

# News Update

Mid-February–  
Early May 2004

COMPILED BY ADINA MATISOFF

## 16TH SESSION OF THE NPC

Some 3,000 Chinese Communist Party (CCP) members from across the country converged on Beijing in early March for the 16th session of the National People's Congress (NPC). Among the issues discussed were official corruption and rural poverty. The session included the introduction of two new amendments to the Constitution enshrining private property rights and respect and protection for human rights. While the amendment pertaining to human rights was hailed as a landmark in constitutional reform, the vagueness of the wording raised doubts as to its application and effectiveness. China maintains that fundamental human rights encompass economic rights such as food, clothing and shelter, as opposed to civil and political rights such as freedom of association, expression and the press.

Both amendments had previously been approved by the NPC Standing Committee in December and the vote during the Party Congress was widely considered a rubber stamp. Some within the NPC, led by Premier Wen Jiabao, called for greater autonomy from the Chinese Communist Party in order to improve effectiveness and represent wider public views and criticism, but legal experts were skeptical that substantive changes would be made to the NPC mechanism. (Reut, SCMP, WSJ)

As is common during NPC meetings, citizens from across the country converge on Beijing to petition the central government over their grievances. This year a total of 88,000 ordinary citizens submitted petitions to the NPC, according to NPC chairman Wu Bangguo. Zhou Zhanshun, director of the agency that monitors complaints, said in January that 80 percent of the petitions reflected reasonable complaints, but should be resolved at the local level. He also noted the number of petitioners in Beijing had jumped by a third in the first 11 months of 2003. Legal experts observed that a key reason for the high number of complaints to the central government was

local corruption and impunity. Many of the petitioners who came to Beijing for the 16th Party Congress were protesting injustices such as mass unemployment, unpaid salaries, forced demolition of homes and corrupt politicians.

Arguably the most high-profile petition to the NPC this year came from **Dr. Jiang Yanyong**, a CCP member and surgeon widely credited for exposing China's SARS cover-up in 2003. Jiang wrote a letter to the Communist Party calling for a reassessment of the Tiananmen crackdown in 1989. Another petition came from more than 100 scholars, lawyers and democracy activists urging the NPC and the Supreme Court to clarify the country's subversion laws to prevent official abuse. The letter, signed by Internet activist **Liu Di** and democracy activist **Gao Yu** among others, was submitted to the NPC and Supreme Court on March 1. (AP, AN, ET, NYT, WSJ)

The onslaught of petitioners during the two-week meeting brought increased surveillance, detentions and arrests of those whose grievances did not meet the Party agenda. Observers estimated that more than 3,000 petitioners were detained at the Shijingshan Gymnasium in the outskirts of Beijing before being sent home. Beijing's Public Security Bureau (PSB) deployed upward of 1,000 police officers to closely monitor and control the movement of certain activists as a means of "keeping the peace." Beijing police detained dissident **Zhang Chunzhu** on March 2, holding him against his will in a small hotel in the Beijing suburb of Changping. Protestant house church leader and social activist **Hua Huiqi** was put under house arrest in Beijing on March 5. When Hua protested his detention, he was arrested and later beaten, along with his wife **Wei Jumei**, who lost a tooth in the assault. Police raided his parents' apartment and confiscated the family's bankbook and cash totaling around \$850. **Li Shanna**, a nurse and the wife of arrested house church leader **Xu Yonghai**, was threatened by a police officer as she tried to provide medical treatment to a handicapped friend, Liu Anjun. She was subjected to a police escort and instructed not to leave home during the NPC meeting except to go to work. Police also maintained 24-hour surveillance outside the home of **Jia Jianying**, wife of dissident **He Depu**. (Asia News, HRIC)

