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EU urges China to hold dialogue on Tibet

29 March 2008

(Reuters) The European Union (EU) called for an end to repression in Tibet and urged China to hold a dialogue on Tibetan cultural and religious rights, ministers said. Emerging from the meeting, British Foreign Secretary David Milliband said the 27-member bloc wanted Beijing to open a dialogue with the Dalai Lama. The EU avoided direct reference to the possibility of boycotting the start of the Games in August, after member states differed on what stance to take. EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner mooted the idea of sending an EU diplomatic fact-finding mission to Tibet and said the time before the Olympics should be used to press for human rights and media access. Given China's huge importance to the EU as an export market and investment magnet, diplomats said there are no prospects of economic or political sanctions.

Diplomats visit Lhasa

29 March 2008

(AFP) Two weeks after protests began in the region, diplomats from 15 embassies, including those of the US, Britain, France and Japan, arrived in the Tibetan capital Lhasa for a tour hastily arranged by the Chinese authorities. "They will carry out on-the-spot investigation of the real facts of the (...) serious and violent criminal incident", the Chinese foreign ministry said. The US welcomed the move but President Bush later urged China to hold talks on the situation with representatives of the Dalai Lama. He said after meeting Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in Washington that he had told China's President Hu Jintao it was in his country's interest "that he sit down again with representatives of the Dalai Lama". Rudd added more forthrightly: "It's absolutely clear that there are human rights abuses in Tibet. That's clear cut. We need to be up front and absolutely straight about what's going on. Shouldn't shilly-shally about it".

Some European leaders will not attend opening of Beijing Olympics

31 March 2008

(The Times) German chancellor, Angela Merkel, will not attend the Olympics in Beijing, neither will Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Germany's foreign minister, nor Wolfgang Schäuble, the interior minister responsible for sport. While announcing that German leaders were staying away from Beijing, Steinmeier denied they were boycotting or staging a political protest against the Chinese military and police campaign in Tibet and surrounding areas. While expressing scepticism about a complete boycott, he did not rule one out. "This is not the right moment to talk about a boycott (...) We should watch how the Chinese government deals with the situation in the next weeks and months". French President Nicolas Sarkozy makes his participation dependent from further developments. Donald Tusk, Poland's prime minister, was the first EU head of government to announce a boycott and he was promptly joined by President Václav Klaus of the Czech Republic, who had previously promised to travel to Beijing.

China Alleges Tibet 'Suicide Squads'

01 April 2008

(AP) Chinese Public Security Ministry spokesman Wu Heping said searches of monasteries had turned up 176 guns, 13,013 bullets, 19,000 sticks of

dynamite, 7,725 pounds of unspecified explosives, two hand grenades, and 350 knives. He provided no details or evidence. *"To our knowledge, the next plan of the Tibetan independence forces is to organise suicide squads to launch violent attacks"*, Wu said at a rare news conference. He used the term *"gan si dui"*, a rare term directly translated as *"dare-to-die corps"*. The official English version of his remarks released by the Public Security Ministry translated the term as *"suicide squads"*.

IOC wants Beijing to open Internet during Olympics

01 April 2008

(AP) Kevan Gosper, vice chairman of the IOC coordinating commission, has told Chinese officials that the internet must be open during the Olympics and that restricting access during the games *"would reflect very poorly"* on the host nation. He made the comments during the first of three days of talks- the last official sessions between IOC inspectors and the Chinese hosts before the games begin in just over four months. *"This morning we discussed and insisted again"*, Gosper said. *"Our concern is that the press (should be) able to operate as it has at previous games"*. Gosper said the Chinese had an obligation under the *"host city agreement"* to provide internet access to the 30,000 accredited and non-accredited journalists expected to attend. Beijing routinely blocks Chinese access to some foreign news websites and blogs, a practice it has stepped up since recent protests began in Tibet.

Olympics aren't improving rights in China: Amnesty

01 April 2008

(Reuters) The Olympics have so far failed to catalyse reform in China and pledges to improve human rights before the Games look disingenuous after a string of violations in Beijing and a crackdown in Tibet, Amnesty International said. The International Olympic Committee, foreign leaders and overseas companies engaging with China could appear complicit if they fail to speak out about the rights violations, the human rights group said. It also called for an end to the repression. Amnesty also said the crackdown on a rash of demonstrations in and around Tibet in recent weeks has led to *"serious human rights violations"*. *"These actions cast doubt on whether the Chinese authorities are really serious about their commitment to improve human rights in the run up to the Olympics"*, Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International, said in a statement. *"The Olympic Games have so far failed to act as a catalyst for reform. Unless urgent steps are taken to redress the situation, a positive human rights legacy for the Beijing Olympics looks increasingly beyond reach"*.

