



IMMOBILITY: Migrants rest outside a railway station in Beijing in 2002, as they arrive back from their home provinces after the Lunar New Year. China's household registration system, which restricts movement within China according to place of birth, is central to government plans and will not be abolished. GOH CHAI HIN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

## Media in China punished for pushing reform Party not budging on household registration system

By HENG HE  
Epoch Times Staff

Punishment came swiftly for Chinese journalists and newspapers involved in publishing an editorial urging the reform and eventual abandonment of China's household registration system, a sign that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is not likely to relinquish this tool for ruling China.

The editorials were published on March 1, just prior to the opening on March 3 of the annual meeting of the People's Political Consultative Conference and the opening on March 5 of the People's Congress's annual meeting.

Most pundits believed that those involved with the editorials would be punished after the conferences, but the Department of Propaganda of the CCP Central Committee acted immediately.

According to Hong Kong's Ming Pao newspaper, by March 5 the top officials of the Economic Observer, which initiated the editorials, had already been punished. The president and editor-in-chief were warned, and the assistant editor-in-chief who drafted the editorial was fired. All 13 newspapers involved received a formal warning from the Propaganda Department.

### CONTROLLING SOCIETY

The Observer's editorial began: "China has suffered under the household registration system for too long. We hold that individuals are born free and have the right to move freely."

The CCP prohibited migration inside China in its first constitution, adopted in 1954, with a provision that has remained unmodified since. In January 1958, the "Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Residence Registration" were adopted, giving force to the constitutional provision.

By 1958 Mao Zedong had wrapped up the first of the anti-rightist cam-

paigns and was ready to launch the Great Leap Forward. That campaign would cause a famine and 40 million deaths, mostly among rural peasants. The household registration system prevented the peasants from leaving their villages and escaping the famine.

Since then, the Ministry of Public Security has issued many new regulations that refine the original regulations.

Chinese scholars have different justifications for the system. One mainstream view is the theory of a planned economy. Another less popular view is the economic crisis theory. Each of these theories partially explains the situation when the regulation was passed. But neither theory can explain why—after more than 50 years and with the original conditions no longer existing—it is still so hard to abandon or change the household registration system.

This system is one of the methods the communist regime uses to fully control Chinese society. Reaching across neighborhoods and villages, the household registration system touches every functional cell of society. Another method the Party uses to assert its control is to set up Party branches in grassroots units, including every law firm and most private businesses.

The household registration system has also contributed tremendously to China's economic development. Rural migrants to the cities provide a huge pool of cheap labour which, because the migrants are illegal, costs the state nothing in social services. The migrants' low-cost contribution to China's growth has indirectly helped the CCP stay in power.

### MISREADING THE SITUATION

The simultaneous publication in 13 Chinese newspapers of an editorial challenging the CCP is unprecedented.

The journalists behind the editorials

may have misjudged the situation. First, the household registration system has been a hot topic in Chinese society, the media, the Internet, and even in political circles for quite some time now. It is not a prohibited area.

Second, the leaders of the regime have already talked about it. During an exclusive interview with Xinhua-net on Dec. 27, 2009, Prime Minister Wen Jiabao mentioned that the Central Party Committee had made the decision to reform the household registration system.

In less than two months, Zhou Yongkang published an article on the household registration system in the journal Qiu Shi (Seeking Truth), the publication of the CCP Central Committee. In this article, Zhou, head of the Political and Legal Committee of CCP Central Committee and the former minister of Public Security, also promised to speed up reform of the household registration system.

Perhaps Wen and Zhou's comments gave the impression that change at the top had already started and so calling for change would not offend the Party.

Wen and Zhou had discussed how to enhance the management of the system in order to make it more efficient and a better fit for today's economy and changing society. Zhou's article used words like "manage (or control) people by housing, and manage (or control) people by job." However one understands manage or control, Zhou was not suggesting abandoning the household registration system.