## ANTICIPATING JUNE 4TH

In anticipation of an upsurge in international and domestic calls for a reassessment of the official handling of the 1989 Democracy Movement, the Chinese government launched a suppression of dissenting voices and implemented regulations to deter protests. **Ding Zilin**, **Zhang Xianling** and **Huang Jinping**, three members of the Tiananmen Mothers, were each arrested in their homes by state security police on March 28. According to the official Xinhua news agency, all three were released by April 2 after confessing they "conspired with overseas forces to evade Chinese customs and import illegal goods to China . . . and engaged in other activities in violation of China's State Security Law." The illegal goods were T-shirts from Hong Kong printed with a Tiananmen Mothers logo in commemoration of the 15th anniversary of the Tiananmen Massacre of 1989. All three women had lost family members in the massacre. (HRIC, TIME)

Concern over potential unrest also rose with reports in early April that former CCP General-Secretary **Zhao Ziyang**, 84, was in ill health. Zhao, who was purged from the Party and government because of his soft line on the 1989 protests, was reportedly being kept alive by a respirator, raising speculation that his death might cause public dissent similar to that following Hu Yaobang's death in 1989. (AP, NYT)

The Beijing municipal government began implementing regulations against demonstrations in Tiananmen Square in mid-April. The new city-wide rules, which were published in State media, provide for strict control of Tiananmen Square and prohibitions against displaying banners, chanting slogans, blocking public transport, self-immolation or other disruptions of public order. The notice stated that any unauthorized protests would result in repatriation and Reeducation Through Labor (RTL). (Reut)

## INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUES

The 60th session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) convened in Geneva on March 15 thru April 23 with discussions on key international human rights issues such as the creation of a special mechanism to monitor the human rights impact of counter-terrorism measures, human rights violations in occu-

pied Iraq, extreme poverty and women trafficking. Members of the international community, such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Reporters Without Borders, criticized the annual meeting as an ineffective mechanism that had ceased to condemn abusive governments and allowed violators of human rights abuses to act with impunity. However, one breakthrough was China's extension of an invitation to the Special Rapporteur on Torture and agreement on the terms of reference for the visit, scheduled for June 2004. Negotiations over such a visit had been pending since 1995. (AI, AP HRW, RSF)

The U.S. delegation tabled a resolution condemning China's human rights record, but China countered by submitting a 'no-action' motion, which passed with the votes of 28 of the 53 member-states, effectively nullifying the original resolution. Although no other countries besides the U.S. were willing to sponsor the resolution, the EU, Australia, Canada, Norway and New Zealand made statements on China's human rights record. Noted areas of concern included freedom of expression, association and religion, the death penalty, torture, arbitrary detention, reform of the legal and administrative system and counter-terrorism measures with respect to Xinjiang and Tibet. (ET, Tibet News)

Impetus for the U.S.-sponsored resolution followed the release of the U.S. State Department's report on China's 2003 human rights record on February 25. The 61-page report accused China of backsliding on several issues, including freedom of expression and religious tolerance. China responded with its own report on the U.S. human rights record on March 1. A month later, China released a 40-page white paper on human rights entitled, "Progress in China's Human Rights Cause in 2003," in which it described the country's "landmark progress" on issues such as the right to subsistence and development. (AP, ET, KRN, Reut, VOA)

Following the announcement on March 22 that the U.S. would table its China resolution at the UNCHR, China announced suspension of its human rights dialogue with the U.S. The Chinese representative indignantly pointed to China's new constitutional amendment pledging to "protect and respect human rights," and the release or sentence reduction of three political prison-

ers who were the subjects of U.S. lobbying efforts.

