

Human RIGHTS UPDATES – JULY 2010

8 Updates

The New York Times

July 24, 2010

China Faces Criticism for Sentence of Journalist

By EDWARD WONG

BEIJING — Human rights groups are strongly criticizing the Chinese government for imposing a harsh prison sentence Friday on an ethnic Uighur journalist and intellectual who gave an interview to a Hong Kong news publication last August, just weeks after deadly ethnic rioting shook the western region of Xinjiang.

The intellectual, Gheyret Niyaz, was sentenced to 15 years in prison for endangering state security, a vague charge that is often used by officials to lock up people they deem political threats. The sentence was especially severe given that Mr. Niyaz was not accused of taking part in the ethnic rioting. Other Chinese intellectuals have recently been slapped with similarly severe sentences: Last December, Liu Xiaobo, a main author of a pro-democracy manifesto called Charter 08, was sentenced to 11 years.

Mr. Niyaz, 51, holds what are considered moderate political views — he has not, for example, advocated for Xinjiang independence, a position held by some Uighurs, a Turkic-speaking people that is the largest ethnic group in Xinjiang. Many of them resent the policies of the Chinese government, which is dominated by ethnic Han, saying that those policies are diluting the Uighur culture and leading to their economic disenfranchisement.

A graduate of Minzu University of China in Beijing, Mr. Niyaz advocates instead for greater exchange between Uighurs and Han. He helped edit a Web site called Uighur Online, started by Ilham Tohti, a prominent Uighur economist who was detained for more than two months last summer.

On July 5, 2009, the deadliest ethnic rioting in China in decades broke out in Xinjiang's capital, Urumqi, after Han security forces tried to suppress a Uighur protest. Uighurs turned on Han civilians and burned stores and residences. At least 197 people were killed and 1,600 injured, most of them Han civilians, the Chinese government said. Uighur advocacy groups say security forces beat, shot and detained an unknown number of Uighurs.

On Aug. 2, 2009, Mr. Niyaz gave an interview to Yazhou Zhoukan, or Asia Weekly, a Hong Kong news publication, that provided the grist for the charge against him.

Mr. Niyaz said that he had warned officials in Xinjiang the day before the July 5 rioting of signs that violence could soon erupt in Urumqi, but that his warnings were ignored. Immediately after the rioting, some of Mr. Niyaz's warnings were discussed on the Internet and circulated through Twitter.

“Niyaz’s draconian prison sentence raises serious concern about the authorities’ respect for freedom of expression, and capacity and commitment to protect fundamental rights and freedoms,” the executive director of Human Rights Watch in China, Sharon Hom, said in a written statement.

The Uyghur American Association, based in Washington, said the 15-year sentence “represents the Chinese government’s policy of no tolerance for any type of Uyghur dissent, as well as the government’s campaign to tightly control the flow of information and stem public criticism of official policy.”

* This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: July 25, 2010

An earlier version of this article misstated the length of the sentence for Liu Xiaobo.

Amnesty International

China sentences Uighur journalist to 15-year prison term Hairat Niyaz was arrested because he had 'given too many interviews'

Hairat Niyaz was arrested because he had 'given too many interviews'

© Uighur on-line

23 July 2010

Amnesty International has condemned a 15-year prison sentence reportedly imposed on a Uighur journalist who warned Chinese authorities over potential ethnic violence in Xinjiang province on the eve of the July 2009 riots.

Hairat (also known as Hailaite or Gheyret) Niyaz was reportedly tried and convicted on state security charges by a court in Xinjiang on Friday.

According to reports, prosecutors relied on essays he had written prior to the July 2009 riots in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang, and interviews he gave to Hong Kong media after the violence.

"Fifteen years imprisonment is an outrageous punishment for journalism that highlighted the longstanding grievances of the Uighur people," said Catherine Baber, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for the Asia-Pacific Programme.

"Adding to this outrage is the fact that Hairat Niyaz, in his words as an 'ordinary person of conscience', had urged the authorities to take emergency measures to prevent ethnic violence."

Hairat Niyaz was arrested in October 2009, because, according to police, he had now "given too many interviews".

In these interviews, Hairat Niyaz highlighted mounting grievances against the implementation of the so-called "bilingual" education policy that had led to many Uighur teachers being laid off.

