmers in rural areas where the first child was a girl.

Yicheng was chosen because it is a typical farming county. Two other areas were ruled out because they were home to large populations of ethnic minorities, among them groups who were exempt, anyway, from the one-child policy.

The plan initially met with opposition in Beijing until officials in the northern Shanxi province wrote to the party chief, Hu Yaobang, in 1984 with their unusual suggestion. The response from the relatively liberal leader was reported to be swift: “Go ahead.” The main stipulation was that the experiment should be carried out without publicity — effectively in secret.

The Yicheng test has been run by strict rules. Men in the county are not allowed to marry until they are 25, women before they reach 23 — three years later than the national policy. Couples taking part in the experiment must leave a six-year gap between their first and second child or face a fine of 1,200 yuan (£120). They are encouraged to undergo sterilisation after the second child to ensure that they do not have a third.

It appears, however, that some couples in the county wanted just one child anyway. One hospital doctor told The Times yesterday: “More and more people only want to have one child. It’s expensive to raise a second, especially in the town. The farmers still like to have two children.”

Many, of course, did take the chance to double the number of their offspring, in a country with a population of 1.3 billion. A 20-year-old waitress working at a Yicheng restaurant told The Times that she was an only child, but her case was unusual and most of her friends had a brother or a sister. “Among my relatives, some have one child and some have two — but no one has three,” she said.

At the start of the experiment the population of Yicheng was 278,000 and the aim was that it should not exceed 300,000 by 2000. Now the county has a population of 310,000. As one official told the Southern Weekend: “The experiment is quite satisfying. It shows that, even if people are allowed to have a second child, there will not be a population explosion.”

News of the Yicheng project comes at a time when many are questioning how long the population control policy should be held in place, especially as the workforce shoulders the growing burden of trying to support an ageing society.

The authorities, anxious about the reluctance of young urban couples to have even one child, have allowed couples who are both sole children to have two babies. In Shanghai this has been actively encouraged — but to scant effect.

China’s newly rich are eager to enjoy their financial independence. They are already burdened by the soaring costs of buying their own home and a passion for bars, restaurants, expensive lapdogs and hanging out at Starbucks. Many feel a baby would cramp their style and cripple their disposable income.

Urban yuppies wanting a career are generally content with the one-child rule; farmers who want more sons to till the land simply ignore the limits.

China’s policymakers may find they have already fallen behind the times.

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**Story from BBC NEWS:**

**<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/technology/8575476.stm>**

**Published: 2010/03/19 12:19:36 GMT**

**Chinese learn to leap over the 'Great Firewall'**

**By Weiliang Nie**

**BBC Chinese Service**

To police the internet China has employed what is regarded by many as the world's most formidable censorship machine. But as ever more Chinese get online, more and more users also understand what it means to jump over the government's "Great Firewall of China".

The country's firewall system is complex and multi-layered, says Isaac Mao, one of China's first bloggers.

"The first layer is technical. The government has invested a lot to build routers and other infrastructure to filter, monitor and block websites and look into how people communicate," he says.

"The second layer is the 'social layer'. It deploys many people to monitor and track people's activities online.

"The most important part is the third layer. I call it the 'psychological layer'. Because of the technical settings and internet police, internet users have become more self-censored, fearful of being tracked."

#### Changing blacklist

The impact of censorship is felt keenly by internet users in China, even affecting their everyday online search results, says Dean Peng, an independent commentator and columnist in Beijing.

"Every day when I search for something which may be regarded as sensitive by the authorities, I encounter difficulties," he says.

"The search engine would tell me that the results that you are looking for will not be shown due to the local laws and regulations."

Topics regarded as sensitive include anything to do with Charter 08, an online campaign for democratic reforms launched by dissident professor Liu Xiaobo, who has since been jailed.

Other topics include the names of political leaders, banned religious group such as the Falun Gong, the restive province of Xinjiang and its Uighur people, Mr Peng says.

"And the blacklist changes from time to time," he adds.

The BBC conducted its own experiment, using China's most popular search engine, Baidu, and the results broadly confirmed the picture painted by Mr Peng.

#### Absurdities

Sometimes, the censorship can throw up real absurdities, according to Mr Mao.

Even an innocent children's song - I love Beijing's Tiananmen - can fall foul of the censors, he explains.

"Initially they block the word Tiananmen because it is associated with the Tiananmen crackdown 20 years ago," he adds. "Then they block the word Beijing because there are many things that happened in Beijing."

"The government also restarted the campaign against online pornography last year, so 'I love' also becomes a sensitive key word.