Among the three prisoners was **Wang Youcai**, 37, a founder of the China Democracy Party (CDP), who was released on medical parole and exiled to the U.S. on March 4. Wang had served nearly half of an 11-year sentence at the Zhejiang No. 1 Prison in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province before his release in early March. **Phuntsog Nyidron**, a Tibetan nun sentenced to eight years in prison for "counter-revolutionary propaganda and incitement" in 1989 and subsequently sentenced to an additional seven years while in prison, was released one week before Wang. She had been the longest-serving female political prisoner in Tibet. A third political prisoner, **Rebiya Kadeer**, 57, a prominent businesswoman in Xinjiang, had one year cut from her eight year sentence on March 3. A critic of China's policies in Xinjiang, Kadeer was sentenced in March 2000 on charges of "providing state secrets to an overseas entity" after mailing newspaper clippings to her husband in the U.S. Critics of China's policies towards political prisoners noted that China routinely releases high-profile political prisoners on the eve of bilateral and multilateral dialogues and meetings in order to show progress on the human rights issue. (AP, AFP, WP)

Despite calls for his release from the U.S. and the international community, **Yang Jianli**, a Chinese-born American citizen imprisoned in China on espionage charges, remained in custody in the run-up to the 60th session of the UNCHR. On March 3 Yang's lawyer, Mo Shaoping, reported to the foreign press that Yang was planning a hunger strike to protest his continued detention despite the passing of the legal deadline for issuing a verdict on his case on December 18, 2003. Yang has also complained of being denied family visitation and legal consultation and of being kept in solitary confinement. Lack of access to Yang prevented the news media from verifying whether Yang had begun his hunger strike as planned. Yang was finally sentenced to five years in prison on May 13. (AP)

While relations between the US and China remained cold, talks between the EU and China showed signs of warming at the EU's annual summit on March 25-26. This was in spite of China's lack of success in lobbying for the EU to lift the arms embargo

it had imposed on China after the military crackdown on student democracy protesters in Tiananmen Square in June 1989. China stated that its great progress in the area of human rights had rendered the ban "obsolete." However, the EU announced on April 26 that the issue would not be decided before the end of June, when the present president of the EU relinquishes power. The EU acknowledged that there were several "complex issues" that still needed to be discussed, including the adequacy of the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports, China's impact on the Asian region, especially Taiwan, and whether sufficient progress had been made on human rights. (AP, RFE)

Of the EU's 25 member-states, France and Germany most strongly supported lifting the ban, citing improved relations between the EU and China and the opportunity to allow EU companies to compete for Chinese military contracts valued in 2003 at an estimated \$90 billion. Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands opposed lifting the ban, citing spotty progress in China's human rights record. Other governments such as Japan and the U.S., and NGOs such as Amnesty International, put strong pressure on the EU to not lift the ban. (AI, AP, DW, RFE)

#### DEATH PENALTY

To coincide with the EU summit on March 25-26, Amnesty International on March 22 released its annual report on the death penalty in China. The report, entitled "Execution 'according to the law?'" noted procedural flaws and failures at every stage of the criminal justice system and the use of evidence extracted through torture in convicting criminal suspects. AI also released its 2003 world report on the use of the death penalty in early April, in which China was found responsible for 726 of the 1,146 known and lawful executions worldwide. AI called for a moratorium on the death penalty in both reports. (AP, SCMP)

AI's disclaimer that its figures were based on "limited and incomplete records" was confirmed soon afterward by a Chinese legal expert. Chen Zhonglin, the director of the law academy at Southwestern Politics and Law University and a senior delegate to the National People's Congress from Chongqing Municipality, noted on March 15 that "nearly 10,000" people were executed in China every year. (SCMP)

## RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION

An official crackdown against unregistered religious groups saw Catholic and Protestant church leaders as well as Falungong practitioners throughout the country subjected to detention, arrest, torture and demolition of their places of worship.

One of the most well-known imprisoned Christian house church leaders, South China Church founder **Gong Shenliang**, was reported to have been severely beaten in prison while serving a life sentence after being convicted of rape and assault. After a visit to the Hongshan Prison in Wuhan, Gong's family reported that Gong was experiencing internal bleeding and hearing loss from beatings and other maltreatment. Guards at the prison denied the allegations and attributed Gong's infirmities to a "fall." During the visit, Gong asked his family to secure his transfer to another prison because he feared for his life.

