



March, 2009

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

INTERNATIONAL & TAIWAN

The **six party talks on the North Korean nuclear program** have broken down because the countries could not agree on 'the issue of verification of the DPRK's nuclear facilities' according to China's deputy foreign minister, Wu Dawei. China's foreign minister, Yang Jiechi, has already expressed concern over the reaction of some foreign governments after North Korea's forthcoming launch of 'an experimental communications satellite'. The US and Japanese governments have suggested that the launch is to test a new inter-continental missile. (See China News, 9 March; Guardian, 31 March)

China has begun using its **huge foreign currency reserves to begin buying assets** to help maintain its economic growth during the economic crisis. The Chinese government has lent Russian oil giants Rosneft and Transneft \$25bn in return for provision of 300,000 barrels of crude a day for the next 20 years at a reduced price of around \$25 per barrel. Vice President Xi Jinping has also arranged a \$10bn loan to the Brazilian company Petrobras in return for 160,000 barrels a day at a similar rate. Chinese SOEs have also made large bids for 'strategic commodity' rights connected with the mining companies Rio Tinto and Oz Minerals, particularly gold, uranium and copper reserves. (See Washington Times, 12 March)

A Chinese foreign ministry spokesman, Qin Gang, has urged that **the International Criminal Court not hear the case of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir** for the time being. The Court issued an arrest warrant for the President over alleged responsibility for crimes committed in Darfur. China has 300 peacekeepers in the region and says that the indictment of President al-Bashir jeopardizes peace efforts. The warrant for his arrest also runs counter to Beijing's long-stated policy of non-interference in other countries' internal affairs. Most Arab and African states have also opposed the indictment. Arthur Shoo, the programme director for the African Council of Churches, has said that China and Russia should abstain from any UN security council debates on Sudan, as they are the principle weapons suppliers to the African state. (See AFP, 5 March; ENI, 5 March)

A spokesman for the Chinese Ministry of Education said that **a record number of Chinese students were studying abroad** in 2008. Over 179,800 students spent time abroad during the year, a number which has risen rapidly since 2004 when new flexible measures were adopted. The most popular destinations were United States, Australia and Britain. The number of students returning home has also increased, with 69,300 returning in 2008. Overall 1.39m Chinese students have studied abroad since 1978, of whom 390,000 have returned home. (See MENAFN, 29 March)

The **South African government refused to give a visa to the Dalai Lama** to enable him to attend a peace conference linked to the 2010 World Cup. The conference is being organized by the Norwegian Nobel Peace Committee, together with local laureates F.W. De Klerk and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. An unnamed South African government spokesman said that the presence of the 'Dalai Lama would divert attention away from the World Cup' and that the 'key strategic relationship' with China would be

damaged. South Africa accounts for over 20% of China's trade with the African continent as a whole and Chinese investment in the country has risen to \$6bn. (See The Times, 23 March)

The **Chinese navy has aggressively pursued and maneuvered around several US navy ships** in waters 75 miles south of Hainan Island. The USNS Impeccable, an unarmed surveillance vessel, was sailing in waters claimed by China and several other South East Asian nations, but which are said by the United States to be international waters. The US embassy has lodged a protest with Chinese officials over the incidents which lasted several days between 4 March and 9 March. (See Bloomberg, 9 March)

Taiwan passed a law in January which allowed outlying islands to build casinos, provided residents were in favour. Subsequently an ecumenical and inter-faith group has been lobbying and supporting a protest against the law, saying it will turn Taiwan into the 'Republic of Casinos', and that it will not benefit ordinary people. (See ENI, 20 March)

NATIONAL NEWS

The annual session of the **National People's Congress (NPC)** was held for nine days, with 3000 delegates from all over the country. This year's parliament was dominated by economic issues, with Premier Wen Jiabao giving the government's report on its stimulus package. He said he was worried about the levels of US debt, and that China would seek to diversify its risk as the US\$ weakened. The government package includes 4trn yuan (£400bn) of spending with tax cuts worth around 6bn yuan, increases to pensions, teacher salaries and a large reform of the health system. Nevertheless there was concern from delegates that rural incomes would not be able to grow in the current economic environment, and that government spending on education was insufficient. There was also debate about the prison system and detention protocols for those arrested. Sixteen veteran, liberal CCP leaders including Chairman Mao Zedong's former secretary have voiced concern that there is not enough scrutiny over how China's stimulus package will be spent, and that it will therefore be frittered away through corruption. (See Sunday Times, 8 March; AsiaNews, 6,13 March)

