



On Jan. 24, 2009 activists of hardline Hindu organisation the Sri Ram Sena (Lord Ram's Army) attack customers at the Amnesia pub in Mangalore, some 400 Kms north of Bangalore. STRAFFIGETTY IMAGES

## India's health minister laments pub culture

By **SUSHEELA HEGDE**  
Epoch Times Staff

BANGALORE, India—India's health minister is condemning a growing pub culture in the country as a hindrance to progress and hinted at legislation to address the problem.

In a New Delhi news conference on Friday Minister Anbumani Ramadoss discussed an attack at a

pub in the southern city of Mangalore the week before. Three young women who were drinking at the pub were attacked by members of a radical Hindu group called Sri Ram Sena (Lord Ram's Army).

The incident has revealed a divide in the thinking between India's liberals and those who are more conservative.

"We definitely condemn the incident, where women were at-

tacked, but the pub culture must stop," Ramadoss told media. He blamed the pub culture for a growing number of youth drinkers and said 40 per cent of road accidents were alcohol-related.

"These young people not only jeopardize their lives but are also a danger to others on the roads."

Earlier, the chief minister of Karnataka, the state where the incident took place, and chief min-

ister of the western state of Rajasthan, both expressed their anguish about pub culture.

Indian media, however, blame the attack on the Taliban-like mindset of Sri Ram Sena members, who vow to protect 'Hindu culture.'

Meanwhile, both central and state governments have ordered separate probes into the pub attack incident.

## Ireland might lose its triple A credit rating

By **MARTIN MURPHY**  
Epoch Times Staff

Failed talks between Ireland's government and trade unions to reduce the public sector expenses via payroll cuts could cost the country its AAA lending rating.

The Government hoped that the talks could produce a package of cost saving measures that would reduce Ireland's public service expenditure by 2 billion Euro this year. Discussions broke down early Tuesday morning over proposed increases in pension payments.

The Government was planning on investing up to 10 billion Euro into the two main banks, Allied Irish Bank and bank of Ireland using money held in the national pension fund.

Rating agency Moody's Investors Service has been closely monitoring Ireland's progress since the Government announced its greatest budget deficit in history last December. The world's top three rating agencies still maintain Ireland's triple A status but the rising budget deficit could result in a downgrading.

Greece, Spain and Portugal are all in a similar position as Ireland. All countries may have to consider the added burden of paying more for their borrowings if their sovereign debt rating falls.

Rating agency Fitch Ratings, Ltd. is more optimistic of Ireland's outlook than Moody's and Standard & Poor's, the other major rat-



An Allied Irish Bank branch is pictured in London, on October 2, 2008. Irish lawmakers passed a controversial emergency law guaranteeing bank deposits Thursday, despite protests that the move gives its financial sector a competitive advantage over neighbouring countries. LEON NEAL/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

ing agency. Fitch has maintained the country's triple A credit rating and considers Ireland's long-term prospects stable. The Irish government is hoping his assurance will help resume foreign investment in the economy.

In an interview published in The Irish Times last week Mr. Chris Pryce, director of Fitch's sovereigns

group, said "Economic fundamentals provide Ireland with the ability to withstand this stress and maintain its AAA status."

He also pointed out that the government's "willingness to be clear regarding the potential economic pain its plans will cause and its acceptance of the consequent electoral unpopularity" were "essential

to its credibility".

Mr Pryce also commented on the Irish government's plans to bail out the two biggest banks. He was of the opinion that these plans would not effect Ireland's current credit status.

Moody's vice-president and senior analyst Dietmar Hornung told Reuters, "We are currently reviewing the strength of AAAs, and we will publish a paper soon on 'how far can a AAA government stretch its balance sheet?'"

"Ireland is still in a pretty favourable situation, it is not only the low debt stocks, it is also being a part of the EU, being part of the EMU (European Monetary Union) and it is certainly a shelter to an imminent crisis situation," he added.

The Irish government's exchequer returns for January now show tax receipts weaker than they had forecast. The live register is reflecting the spate of job losses, and increasing social welfare commitments.

