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China reports new bird flu outbreak in TAR

18 February 2008

(Reuters) Chinese authorities have reported a bird flu outbreak in poultry in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), the second in two weeks. The outbreak, which started on 06 February in a village outside Lhasa, has killed 132 birds and led to the culling of 7,698 more, the Agriculture Ministry said. The National Avian Influenza Reference Laboratory said that the virus the birds contracted was a subtype of the H5N1 strain. Authorities have taken emergency measures to bring the epidemic under "effective control". An outbreak of the H5N1 strain in Tibet's Gongkar county on 25 January killed 1,000 chickens and ducks.

Tibetans clash with police at Amdo festival

21 February 2008

(RFA; Reuters) A clash between a large Tibetan crowd and police broke out in Rebkong (Chin: Tongren), Qinghai province, (traditionally part of Amdo). According to Reuters, the clash started because of a dispute over the price of balloons. The Tibetans threw stones and attacked police for over an hour during Monlam Chenmo celebrations the source said. The clash are said to have happened following a scuffle between Tibetan youths and a Hui trader (Chinese Muslims), the source said. *"Members of the crowd (...) tried to intervene, and then beat the policemen, who ran away. Rumours that the police had beat up some local youths spread through the crowd, and many other police were beaten or chased away, leading to large-scale unrest"*, the source said. A contingent of People's Armed Police (PAP) later arrived to restore order, firing tear gas and detaining about 100 to 200 people, most of whom were monks from the area one source told RFA's Tibetan service. They were released next morning. *"This suggests the local government also decided the incidents were a reaction to excessive force, not a protest about China's role in Tibet"*, the source said.

Outrage about fake photograph of antelopes, Tibet railway

22 February 2008

(Wall Street Journal; Xinhua; CCTV; Chengdu Business Daily; Daqing Evening News) Xinhua, China's state-run news agency, issued a public apology for publishing a doctored photograph of endangered Tibetan antelopes (chiru) apparently frolicking near the Qinghai-Tibet railway. The picture shot by Liu Weiqing, a wildlife photographer from the Daqing Evening News, featured dozens of antelope galloping peacefully across the Tibetan landscape, unfazed as the train raced beside them. It was captioned *"Qinghai-Tibet railway opens green passage for wildlife"*. Liu claimed to have waited in a pit for eight days for the antelope to pass at precisely the same moment as the train. He spent several months on the Tibetan Plateau for a highly publicized series by the Daqing Evening News meant to raise awareness of the rare Tibetan antelope. Liu who was also under contract with Xinhua said *"I wanted to capture the harmony among the Tibetan antelope, the train, men and nature"*. In late 2006, Liu's picture was declared one of the top ten *"Photographs of the year"* by CCTV, China's state-run television network. The endangered antelope has recently emerged as a symbol of China's environmental-protection efforts. It is one of the five official mascots of the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Suspicions about the photo emerged after its display in Beijing's subway system. Chinese internet users finally uncovered the deception. Cornered by the mounting evidence, Liu admitted he had indeed used Photoshop to blend two pictures. Liu resigned from the Daqing Evening News and posted a statement on his blog. *"I have no reason to continue my sacred career as a newsman"*, he wrote, *"I am not qualified for the job"*. His editor then resigned too, and the newspaper posted an apology on its website. CCTV posted a statement saying it was revoking Mr. Liu's award. Xinhua and several other government news organisations published an apology for circulating the photo. They said they would delete all of Liu's images from their databases. The issue has brought on new debates about media ethics and the environmental sustainability of the Qinghai-Tibet railway.

Arrested Tibetan handed over to China

24 February 2008

(AFP; Phayul) Nepalese Police arrested a 27 year-old Tibetan man from the Tibetan Reception Centre in Kathmandu. The man, identified as Tsering Dhondup, is from Bayan county, in Qinghai province, (traditionally Amdo). Nepalese police arrested Dhondup without an arrest warrant and without informing the centre or the UNHCR, one of the partners running the centre. The arrest has been linked to an incident where a man was stabbed in Tibet. *"This is the first time anybody has been arrested from here"*, an official from the centre said, on condition of anonymity. A senior Nepalese police officer confirmed that Nepali authorities had handed the man over to Chinese authorities. *"The immigration department of Nepal sent him to the Nepal-China border in Kodari and handed him over to Chinese officials"*, according to the officer. *"I cannot give you more information"*, he said when asked why Dhondup was arrested.