The editorial suggested replacing the household registration system with a personal information registration system, which is more like the system used in most countries. The description of the two systems may seem similar, but the meaning is totally different.

In China, just because the Party leaders talk about a certain subject doesn't

mean the media can cover it; and just because the media talks about a subject doesn't mean editorials can be published about it. But even if one newspaper editorial can talk about something, that doesn't mean 13 newspapers can publish joint editorials about it.

### MISPLACED IDEALS

The joint editorials appealed to the People's Political Consultative Conference and the People's Congress. If China had a functioning legislative body, such an appeal would make sense.

But without permission from the Party, the issue of household registration would never be raised in either body. The representatives and the members of the two conferences are called a "hand-raising machine" for a reason. The two conferences are just a show that has to play every year. The representatives are simply actors and actresses.

This year, the reward for participation is one laptop computer for every representative. Besides, every representative will spend about 1 million Chinese Yuan (CA\$150,000) during the conferences on meals, hotels, transportation, entertainment, and so on.

To safeguard the conferences, Beijing activated the Moat Project. The governments, law enforcement agencies, and the people of the six provinces and metropolitan areas surrounding Beijing were put on alert to protect the conferences, with 700,000 security forces deployed in Beijing. This is surely the most costly show in the world.

But a show is only a show, no matter how costly it is.

There are only two situations in which the household registration system can be totally abandoned. Either the CCP finds an alternative law or regulation that can do the same job, or the CCP itself will disappear.

## Storms of protest forming over Thailand

PROTEST CONTINUED FROM P1

Thaksin has been living in exile ever since, but has remained very much in charge of his former party that was disbanded after the coup but later recreated under a different name.

INTERNAL SECURITY ACT IMPOSED Thailand's current Prime Minister, Abhisit Vejjajiva, on Monday canceled a planned state visit to Australia March 13 to 17 to stay home and deal with any potential trouble.

The prime minister was also granted an audience by Thai King Bhumibol Adulyadej. While the content of their discussion has not been disclosed, it is widely speculated that the tense political situation was high on the agenda.

Abhisit's government also announced that it had invoked the Internal Security Act, which would give sweeping powers to authorities to quell protests should the demonstrations violate laws for peaceful assembly.

The prime minister held a session with his top bureaucrats to prepare them for the weekend. According to The Nation, Abhisit told his staff that he had received phone calls reporting high sales of military fatigues, bullets, and water pipes that can be used to make guns.

The Nation also reported that the

Thailand's current Prime Minister, Abhisit Vejjajiva, on Monday canceled a planned state visit to Australia March 13 to 17 to stay home and deal with any potential trouble

prime minister said in his briefing that "intelligence shows that there are no exact plans for this upcoming rally. And there's no unity. There's even an idea to harm some fellow red-shirt leaders to create an incident. The government insists on enforcing the law and avoiding use of force."

Thai Finance Minister Korn Chatikavanij, who was in Washington on Monday, said that the prime minister would be "as patient as all governments need be," but at the same time was prepared to "use all means within its powers, within the laws of the country, to make sure that the property and safety of its citizens are protected," reported AFP.

## Spanish judge accuses Venezuelan gov't of aiding terrorism

JUDGE CONTINUED FROM P1

The terrorist groups had been plotting to assassinate several Colombian politicians, among them, the current president, Alvaro Uribe, according to Spanish judiciary sources.

Judge Velasco issued a 26-page bill of indictment against six alleged members of the ETA and seven alleged FARC members for "the felony of conspiracy to commit terrorist murders."

In the bill, Velasco says there is sufficient evidence "that exposes the Venezuelan government's cooperation in the illegal collaboration between FARC and ETA."

One of the principal members of ETA charged was Arturo Cubillas Fontan. Fontan had been chief of the Venezuelan branch of the ETA since 1999, and during his tenure he helped coordinate relations between the ETA and FARC.

According to testimony from four ex-members of FARC and two Spanish policemen, the ETA provided explosives and weapons training to FARC. In exchange, ETA received urban warfare training in at least six Venezuelan locations between 2003 and 2008.