President **Hu Jintao addressed Tibetan delegates** at the National People's Congress (NPC) saying that China had to build a 'great firewall' against separatism and they all had a duty to 'safeguard the unity of the motherland.' Premier Wen Jiabao said that China was willing to reopen talks with envoys from the Dalai Lama, so long as the latter renounced any talk of separatism. 'The key is the Dalai Lama must demonstrate his sincerity so that the talks can achieve substantive results.' Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi has also urged foreign governments not to allow the Dalai Lama to visit their countries or 'use their territories for secessionist activities.' This should become one of the 'basic norms of international relations'. In the run-up to the 10 March anniversary of the 1959 Lhasa Uprising, the governor of Tibet, Qiangba Puncong, opened an exhibition showcasing the democratic reforms brought by China to Tibet since 1959. Earlier in the month the State Council Information Office released a White Paper outlining China's role in Tibet as overthrowing the 'feudal, serfdom system' and instigating economic growth and reform. (See UPI, 16 March; Reuters, 13 March; BBC, 2 March)

In a speech to mark the 50th anniversary of the Lhasa Uprising, the Dalai Lama said that Chinese rule had made Tibet 'hell on earth' and led thousands of exiled Tibetans in a candlelit vigil in Dharamsala, India. The Tibetan President-in-exile Samdhong Rinpoche has appealed to Tibetans not to carry out any protests because of feared repercussions, and to adhere to the principle of non-violence. (See AsiaNews, 2, 10 March)

Wu Bangguo, the second highest figure in the Chinese Communist Party, told the NPC that **China would 'never simply copy the system of Western countries'** or introduce a system of multiple parties holding office in rotation.' He urged all sections of government to adhere to the 'line, principles and policies of the Party.' This was seen as the Party's strongest rebuff yet to calls for liberalisation and democratisation. (See BBC, 9 March)

The National People's Congress (NPC) has enacted **new food safety legislation** in the wake of several recent food scandals. A new monitoring and supervision system, which will halve the number of agencies responsible for food safety, will severely restrict the number of additives available to food producers. A UN report last year blamed the profusion of food safety agencies in China for failures leading to the food scandals, the most extreme of which was the addition of melamine to milk which resulted in the death of several babies. (See Xinhua, 28 February)

Tian Wenhua, the chairwoman of Sanlu Group which was at the centre of the tainted milk scandal, has been sentenced to life imprisonment. Three other defendants, peasants who added the melamine to boost the protein content, have been given death sentences. (See HKSE, 15 March)

China continues to be the nation which uses **capital punishment** most extensively. According to an Amnesty International report, the Chinese judicial system killed 1718 through firing squad and lethal injection in 2008. China continues to hold around 7000 criminals on death row. (See AsiaNews, 24 March)

Concerns remain high over the **treatment of suspects in Chinese police custody**. Five people have died in detention while awaiting trial recently, prompting renewed allegations of torture and abuse. Legal experts have said that perhaps the responsibility for detained citizens needs to be taken away from the Ministry for Public Security and given to the Justice Ministry. Statistics are not released on deaths in police custody in China, and there as yet no formal plans to reform the detention system. (See AP, 24 March; UPI, 18 March)

In an article in the *China Daily*, the Chinese Minister for Health has urged all doctors and medical staff to **quit smoking** as an example to their patients. According to statistics held by the China Preventative Medicine Association (CPMA), nearly 57% of Chinese doctors smoke. The minister, Chen Zhu, particularly instructed doctors not to smoke indoors and the CPMA has said that it will make medical schools and hospitals smoke free by the end of 2009. China is estimated to have about 350m smokers. (See AP, 3 March)

LOCAL NEWS

Despite a large police and military presence there have still been **some 'mass incidents' in Tibetan areas**. The Qinghai authorities reported that a police car and fire engine were 'blown up' by dozens of protestors in the Golog Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. Nearly 100 monks from the Lagyab monastery were subsequently arrested, along with several hundred civilians. Exiled Tibetans say the protest was sparked when a 25-year-old monk, Tashi Sangpo, escaped police custody and subsequently killed himself by jumping into the freezing Yellow River. He had been arrested for unfurling a Tibetan flag on the roof of the main prayer hall at Lagyab monastery. President Hu Jintao has ordered more military into the region during the 50th anniversary of the 'Lhasa Uprising' which lasted from March 10 until September, 1959. (See China News, AFP, 9 March; SCMP, 23 March)

The Qinghai provincial authorities have announced the first large scale **wind power equipment factory**. The \$90m factory will produce 2000 small and medium sized turbines each year when it comes on line in September, and will expand capacity in 2012 to between 8-10000 turbines. The turbines would be especially suited to areas with relatively slow but consistent wind speeds, such as Qinghai itself. At the moment there are seven wind farms in the province, but officials are planning on establishing new wind farms in the Chaidamu basin and the rim of Qinghai lake (Kokonor), the largest lake in China. (See Interfax, 19 March)