Another house church leader, **Chu Wei**, 40, from Huaibei City, Anhui Province, went on the run with his wife, Yin Yanling, 37, on February 10 after PSB officers threatened to send him to RTL. Chu's church was raided by the local PSB on February 9, and 12 church members were held, interrogated and asked to sign a form renouncing their faith before being released that same day. Yin returned home, but Chu was still in hiding as of early March.

A third house church leader, **Zeng Guangbo**, 36, from Nanyang City, Henan Province, was detained by customs officials while trying to pass the Inner-Mongolian border to Russia for a house church ministry there on March 1. He was released and then detained again two hours later by Nanyang PSB officials. Zeng had previously been detained on January 25. (AP, CAA)

An unofficial house church in Ningbo, Zhejiang Province, where some 300 worshippers had gathered for 20 years, was declared the site of "illegal religious meetings" on March 8. The building was badly damaged in a PSB raid on March 11, and then completely destroyed on March 31. Four onlookers who questioned the PSB's actions were sentenced to 15 days of administrative detention. The church's pastor, **Liu Fuen**, 50, was arrested on April 9 and his son **Liu Mingliang** was arrested on April 11. Neither had been charged but remained in detention at last report.

**Liu Fenggang, Xu Yonghai and Zhang**

**Shengqi**, three Protestant Christians detained in October and November 2003 after investigating the destruction of a house church in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, were tried in a three-hour court session in Hangzhou on March 14. Their relatives were not allowed to attend the trial and a verdict has not been announced. (CAA)

The crackdown on unofficial Protestant house churches comes at a time when Christianity is burgeoning throughout the country. At least seven new authorized churches were being planned for construction in Beijing, with two of them able to accommodate 4,000-5,000 people. Officially there are 20 million Protestants in China, but estimates of unofficial house church members ranged from 30 million to 50 million. Official tolerance of the expansion of the official Protestant church in Beijing was perceived by Christian monitoring groups as a means to counter rapid growth of unofficial churches. (CSM)

China's Catholics also experienced the crackdown with the secret detention of two Catholic bishops. **Wei Jingyi**, the underground bishop of Qiqihar, Heilongjiang Province, was detained on March 5 on his way back from meeting a friend at Harbin airport. He was released on March 14 without being charged. Wei has been in and out of labor camps for years and was last arrested in September 2002. Another bishop, **Julius Jia Zhiguo**, 69, from Zhengding, Hebei Province, was detained on April 5 for leading an unregistered church, and was released ten days later on April 14. He had spent a total of 20 years in prison for his religious activities. (AFP, AP)

The Falungong spiritual movement continued to experience official persecution. On February 19 five Falungong practitioners in Chongqing were convicted of "libeling the government" by spreading "fabricated stories" in connection with information the group posted on the Internet about the mistreatment in prison of another Falungong practitioner. **Lu Zengqi** and **Yan Qiuyan** were each sentenced to ten years in prison, Li Jian was sentenced to 13 years, **Chen Shumin** was sentenced to 14 years and **Yin Yan** was sentenced to 5 years. Four hundred people carried out a protest in Hong Kong on May 2 to call attention to the mistreatment of Falungong practitioners in China. (AFP, AP)

## LABOR RIGHTS

An estimated 1,200 workers at the Tieshu Textile factory in Hubei Province joined in on protests against unpaid benefits and corruption on February 8. Police detained nine protesters, subsequently releasing five. Two others, **Chen Kehai** and **Zhao Yong**, were subjected to a summary trial at the Suizhou No. 1 Detention Center on April 22 for "disturbing public order." Another, **Zhu Guo**, was tried at the Zeng Du District Basic People's Court on April 26 for "assembling a crowd to disturb the social order," and the last was still awaiting trial. No verdict has been announced in any of the cases, but the detained protestors are expected to draw sentences of between 12 and 27 months of RTL. (CLB)

In a related event, 1,000 retired workers of the Tieshu factory collectively filed an administrative lawsuit against the Suizhou Social Insurance Bureau for "administrative negligence" resulting in unpaid wages. Some of the protesters released in April also planned to sue the government for torture and mistreatment they received while in detention. (CLB)