Olympics ban "not best way" on Tibet: White House

02 April 2008

(AFP) US Congressional moves to prevent President Bush from going to the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony are *"not the best way"* to deal with the Tibet crisis, the White House has said. A bill was introduced in the House of Representatives compelling the US leader to skip the ceremony while 15 lawmakers, both Republicans and Democrats, asked Bush to *"renounce"* his decision to attend games. The legislation wanted *"to prohibit federal government officials and employees"* from attending the Olympics opening session based upon China's *"brutalizing protesters in Tibet"*. *"We share concerns on Tibet and other issues, but efforts to prohibit US attendance at this international sporting event are not the best way to address them"*, said National Security Council spokeswoman Katherine Starr. The US leader has said he plans to attend the Olympic Games in August.

Exile Tibet radio claims China steps up jamming of broadcasts

02 April 2008

(AP) The exile radio network Voice of Tibet (VOT) has accused Beijing of stepping up jamming of its shortwave news broadcasts into Tibet during a crackdown on anti-Chinese demonstrations in Tibetan areas and ahead of the Beijing Olympics. *"There has been enormous focus on journalists not getting free access to Tibet. The other side of the coin is that information from the outside is not getting into Tibet"*, said Oystein Alme, a Norwegian who runs the nonprofit foundation's business office in Oslo. *"They started jamming us nearly 13 years ago"*, Alme told The Associated Press. *"Now they have been stepping it up in connection with the demonstrations"*. Alme said the Chinese use ground stations in Tibet to transmit two or more additional signals on the frequency used by the VOT to make the broadcasts incomprehensible. The Chinese are *"denying Tibetans access to uncensored news and information from the outside world"*. Alme said Chinese jamming violated international treaties giving the network exclusive rights to its registered frequency.

Dalai Lama appeals to the international community

02 April 2008

(TibetNet) The Dalai Lama has expressed his appreciation and gratitude to world leaders, parliamentarians, NGOs and members of the public who have expressed their concern over recent events in Tibet. *"I am also grateful for their efforts to persuade the Chinese authorities to exercise restraint in dealing with the peaceful protesters, while at the same time calling for meaningful dialogue to resolve the issue"*, he said. He continued: *"I believe the recent demonstrations and protests are a manifestation of the deep-rooted resentment not only of the Tibetan people in the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region, but also in the outlying traditional Tibetan areas now incorporated into Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan provinces, where there exist substantial communities of ethnic Tibetans"*. The Dalai Lama also said: *"I therefore appeal for your continued support in calling for an immediate end to the current crackdown, the release of all those who have been arrested and detained, and the provision of proper medical treatment to the injured. We are particularly concerned about the lack of adequate medical facilities, as there are reports of many injured Tibetans being afraid to go to Chinese-run hospitals and clinics. I would also request you to encourage the sending of an independent international body, to investigate the unrest and its underlying causes, as well as allowing the media and international medical teams to visit the affected areas. Their presence will not only instil a sense of reassurance in the Tibetan people, but will also exercise a restraining influence on the Chinese authorities"*.

EU will invite Dalai Lama for talks

02 April 2008

(AFP) The EU will invite the Dalai Lama for talks in Brussels, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said, after EU foreign ministers called for *"substantive and constructive dialogue"* between China and the Dalai Lama. The 27 EU foreign ministers will invite the Dalai Lama once a decision

has been made by the Slovenian EU presidency, which is expected shortly, Kouchner said. "As the Dalai Lama does not ask for a boycott [of the Olympic Games in Beijing] nor Tibet's independence it is time to go back [to dialogue]", he added. Chinese state media said China voiced "strong dissatisfaction" after the EU foreign ministers' statement. "The Tibet issue is completely China's internal affair. No foreign countries or international organisations have the right to interfere in it", said foreign ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu, according to Xinhua.