"Now, if you search for the song, the results returned can be: 'sensitive key word, sensitive key word, and sensitive key word'."

According to Willy Lam, former China editor of the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post, China has every reason to control the internet.

"It is quite obvious looking from outside or the Western perspective that the Communist Party regime is quite stable. However the social and political situation in China is potentially unstable."

There are an estimated 100,000 cases of mass incidents - riots and disturbances - every year, Mr Lam says.

And the gap between the rich and poor is widening, resulting in "a severe situation of class antagonism between the newly rich entrepreneurs, senior party leaders on the one hand, and the so-called disadvantaged sectors - the peasants, migrant workers", he adds.

"The erection of the so-called 'Great Firewall of China' is a pre-emptive strike against possible potential destabilising factors getting worse, particularly given Beijing's suspicion that there are so-called anti-China organisations in the West, in the US in particular, who want to exploit these potential destabilising factors in China to make trouble for the regime."

Anonymity software

But the firewall is not unbreakable, at least to some Chinese internet users.

"Just two years ago, only 5% of Chinese internet users knew that the government censored the internet," Mr Mao says.

"But today, information flows faster and faster and people try to use different tools to spread information between social networks."

"There are a minority of users who can use technology to bypass censorship. No more than one or two percent. More users - about 18% - have become second-hand information consumers from those savvy users."

"So roughly 20% of Chinese internet users now understand what 'Fan Qiang' ('circumventing the firewall') means, and they also have a strong determination to do so."

Stopping people evading the firewall is not easy, says Zhou Shuguang, an active Twitter user and blogger from the central province of Hunan.

He cites the availability of free, open-source, peer-to-peer (P2P) software such as Tor.

"Everybody can use it. If you can pay some money, you can get a virtual private network (VPN) account so you can get a faster connection to the internet."

According to internet users in China, you can download the P2P software from the Tor website. However, the site itself has been blocked in China.

Nevertheless, more and more so-called "mirror sites" - exact copies - are now emerging.

"They can block one. Maybe five will appear tomorrow," Mr Mao says.

You can listen to Weiliang Nie's radio documentary for the BBC World Service:

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/documentaries/2010/03/100316\\_chinas\\_firewall.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/documentaries/2010/03/100316_chinas_firewall.shtml)

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**AsiaNews - [www.asianews.it](http://www.asianews.it)**

**03/19/2010 02:21**

**CHINA – AFRICA**

### **African stories: where the Chinese put their life at risk to enrich Beijing**

Two men convicted of murdering Chinese workers are executed in Sudan. Seven Chinese fishermen are released after they were abducted in Cameroon. Through its companies, China is increasingly raising its profile in Africa, to exploit the continent's natural and human resources. However, more and more, the local population views this presence as a "foreign invasion" and turning against it.

Beijing (AsiaNews/Agencies) – Sudan executed two people convicted of killing four oil workers, two of them Chinese. Seven Chinese fishermen who were abducted off Cameroon's resource-rich Bakassi peninsula on 12 March were freed on Wednesday.

The two men who were executed were found guilty in 2004 of killing the workers and taking their vehicle in Heglig in Sudan's South Kordofan state. News agencies reporting the execution did not give further details about the incident; they only said the workers had been employed by a Chinese oil company.

China is one of the main partners of oil-rich Sudan, but in recent years, violence against Chinese workers has escalated. In October 2008, gunmen abducted nine Chinese oil workers, killing four.

In Cameroon, the seven fishermen taken hostage were freed last night, Chinese state-owned Xinhua news agency reported. The men, abducted on March 12 from two fishing boats, were travelling to Limbe. Their kidnappers were from a group calling itself the Africa Marine Commando and had demanded a ransom of US\$ 15,000 to US\$ 25,000. Their release was secured after days of negotiations.

Beijing is heavily involved in Africa. Its huge demand for raw materials means that it is willing to spend, no questions asked of how local governments use the money. Hence, it is prepared to do business with corrupt governments, willing selling off their nation's resources so that its leaders can get rich quick.

When Western governments have to deal with questionable governments, they ask for guarantees that the money will be spent to benefit the population and refuse to deal with governments accused of crimes against their own people, like that of Sudan, which buys weapons from China to use against its own population.

China is gaining a bigger foothold in the African continent, but it is also causing greater resentment against its own people, increasingly seen as the new colonisers.

In Zambia's Chambeshi region, Chinese firms have been accused of union busting and forcing their employees to work in unsafe conditions. In 2005, 51 miners died in a mining explosion. In 2006, Chinese supervisors and police shot at miners who were demanding better working conditions and better wages. In March 2008, miners staged a violent protest with police barely saving Chinese company officials from lynching.