On March 16, the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) submitted a petition under Section 301 of U.S. trade laws, which called on the Bush Administration to use trade tariffs to pressure China into enforcing core labor rights. The AFL-CIO accused the Chinese government of prohibiting strikes, forbidding workers to organize unions independent of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), and of failure to enforce minimum wage, overtime and health and safety laws. After considering the petition for 45 days, the Bush Administration refused to file the AFL-CIO's complaint with China on April 28. (AFL-CIO, DJ, Reut)

## INTERNET AND PRESS CENSORSHIP

The lead-up to the NPC saw an increase in the suppression of freedom of information and expression on the Internet through surveillance of online content and Internet cafes, as well as through legislation.

As the sessions of the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Congress commenced in early March, the central government prohibited Internet news discussion chat rooms from running news forums

about any subject not covered by state-run media. Access was blocked to the Chinese Web sites of the Wall Street Journal and Deutsche Welle, and two online diary sites, blogbus.com and blogcn.com, were temporarily shut down for posting criticisms of the government. (AP AT, RSF)

Authorities in Shanghai Municipality and Shandong Province announced new restrictions on use of the Internet in April. The Shanghai Culture, Radio, Film and TV Administration said it would install video cameras and high-tech software to censor Internet use. Starting at the end of June, all customers of Shanghai's Internet cafes must enter an identification number to access the Internet. Access to "illegal content" will send an automatic message to a "remote supervisory center" monitoring all of the city's 1,325 Internet cafes. The Shandong Public Security Bureau is implementing a similar program, called the "Internet Real Names" project, which allows people to access the Internet only if they use their real names. The new system, which has no start date scheduled, will track Internet access through a user identification system connected to ID cards that Internet users must purchase. (AP, CIC)

On the national level, the Chinese government "indefinitely postponed" plans to impose its own wireless software encryption standard on all domestic and foreign software developers on June 1. The government had insisted that any company developing wireless computer technology for distribution in China had to use Chinese encryption software and wired authentication and privacy infrastructures (WAPI), and must co-produce their goods with one of 24 designated Chinese companies. Several foreign companies objected to the plan, and the U.S. government had filed a complaint with the World Trade Organization (WTO), expressing concern that the imposition of technology transfers and local content requirements went against China's agreement to eliminate trade barriers when it entered the WTO in 2001. This was the first time a complaint had been filed against China to the international trade governing-body. (AP, NYT)

A Beijing court blamed pornography and violence on the Internet for the huge increase in juvenile crime in 2003. A survey of 100 young offenders appearing before the court found that 75 percent regularly

viewed violent images, 61 percent regularly viewed pornographic images and 30 percent regularly visited Internet cafes. Citing the surveys as evidence that the Internet provided "harmful cultural information" and was "hurting children's mental and physical health," Beijing officials announced in early March that no new Internet cafes would be allowed within 200 meters of schools.

The court that conducted the survey also set up a "workgroup" to deal specifically with Internet cases in early April. The court justified the new monitoring body by pointing to the growing number of Internet crimes, which had reached 4,500 cases in 2002. (AP SCMP, Xinhua)

Spring saw the sentencing of at least two people in connection with their Internet activities. **Ma Yalian**, from Shanghai Municipality, was sentenced to 18 months of RTL on March 16 after posting a number of exposés on China's petitioning system on the Internet. Well-known dissident **Ouyang Yi**, from Chengdu, was sentenced on March 16 to two years in prison on charges of incitement to subvert state power. Ouyang, who was originally detained on December 5, 2002, was a drafter of the Open Letter to the 16th Party Congress calling for political reform. (HRIC)

The Committee to Protect Journalists released the latest of its annual reports, "Attacks on the Press in 2003," in early March, naming China the world's leading jailer of journalists for the fifth year in a row. At the time the report was published, 39 out of 136 journalists imprisoned worldwide were located in China. The CPJ named China as one of the "Ten worst places to be a journalist" on World Press Freedom Day, May 3. By then the number of journalists imprisoned in China had increased to 41. (CPJ)