Arrests and ideological education in TAR

03 April 2008

(AP) More than 1,000 people have been arrested or turned themselves in to police after the demonstrations in Lhasa in March, the city's deputy Communist Party secretary said. Trials will be held before 01 May, Wang Xiangming was quoted as saying by the official Tibet Commerce newspaper. Wang said 800 had been arrested in the Lhasa violence, while another 280 had surrendered to take advantage of a police offer of leniency. Alongside increased security, the officials have ordered boosted ideological education and ramped-up propaganda in Tibet "to build anti-separatist sentiment", another official newspaper said. The region's Communist Party leader also ordered harsh punishments for local party officials found lacking in their commitment to Beijing's official line. "We absolutely will not condone violations of political and organizational discipline and will definitely find those responsible and mete out harsh punishment", said Zhang. Also indicating Beijing's haste to return Tibet to normal, the regional tourism authority announced that the region would reopen to foreign tourist groups from 01 May.

US Congress Speaker Pelosi introduces resolution on Tibet

04 April 2008

(ICT) Speaker Nancy Pelosi, with the members of a bipartisan congressional delegation that met on 21 March in Dharamsala with the Dalai Lama, introduced House Resolution 1077 on 03 April, which calls on China to cease the crackdown, release protestors, provide unfettered access to journalists and independent international monitors to Tibet, and engage in a results-based dialogue with the Dalai Lama. The resolution also cites the Tibetan Policy Act, which calls for an official US government presence in Lhasa.

China cancels official Czech visit in Tibet flag row

05 April 2008

(AFP) Beijing cancelled a visit by Czech education officials because Prague's government ministry raised a Tibetan flag in one of its windows, Chinese authorities said. "The displaying of the so-called Tibetan flag signifies direct support for the independence of Tibet", said the statement from the Chinese education ministry, released by China's embassy in Prague. "We cannot accept it and that is why we have cancelled this visit". The delegation to Beijing was to have been led by a vice-minister and included the heads of three top colleges, with the aim of signing a cooperation agreement including a bilateral student exchange programme. Reacting to the Chinese announcement, Czech education minister Ondrej Liska cited the issue of human rights in China. "China's reaction is evidence that our criticism regarding human rights has not gone unnoticed", Liska said. He added that he was sure the bilateral agreement would eventually be signed. "It is also in China's interest".

Harassment of western journalists on Tibet

05 April 2008

(WSJ) Some Chinese nationalists have undertaken a campaign of harassment, including threats of violence, against foreign reporters who took part in the first government-arranged trip to Lhasa, for alleged bias in their coverage of Tibet. The intimidation efforts have included hundreds of calls and text messages to the cellphones of reporters who took part in the trip, including correspondents from The Wall Street Journal, USA Today, and the Associated Press. The threats began after the cellphone numbers, Chinese names, and brief descriptions of several of the correspondents were published on a military-themed Internet bulletin board. Contributors to that site have boasted of making harassing phone calls, and posted their own violent threats. "Beat to death these unjust, conscienceless criminals", wrote one. It isn't clear how the contact information for the reporters who took part in the Lhasa trip made its way onto the internet. A Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs said he was unaware of it.

London Olympic torch relay disrupted

06 April 2008

More than 35 protesters were arrested during the London Olympic torch relay in a series of clashes with the police, who had to reroute part of the procession. Despite nearly a year of planning and the deployment of 2,000 officers, the Metropolitan Police were unable to stop protesters breaking through the security cordon at vulnerable points. One demonstrator attempted to seize the torch, two others tried to douse the flame with a fire extinguisher near Ladbroke Grove. A campaigner, Peter Tatchell, jumped in front of a relay bus in Oxford Street. Tumultuous scenes occurred in front of Downing Street, the official seat of the British Prime Minister. The torch was diverted from foot to a bus at St Paul's to avoid increasingly chaotic scenes. The Olympic torch's progress was halted in several places where police scuffled with protesters. Fu Ying, the Chinese Ambassador to the UK, was forced to run her stretch of the route through Chinatown after ditching plans to run through Bloomsbury, where hundreds of pro-Tibet protesters were waiting. Police pushed the protesters behind barriers 20 yards from the route to separate them from pro-Chinese groups waving red Chinese flags on the pavement.

