



January, 2009

1. **International News**
2. **National News**
3. **Church and Religious News**

INTERNATIONAL & TAIWAN

Premier Wen Jiabao began a **'trip of confidence'** around several European capitals to coincide with the Davos economic summit. In five days he will visit Switzerland, Germany, the EU headquarters in Brussels, Spain and Britain. The trip pointedly leaves out a visit to France, after Beijing's disputes with President Sarkozy last year. Assistant Foreign Minister Wu Hongbo said the confidence-boosting visit would cement China's commitment to reform and opening up, economic development and foster cooperation through the financial crisis. The EU's trade deficit with China reached €160bn in 2007 and was expected to rise fast in 2008. China also surpassed Germany as the third largest economy by GDP according to figures for the year 2007. (See AsiaNews, 27 January)

US President **Barack Obama's inaugural speech** was broadcast on Chinese media, but references to 'communism' and 'dissent' were censored. Obama's reference to a previous generation's defeat of 'fascism and Communism' was not translated, nor was his sentence on opposing rulers 'who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of deceit' or his offer to help them 'unclench their fist'. The English *China Daily* carried the speech in full. (See Telegraph, 21 January)

President Obama's half brother, Mark Ndesandjo, owns a restaurant chain called China BBQ in Shenzhen. The two are not close and have only met a couple of times in their entire lives. Nevertheless, Mark flew to Washington to attend his brother's inauguration. (See CBN, 20 January)

President Obama's choice for Treasury Secretary, Tim Geithner, has caused a diplomatic scuffle after saying that **Obama 'believes that China is manipulating its currency'** and has pledged 'aggressive' diplomacy in response. China's central banker, Zhang Jianhua, has already accused the US of formenting the economic crisis through 'wrong economic policies and improper market monitoring', and suggested 'any attempts to shift the responsibility to other countries reflect an inability to develop the right attitude to seeking solutions.'

China would like to strengthen **military links with the US**, according to senior military official Colonel Hu Changming. He hoped that 'military-to-military relations' between the two countries could be established, but noted that US military aid to Taiwan was a major hurdle. Last year the US government sold \$6.5bn of military hardware to Taipei. According to official figures China's spending on defense rose by 14% in 2007 to 1.4% of GDP (equivalent figures for the US (4.5%) and UK (2.7%) were also included in the Chinese report). (See BBC, 20 January)

China's Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi has told African reporters that China will not abandon their countries during the financial crisis. Yang was in Malawi to sign an agreement for a parliament building, a highway linking northern Malawi with Zambia and a \$90m hotel/conference centre in Lilongwe. (See AP, 15 January)

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US Deputy Secretary of State, John Negroponte, on his last visit to China said that **the Sino-US relationship had never been better**. His counterpart, Qin Gang, agreed, saying that a 30 year review would 'naturally draw that conclusion'. Mr Negroponte added that those looking back at the Bush administration in future years would say that one of its greatest achievements was improvement in the bilateral relationship with China. Mr Qin said that China was looking forward to working with the new Obama administration. (See Christian Post, 9 January)

NATIONAL NEWS

Since mid-January, the **police in Tibet have launched a crackdown against crime**, raiding hotels, rented rooms, internet cafes and bars. 51 people were arrested in Lhasa on 24 January, and 30 on 25 January, many for unspecified crimes. However at least two are known to have been detained for having 'reactionary music' on their mobile phones. In December 59 Tibetans were arrested for making subversive statements and downloading reactionary music. International campaign groups are suggesting that the crackdown is aimed at intimidating Tibetans ahead of important anniversaries in March. (See AsiaNews, 28 January)

Professor Ming Chu-cheng, of National Taiwan University, estimates that the **incidence of social unrest in China is growing by between 18 and 25 per cent each year**. He predicts China will see a further rise in the level of conflict in the next five years, with consequences that could be as dramatic as those in Eastern Europe and the USSR during the late 1980s. Professor Ming was speaking on the final day of an international seminar on thirty years of China's economic reforms at Chung-Hua institution. (See Taipei Times, 15 Jan)

The Minister for Public Security, Meng Jianzhu, thinks that the **'present situation of maintaining national security and social stability is grave'**. In a speech to leading public security officers, he called for specific measures to prevent public agitation ahead of the 60th anniversary of the founding of the PRC on 1 October. Yang Fengchun, a political scientist at Peking University, said he was worried that there would be a 'social crisis' in 2009. This would be precipitated by migrant workers losing their jobs and returning home. A report in *Liaowang* [Outlook] reported that 10m workers had already lost their jobs. (See AP, 7 January)