The cases of three imprisoned former editors from the popular *Southern Metropolis News* (*Nanfang Dushi Bao*) drew considerable international attention on perceptions that they had been targeted for running stories about the death in police custody of university graduate student Sun Zhigang in March 2003 and the resurgence of SARS in early 2004. **Yu Huafeng** was sentenced to 12 years in prison for corruption on March 19, and **Li Minying** was sentenced to 11 years for bribery on March 19. **Cheng Yizhong** was detained on the night of March 19–20 in connection with Yu and

Li's case, but he has not yet been tried. Dozens of Chinese legal experts and journalists in early April began circulating an online petition demanding a retrial for the Guangzhou editors on the grounds that their rights had been violated and that their imprisonment was "a slap in the face" to President Hu's new constitutional amendment on human rights. *The Southern Metropolis News* has gained a nationwide reputation for its aggressive reporting and willingness to test the limits of official toleration. (AP, SCMP)

The Chinese government agreed to air a speech by U.S. Vice-President Dick Cheney to 500 Fudan University students in its entirety on state TV on April 15. The speech, which discussed political freedom in China, free speech, assembly, religion and conscience, ran with a 1-minute delay. A subsequent official transcript of Cheney's address omitted some of his more sensitive comments.

The State Propaganda Department in April issued reporting directives to all media organizations regarding subjects the news agencies were forbidden to report on. The list of "ten forbiddens" included certain scandals, government officials selling stocks and currency valuation. (CIC)

The government has also been conducting structural reforms to the state-run media, which has included shutting down 677 newspapers nationwide, as well as allowing private and foreign investment in other state-owned media. The reforms, which were explained as a means to make China's state-run media competitive in global markets, did not include a relaxation of censorship. (CD, WSJ)

#### PUBLIC HEALTH

China suffered recurrences of SARS in March and April. On April 25, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced five confirmed cases and four suspected cases, including the first fatality since the disease killed 349 people last year. The outbreak was said to have originated with the infection of a female and a male medical student working at the Beijing Institute of Virology under the Chinese Center of Disease Control and Prevention. The woman was infected at the Institute in late March and the man was infected almost one month later. The woman passed the disease to at least two other people, one of

whom died, when she traveled by train to and from her home in Anhui Province after a Beijing hospital misdiagnosed her as a pneumonia patient. (NYT, WSJ, WP)

As China's May 1 holiday approached, health officials were quick to implement disease containment measures nationwide. Hundreds of people who came into contact with the two medical students were quarantined, hospitals nationwide were on alert, temperature checks were instituted at transportation hubs and border crossings, and Beijing's Institute of Virology closed while testing for contamination took place. Although the outbreak was not considered a significant threat to public health, the WHO was troubled by several official missteps, including the neglect of laboratory safety measures at the Institute of Virology, the misdiagnosis of the female medical student, and the failure to immediately isolate all of the SARS patients. (NYT, WP)

In March the Hong Kong Health Department announced that it might ease its SARS precautionary regulations in light of budgetary considerations and a lack of new cases reported since June 2003. The agency was considering ending random temperature checks at border crossings and transportation hubs, as well as terminating the policy of isolating all pneumonia cases in the territory's hospitals as potential SARS cases. However, the department said it wanted to continue infrared fever screenings and having travelers sign declarations of health at border crossings. The department noted that the cost of maintaining precautionary programs was high, and the money could be used on the city's other public health needs. However, some health experts objected to the proposals, citing the great risk of not handling SARS patients carefully and the usefulness of the precautions in preventing the spread of other diseases. (AP)