In February 2007, rebels abducted 14 Chinese employees of the Chinese National Petroleum Company (and later released them) after they accused the company of helping a corrupt government steal local resources. In March 2007, two other Chinese employees were abducted. That same year, a Chinese engineer was killed in Kenya, and another wounded.

Anger is so widespread that in some countries like Zambia visiting Chinese dignitaries have had to curtail their public engagements to avoid popular protest.

In various countries, Beijing funds large-scale infrastructural development in exchange of natural resources; however, it usually requires that much of the construction be contracted out

to Chinese companies, which bring in their own technical staff and workers, relying on local manpower only for the most menial and underpaid work.

China is also flooding many countries with its low-cost goods, undermining local manufacturing. In places like South Africa, the textile sector is reeling under the burden of Chinese competition.

More importantly, resource development is often indiscriminate. In January 2008, Sierra Leone had to ban lumber exports because of the “indiscriminate plunder of the forests” by foreign companies, chiefly those from China.

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## **China drought leaves millions short of water**

**Wednesday, March 17 07:20 am - AFP**

Millions of people face drinking water shortages in southwestern China because of a once-a-century drought that has dried up rivers and threatens vast farmlands, state media reported Wednesday.

The drought has gripped huge areas of Guizhou, Yunnan, and Sichuan provinces, the Guangxi region, and the mega-city of Chongqing for months, with rainfall 60 percent below normal since September, the Global Times said.

Guizhou province has been particularly hard-hit, with 86 out of its 88 cities within the drought zone and more than 17 million people short of drinking water, the report said.

Millions of people also were said to be short of water in other provinces, according to various reports.

The Global Times said some rivers had dried up in parts of Guizhou and that local villagers in some areas were lining up to obtain emergency water supplies distributed by the government.

China is prone to extreme weather, and severe droughts are a regular occurrence throughout the country. However, the current water shortages reported in the southwest have been particularly acute.

Meteorological officials in Yunnan have said the drought was the worst in 100 years in some areas, the Global Times said.

The government announced last week that it had initiated hundreds of cloud-seeding operations in the region in recent months, using rockets fired into the sky or chemicals dropped from aircraft in a bid to induce rainfall.

However, Xinhua news agency last week quoted officials saying the efforts had so far been largely unsuccessful due to a lack of moisture in the skies.

Media reports also have said millions of livestock and huge farming areas were short of water.

Meteorologists have predicted the situation could worsen in coming months as hot and dry weather was expected to continue and water demand rises as farmers turn soon to their spring planting.

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**Asia Times Online**

**Greater China**

**Mar 17, 2010**

## **China's Panchen Lama enters political arena**

**By Saransh Sehgal**

DHARAMSALA, India - China's handpicked 11th Panchen Lama, born Gyaltzen Norbu in northern Tibet, made his political debut this month at the annual session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) in Beijing, appearing as a national committee member of the top political advisory body.

Observers expect the 20-year-old Panchen Lama will be named a vice chairman of the CPPCC within the next couple of years, though he was not, as expected, given the post this year. While the title is largely honorary, it is an important national leadership post similar to one his predecessor, the 10th Panchen Lama, held when he died in 1989.

Beijing hopes that with an elevated political status the 11th Panchen Lama will more effectively keep the the influence of the exiled Dalai Lama in check among Tibetans. Traditionally, the Panchen Lama is respected as the second-highest ranking leader in Tibetan Buddhism, second only to the Dalai Lama.

In Dharamsala, the Tibetan government in exile and exiled Tibetans insist that Gyaltzen Norbu is not the legitimate 11th Panchen Lama, since he was appointed by the Chinese government and is not acknowledged by the Dalai Lama as the reincarnation of the 10th Panchen Lama.

However, they are concerned that Beijing's elevation of his political profile could affects the choice of successor to the Dalai Lama, who is 74. In Tibetan Buddhism, the reincarnation of the Panchen Lama normally needs to be acknowledged by the Dalai Lama, and vice versa.

In 1995, the six-year-old boy Gendun Choekyi Nyima was named as the reincarnation of the Panchen Lama by the Dalai Lama, but he and his family disappeared soon after and have not been heard from since. The Tibetan community living in exile in north India say Chinese authorities are keeping him in detention.

Beijing's Panchen Lama was named a new member of the CPPCC's National Committee in late February. At the same time he was also elected the vice president of China's state-run Buddhist Association.