He spoke about mounting local resentment of employment initiatives sending young Uighurs, mainly women, to work in Southern Chinese factories.

"Hairat Niyaz is a prisoner of conscience and should be released immediately," said Catherine Baber.

At his trial Hairat Niyaz was denied the right to be represented by a lawyer of his own choosing, and only one family member, his wife, was permitted to attend the proceedings.

During the trial he insisted that he had broken no laws and was only carrying out his duty as a citizen and journalist.

Hairat Niyaz is an established journalist and administrator of Uighurbiz, one of the websites accused of promoting the July unrest. He had been a senior journalist with the Xinjiang Economic Daily, Chief Editorial Director of Xinjiang Legal Daily, and Deputy Director of the Legal Magazine Fazhi Zongheng.

"Hairat Niyaz's testimony and those of other witnesses to the unrest must be openly investigated if we are to get to the truth of what happened in July 2009 in Xinjiang," said Catherine Baber.

Amnesty International has called for an independent investigation into the violence of July 2009, including into what and who caused the violence, how many people died, and who killed them.

July 21, 2010

China: Witnesses Lift Veil on Abuses by Security Forces in Tibet Scale and Severity of Violations Warrants International Investigation

(New York) - Eyewitness accounts confirm that Chinese security forces used disproportionate force and acted with deliberate brutality during and after unprecedented Tibetan protests beginning on March 10, 2008, Human Rights Watch said in a new report released today. Many violations continue today, including disappearances, wrongful convictions and imprisonment, persecution of families, and the targeting of Tibetans suspected of sympathizing with the protest movement.

The 73-page report, "'I Saw It with My Own Eyes': Abuses by Security Forces in Tibet, 2008-2010," is based on more than 200 interviews with Tibetan refugees and visitors conducted immediately after they left China, as well as fresh, not previously reported, official Chinese sources. The report details, through eyewitness testimonies, a broad range of abuses committed by security forces both during and after protest incidents, including using disproportionate force in breaking up protests, proceeding to large-scale arbitrary arrests, brutalizing detainees, and torturing suspects in custody.

"Dozens of eyewitness testimonies and the government's own sources show clearly the official willingness to use lethal force against unarmed protestors," said Sophie Richardson, Asia advocacy director at Human Rights Watch. "This report decisively refutes the Chinese government's claim that it handled the protests in line with international standards and domestic laws."

The report also suggests that contrary to government claims, Chinese security forces opened fire indiscriminately on demonstrators in at least four separate incidents, including in one area of downtown Lhasa on March 14.

In order to avoid external or independent scrutiny of the security operations, the Chinese authorities effectively locked down the entire Tibetan plateau and dispatched massive numbers of troops across all Tibetan-inhabited areas. It expelled journalists and foreign observers, restricted travel to and within the region, cut or monitored telecommunications and internet, and arrested anyone suspected of reporting on the crackdown. The government has rejected all calls for independent investigations into the protests, including those from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and UN special rapporteurs.

Human Rights Watch has condemned violence committed by Tibetans as well as by security forces. In Lhasa alone, 21 people were killed and several hundred injured during the March 14-15 time period in 2008, according to government figures. But international legal standards limit the use of force by states to that which is strictly necessary in order to protect life or to apprehend perpetrators of violent crimes. In multiple incidents, eyewitness testimonies show

that Chinese forces acted in contravention of these standards and broke international law - including prohibitions against disproportionate use of force, torture, and arbitrary detention, as well as the right to peaceful assembly - despite government claims to the contrary.

From the outset of the protests, the Chinese government consistently stated that it would handle all cases arising from the protests in an impartial manner and "according to law." But the report offers a very different picture: one in which thousands of demonstrators and ordinary Tibetans were arrested and detained without due process and without regard to legal procedures; where the state provided no accountability as to the whereabouts of detainees; and where a politicized judiciary controlled by party authorities conducted proceedings in which defendants had virtually no due process.

Human Rights Watch said that the report's finding showed that the Chinese government urgently needs to investigate the protests and their aftermath, and open the region to media and international monitors. The Chinese authorities also need to examine the conduct of its security forces, which eyewitnesses consistently say used disproportionate force; deliberately brutalized and mistreated Tibetans detained for suspected involvement in the unrest; and deprived detainees of minimum guarantees of due process of law, including formal notification of where, or why, they were held.