But the rating agencies are unlikely smile upon the government's failed talks with public sector representatives.

Fitch, Moody's and Standard and Poor's all provide information to investors with respect to the risks involved in investing in a particular company, market or country.

Ratings can be short term or long term obligations, securities, loans etc. The type of long term credit rating a country has will reflect their ability to honour their debts.

## Chinese censors plot takeovers of Western media

Epoch Times Staff

At a meeting that took place in the second half of January, members of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) Political Bureau Central Committee discussed propaganda campaigns outside China for the upcoming year.

During the meeting's concluding speech, the Standing Committee member in charge of "ideology" pointed out that due to the joint efforts of the Propaganda Department, the "United Front" and the Foreign Affairs departments over the past decade, most overseas Chinese media companies very much carry the identity of the CCP's policies and practices.

(The "United Front" is the CCP's effort to promote its interests through business contacts, front organizations and student groups outside of China.)

In light of that success, the regime has announced plans for substantial investment in overseas propaganda efforts.

During the Propaganda Minister's speech, he said that after the fund was allocated, several overseas Chinese media owners contacted the Propaganda Department and said they were willing to cooperate with the CCP to promote "China's international image."

But leaders from the "United Front," and the CCP's Intelligence Agency warned that extra spending may not be necessary because advertising revenue from CCP-funded companies should be enough to keep them cooperating with the regime, and as such, there is no longer need to give them special funding.

Instead, a special report from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs suggested that the CCP begin to focus their attention on Western mainstream media outlets. They cited the UK publication Evening Standard's acquisition by former KGB agent Lebedev as an example to follow and urged that the CCP begin training overseas Chinese agents to begin acquiring Western mainstream media.

They cited examples such as a CNN analyst's "distorted" remark in 2008 that the regime as a "bunch of goons and thugs" as a warning bell that manipulating overseas Chinese media is not enough.

Some foreign affairs experts believe the CCP's perceived strength on the international stage and their influence on world affairs will enable them to gain full control over several mainstream Western media outlets.

It was not a coincidence that the CCP's Intelligence Agency's report mentioned the acquisition of a British media outlet by a former KGB agent.

The report analyzed the increasing financial difficulties that many Western media outlets are facing during the current global economic crisis and made the conclusion that the time is right to begin attempting to acquire such outlets without it being construed as a political move.

The Ministry of State Security warned that extreme caution should be exercised when selecting which agents should attempt to acquire Western media. Their recommendation was to inject money to various overseas Chinese media and use them as pawns to take control of the outlets.

Participants at the meeting are said to have reached a consensus that the main goal of the communist party's 2009 overseas propaganda campaign would be to concentrate all of the Party's financial, material, and human resources to infiltrate Western media through either the injection of funding or direct acquisition, with the ultimate goal being to so-called "enhance China's international status."

A Hong Kong-based media source pegs that investment at 45 billion Yuan (USD \$6.62 million).

Professor Yu Guoming, School of Journalism at Renmin University in China said, "This plan is generated by the CCP because of the protests during the Beijing Olympic torch relay in some overseas countries last year."

## China's tough employment situation

By **WANG ZHEN**  
Epoch Times Staff

At the World Economic Forum's Annual Meeting in Davos, Switzerland on January 28, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao said that China is undertaking various measures to reach its goal of an 8% GDP growth this year. However, he admitted this would be very difficult given the present economic climate.

Since the financial crisis swept through the world, China's economy has been growing at smaller and smaller rates. As its economy slows down, unemployment in China is rising steadily—heightening anxiety in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), about opposition to its rule which has increased in recent years.

### 2008 fourth quarter GDP growth only 6.8%

According to data published by the National Bureau of Statistics of China, China's fourth quarter GDP growth for 2008 was only 6.8 percent—the lowest growth seen in the past seven years.

Since the financial storm broke out last year, China's export industry, which accounts for 20 per cent of China's total economic growth, was slammed by a drop in demand. It started to shrink in November 2008, and in December experienced a 2.8 per cent decrease, the worst performance since 1999.