"I have shouldered the mission of safeguarding national unity and ethnic solidarity since I was enthroned," Gyaltzen Norbu told the official Xinhua news agency on March 4. "Now, such a sense of responsibility is becoming even stronger."

A slight man who wears thick glasses and traditional crimson robes, Gyaltzen Norbu was the youngest delegate at the CPPCC, which is made up of 2,200 business leaders, religious figures, academics and celebrities and advises the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

At the meeting, Norbu advised China's other religious figures to listen more closely to their communities. "People place great expectations on us. We will continue to do our best not to do any evil, to cultivate good, to purify our minds, and to help people from the roots up. We must do good rather than evil, on however humble a scale."

Norbu, whose parents are both members of the CCP, has been promoted by Beijing as the official face of Tibetan Buddhism in China. China has been raising the profile of its young Lama while stepping up its efforts to reduce the influence of the current Dalai Lama in Tibet, where he served as the God-King.

While the Dalai Lama has criticized the CCP's ethnic policies in Tibet, blaming the ruling party for the erosion of Tibetan culture and for curtailing religious freedoms, the Panchen Lama has been a strong supporter of party policy. He has begun to make more public appearances in Tibet alongside communist officials.

Norbu's appointment to the CPPCC does not change his role or give him any decision-making powers, but it does underscore the CCP's efforts to legitimize his position, say analysts.

"This is a pro-forma elevation for him to a titular role that does not amount to much in terms of actual decision-making or policy," Srikanth Kondapalli, chairman of the Center for East Asian Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, told the Hindu. "This could also be a move to placate the views of Tibetans, both in China and outside."

Hao Peng, vice chairman of the Tibetan Autonomous Region and therefore the official voice of the government, told AsiaNews that "the Panchen Lama's participation in social activities in China demonstrates the important role of the living Buddha in our world. Norbu is very

popular in Tibet, and we all are very happy for his appointment. I hope he can continue in this vein, showing love for the motherland."

However, Norbu rarely visits the Tashilunpo monastery in Tibet to which the Panchen Lama traditionally belongs. The young man spends most of his time in Beijing, studying and surrounded by the care and control of the CCP.

Despite this, Gyaltzen Norbu was not "elected" this year as a vice chairman of the CPPCC, as was widely predicted.

Elliot Sperling, an expert on Tibet issues from Indiana University's Central Eurasia Studies Center, told the South China Morning Post that the delay in the Panchen Lama's elevation hoped to avoid his rise seeming too precipitous.

The Panchen Lama has helped the CCP build influence among Tibetan Buddhists across the world by playing a key role in state-sponsored conferences like the World Buddhist Congress and making statements praising the government.

While he has not joined the government's campaign to vilify the Dalai Lama, observers say his new position as a member of the CPPCC means that he soon could. They speculate that he will start participating in press conferences on Tibet-related issues and travel around the world to canvass support for the government's point of view.

It will be interesting to see what message Norbu has for Tibetans in exile; the news of his political elevation was greeted with mistrust by the Tibetan communities living in north India. Some said it was a "gift" by Beijing to the Dalai Lama and Tibetans in exile to mark the 51st anniversary on March 10 of Uprising Day, a failed Tibetan revolt against Chinese rule in 1959.

During his annual address to mark the uprising, the Dalai Lama said the Chinese government was keeping "the monks and nuns [of Tibet] in prison-like conditions", and deliberately "annihilating Buddhism".

On the same day, young Tibetans protested at the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi. "There are no human rights in Tibet; it shows that Tibet is not part of China; we are a free country," said one of the demonstrators, who were carrying placards calling for the release of Gendun Choekyi Nyima, the Dalai Lama-endorsed Panchen Lama. "The 11th Panchen Lama of Tibet is the world's youngest political prisoner," said the banners. Nyima, aged six at the time he disappeared, would now be 14.

"The Chinese do not appear too intelligent; they hope that their appointed Panchen Lama will listen to them," Samdhong Rinpoche, prime minister of the Tibetan government in exile, told AsiaNews. "However, their puppet is a Tibetan and sooner or later his roots and heart will be manifest and all the indoctrination and grooming by the Chinese will be to no avail."

Thubten Samphel, a spokesman for the Tibetan government in exile, told Asia Times Online that the political elevation of Beijing's Panchen Lama was of no significance to the Tibetan people. "In the eyes of Tibetans he [Norbu] has no legitimacy. It's just an image-building exercise by Beijing. He is used as a tool by no fault of his own.