In 2005, both Fontan and his wife were appointed to positions in Chavez's government in the agriculture ministry.

The Spanish government has reacted strongly to the accusations. Not long after the news first broke that the Venezuelan government might be implicated with the terrorist organizations, Spanish President José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero was already asking for explanations. Following him, the vice president, minister of defense, minister of internal affairs, and Spain's opposition Popular Party (PP), all made declarations regarding this matter.

Chavez also gave a strong reaction after the judgment was delivered. "Now a Spanish judge, based on some supposed computers that they took from the murdered Raul Reyes ... accuses me, accuses the government of Venezuela of cooperating with the ETA and FARC"

—Chavez

their networks, are trying to sabotage the Community of States that he promoted. This irritates the Yankees."

Aiming his statements directly at the Spanish president, he added, "If you want to, ask your judge for explanations. I have nothing to explain to you or to anybody on this planet," Chavez said.

Zapatero's only reaction to Chavez was to say that he was only "asking the Venezuelan government for information." The two Spanish ministers and the vice president were more stern requesting "mandatory cooperation" from the Venezuelan government in the case.

"In order to carry out such an investigation we need Venezuela's cooperation, and I will indeed ask this in an outright way to the Venezuelan government:

You have to cooperate with the Spanish justice given the fact that the matter is of grave importance," said Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba, the minister of internal affairs on public television.

The general director of the Spanish police, Francisco Javier Velásquez, is scheduled to travel to Venezuela this week to work with Chavez's government

regarding ETA activities in the country and their relations to the FARC.

Minister of External Affairs Miguel Ángel Moratinos announced that Velásquez's trip will happen once the Spanish government clears any doubts about the judge's charges of cooperation between both terrorist groups and the Venezuelan government.

The ETA is a Spanish terrorist organization that, since its creation in 1968, has assassinated over 839 people and bombed several buildings causing the death of many innocent civilians.

The FARC is a guerrilla group which operates in Colombia and its borders. It is responsible for the death of over 7,000 people and the kidnapping of several important Colombian politicians as well as foreign civilians. In 2008, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez asked the international community to consider the FARC a "belligerent group" and not consider them to be terrorists.

## Rash of recent earthquakes just coincidence, experts say

By STEPHEN JONES  
Epoch Times Staff

The last several weeks have seen devastating earthquakes in Haiti, Chile, Taiwan, and now Turkey, but there is little cause for concern, experts have said.

An earthquake measuring 6.0 on the Richter scale hit Turkey on Monday, killing dozens.

It follows two months of major earthquakes, including the Chilean earthquake, measuring 8.8, and the Haiti earthquake, which measured 7.0.

Four days ago, Taiwan saw widespread power cuts after being rattled by a magnitude 6.4 quake.

Seismologists estimate that there are tens of thousands of large and small earthquakes a year but many of them are not felt because they are deep below the surface of the earth or in the middle of wide oceans.

Of the major earthquakes, around 18

a year are of magnitude 7.0 or higher, said Don Blakeman, a geophysicist at the U.S. Geological Survey.

"Although earthquakes are not random in location, they are random in their timing," said Blakeman. "I think we are at a time now where we are seeing a cluster of them all happening at the same time."

Jon Davidson, a professor of Earth Sciences at the Durham University in the U.K., said that the Chilean earthquake may have been triggered by aftershocks from the Haiti earthquake—but the link between these two and others around the world is probably coincidence.

"There are a large number of earthquakes taking place everywhere in the world all the time," he said. "However most of them are deep below the surface or are in remote areas, and aren't reported on."

"It just so happens that we've had a few big ones around the same time."



VANISHED INTO THIN AIR: Villagers gather around a camp fire amongst tents and debris of what used to be houses in the village of Okular, Turkey, on Monday, after a 6.0 earthquake struck the country. AFP/GETTY IMAGES