"The need for an international investigation into the situation in Tibet is as great as ever," Richardson said. "Abuses by security forces are unlikely to quell, and may even aggravate, the longstanding grievances that prompted the protests in the first place."

Background

In early March 2008, the suppression by Chinese security forces of a string of peaceful protests by Tibetan monks from major monasteries in and around Lhasa led to a severe breakdown of public order in the capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region of China on March 14.

As massive security reinforcements from neighboring provinces poured into the area and the government threatened a major crackdown, an unprecedented wave of protests erupted across the Tibetan plateau. Official reports acknowledged over 150 incidents in the first two weeks, and occasional isolated protests continued to be reported over many months.

In response to this most sustained episode of Tibetan unrest in decades, the Chinese government launched largest security operations in the country since the crackdown of the Tiananmen movement in 1989.

Yet the Chinese government has yet to explain the precise circumstances that led to dozens of clashes between protesters and police. It has not addressed how its security forces handled protesters - including allegedly using lethal force and abandoning Lhasa's city-center to protesters and looters for several hours on March 14. Nor has the Chinese government revealed the fate of hundreds of Tibetans arrested during the protests, or disclosed how many

Tibetans have been detained, sentenced, held pending trial, or sentenced to extrajudicial forms of detention.

Testimonies from "'I Saw It with My Own Eyes': Abuses by Security Forces in Tibet, 2008-2010":

"They were firing straight at people. They were coming from the direction of Jiangu Lu firing at any Tibetans they saw, and many people had been killed."

- Pema Lhakyi (not her real name,) a 24-year -old Lhasa resident.

"She was shot by a single bullet in the head. Local people managed to take her body home to the village, which is about five kilometers from Tongkor monastery."

- Sonam Tenzin (not his real name), a 27-year-old monk from Tongkor monastery.

"At first, the soldiers fired in front of the crowd a few times to scare them, but the crowd thought they would not dare to actually fire and continued crowding inside the compound. At that point, the soldiers started to fire."

- Tenpa Trinle (not his real name), a 26-year-old monk from Seda county.

"The first thing I saw was a lot of soldiers and police beating the crowd with electric batons. Groups of four or five soldiers were arresting crowd members one by one and putting them in a truck."

- Dorje Tso (not his real name) 55-year-old resident from Tongren.

"They burst in, breaking the doors and gates of the colleges and dormitories. The soldiers were armed and equipped with hatchets and hammers, as well as torches, handcuffs and wire ropes. On entering monks' rooms they would first ask for phones, which were systematically confiscated ... Some of the arrested monks were handcuffed; others tied up with wire ropes ... They ordered us to move very fast, and if we didn't, they'd hit us. Several hundred monks were taken away."

- Jampa Lhaga (not his real name), a former Drepung monk in Lhasa.

"None of the means ... adopted there have exceeded the constitutional rights of the armed forces or international law."

- Wu Shuangzhan, Commander of the People's Armed Police, March 16, 2008.

"We were beaten very badly. The guards used clubs and sticks to beat us ... They hit us mostly on the lower body. This lasted two days. Then we were taken to Gutsa prison in Lhasa. There, the police interrogated us non-stop for two whole days and nights. They were beating us, taking turns to conduct the interrogation ..."

- Rinchen Namgyal (not his real name), a 33-year-old monk from Ganden monastery.

"Up to 30 people were crowded in cells of three or four square meters. There was no space to sit down so detainees had to stand most of the day and night. The cells had no toilets but

prisoners were not taken out and had to relieve themselves in the cell. They were given one bowl of rice congee a day. Many were subjected to beatings."

- Pasang Choepel (not his real name), a former detainee from Aba.

"The Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture Intermediate People's Court held that the defendant Dorje Kandrup [Ch. Duoji Kangzhu] wrote pamphlets calling for Tibetan independence, threw them on important roads of Ganzi County, brazenly inciting to split the country and destroy national unity, and that her actions amounted to the crime of inciting separatism.

- Public notice of Ganzi prefecture's Political and Legal Committee announcing the 6-year imprisonment verdict of Dorje Kandrup.

"The beatings continued in the courtyard. The PAP soldiers were using belts and the butt of their guns ... They were kicking him on the ground, and he was bleeding a lot—there was so much blood. Then they left him just lying on the ground, motionless ... I saw it with my own eyes."