"The real reincarnation is inside China, but he has been captured. If the genuine Lama receives his rightful status then it is good. But China's appointed Lama will get no respect, maybe he is a fortunate boy but we cannot recognize him as the reincarnation of the 10th Panchen Lama. His rise will not affect so much; he is not able to live in his own monastery. This act is just for namesake and there would be no influencing. There is no respect from the monks - this gives a clear indication" said Thupten.

But Tibetans acknowledge that the rise of Panchen Lama could influence the selection of the next Dalai Lama. "Seeing the new post and rise of Beijing's Panchen Lama will alter the Tibetan people's view," said Thupten, adding that Panchen Lama carries extra spiritual weight. He said that while the selection of next Dalai Lama is the one of the main responsibilities of the Tibetan government in exile, the approval of high-ranking lamas in exile will also count.

"I wish the genuine Panchen Lama flees to India like the Dalai Lama and Karmapa Lama. Tibetan unity will be strong and above all Tibetan Buddhism will be saved" said Jamphel Sichoe, a young Tibetan.

China has shed some light on the life of the other Panchen Lama, denying he is in detention. The newly appointed governor of Tibet, Padma Choling, told media on the sidelines of the CPPCC that the young man is living in Tibet, where "his brothers and sisters are attending university or doing regular work".

He gave no hint as to the family's whereabouts but repeated the Communist Party's mantra: "As far as I know, his family and he are now living a very good life in Tibet. He and his family are reluctant to be disturbed. They want to live an ordinary life."

Padma Choling said that the candidate for Panchen Lama picked by the Dalai Lama was illegitimate and invalid, Xinhua reported. Beijing says it has the historical right to appoint leading Tibetan lamas.

How the issue of the Dalai Lama's succession will be resolved is likely to depend on relations between the Dalai Lama and the Chinese government. In this context, it will be interesting to see how Beijing's Panchen Lama shapes his own political future; and if he will exploit the international spotlight.

If an agreement can be reached before the current Dalai Lama dies, then the Tibetan government in exile could avoid a repeat of the the confusion and international opprobrium that has surrounded the Panchen Lama succession.

\* Saransh Sehgal is a contributor based in Dharamsala, India, who can be reached at [info@mello.com](mailto:info@mello.com).

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## **Foreign media hails outcome of China's NPC, CPPCC sessions**

**16:00, March 15, 2010**

**By People's Daily Online and contributed by Wen Xian, Li Wenzheng, Yu Qing and other PD resident overseas reporters**

As China's legislature and advisory body ended their annual sessions, media from overseas and foreign experts and scholars alike have highly commended third annual sessions of the 11th National People's Congress (NPC) and the 11th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). Meanwhile, they highlight a positive message Premier Wen Jiabao released during his press conference at the closing session of China's NPC on Sunday.

In an interview with People's Daily reporters, Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, Secretary General of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), said on Sunday that the NPC and CPPCC 2010 sessions have reaped a lot of significant outcome, which would indicate the direction of China's future development and provide a policy support to help the Chinese government to solve practical issues it is currently facing, so as to obtain the sustainable development of Chinese economy.

The "Millennium Newspaper" in Mexico has reported that the Chinese government cites the maintenance of economic stability as a most crucial task for the coming year. China's greatest challenge in the economic field, however, is to maintain a stable and relatively fast (economic) growth after the eruption of global financial crisis, said a visiting professor of international strategic issues from Brazil's supreme military academy and director of China-Asia Pacific Institute.

Chinese leaders take precautions to speed up transforming the mode of economic development, enhance the environmental protection, develop the low-carbon economy and narrow the urban-rural gap, which is conducive to China's sustainable economic growth and the eradication of main obstacles along the road of sustainable development.

"China Business Daily" in the U.S. noted in a commentary on the in-depth reporting page that China's annual NPC and CPPCC sessions have drawn global attention. The Chinese government reaffirms that it would unswervingly push forward the reform and further expand

the opening-up, so that the world has once again felt the nation's firm resolve to open itself further to the outside world.

Mainstream media overseas have reported in their prime time the Chinese Premier's Sunday press conference. Reuter news agency, for example, has the news reports titled that Premier Wen says China would maintain the currency stability, and its stories center around the Reminbi (RMB) exchange rate, the world economy, China's stabilized pick-up, the trade issue and other related topics to quote Wen's replies to reporters' queries.

In its reports, the Associated Press (AP) stresses the latest sign of China's greater government vigilance on global financial crisis and efforts of expanding the hard-won economic recovery so as to stabilize the situation and to prevent repetitious economic development with an indication that economic development remain the focus of attention in the country.