A survey of 400 people conducted by the Chinese University of Hong Kong in January and released in late March found that Hong Kong citizens had been emotionally traumatized by SARS and were having difficulty moving past the disease's stigma. The survey's results showed that 20.1 percent of respondents avoided contact with former SARS patients and 16 percent would not shake hands with a former SARS patient. In addition, ten percent thought recovered SARS patients were still contagious and

half believed in the possibility of airborne transmission across great distances. At the same time, a report published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in late April indicated that the virus might be able to travel greater distances than experts originally thought. The report found that airborne spread of the virus over great distances might explain the chain of transmission at the Amoy Gardens housing complex, where 300 people were infected, and other outbreaks where there was no close contact. The researchers recommended the continuation of rapid isolation to control outbreaks. (DJ, WP)

On March 16, China's Minister of Agriculture, Du Qinglin, reported that Avian influenza had been stamped out in China. The "bird flu," which afflicted China's poultry, had not appeared in any of the 12 regions previously hit for 29 days, in spite of at least 22 human cases in Vietnam and Thailand. In February, Du was publicly photographed eating chicken in an attempt to alleviate fears about the safety of eating poultry. (AP, Reut)

SARS, avian influenza and other "zoonoses," or diseases that can cross species, were discussed at a three-day meeting of human and animal health experts co-convened by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Organization for Animal Health at the WHO's Geneva headquarters in early May. Officials warned of the threat of more diseases jumping species and creating fatal epidemics. Experts recommended further research into the role of climate change, air travel, growth of cities in developing countries and interactions between animals and humans as a means of containing such diseases in the future. (AP)

Food safety became a hot topic in the official media as a fake milk scandal in Anhui Province came to light in late April. Thirteen babies died and around 200 more were afflicted with "big head disease," or malnutrition, after being fed fake formula. A preliminary inquiry by local authorities found that 45 brands were selling substandard formula in Anhui Province, as well as 10 in Shandong and 33 in Guangdong. Some of the deficient formulas were found to be loaded with sugar and containing only two percent nutrients instead of the minimum of 12 percent. Local authorities in Anhui Province responded to the crisis by

pulling the substandard formulas from shelves in late April, giving free medical treatment to surviving babies and calling for preliminary inquiries. It was later revealed that officials may have been aware of the problem up to a year ago without taking action. Independent experts blame China's recurring problem with food poisoning on the lack of consumer protection measures and the impotence of China's Food and Drug Administration in regulating the food industry. (BBC, NYT)

#### HONG KONG AND TAIWAN

Throughout February and March, China's state-controlled media and other sources close to the government made statements to the effect that Beijing would not permit Hong Kong to carry out full democratic elections for its Chief Executive in 2007 and for its Legislative Council in 2008. On February 19 and 20, *the People's Daily*, *China Daily*, *Xinhua News Agency* and *CCTV* all ran editorials claiming that people who "unpatriotically" led organizations aimed at opposing the CCP's leadership should be excluded from Hong Kong's government. On March 12, *Wen Wei Po*, Beijing's mouthpiece in Hong Kong, quoted an unnamed Chinese official as saying that full democracy was out of the question because Beijing feared the election of a leader with questionable loyalty to the CCP. Xiao Weiyun, a mainland legal expert and original drafter of Hong Kong's Basic Law, stressed on March 16 that with regard to electoral reform, the Basic Law should be interpreted in "spirit" as well as letter. (AP, NYT, Reut, WSJ, WP)

This brought objections from Hong Kong's democracy activists in an editorial published in the *Apple Daily*, which decried the comments as weakening the authority and credibility of the Basic Law. James To and other pro-democracy legislators moved a nonbinding motion on March 17 urging the Hong Kong government to propose specific democratic reforms. The motion garnered a 25-18 vote, but failed to carry the two-thirds majority required to take effect. (AP)

Public demonstrations continued with a protest on March 29 and a vigil on April 2 attended by an estimated 3,000 people calling on the Standing Committee not to issue an interpretation of the Basic Law at its meeting on April 2-6. A spokesperson for the U.S. Consulate General in Hong