- Lhundrup Dorje (not his real name), a resident from Lhasa.

* Press release also available in Chinese: <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/07/21>

* The 73-page report, "'I Saw It with My Own Eyes': Abuses by Security Forces in Tibet, 2008-2010:

<http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2010/07/22/i-saw-it-my-own-eyes-0>

Lawyers' Licenses Withheld

2010-07-18

Chinese authorities use the annual license inspection to intimidate lawyers.

HONG KONG—Chinese authorities have refused to renew the professional licenses of several prominent rights lawyers in this year's inspection. Other rights lawyers were forced to clear extra hurdles before passing the annual inspection, which has been criticized as a mechanism to control what cases lawyers represent.

Prominent rights lawyer Jiang Tianyong, whose license was not renewed this year for the second time, told RFA, "Now some new conditions are appearing. It seems that ... before allowing them to pass they requested many lawyers write various guarantees—not to take on certain cases, not to receive interviews, etc."

Other rights lawyers who did not pass included Wen Haibo, Zhang Lihui, Tong Chaoping, Yang Huiwen, and Li Jinsong, according to a statement from the Hong Kong-based China Human Rights Lawyers Concern Group on Friday.

The inspection process, which is conducted by the local lawyers associations, examines individual lawyers' work over the past year and requires lawyers to register, pay a fee, and receive approval for renewal of their licenses. This year's inspection ended on Thursday.

When lawyers lose their licenses in the inspection, the cases they currently represent are unable to proceed.

The process, for which the deadline was postponed this year to July 15 from the original date in May, has been criticized as a mechanism for controlling individual lawyer's behavior and preventing them from taking on sensitive cases.

Jiang Tianyong had represented sensitive cases including the defense of Tibet protesters and Falun Gong members. Jiang, who has testified in the U.S. Congress on rule of law issues in China, said Chinese Justice Bureau authorities refused to even accept his application materials for the annual inspection.

Another rights lawyer, Wen Haibo, who had worked with the disappeared lawyer Gao Zhisheng, also failed the inspection for the second year in a row.

"I went to the relevant department for the inspection but they said that because I didn't pass last year, if I wanted to recover [my license] then I'd have to apply again for certification. But because I'm not from Beijing, it is difficult to reapply," he said.

Pressure on Law Firms

"Now the authorities' main methods are to go through the law firm to exert pressure," Wen said.

Jiang said, "They put a lot of requirements on law firms, even making lawyers make strict promises, and at the same time making them pay guarantee deposits. But as soon as they say they are going to do a certain case, this insurance money disappears."

One lawyer who did not want to be publicly identified told RFA that the authorities went through the law firm where he works to put pressure on him, requiring him to promise not to represent cases that the authorities consider sensitive, and only after that gave him his license.

The law firm also required him to give a 10,000 RMB deposit, to be used as punishment if he breaks his promise.

He said the move was illegal and unreasonable, but he had no choice but to accept it.

Other Obstacles

Other rights lawyers did not fail the inspection but passed only after much difficulty or after facing extra conditions for approval. Li Xiongbing, Li Heping, and Li Jinglin were only able to pass the inspection a few days before the deadline, according to the China Human Rights Lawyers Concern Group.

Chang Boyang, a rights lawyer from Henan, told RFA that he passed this year's review and was allowed to keep his license, but only after judicial administrative authorities stamped the words "failed" on his license.

"They said it was because I represented a Falun Gong case and didn't report it," Chang said.

Chang said there was no provision in the law requiring lawyers to report their taking on sensitive cases. "It's something they made up themselves," he said.

Chang explained that having the stamp on his license does not affect his ability to practice, but does lead to misunderstandings because others do not know this.

Chang had previously represented cases such as those of victims of a tainted milk scandal and Tibetan filmmaker Dhondup Wangchen.

In May of this year, he collected a hundred lawyers' signatures on a petition against the practice of using mental illness as an excuse to illegally detain activists and put them under psychiatric care.

Tang Jitian, another prominent rights lawyer, commented on Chang's situation saying, "Strictly speaking, the Justice bureau doesn't have the right to put stamps on law licenses. But nevertheless lawyers are now under a special situation and no one dares speak out, much less resist this illegal practice."

Tang Jitian was disbarred earlier this year.