China will maintain a smoother, faster economic growth and stimulus policy measures, says the Agence france-presse (AFP) in a signed article, and Beijing would not cede to foreign pressure to boost the value of its currency.

Meanwhile, Russia's Information Agency Novosti (or RIA) quoted Premier Wen as saying that "We oppose mutual accusation between countries, and even using coercion to force a country to raise its exchange rate, as doing so is not conducive or favorable to the reform on the RMB exchange rate.

Kyodo News in Japan has quoted Premier Wen as saying that the RMB yuan is currently not undervalued, and stressing that the RMB exchange rate would basically be maintained in the future, and Japan's NHK reported that Premier Wen highlighted the attainment of the structural adjustment of China's economy, the change of economic development mode and the efforts to contain inflation.

Agencia EFE, a national news agency in Spain, also reported that the Chinese government has sought to conduct more contacts or engagement with overseas investors, and China would continue its policy of opening-up, and this third largest global economy would welcome foreign companies and high-tech firms in particular.

Mohan Guruswamy, president of the center for policy alternatives, New Dehhi, told PD resident reporters in India that Premier Wen underscored the determination of the Chinese government to alter China's economic development mode and set the long-term direction for sustained development of Chinese economy.

Mr. Keynes, the president of Media Water Global based in the capital city of Ottawa, Canada, who had come from agriculture areas in Western Canada, acknowledged that Premier Wen voiced his deep concerns and great interest in the production and living conditions of Chinese farmers at the Sunday press conference. And he also expressed the belief that China, as

Premier Wen stated clearly, has long resolved to gradually eradicate the rich-poor gap and seek the common prosperity.

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## **South China Morning Post**

### **Beijing tightens rules on foreign funding of NGOs**

**Verna Yu**

**Mar 12, 2010**

The central government has tightened restrictions on overseas donations to independent domestic non-governmental organisations in a move that experts and NGO workers fear will threaten the survival of the mainland's fledgling civil society.

Under regulations that came into effect this month, independent NGOs that accept donations from overseas donors face more scrutiny than ever.

The central government refuses to allow independent NGOs to register as non-profit organisations, so most are forced to register as companies and are liable to pay tax.

But now the State Administration of Foreign Exchange is requiring NGOs to meet a new set of conditions, among them the presentation of certificates of registration of the overseas donor organisations abroad and a notarised donation agreement.

Religious groups are also required to obtain approval from the authorities before accepting donations worth more than 1 million yuan (HK\$1.13 million).

NGOs connected to the government are exempted from the rules.

The move has sparked outrage among independent grass-roots NGO workers, who fear it is the latest step by the government to restrict their work.

"Obviously this is targeting funding [from abroad] for independent NGOs," said Wan Yanhai, head of outspoken Aids organisation Aizhixing. "This gives the government even more control. The new policy is a weapon that targets NGOs, it's a gun in their hand."

The central government increasingly realises the value of NGOs' community work but also distrusts their motives, especially those that receive funding from abroad.

The closure last July of Beijing-based civil rights group Open Constitution Initiative, which received grants from the Yale University law school, is still fresh in many NGO workers' memories. The non-profit group annoyed the government with a series of high-profile cases,

including providing legal aid to victims of tainted baby milk formula. Apart from being fined 1.4 million yuan for tax violations, its founder Xu Zhiyong was detained for weeks.

Wan said grass-roots NGOs already faced a plethora of bureaucratic procedures and were subject to scrutiny from various government departments including tax, commerce and state security authorities.

Wan has been detained and questioned from time to time over his projects. "This is very upsetting ... I'm prepared to close any time," Wan said. "I've worked hard for 16 years in this area and now I realise not only are they not grateful, they actually want to do away with us."

Although the new rules do not apply directly to international groups, the move nonetheless signals a further restriction on NGOs' overall operating environment. Last month, a notice attributed to the Ministry of Education appeared on the websites of several mainland universities saying Oxfam Hong Kong was an organisation with "ulterior motives".

NGO workers say the bureaucracy involved under the new rules is unworkable and fear funding will be severely delayed or cease altogether because of the procedure's complexity.

"If the government wants to seriously implement this rule, there will be big problems because many organisations might not be able to access their funding," independent NGO researcher Fu Tao said.

He said one NGO tried to get a donor's agreement notarised but was told the overseas donor organisation had to be present on the mainland to sign a document to prove the authenticity of the donation.

Deng Guosheng, an associate professor at Tsinghua University, said grass-roots NGOs that received funding from overseas had been looked on with suspicion in recent years, especially after the "colour revolutions" in former Soviet states.