The Chinese architect Ai Weiwei, co-designer of the Beijing Olympics' Bird's Nest stadium, has launched a website to **find those responsible for the poor construction of schools in Sichuan** which led to so many students being killed in last May's earthquake. In a first step he has asked parents and relatives to list all students who died on his website to get a final figure of the impact of the tragedy. Although the Sichuan authorities initially said 6376 students had died, unofficial figures are substantially higher, and no final government number has ever been released. Mr Ai hopes to use the list to ensure that corrupt officials who

took money out of the school construction budgets will eventually be brought to justice. (See AsiaNews, 20 March)

The Beijing Yitong Law Firm was ordered to close for six months by the Haidian District Judicial Bureau probably because some of its lawyers signed a letter in August last year asking for independent candidates to be able to run for the leadership of the Beijing Lawyers Association. The firm has also taken on a number of human rights cases, including those of arrested house church Christians. The official reason for the closure is that the firm allowed Christian lawyer Li Subin to practise without a license (his license has not been renewed since 2001 after he sued a local Bar association for collecting illegal registration fees). The firm maintains that Li, who was deputy director, only worked in an administrative capacity. (See China Aid, 6 March)

CHURCH AND RELIGIOUS NEWS

The Vatican announced that its **Commission for the Catholic Church in China** would convene its second meeting on 30 March-1 April. The Commission will discuss the aftermath of Pope Benedict's pastoral letter to Chinese Catholics, and the prospect of elections for chairpersons of the China Catholic Bishops Conference and Catholic Patriotic Association. The Commission is made up of Curia officials, 'some representatives of the Chinese episcopate and of religious orders.' Chinese representatives are Cardinal Archbishop Zen Ze-kuin (Hong Kong), bishop John Tong Hon Secretary of State, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, is expected to chair the plenary meetings. (See VIS 28 March, UCAN, 28 March)

The Catholic archbishop of Hong Kong, **Cardinal Zen Ze-kiun, is expected to step down** after Easter to be succeeded by his coadjutor bishop, Mgr John Tong Hon. Bishop Tong has reiterated that while he wants to continue open dialogue with clergy from China's state-approved congregations and the underground church, he will not participate in dialogue with the Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA). Anthony Liu Bainian, a vice-president of the CPA, had said in an interview with the SCMP that he hoped the succession of bishop Tong could lead to better relations between the mainland and Hong Kong churches in a 'spirit of patriotism'. Bishop Tong responded that Catholics 'should get beyond a narrow sense of patriotism.' (See AsiaNews, 11 March; UCAN, 12 March; The Tablet, 21 March)

Detentions have continued of 'underground' Catholic priests in Hebei province. Fr Paul Ma, a priest in Donglü, Hebei Province, was detained after celebrating mass with a handful of underground parishioners. Controls in the province are said to be tightened ahead of the anniversary of the death in police custody of the former bishop of Baoding, Fan Xueyan, in 1992. Two other bishops from the underground church in the province remain missing (James Su Zhimin, arrested in 1996, and Cosma Shi Enxiang, arrested in 2001). The Catholic Patriotic Association has been holding nationwide meetings ahead of a planned National Congress of Catholic Representatives, but no date has yet been announced for this meeting. (See AsiaNews, 30 March)

A Catholic priest, Fr Francis Gao Jianli, has been attacked and beaten while in the mayor's office in Baoji city, Shaanxi province. The beating came as part of a long running dispute between the church and the municipal authorities over a piece of land confiscated from them during the Cultural Revolution and handed over to a factory. The factory has since closed and the church is appealing for its return, but the Chencang district government's property management office have disputed their ownership. Last year the town government decided to send in property developers, but the Catholics view this as a violation of their property rights and so have occupied the site (now a rubbish dump) in order to protect it. The mayor asked Fr Gao to his office to settle the issue, but when he arrived, Fr Gao was assaulted by two men. Catholics then stormed the mayor's office forcing him to lock himself in his office. A complaint has been lodged with the local Bureau for Letters and Calls, and should be heard within four weeks. (UCAN, 19 March)

The **Vatican has launched a Chinese version of its website** www.vatican.va to coincide with the feast of St. Joseph. Although this site now makes most papal texts easily accessible to Chinese, some sources suggest that the Pope's pastoral letter to Chinese Catholics cannot be accessed from the site in

China. Chinese is the eighth language, and first non-European language, for the Vatican website. The website of the Catholic diocese of Hong Kong also remains blocked, largely due to its reporting of critical speeches by the Archbishop Joseph Zen. (See AsiaNews, 20 March; VIS 16 March)