Kong voiced American support for greater democracy in Hong Kong, and legislator Martin Lee was invited to the U.S. in early March to brief government officials on Hong Kong's political situation. (AP, NYT, Reut)

A taskforce on constitutional reform, headed by Hong Kong's No. 2 official, Donald Tsang, presented a report on public opinion to NPC Standing Committee members in the border city of Shenzhen on March 30, but Tsang announced that no change to electoral policy would be made without Beijing's go-ahead. (AP)

On April 6, Beijing announced that the decision of when to proceed with electoral reform would be made by the central government, and that Beijing's prior approval was necessary before initiating any reforms. A Standing Committee spokesperson claimed the central government had the authority to rule on the election of the Chief Executive as well. (WSJ, WP)

The Civil Human Rights Front, a coalition of civil society and democracy groups in Hong Kong, held an impromptu rally against Beijing's decision later that week on Easter Sunday (April 11). The crowd was estimated at between 7,600 and 20,000 people. International rights groups such as Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the International League of Human Rights (FIDH) condemned the decision as an "antidemocratic interpretation" that seriously set back electoral reform. (AP, FIDH, HRW, NYT, WP)

On April 26, Beijing delivered its pronouncement that full democratic elections would not take place in 2007 and 2008. As protesting voices surged again, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao pledged on April 28 to allow direct elections of the Chief Executive and the Legislature in Hong Kong, but without giving any timetable. Some observers have noted an increasingly aggressive Chinese government stance towards Hong Kong more recently, with eight Chinese warships spotted in Victoria Harbor on May 5. (AP, NYT, Reut)

In the meantime, the Civil Human Rights Front announced plans for protests on June 4 commemorating the 15th anniversary of Beijing's crackdown on the 1989 Democracy Movement, as well as a demonstration on July 1 marking the anniversary of the rally against an anti-subversion bill that compelled 500,000 Hong Kong people to take to the streets. (NYT)

In Taiwan, a controversial referendum

and presidential election took place as planned on March 20. The pro-independence incumbent, Chen Shui-bian, won a second four-year term over Lien Chan of the Nationalist (Kuomintang) Party by fewer than 30,000 votes out of 13 million cast. One week after the election, the Nationalist Party sued to obtain a court-supervised recount of the election on the grounds that it had been marred by irregularities and the shooting of Chen and his vice-president Annette Lu on March 19 in Tainan. Lien's camp alleged that the shooting, during which Chen was wounded in the abdomen and Lu was grazed in the knee, gave Chen last-minute sympathy votes. President Chen publicly agreed to a recount soon afterwards, but his lawyers demanded that the Nationalist Party pay for the recount costs, estimated at \$16 million. The recount began on May 11. (AP, NYT)

The shooting, which remains unexplained, and for which no arrests have been made, contributed to further unrest in the controversial election, which had drawn voters back to Taiwan from all over the world. Several demonstrations turned violent, as rock-throwing protesters and police in riot gear clashed in the streets.

Beijing, which at first had only made subtle comments after the election, denounced President Chen on April 1 for continuing to insist that the island is an independent country, and rejected as "deceitful" his offer to hold cross-strait talks without preconditions. A senior Beijing official said that Chen's narrow reelection victory remained in dispute and that China was keeping a watchful eye on the recount process. (WP)

#### ABBREVIATIONS

AI	Amnesty International
AN	Asia News
AFP	Agence-France-Presse
AP	Associated Press
AT	Asia Times
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CAA	China Aid Association
CIC	China Information Center
CLB	China Labour Bulletin
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
CSM	Christian Science Monitor
DJ	Dow Jones
DW	Deutsche Welle
ET	Epoch Times
FIDH	International League of Human Rights
HRIC	Human Rights in China
KRN	Knight Ridder News
HRW	Human Rights Watch
NYT	New York Times
Reut	Reuters
RFE	Radio Free Europe
RSF	Reporters Sans Frontieres
SCMP	South China Morning Post
WP	Washington Post
WSJ	Wall Street Journal