2008 Tibetan Olympic Torch in Taipei

25 February 2008

(AFP; Taipei Times) The 2008 Tibetan Olympic Torch relay reached Taiwan on 24 February 2008 as a prelude to the alternative Tibetan Olympics organised by exile Tibetan producer Lobsang Wangyal. The event was attended by Tsering Chungtak, Miss Tibet 2006. Tsering Chungtak deplored the human-rights situation in Tibet, but stated that she believes Beijing should still host the upcoming Olympic Games. *"I think Beijing should get the opportunity to host the Olympics because the games celebrate the spirit of sports. Moreover, it gives Beijing a chance to prove its claims about the human rights conditions in Tibet and China"*, she said, adding the international event will also give the world the opportunity to judge the truthfulness of Beijing's claims. Tenzin Chungtak was expelled from the 2007 Miss Tourism competition in Malaysia in December 2007 after she refused to wear a sash reading *"Miss Tibet-China"*. The 2008 Tibetan Olympic Torch relay started in Delhi on 30 January 2008 and reached Sydney on 17 February. The next leg will be Dharamsala, India, on 10 March, after which the torch will move on to Tokyo, Hawaii, San Francisco, New York City, Sucre (Bolivia), London, Cape Town and Jerusalem. The relay will end in Dharamsala on 25 May 2008.

Death of sole Tibetan Long March veteran

26 February 2008

(Associated Press; TibetInfoNet) China's state-run CCTV reported the death of Tian Bao, who passed away aged 92 due to illness on 21 February in Chengdu, Sichuan. Born as Sangye Yeshe in eastern Tibet (Kham), now part of Sichuan province, Tian Bao joined Mao's army as it pushed through Western on the flight from the nationalist Guomintang forces, an episode known in Chinese history books as the 'Long March'. The Chinese name Tian Bao, literally 'Heavenly Treasure', was given to him by Mao Tse Tung personally, thus underlining the great importance he attached to having a Tibetan join the Red Army. Tian Bao became 1965 a deputy secretary of the regional Communist Party in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). Although not considered a man of great ability, Tian Bao enjoyed fame and privileges as the only Tibetan veteran of the Long March (chang zhang gan bu).

CTA reshuffles representatives of the Offices of Tibet

27 February 2008

(tibet.net) The Central Tibetan Administration in Dharamsala have announced a major reshuffle in the post of representatives of the Offices of Tibet (OoT). According to the announcement, Kasur Tashi Wangdi, currently representative of the Dalai Lama in New York, US, will head the new Office of Tibet in Brussels, Belgium. He will be replaced in New York by former Kalon Lobsang Nyandak. Special Envoy Kelsang Gyaltsen, currently representative in Geneva, Switzerland, will take a new responsibility to enhance relations and political activities in European countries, from 17 March 2008. Mr Tsetan Samdup, a former deputy secretary at the Office of Tibet London, has been appointed the new representative in Geneva. He will take charge from 18 March. Mr Dawa Tsering, Additional Secretary at the Department of Information and International Relations will be the new representative at the Taiwan office, replacing Mr. Tsegyam who will become the secretary at the Office of the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala.

Record tourist figures in Lhasa

29 February 2008

(Xinhua) Tibet's Potala Palace and the Norbu Lingka Palace, traditionally the winter and summer palaces of the Dalai Lamas, received more than 1.63 million in 2007, a 53.7 percent increase year-on-year, according to Chinese statistics. *"The Potala Palace has taken measures to improve its reception capability so as to meet the needs of increasing number of visitors from home and abroad"*, said Yu Dawa, director of the region's cultural relics bureau. In 2008, officials expect at least five million tourists to visit the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR); the region received 4.02 million tourists in 2007. The huge number of tourists has been attributed mainly to the operation of the Golmud-Lhasa Railway completed in July 2006.

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