China insists torch will go through Tibet

07 April 2008

(AFP) China's top official in Tibet, rejecting a demand of activists around the world, has insisted that the Beijing Olympics torch relay will pass through the TAR as planned. Zhang Qingli, the most senior Chinese Communist Party official in Tibet, told local leaders that Beijing was in no mood to listen to the demands of demonstrators calling for the route to be changed. In a statement on the Tibet government website, Zhang said Tibet was determined to play its part in a successful Olympics by hosting the torch relay on 19 and 20 June 2008 and overseeing the flame's ascent of Mount Everest on 10 May. He urged people to "deepen their drive to complete the glorious, important and arduous task" of having the torch pass through Tibet.

Paris Olympic torch relay cut short

07 April 2008

The Paris leg of the Beijing Olympic torch relay was disrupted by large groups of people protesting China's policies in Tibet. A Green Party MP attempted to seize the torch directly at the start of the relay on the first floor of the Eiffel Tower. A planned reception for the torch at the Paris city hall was cancelled, allegedly on request of the Chinese organisers of the rally. The relay was cut short and the torch was put on a bus outside the French parliament to be carried on the final stretch of its trip to a stadium in the south of the city. The flame was extinguished at least twice during the relay and had to take refuge on the bus.

CTA takes position on Olympic torch protests

08 April 2008

(AFP) The Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) in Dharamsala asserted that people had a right to oppose China's "appalling" rights violations in Tibet tacitly backed during the Olympic torch relay. "As long as they are peaceful, it's the right of any NGO or individuals to protest the appalling human rights abuses that are going on in Tibet", CTA spokesman Thubten Samphel, told AFP. He said the Dalai Lama still backed China's rights to hold the Games, but did not speak out against ongoing protests in India and abroad. "We support the right of China to host the Games which will make it better integrated with the international community". "Also, the Dalai Lama has made appeals to NGOs that since we are guests in India, we must abide and respect the sensitivities of the Indian government towards China", Samphel said in a guarded statement. He also argued the protests that dogged the torch relay in London and Paris were "largely peaceful". The head of CTA, Samdhong Rinpoche, said the CTA were open to a dialogue with China, and Beijing was sending many signals through "all kinds of channels". "But they are mixed signals. We are not able to understand", he said.

Tibetan task force seeks talks with Beijing

09 April 2008

(AFP) The Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) in Dharamsala offered to travel to Beijing to resume a dialogue about their homeland's future. "We want to reopen the talks to resolve the Tibetan issue through the process of dialogue and whenever it is convenient for the Chinese authorities our special envoys could travel to Beijing", said spokesman Thubten Samphel, who is also a senior official of the CTA. He was speaking during a three-day meeting of the dialogue task force established by the Dalai Lama. The meeting was called to assess the situation in Tibet following the recent unrest. It was clarified that even after six rounds of inconclusive talks with Beijing since 2002, there is no departure from the "the Middle Path" approach advocated by the Dalai Lama.

Gordon Brown won't attend Olympics opening

09 April 2008

(AP) Prime Minister Gordon Brown will not attend the opening ceremony of the Beijing Summer Olympics, a spokeswoman said. Downing Street said he was not boycotting the Olympics and would attend the closing ceremony. Brown's decision not to attend the opening ceremony was not aimed at sending a message of protest to the Chinese government, a spokeswoman in line with government policy. "He had never planned to attend", she said. "There is absolutely no change in our position". In March 2008, Brown said he planned to attend the Olympics, without mentioning the opening ceremony. Brown has been under intense pressure from human rights campaigners to skip the opening ceremony on 08 August 2008 to protest against Beijing's ongoing crackdown in Tibet. Olympics Minister Tessa Jowell will represent the British government at the opening of the Beijing Olympics.

Tibetan monks protest in front of foreign reporters

09 April 2008

(AFP) About 15 monks from the Labrang Monastery in Sangchu county, Kanlho TAP, Gansu province approached foreign journalists carrying banners and voicing support for the Dalai Lama, said a reporter, who was on a government-controlled media tour. "They said in Chinese: 'We want more freedom, more human rights and we want to see the Dalai Lama'", said Caroline Puel, a journalist with France's Le Point magazine. The protest lasted about 10 minutes and ended when government officials conducting the tour urged the foreign journalists to leave. Xinhua also confirmed that a group of monks had "interrupted" the media tour, but gave few other details.