Baoding diocese has followed guidelines for 'Earth Hour' on 28 March and instructed Catholics to switch off their lights between 8.30 and 9.30pm to raise awareness of global climate change. (See UCAN, 24 March)

More than fifty Catholic priests from the province of Sichuan attended a Lenten retreat (27 March – 5 April), held to boost their spirits and allow them to compare needs in their parishes after the 2008 earthquake. Sister Theresa Wang Yan, who acted as translator to the retreat leader, Fr Larry Lewis, said that priests themselves were in need of spiritual comfort after consoling parishioners and others for many months. (See UCAN, 25 March)

The Catholic bishop of Beijing, Joseph Li Shan, has spoken of a Lenten 'opportunity that allows us to intensify our prayer, make sacrifices, practice charity, open our hearts and accept the Will of God with docility.' In his Lenten Message to his diocese, he instructs priests and laity to pay special attention to preparing those who are seeking baptism this Easter and in evangelisation. (See AF, 3 March)

Fr Peter Zhao Jianmin, director of the Beijing Institute for the Study of Christianity and Culture, has become the first Chinese priest to deliver classes at the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium. Fr Zhao gave a series of 4 lectures during the university's Onclin week, featuring issues of preaching, media and publication, lay training and catechetical instruction. (See AF, 10 March)

The **Second World Buddhist Forum convened in Wuxi**, Jiangsu Province, with more than 1700 Buddhist monks and scholars attending. The theme of the conference was building a harmonious world and Du Qinglin, head of the UFWD and vice chairman of the CPPCC addressed this possibility while opening the conference. He said that Buddhism could 'manifest the qualities of mercy and compassion, reclaim people's souls and promote harmonious coexistence between humans and nature ...' In a rare public appearance, the 11th Panchen Lama as recognised by China, Bainqen Erdini Qoigyijabu (also known as Gyaltzen Norbu), added that the event showed that the Chinese people enjoyed freedom of religion. (However the Panchen Lama as recognised by the Dalai Lama and many Tibetans, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, has not been seen publicly since he and his family were moved by Chinese officials when he was six years old in 1995.) Action-film superstar Jet Li also spoke at the forum (See Xinhua, 28 March; AP, 28 March; AsiaNews, 17 March)

Protesting at development work, monks at the Buddhist Famen Temple in Shaanxi province, have torn down a wall put up in front of their temple. The developers and local government are hoping to transform the temple into a major tourist complex following the discovery in 1987 of a finger bone believed to be that of Siddhartha Gautama (the historical Buddha). The wall was part of a new development which would mean that visitors and devotees would have to pay RMB180 (£18) to enter the temple complex. It also blocked a side entrance to the temple frequently used by the monks. Local authorities closed the temple for a day after the protests, but have said that the developments will still go ahead. (See SCMP, 25 March)

Following meetings last month between leaders of the CCC and the National Council of Churches in the United States, leaders agreed to speak together on issues like environmental pollution in China and the United States, and that the NCC would promote the forthcoming Bible Ministry Exhibitions of the CCC in Washington DC and Dallas. (See Christian Post, 5 March)

3rd floor Bastille Court 2 Paris Garden London SE1 8ND
telephone +44 (0) 20 7654 7254 fax +44 (0) 20 7654 7222 email info@ctbi.org.uk www.ctbi.org.uk

General Secretary Revd Bob Fyffe Registered charity no 113299 Company limited by guarantee Registered in England and Wales Registered no 5661787

The China Desk Bulletin is a digest of published news sources. The China Desk is not responsible for the content of these items nor does it necessarily endorse all the views expressed. Please follow the links identified below to read the full report of each story.

ABBREVIATIONS AND SOURCES

AF	Agenzia Fides	www.fides.org
AFP	Agence France Presse	www.afp.com
AFPC	American Foreign Policy Centre	www.afpc.org
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	www.cbn.com/CBN/news
CCC	China Christian Council [Protestant]	www.chinesechristianchurch.org.cn
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	www.cri.com.cn
CWN	Catholic World News	www.cwnnews.com
	Chinaview	www.chinaview.cn
	China News [Zhongguo Xinwen She]	www.chinanews.com.cn
	China.org.cn	www.China.org.cn
DPA	Deutsche Presse-Agentur	www.dpa.com
EDA	Églises D'Asie	http://eglasiemepasie.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.ihf.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
	Sky News	http://news.sky.com/skynews
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/

3rd floor Bastille Court 2 Paris Garden London SE1 8ND

telephone +44 (0) 20 7654 7254 fax +44 (0) 20 7654 7222 email info@ctbi.org.uk www.ctbi.org.uk