Tibetan exile groups have asked Tibetans around the world to forego their New Year (Losar) celebrations (to be held on 25 February) in exchange for a commemorative vigil for those Tibetans killed following the March protests. Tibetan groups say that 200 protestors were killed by the Chinese army. (See AsiaNews, 27 January)

One of the main **drafters of Charter 08**, Liu Xiaobo, remains in detention and 'residential surveillance' outside Beijing. Residential surveillance can last up to six months. Many of the original 303 signatories have been questioned by police, their possessions searched, and their communications monitored. Signatory Liu Di, a well-known writer in Beijing, was placed under house arrest ahead of the Chinese New Year to prevent her travelling. Another author and signatory, Zhao Dagong has been told not to leave Shenzhen. Shanghai lawyer, Zheng Enchong, has been taken for questioning four times since signing the Charter. Prof Xu Youyu, an expert on Western philosophy at CASS, says that unless he retracts his signature he will no longer be allowed to publish any articles or books in China. The Charter continues to be spread on internet blogs despite government attempts to remove it from all Chinese

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websites. Vaclav Havel, one of the original signatories to Charter 77, has warned the Chinese government that 'intimidation, propaganda, and repression cannot replace reasonable dialogue' in their response. (See The Times, 6 January; Amnesty International, 7 January; BBC, 12 January; Reuters, 21 January; AsiaNews, 28 January)

In a perceived oblique response by China's leaders to Charter 08, Jia Qinglin, China's fourth-highest official as chair of the CPPCC has refuted any hope of political reforms. Writing in *Qiushi* [Seeking Truth], Mr Jia recapped the history of the CPPCC and the cooperation of the eight 'democratic' parties within it, under the leadership of the Communist Party. Mr Jia concluded that this was 'a form of democracy with Chinese characteristics'. In addition it was the duty of the CPPCC to **'strengthen the defence line against disruption from erroneous ideological thinking such as the western two-party and multiparty systems, bicameralism and the separation of powers.'** (See Reuters, 18 January; SCMP, 19 January; Time Magazine, 27 January)

Tiananmen Square protester Wang Lianxi has been held at a hospital in Beijing since the summer. Wang was initially given the death sentence in 1989 after being convicted of setting fire to military vehicles. His sentence was commuted to life imprisonment and he was released in July, 2007 after eighteen years in prison. However, he was detained in a sweep of dissidents prior to the Olympics and has been held at the hospital for over six months. (See AP, 23 January)

Another veteran pro-democracy protestor, Wang Rongqing, was sentenced to six years imprisonment for subverting the state. Wang has helped run the Chinese Democracy Party in Zhejiang, and was an organiser of the CDP's first national conference in Beijing last year, ahead of the Olympics. Despite Wang's illness and cooperation with the authorities, this is one of the longest sentences handed down in such a case by a Zhejiang court. There are currently nine CDP members imprisoned in the province. Zhou Wei, a fellow dissident writer from Hangzhou, suggests that the government is trying to suffocate pro-democracy activism after the signing of Charter 08 and ahead of sensitive anniversaries in 2009. (See AsiaNews, 8 January)

President Hu Jintao addressed a gathering to celebrate China's New Year, extending greetings to Chinese all round the world. Premier Wen Jiabao followed, adding that 2009 marks the sixtieth anniversary of the foundation of the PRC. He said that all the **government's efforts in the year ahead would be to improve people's livelihoods** – better social security and health care, supplies of affordable housing and better quality education. He stressed the full recovery of regions hit by the Sichuan earthquake last year. (See CCTV, 25 January)

Accompanying a measured relaxation of press restrictions in China last year there were **increased cases of 'press corruption'**. In May the State Council issued Information Disclosure Rules which meant that government agencies had to release details on disasters and emergencies. However the Central Publicity Department maintained several restrictions on reporting after the Sichuan earthquake on items like *tofu* buildings or interviews with family groups. However there have also been a rise in the number of cases of 'paid journalism', and cases of blackmail and corruption involving press reporters. However, Dr. Zhang Zhi'an, a media lecturer at Fudan university, says that this is also a positive development as local authorities are increasingly resorting to the law to deal with such cases rather than physical intimidation and assaults. (see SCMP, 16 January)