In May 2009, at the end of last year's inspection, the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Justice refused to renew the licenses of over 50 lawyers. One week later, Beijing authorities closed down the Open Constitution Initiative, a legal research center.

* Original reporting by Xin Yu for RFA's Mandarin service and by Ji Lisi for RFA's Cantonese service. Mandarin service director: Jennifer Chou. Cantonese service director: Shiny Li. Translated and written for the Web in English by Rachel Vandenbrink.

China must halt harassment and censorship of HIV/AIDS activists

9 July 2010

Chinese security forces last night cancelled a documentary screening by an HIV/AIDS education group, which Amnesty International is strongly criticising as part of the ongoing harassment of peaceful public health educators.

“Harassing and curtailing HIV/AIDS activism in China poses a real threat to effective HIV/AIDS prevention, with dire consequences for the right to health,” said Catherine Baber, Amnesty International’s Asia-Pacific Deputy Director.

China’s internal security police questioned staff of the Beijing HIV/AIDS education NGO Aizhixing Institute of Health Education on 7 July and instructed them to cancel the show planned for 8 July. The film screening did not go ahead and the Aizhixing event-organiser has resigned from coordinating the event.

Aizhixing staff have been so frequently subjected to questioning and harassment that the director Wan Yanhai left China in May 2010 to avoid constant police interrogations and detentions. The organization’s offices have been subjected to an endless series of government checks on their bank accounts, licenses, and fire safety, with the aim of disrupting work and intimidating staff.

On 7 July, police also questioned and intimidated the documentary film-maker, and the subject of the documentary, a 23-year-old university graduate called Tian Xi living with HIV/AIDS.

Documentary-maker Laohu Miao was warned by police that the film could threaten social stability by arousing audience emotion. Laohu Miao, a pen-name meaning 'Tiger Temple', is a well known blogger and tweeter on human rights issues, with the twitter handle @24hour.

Police warned Tian Xi, the documentary-subject, against taking part in any public protest on HIV/AIDS issues. Tian Xi was infected at the age of nine through a blood transfusion. The documentary showed him as a positive example of a person living their life with HIV/AIDS. Tian Xi has been active in calls for compensation for HIV/AIDS patients infected when receiving healthcare, and for hospitals to address medical malpractice.

Aizhixing is a pun on the Chinese term for HIV/AIDS ‘Aizibing’, replacing the word ‘illness’ with ‘action’. The organization has lobbied the Chinese government to review HIV/AIDS policies and resource use, for example to provide better care to HIV/AIDS patients, and provide accountability for people infected through medical malpractice and blood transfusions.

Amnesty International

New testimonies reinforce call for China to investigate Xinjiang riots Eyewitnesses said that the peaceful protest was met with violence by security forces

2 July 2010

Amnesty International has urged the Chinese government to launch an independent investigation into last year's riots in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, after new testimony obtained by the organization has cast further doubt on the official version of events.

A new report, "Justice, justice": The July 2009 Protests in Xinjiang, China includes newly gathered testimonies from Uighurs who fled China after the unrest, which centred on Xinjiang's capital, Urumqi.

Interviewees described unnecessary or excessive use of force, mass arrests, enforced disappearances, and torture and ill-treatment in detention that occurred on 5 July 2009 and during the ensuing government crackdown.

"The official account leaves too many questions unanswered. How many people really died, who killed them, how did it happen, and why?" said Catherine Baber, Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific Deputy Director.

Ahead of the 5 July anniversary, security in Xinjiang has been tightened, with reports of restrictions on freedom of movement and expression, and on Uighur community organizations.

"Instead of stifling inquiry, blaming outside agitators and generating fear, the Chinese government should use the anniversary to launch a proper investigation, including into the Uighur community's long-simmering grievances that contributed to the unrest," said Catherine Baber.

Eyewitnesses to the 5 July events confirmed that the protest against government inaction in the face of killings of Uighur factory workers in southern China started peacefully, but was met with violence by security forces. One 29-year-old woman from Urumqi said:

"...some 20 military vehicles arrived. The security forces carried automatic rifles and started to push the demonstrators. A woman walked towards them. A policeman shot her. She died. It was shocking, and I was very frightened. Everything then became chaotic."

Rioting erupted later in the evening, particularly in the southern, Uighur, part of the city, resulting in numerous deaths and injuries. Chinese officials said that 197 people died in the violence on 5 July. Of the killed, 156 were described as "innocent people" who included 134 ethnic Han Chinese, 11 Hui, 10 Uighurs and one Manchurian.

