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CHINA: Religious persecution and issues – Bimonthly digest May 01-15

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General

12.05.2023 – China demands ‘total loyalty’ from state-run churches

The annual inspection of churches and license renewal are seen

as measures to 'governing religion according to the law'

Leaders of two pro-government Christian groups in southeast China organized a conference with the aim to strengthen the re-evaluation of state-controlled churches and control of religious clergy on annual inspection and license renewal for the clergy.

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10.05.2023 – 'The Yunnan Model' could be an indicator that life is going to get even harder for religious and ethnic groups across China

Wang Shunping, Nu Sangdeng, San Luobo, Hua Xiuxia and Dong Mengru spent the past nine months in detention.

Their crime? Holding a handful of Christian gatherings and teaching guitar and hymns to a group of young people in their rented home in Fugong County in the Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture of China's Yunnan Province.

Though they were released on bail on 7 May, the charges against them relating to 'organising and sponsoring an illegal gathering' are yet to be dismissed.

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Buddhists

04.05.2023 – How China is hell-bent on antagonizing Nepali Buddhists?

As part of its strategy to "antagonize" Nepali Buddhists, China seems to step up efforts aimed at crushing people's faith in the religion.

This is evident as some Chinese political leaders are attending a program in Lumbini, the birthplace of Buddha and a UNESCO-protected World Heritage Site, on Friday.

Observers raise concerns as to how can political leaders of a Communist state, who do not believe in religion, attend a religious program and that too in a World Heritage Site on the occasion of Buddha Jayanti.

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03.05.2023 – China is blocking Tibetan monks and writers from spreading religious content online

China has been rigorously barring Tibetan writers, Buddhist monks and other influential people from spreading religious content online without prior approval, sources told Radio Free Asia.

The clampdown, based on a March 2022 regulation, gives authorities additional power to restrict online content that the ruling Communist Party considers damaging and is yet another example of how China has ramped up restrictions on expression, religion and culture in the western Tibet Autonomous Region.

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02.05.2023 – US Commission: China's suppression of Tibetan Buddhism intensified

China intensified its control and suppression of Tibetan Buddhism in 2022, but the United States took steps to increase support for the religion's followers, a new report from a US Commission says.

The 2023 annual report of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, released May 1, says China's authorities restricted Tibetans' access to religious sites, banned religious gatherings, destroyed places and symbols of religious significance, and subjected monks and nuns to "political reeducation."

China even persecuted Tibetan Buddhists living in the United States, according to the report.

At the same time, the report notes the US arrested and sanctioned Chinese officials charged with violating Tibetans' rights, held hearings and events on China's abuse of the Tibetan people and raised the issue of Tibetans' religious freedom at the UN.

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Catholics

11.05.2023 – Confronting China's war on religion: The Catholic church

On Thanksgiving Day, 90-year-old Cardinal Joseph Zen, a Hong Kong priest, was convicted, along with five others, of failing to register a defunct charitable organization that tried to help pro-democracy demonstrators targeted by the regime.

Ostensibly, the charges stemmed from the group's failure to submit paperwork to authorities. But Chinese people of faith and governments around the world understood the real message Beijing was sending when it arrested **Fr. Zen**, known as "the conscience of Hong Kong," last May. The purpose of the prosecution, said U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price, was to show that China's government "will pursue all means necessary to stifle dissent and undercut protective rights and freedoms."

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Protestants

12.05.2023 – Abundance evangelical church: Christians fined for attending zoom meeting

30+ Christians of Abundance Evangelical Church attended a Zoom Sunday Service, hosted by one of the female congregants. Dozens of police and personnel barged into her home and disparaged her for the “unlawful gathering.” Every Christian in the meeting had to pay a fine of 200 yuan (~\$29).

Personnel of the Bureau of Ethnic and Religious Affairs fined each congregant and made them pay via QR code. Afterward, everyone present was taken to the police station. Authorities released the last group of seven around 9 PM. One church co-worker was summoned to the police station and remained in custody.

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10.05.2023 – Rural pastor Chang Hao unable to meet with his lawyer

The detention center in Zhenxiong County denied a lawyer visit for rural preacher **Chang Hao**. According to officials, the pastor’s case is “unique” and upper-level leaders won’t allow the meeting.

On May 6, the attorney representing Chang Hao arrived at the detention center after traveling hundreds of miles. He requested to meet with his client, a local preacher detained on a false charge of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble.”

Chang Hao's wife, Enlin, and his attorney went to the Zhenxiong County Bureau of Public Security to learn more about the case. Guards let them in after writing down their information. Chang's advocates were initially treated well while talking about the purpose of their visit. However, when the pair brought up the explicit and certain regulations and laws, staff working at the Bureau of Public Security ignored them.

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05.05.2023 – Qingcaodi Church: elder Wu Jiannan's father calls for son's release

Wu Tingmin, the father of imprisoned Elder **Wu Jiannan** of Qingcaodi Church, called for his son's release.

Elders Wu Jiannan and **Hao Ming** were arrested together on November 17, 2021. Police also took many church co-workers. The next day, authorities charged Wu and Hao with "fraud" because their church accepts a tithe and offering. According to Qingcaodi Church, the alleged amount money "defrauded" from church totaled 560,000 yuan (~\$81,000).

Wu Tingmin posted an article titled "A Father's Appeal: please release my son" on the Chinese social media Weibo. "Today I want to speak up for the persecution and injustice my son Wu Jiannan underwent because of his Christian belief," he wrote.

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Falun Gong

13.05.2023 – Senior geological engineer and father of U.S.

resident sentenced to eight years and fined 100K Yuan

A senior geological engineer employed by the Shengli Oilfield in Dongying City, Shandong Province, was sentenced to eight years with a 100,000-yuan fine on April 22, 2023.

Mr. Zhou Deyong was arrested on April 23, 2021, for practicing Falun Gong, a mind-body practice that has been persecuted by the Chinese Communist Party since July 1999. His arrest came six months after he returned to China from a trip to the U.S. His wife, Ms. You Ling, who traveled with him, stayed in the U.S. with their son Mr. Zhou You, who resides in Florida.

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10.05.2023 – 25 Falun Gong practitioner deaths due to persecution reported in April 2023

The deaths of 25 Falun Gong practitioners as a result of the persecution by the Chinese communist regime were reported in April 2023.

Six of the deaths took place between 2003 and 2020, another six in 2022, and the remaining thirteen in 2023. Due to strict information censorship in China, deaths can't always be reported in a timely manner, nor is all information readily available.

The 25 practitioners, including 16 females, hailed from 11 provinces. Hubei reported five cases, followed by four cases each in Hebei and Liaoning. Heilongjiang ranked the fourth with three cases. Hunan and Jilin each had two cases. The remaining five provinces, including Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Inner Mongolia, Shandong, and Sichuan, each had one case.

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07.05.2023 – Retired preschool teacher loses pension after serving three years for her faith

Ms. Li Caixia, a retired preschool teacher from Chifeng City, Inner Mongolia, walked out of prison in July 2022 after three years of incarceration for her faith in Falun Gong, only to find that her pension had been cancelled by the Chifeng Social Security Bureau. Meanwhile, officials from the judicial department, the police and the residential committee still constantly harass her and monitor her daily activities.

Ms. Li filed a complaint with the Songshan District Court against the suspension of her pension. It's not clear whether the court has accepted her case.

Growing up in the countryside, Ms. Li married a man in the city at the age of 23 in the hope of a better life, only to become a victim of domestic violence. Her husband treated her even worse after she gave birth to a daughter. She had to divorce him in order to survive. She and her daughter led difficult a life until she took up Falun Gong in July 1999.

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