Karmapa prepares for US visit

09 April 2008

(Times News Network) The Karmapa Lama is preparing for his first trip abroad from India where he has remained since his escape from Tibet in 2000. He has been granted permission by the government of India to travel to the US from 15 May to 02 June. 22-year-old Ugyen Trinley Dorje, the 17th Karmapa who heads the Karma Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism will arrive in New York City on 15 May 2008 and then travel to Woodstock, NY; Boulder, Colorado; and Seattle, Washington, ending his US tour in the first week of June. Confirming the Karmapa's first ever trip outside China and India, his secretary, Dupon Rinpoche, said: "Yes, His Holiness is getting ready for his first foreign tour to the US". "As has always been the intention, His Holiness's focus during his stay in the US will be to meet with disciples, bless centres, and offer Dharma teachings", said Ponlop Rinpoche.

Fukuda says China "responsible" for Tibetan unrest

10 April 2008

(AFP) Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda said that China bears responsibility over recent unrest in Tibet, calling on Beijing to resolve the problem peacefully. "I think China is the most responsible over the issue. I hope they will deal with it in a calm manner and resolve the issue through dialogue", Fukuda said in parliament when asked about recent violence in the region. "I call on the Chinese government to do its utmost to that end",

he said. Fukuda also called on China to ensure that the Beijing Olympics in August will be held safely following anti-China protests during the torch relay. He also urged protesters not to use violence when the Olympic torch relay comes to Japan.

Re-opening of Tibet for tourism postponed

10 April 2008

(ICT) As unrest continues in Tibetan areas right across the PRC, the authorities have postponed the re-opening of the TAR for tourism. It had previously been announced by Chinese officials that the TAR would open again for tourism on 01 May, but according to the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) it seems that re-opening may now not be until after the Olympics have taken place. The decision comes after an emergency meeting among tourism officials in Lhasa. The Chinese authorities have also stopped issuing multiple entry visas to China and slowed visa procedures in Hong Kong, a major gateway for travel into China, according to travel agencies.

US House of Representatives criticises China on Tibet

10 April 2008

(AP) The House of Representatives in Washington has criticised China for its *"disproportionate and extreme"* response to protests in Tibet, and urged Beijing to hold direct, unconditional talks with the Dalai Lama on the future of Tibet. The House resolution, sponsored by Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., called on China to end its crackdown on non-violent protests in Tibet, release Tibetans imprisoned in peaceful demonstrations, and allow international monitors and journalists unfettered access to the TAR and other Tibetan areas of China. It passed 413 to 1. In the Senate, Sens. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., and Gordon Smith, R-Ore., introduced a similar resolution. Like the House measure, it states that the opening of further Chinese diplomatic missions in the United States should be contingent on Beijing allowing the US to establish an office in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet.

UN experts urge full access for independent observers, media in Tibet

10 April 2008

(UNNS) Concerned about reports of mass arrests in the TAR and Tibetan areas of the PRC, a group of United Nations human rights experts have called for unhindered access for independent observers and journalists to those areas and full transparency on the part of the authorities. The six independent experts, who report to the UN Human Rights Council, *"are deeply concerned by reports of security forces firing on protestors and alleged killings"*, according to a statement issued in Geneva. They urged China to *"fully conform to its commitment to freedom of expression and assembly, and to distinguish between peaceful protestors and those committing acts of violence"*. In addition, *"they urge restraint and non-violence by all parties, greater and unfettered access to the regions concerned for journalists and independent observers, guarantees for the free flow of information, and full implementation of international standards in regard to the treatment of protestors and those detained, both in the People's Republic of China and in other countries in which protests are taking place"*, the statement added. The Chinese Government was called on *"to lift restrictions imposed on the media, including Internet websites that limit access throughout China to information concerning the TAR"*.

Rice wants US consulate in Tibet

10 April 2008

(The Washington Times) The US wants to open a consulate in Tibet in order to gain full access to developments in the Chinese province, which only one US diplomat has been allowed to visit since protests began last month, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said. *"We are looking at the possibility of a consulate in Tibet"*, Miss Rice told a Senate appropriations subcommittee hearing. *"It's on the internal list to take a look at when we could do it"*. It was not clear if Washington has discussed the issue with Beijing, but the secretary said she was not satisfied with the Chinese decision to let one American official go to Tibet as part of a group that had a government minder. The US currently has five consulates in China, in addition to its embassy in Beijing. They are in Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Shenyang and Wuhan.

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Website: www.tibetinfonet.net
Phone: +44 (0) 20 300 206 33
Fax: +49 (0) 2238 9494466
Email: tin@tibetinfonet.net