A 22 year-old male eyewitness described the chaos and violence in Urumqi:

"At about 8pm [on 5 July], a group of Uighurs went past our house towards the south, smashing cars and other property. Then, about 30 minutes later there was another group of Uighurs. They were running, the army was behind them. The army shot at them as they fled, in the back. I think maybe three of them died, they were shot in the back."

"It's unclear whether authorities were adequately prepared to protect all citizens, and whether they had the right training and equipment to control the situation without resorting to lethal force," said Catherine Baber.

Violent attacks were reported in the city throughout the week, with eyewitnesses reporting to Amnesty International that in some cases police failed to protect Uighurs attacked by Han Chinese on 7 July.

China has recently approved a development package for Xinjiang to promote social stability, but Amnesty International has urged the government to deliver both equity and justice in Xinjiang, and ensure broad community consultation in all future planning and implementation.

"The Chinese government hopes to stabilize Xinjiang by directing money at the problem, but without a credible independent investigation of the Urumqi riots and underlying grievances, resentment and mistrust will continue," said Catherine Baber.

Over a thousand people were detained in the aftermath of the unrest and possibly hundreds subjected to enforced disappearances. According to official statistics, at least 198 people have been sentenced, following trials that Amnesty International considers to have fallen short of international fair trial standards. Nine people are known to have been executed and at least 26 more sentenced to death.

Amnesty International has called on China to set up an independent and impartial inquiry into the human rights abuses committed by all participants in the Urumqi unrest, and to ensure a transparent judicial process for all those facing charges linked to the unrest, including fair trials in accordance with international standards.

* China: "Justice, justice": The July 2009 protests in Xinjiang, China

Download <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA17/027/2010/en/425679a8-6fde-40b5-a38b-83699e5ac1bc/asa170272010en.pdf>

BBC News

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Timeline: China's net censorship

As Google considers withdrawing from China, the BBC looks at the highs and lows of internet access and freedom in the most populous country in the world.

1 May 2001: US and Chinese hackers engage in an internet war as the diplomatic row about the crashed US spy plane rumbles on.

7 November 2002: Activist Jiang Lijun arrested following an investigation that used information supplied by Yahoo.

14 June 2005: Microsoft agrees to censor its blog writing tool, called Spaces, on MSN China.

7 September 2005: Net giant Yahoo is accused of supplying information to Chinese authorities which led to the jailing of journalist Shi Tao.

25 January 2006: Google.cn is set up, and censored by the search giant in line with official rules on what people can do and see online in China.

9 February 2006: Yahoo is accused by Reporters Without Borders of aiding the Chinese authorities by releasing data that led to the arrest of net activist Li Zhi.
Computer screen in Beijing showing Yahoo- 7/9/05

15 February 2006: Yahoo, Microsoft, Cisco and Google are criticised in a US congressional hearing for giving in to pressure from China to censor their web.

16 November 2006: The first part of The great firewall of China - also known as the Golden Shield Project - goes into service. This uses several means to make it difficult to reach sites the Chinese government has deemed illegal.

April 2007: Chinese version of MySpace launches, but lacks discussion forums devoted to politics and religion. It also has a filtering system that stops the posting of content about Taiwan's independence, Falun Gong, the Dalai Lama and other "inappropriate" topics.

June 2007: Yahoo issues a statement saying it was "dismayed" that Chinese citizens have been imprisoned for expressing their political views on the internet.

August 2007: MSN and Yahoo sign a "self-disciplinary pledge" that will limit what users can say on their blogging sites. Both decline to implement one element of the pledge requiring them to collect the real names of users.

November 2007: Yahoo settles a lawsuit brought by families of bloggers convicted by information the internet firm handed over to the Chinese authorities.

25 March 2008: BBC News website "unblocked" in China.
Facebook page

1 April 2008: In the run-up to the Olympic games, China unblocks websites such as Wikipedia, Blogger and YouTube. However, many thousands of others remain inaccessible.

16 October 2008: China introduces laws which say anyone using an internet cafe must have their picture taken and show ID before they can go online.

24 March 2009: Chinese government blocks access to YouTube for carrying videos of soldiers beating monks and other Tibetans.