"The government is worried about a colour revolution," he said. "They are quite cautious about anti-China forces that are giving donations, but in the process they might have gone a bit overboard."

The head of a workers' rights NGO who declined to be named said the government's focus in the foreseeable future would be on social stability, fuelling its suspicions of the motives of NGOs funded by foreigners.

"If you do what they don't like, they can use this rule to investigate you at any time," he said.

While the government may not intend to stifle the non-profit sector, the fact that it feels that there is a continual need to regulate its funding and activities means the road ahead will be a lot harder for NGOs, analysts say.

"Its paternalism," said Nick Young, former editor of the English-language China Development Briefing, which was forced to close under government pressure in 2007. "They want the children to have certain freedoms, but only if they use them in the right way."

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## **China vows to improve social safety net**

**By CHRISTOPHER BODEEN, Associated Press Writer**

**Tuesday, March 9, 2010**

BEIJING, China (AP) -- China's top lawmaker said Tuesday that legislative priorities this year would be to improve social security and promote more equitable economic development, but he rejected calls to open up the political system.

Uneven economic growth, skyrocketing home prices, limited and expensive medical care, and sparse pension plans have raised huge concerns in China about social stability and provoked widespread discontent.

"China is in an important period of strategic opportunities for its economic and social development as well as a period of serious social problems," Wu Bangguo told the legislature, or National People's Congress, whose annual session ends Sunday.

He said this presented "arduous and formidable" tasks in promoting reform, development and stability.

Delegates would put the final touches on a draft social security law and make adjustments to the legal system to "dispel the people's worries and better maintain social harmony and stability," Wu said in his address at the Great Hall of the People in central Beijing.

The law broadly aims to establish a safety net of pension, health care and unemployment benefits, provide free primary and secondary education, and assist the migration of rural residents to cities.

Wu gave no details of the law, but the changes are believed to include more support for lower-income Chinese, many who have been left behind by China's rapid economic growth over the last three decades.

Wu is chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress and the ruling Communist Party's second-highest ranking official. His speech comes midway through the legislative session. Most of the business of the congress is handed by a standing committee that meets year-round.

The nearly 3,000 delegates meet once a year in full session to approve decisions already made at the top levels of the Communist Party. Wu, despite some calls for reforms to strengthen the congress's powers, indicated there would be no changes toward a more open system.

The congress has "reached a thorough understanding of the essential differences between our country's system of People's Congresses and Western capitalist countries' systems of political power," he said.

While such statements are routine in speeches to the legislature, Wu's language was far milder than last year, when the party was beating back a bold call for sweeping political reform known as "Charter '08" that drew considerable attention among intellectuals and on the Internet.

More than one year later, the charter's most illustrious signatory, Liu Xiaobo, is in prison serving an 11-year sentence for incitement to subvert state power. Others who signed have been threatened and intimidated into silence, along with activists for religious and ethnic minority rights.

The crackdown's apparent success has left the leadership confident enough to tone down the tough rhetoric, which alienates many better-educated and cosmopolitan Chinese.

Wu said the congress would focus on fighting climate change and improving the functions of the government.

In particular, Wu said the congress will pay close attention to efforts to accelerate economic and social development in Tibet, the vast western region of Xinjiang and other ethnic minority areas.

Tibet was hit by violent anti-government riots two years ago, and ethnic riots in July left nearly 200 dead in the Xinjiang capital of Urumqi.

China's rulers are also pouring money into rural areas. The urban-rural wealth gap has widened in recent years and countryside residents earn incomes that are on average just one-third of urban ones. Schools, hospitals, recreational facilities and government services lag far behind those in the cities.

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## **China warns again against Hong Kong democracy push**

**By MIN LEE Associated Press Writer © 2010 The Associated Press  
March 7, 2010, 10:24AM**

HONG KONG — China has warned that a plan by pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong to use a special election as a de facto referendum on democratic reform is a threat to stability in the former British colony.

While Hong Kong returned to Chinese rule in 1997, it maintains a separate political system and enjoys Western-style civil liberties typically denied on the mainland. But Beijing has continued to deny full democracy. Hong Kong's leader is chosen by an 800-member committee stacked with pro-China figures and its legislature is half elected, half picked by special interest groups.

Pro-democracy activists have argued for years that the wealthy financial hub of 7 million people is mature enough to choose its own leaders. In their latest campaign, five opposition legislators — one from each of Hong Kong's five major electoral districts — resigned in January, triggering a special election. Opposition parties plan to field candidates in the by-election, hoping to turn the territory-wide contests into a de facto referendum on democratic reform.