According to a forecast by HSBC Hong Kong, during the first quarter of 2009, China's exports could drop by 19 per cent. That could lead to many export companies closing down and cost ten million peasant laborers their jobs.

### Experts anticipate 5% growth in 2009

On January 28, the International Monetary Fund estimated that China's GDP would grow 6.7 per cent in 2009. Other financial experts predicted that the number could be as low as 5 per cent.

According to Nouriel Roubini, an economics professor at New York University famous for accurately predicting the global financial crisis, China's GDP growth this year will not exceed 5 per cent. China economist, Mark Williams,

from London-based Capital Economics, told Voice of America that he also anticipated a growth of 5 per cent this year in China's GDP.

### Tough job market

Recently Chinese authorities often speak of the tightening job market. In early November 2008, China's Human Resources and Social Security Department demanded that employment stabilization be treated "as a top priority."

In early December 2008, China's highest level economic meeting, the Central Economic Work Conference, continued to stress implementing a more active employment policy.

In mid-December 2008, Hu Jintao warned that China's employment situation in 2009 would be very grim. Recently, the Human Resources and Social Security Department also disclosed that Chinese citizens will face a very tough employment situation in the months ahead.

### Scholars: China's actual unemployment rate is between 24 and 27 percent

The actual unemployment rate in China has always been something of an enigma because the CCP represents China's unemployment with a rate that excludes migrant workers and rural populations. The CCP's official data at the end of 2008 showed "urban" unemployment at 4.2 percent.

In the latest "Blue Book of China's Society," a yearbook from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the actual unemployment rate in urban areas was 9.6 percent.

Professor Zeng Xiangyuan, Director of the Academy of Labor and Social Relations at the Renmin University of China, has said that based on data uncovered through investigations, China's unemployment rate for both urban and rural areas is actually between 24 to 27 percent if converted to international standards.

As the Chinese unemployment rate rises, protests have increased. This unrest is a growing concern in the minds of the CCP officials, ever fearful the party will lose its power base in China.

Translated from the Chinese edition of the Epoch Times.

## Rights lawyer freed in China: reports

CONTINUED FROM FRONT P1

Gao was awarded the Courageous Advocacy Award by the American Board of Trial Advocates while still in detention in 2007. He is among the few Chinese lawyers who dares to speak out against the human rights abuses of the CCP.

Besides representing the families of miners killed in a 2004 coal mine explosion, Gao has stood up Falun Gong, a Chinese meditation practice that has been persecuted ruthlessly by the communist authorities since 1999.

According to Cook, it is still un-

clear what the cause of his most recent detention was, yet his release, if it is true, stands as a reminder of what can be done when the international community pressures the CCP for human rights.

"My sense and observations have been that the human rights society speaking out and civil society groups speaking out plays a role when their voices are joined by the diplomatic community—it has all that much more authority and power that comes to bear on the Chinese authorities," she said.

## Fear of missile technology amid Iran satellite launch

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"Obviously, there are dual-use capabilities in the technology here which could be applied toward the development of a long-range ballistic missile," said Mr. Morrell in a Feb. 3 report by the American Forces Press Service.

Former U.N. Ambassador John Bolton said on IBA News (the Israeli Broadcast Authority) that he questions how effective the U.N. sanctions placed on Iran are.

"Russia has made it clear it will block any new sanctions or more effective sanctions, and we have the unbelievable spectacle of the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency basically

saying that we should ignore the Security Council demand that Iran suspend enrichment and allow Iran to proceed," he said.

Meanwhile, Japanese and South Korean media have also reported that intelligence officials are concerned that North Korea is also preparing to launch a long-range ballistic missile. Their concerns arise over satellite imagery.

Such a launch would ignore resolutions placed on North Korea to ban such tests. In a Jan. 3 White House press briefing Mr. Wood stated that the UN Security Council Resolution 1718 "basically prohibits North Korea from engaging in missile-related activities."