9 June 2009: China introduces the Green Dam net filtering software that will be fitted to every new PC sold in the country from July 2009. The software was created to stop people looking at "offensive" content such as pornography and violent imagery. The Chinese authorities say use of the software is not "mandatory".

10 June 2009: On the 20th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square protests, micro-blogging service Twitter, photo site Flickr and YouTube are blocked to stop people discussing or seeing footage of events in 1989.

July 2009: During riots, China blocks keyword searches for "Urumqi" - the city where the unrest was unfolding. Also blocked were Twitter, Facebook and local alternatives.

13 January 2010: Google announces it is considering withdrawing from China following a cyber attack on e-mail accounts of human rights activists.

21 January 2010: The US calls on Beijing to investigate the cyber attacks on Google, saying China has tightened censorship.

22 January 2010: China denounces US criticism of its internet controls, saying it could harm ties between the two countries.

21 March 2010: China's state media attacks Google for having "intricate ties" with the US government.

22 March 2010: Google announces it will redirect its mainland China customers to an uncensored Hong Kong-based site.

8 June 2010: China has defended its right to censor the internet in a document laying out the government's attitude towards the web.

29 June 2010: Google softens its stance, saying users in mainland China now have to actively click on a link before accessing unfiltered search results.

China's Central Party School media tour unveils mystery, reflects increased openness

English.news.cn 2010-06-30 23:08:45

by Xinhua writers Miao Xiaojuan, Cui Qingxin

BEIJING, June 30 (Xinhua) -- The Party School of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, or the Central Party School, opened its door to more than 60 correspondents from domestic and overseas media on Wednesday, one day ahead of the 89th anniversary of the founding of the CPC, on July 1.

It was the first time the country's highest institution for the training of high- and middle-level Party officials invited a large group of media workers from home and abroad to tour the mystery-shrouded campus in northwestern Beijing.

Forty-two correspondents, photo journalists and TV reporters from major overseas media organizations - including the Associated Press, the Agence France-Presse, the Guardian, CNN and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation - participated.

During the two-hour tour Wednesday afternoon, the group attended a press conference, a class and interviewed some teachers and students during their visit to the school's main teaching building, gymnasium, canteen and dormitory building.

"The Central Party School and the whole Party system haven't interacted much with the outside world -- this is something we are trying to change," said Li Baosheng, the school's vice president.

The Party, founded July 1, 1921, is the world's largest political party. It had 78 million members as of last year.

"The Party system should open up to the outside world because the Party exists to serve the people and the Party has nothing to hide," Li said at the press conference.

Some correspondents from overseas media interviewed by Xinhua said they had known nothing about the school before the tour. Other correspondents from domestic media said it was their first time to visit the school.

The school's history dates back to the School of Marxism and Communism set up in March 1933. Late chairman Mao Zedong served as president of the school. President Hu Jintao also served as the school's president and its current president is Vice President Xi Jinping.

The school has trained 60,00 high- and middle-level officials over three decades. Its curriculum includes Marxism masterpieces and Party principles, western political theory, economics, contemporary law, religion and military affairs.

The school has academic cooperation agreements with government departments, research institutes and universities from nearly 30 countries.

The media group found the tour interesting, and some even took photographs of the food menu in the canteen. Some walked around the huge campus decorated with trees and fountains like many other college campuses in the world.

"It's a beautiful campus. The environment here is a great place for study," said Stephen McDonnell, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's China correspondent.

The tour of the school was welcomed by many correspondents. The school's spokesman, Luo Zongyi, made his debut at a press conference held Tuesday.

Some correspondents from overseas media expressed their wish to know more about how the school plays its role as the highest institution.

"The tour was interesting and the school is probably less mysterious than people think. I hope we will have more opportunities of this kind to visit and see for ourselves and to have interactions with officials, teachers and students as we did today," Jaime A. Florcruz, CNN's Beijing Bureau Chief, said after the tour.

Florcruz said that he wanted to interact with teachers and researchers at the school and know their views about international and domestic affairs because "whatever they are thinking and studying here is a reflection of what's going on in China."

The school's vice president, Li Baosheng, pledged to organize more activities to help the media know more about the Party system.

"The Central Party School will not be a mysterious place in the future. Journalists will have fewer and fewer difficulties in contacting with people within the Party system," Li said.

(Xinhua correspondent Wang Cong contributed to the story.)

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