"There are political groups that have launched the so-called 'five district referendum campaign,' even proposing sensational and extreme slogans like 'civic uprising' and 'liberating Hong Kong,'" Peng Qinghua, the head of China's liaison office in Hong Kong, said when he met with Hong Kong delegates on the sidelines of the annual meeting of China's parliament in Beijing on Saturday.

"This is a total violation of mainstream public opinion that wants stability, harmony and development," Peng said. His comments were broadcast on Hong Kong television.

In a more veiled criticism, speaking to the Hong Kong delegates on Sunday, Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping urged locals to "promote the gradual development of Hong Kong's political system together by communicating rationally and discussing the matter with a practical mindset," according to Peng. The meeting was closed to the media.

China first lashed out at the referendum campaign in a statement in January, calling it a challenge to its authority. Hong Kong's pro-Beijing parties have said they will boycott the May 16 elections.

Former Hong Kong legislator Rita Fan, now a member of the National People's Congress Standing Committee, told reporters Saturday that the campaign was a "farce" and a waste of taxpayer dollars. The Hong Kong government estimates the election will cost 159 million Hong Kong dollars (\$20.5 million).

The main spokeswoman for the referendum campaign said democratic reform isn't a radical idea.

"This moderate issue is the desire of most Hong Kongers. If the central government is sincere about implementing genuine universal suffrage in Hong Kong, what does it have to fear in public opinion?" pro-democracy legislator Audrey Eu said in a statement.

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## **South China Morning Post**

### **Education spending target set for 2012**

#### **Mainland promises to cut bureaucracy**

**Raymond Li**

**Mar 01, 2010**

The mainland has set 2012 as the new deadline for meeting an international education expenditure benchmark that requires 4 per cent of gross domestic product to be spent on schooling.

It is a step towards reforming a system that has been increasingly dogged by bureaucratic corruption and widening inequality.

An interdepartmental work group under the State Council yesterday released the National Middle and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Blueprint, a guideline document to cover the next 10 years, for public consultation.

The blueprint reaffirms a government pledge to reach the internationally accepted benchmark for developing countries that ensures adequate school funding.

China's spending on education rose to 3.48 per cent of GDP in 2008 from 3.32 per cent a year earlier. The central government originally set its sights on 2000 as the year when it would achieve its 4 per cent expenditure target but failed to meet it.

Chinese universities had amassed 200.1 billion yuan in debts by the end of 2005, according to a 2007 government report, and some estimates say total outstanding loans for mainland universities could reach 450 billion yuan (HK\$511 billion). Many of them have virtually gone broke because of reckless borrowing.

Under an arrangement between the central government and regional authorities, low-level authorities were required to provide about 90 per cent of education funding, but they have been more inclined to invest in infrastructure because that shows off their achievements better and brings promotions within the Communist Party. Professor Xiong Bingqi, deputy

director of 21st Century Education Development Research Institute, said meeting the 4 per cent target from a statistical standpoint was no problem.

"But as a longer-term blueprint, the document should spell out targets for not just the first two years," he added. "Another question the blueprint fails to address is whether the current spending level is adequate."

Xiong said the government had to raise the target for education spending to at least 4.5 per cent of GDP by 2020 to improve the level of education, tackle inequality and offer free schooling for more years, not to mention addressing the debts mainland schools had amassed over the years. The blueprint, which has been worked on since September 2008, has emphasised the role of the school system in helping make the country "a global power" in terms of its talent pool. Under the blueprint, the work group would also initiate pilot projects in 10 areas to tackle inequality in access to basic education, and stop the increasing bureaucracy in school governance, particularly at universities. Professors are increasingly pressured by government officials, who wield the power in deciding where resources go.

Xiong said authorities had made it part of the agenda to address bureaucracy at universities by their pledge to explore ways to establish a modern university system, in which professors get more say in school governance to balance parallel governing bodies such as boards of governors and academic committees.

But the blueprint had set no specific target in this regard and "if it [weeding out school bureaucracy] is only treated as a gradual experiment, it will become something unattainable", Xiong said.

Dr Cheng Fangping , a research fellow at the China National Institute for Educational Research, said the blueprint delivered a very positive message as it was much more issue-driven, and the public consultation showed a sense of sincerity.

Citing the country's failure to introduce a School Law in the past three decades, which he said would bring more equal access to quality education in China, Cheng warned that any reform would come down to how effectively authorities restrict vested interests. Some prestigious schools in urban areas have focused on rich and powerful families to the disadvantage of students from less privileged families.