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A 2006 report by family planning officials has only just been released. The report suggests that **most Chinese women would like more than one child**. Over 70% of those who responded would like two or more babies, and most would prefer to have one boy and one girl. Respondents said that only children often grow up to be self-centred. However the minister for the Family Planning Commission, Li Bin, told the report that 'family planning policy underpins the country's economy and demographics' and would not be changed. (see BBC, 16 January)

A record 4.7m Chinese caught the train on the first day (11 Jan) of the national holiday to mark Chinese New Year. Tens of millions of migrant workers are expected to travel home in the only opportunity they have each year to see their families in rural areas. Last year's snowstorms mean that many have not seen their loved ones in nearly two years. The Deputy Minister for Civil Affairs, Jiang Li, announced that special New Year payments of Y100 to rural inhabitants below the poverty line, Y150 to poor urban inhabitants and Y180 to longstanding CCP members would be made ahead of the New Year. The subsidies will cost the national government Y9bn (\$1.3bn). Some provinces are also giving payments to poor inhabitants affected by the financial crisis. (see AsiaNews, 12 January)

Colleges in developed eastern provinces are to take a higher quota of students from less-developed areas, according to the Ministry of Education. Quotas for universities in Shanghai, Tianjin, Liaoning and other eastern provinces will have to take 60,000 freshmen from Inner Mongolia, Guizhou, Gansu, Henan and Anhui provinces. 'Through this program, we hope to close the gap between developed and less developed regions and help more young people from poor regions to enjoy the access to higher education', ran a statement from the ministry. Universities and colleges will enrol 6.29m students in China in 2009, an increase of 4% on 2008. The government also plans to expand the role of adult vocational training, to equip migrants losing their jobs with new skills. However it is expected that this summer there will be more than 7m graduates this year looking for work in a contracting job market. (See Xinhua, 10 January; Reuters, 6 January; AsiaNews, 5 January)

CHURCH AND RELIGIOUS NEWS

Reports are now widely circulating of November **meetings between government officials and representatives of the Protestant house churches**. The number of unregistered Christians has increased rapidly in recent years, causing many academics to call for changes in China's religious regulations. Some papers to the meeting indicated that the number of house church Christians had reached 100m. The meetings also included prominent Christian academics and researchers in central government institutes. They were coordinated by the State Council, China's highest governing body. (See The Times, 26 January)

The Christmas appeal '**Supporting China's Forgotten Christians**', sponsored by the COPE and Aid to the Church in Need raised €442,000. The money will be used for construction and maintenance of churches, means of transportation, support for seminarians and religious, but most especially for formation of priests, seminarians and religious. This is the third year that the COPE and ACN have held Christmas appeals, with previous donations going to Christians in Iraq and Bosnia. (See AF, 21 January)

Two Catholic dioceses in Shanxi Province held a joint-gathering for new Catholics and catechists at Yuci cathedral. This is the first time such a gathering has been held, and priests expressed hopes that it would be the 'start of exchange and interaction' between the laypeople from the two dioceses of Yuci and Taiyuan. Taiyuan cathedral parish now has about 60 catechists, while Wu Lai'ai, president of Yuci

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cathedral parish council introduced the evangelisation programme of 'one helps one, one brings one' which encourages Catholics to help non-Catholics and invite them to attend the church. (See UCAN, 23 January)

Beijing municipal government has dedicated funds to **restore 12 religious buildings** in the municipal area. Fr Zhen Xuebin, secretary-general of the Beijing diocese, reported to the *China Daily*, that there are now 50-60,000 Catholics in the city and only twenty churches. Yang Xiaodong, an official with Beijing RAB reported that one project would be the restoration of Changxindian church at a cost of approx. Y12m (\$1.76m). The church was turned into a warehouse during the 1950s. Two mosques are also included in the reconstruction plans. (See Chinaview, 19 January)

Representatives from 11 Chinese religious congregations and Jinde Charities toured the areas of Sichuan affected by the 12 May earthquake (9-13 January). Each of the congregations had sent volunteers to the devastated region to pray, serve Jesus and the people with love and bring consolation. One district leader told the visitors, "Jinde (Charities) has been approved by people of all ethnic backgrounds and religious beliefs. Your 4 centers for psychological and moral support have been a great consolation and help to us. We have been moved by all your work. Thank you." (AF, 16 January)

Wang Dao, a house church pastor in Guangzhou has had his **case against the local SARA accepted by Haizhu District People's Court**. This is the first time that a house church pastor has had an administrative lawsuit challenging a SARA penalty decision accepted by a Chinese court. On 14 December, 50 officials from SARA and the PSB raided his Liangren Church serving it with a penalty notice, claiming it was an 'illegal gathering' and demanding that no future house meetings are held. This could be a test case to determine how local courts will respond to increasing lawsuits against the Chinese official organs of religious management. (China Aid, 1 January)

The wife of a house church member has **filed a motion to dismiss the Chief Justice of her local court** in Henan Province. This came after three men arrested on 3 December were sentenced to re-education through labour for organising an 'illegal gathering' in one of their homes. The men's lawyer filed an administrative lawsuit with Chuanhai District People's Court hoping to get the sentences repealed but their case was refused. Now the lawyer has called for the dismissal of the Chief Justice on the grounds that the Court had no legal basis to refuse to hear the case, the court violated the law by failing to provide receipts documenting that the case had been filed, and the court violated the law by causing long delays without coming to a decision on whether to hear the case. The men were all accused of belonging to the Shouter cult, though they belong to the mainstream China Gospel Fellowship. (See China Aid, 26 January)

On 5 January, representatives from the **Beijing PSB has paid compensation of Y17,000 (approx. £1745) to the family of Pastor 'Bike' Zhang Mingxuan** following his arrest and detention last year and the beating of his sons by PSB officials. They also blamed the pastor for 'extremely bad publicity', though Pastor Zhang has agreed to withdraw the lawsuit against them. However, since then he has been forcibly removed from Beijing and placed on a bus for Henan Province. This was after he went to the house of another prominent Beijing pastor, Hua Huiqi, whose mother Shuang Shuying (aged 79) is in prison and whose father Hua Zaichen is dying. (See China Aid, 13 January; 29 January)

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Some Hong Kong Catholics are worried that amendments to the law on domestic violence to include same-sex partnerships raise the possibility of calls to legitimise same-sex 'marriages'. The Domestic Violence Ordinance (1986) was amended in August to extend protection to former spouses, heterosexual cohabitants, immediate and extended family members, and now a proposed amendment will extend it to same-sex couples. However some Christian groups worry that this will lead the way to reviewing the law on homosexuality in Hong Kong, where homosexual acts are neither criminal nor have they been previously legalised. (See UCAN, 7 January, 16 January)

The **Taizé Community will fund the printing of 1m Bibles in China**, and distribute them in phases to Catholic churches throughout the country. 200,000 complete Bibles and 800,000 NT and Psalms will be printed in Nanjing, and will be in the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Hong Kong translation, completed in 1968. (See Zenit, 7 January)

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ABBREVIATIONS AND SOURCES

AF	Agenzia Fides	www.fides.org
AFP	Agence France Presse	www.afp.com
AP	Associated Press	www.ap.org
ATO	Asia Times Online	www.atimes.com
BBC	British Broadcasting Association	www.bbc.co.uk
CAA	China Aid Association	www.chinaaid.org
CASS	Chinese Academy of Social Sciences	
CBNN	Christian Broadcast Network News	
CCC	China Christian Council [Protestant]	
CCP	Chinese Communist Party	
(C)CPA	(Chinese) Catholic Patriotic Association	
CPPCC	Chinese People's Political Consultative Congress	
CD	China Daily	www.chinadaily.net/news/
CHCA	Chinese House Church Association [Protestant]	
CRI	China Radio International	
CWN	Catholic World News	
	Chinaview	www.chinaview.cn
	China.org.cn	www.China.org.cn
DPA	Deutsche Presse-Agentur	
EDA	Églises D'Asie	http://eglisie.mepasie.org
FT	Financial Times	www.ft.com
	Guardian	www.guardian.co.uk
HK	Hong Kong	
	Independent	www.independent.co.uk
IHT	International Herald Tribune	www.iht.com
IPS	Inter Press Service	www.ipsnews.net
PBS	Public Broadcast Radio	www.pbs.org
RAB	Religious Affairs Bureau	
	Religious Intelligence	www.religiousintelligence.co.uk
	Reuters	www.reuters.co.uk
SARA	State Administration for Religious Affairs	
SCMP	South China Morning Post	www.scmp.com
SOE	State Owned Enterprise	
	The Daily Telegraph	www.telegraph.co.uk
	The Times	www.timesonline.co.uk/
UCAN	Union of Catholic Asia News	www.ucanews.com
UFWD	United Front Work Department	
UNPO	Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization	
WP	Washington Post	www.washingtonpost.com
	Xinhua	http://www.xinhua.org/

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