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Asia - China

Censorship flood

Criticisms of government's flood disaster management censored and banned

26 July 2012

Amid widespread domestic and international concern about the flooding in China, the Chinese media and Internet users have been asking why the Beijing drainage system failed to avert the disaster in the capital and why the authorities failed to give its inhabitants more warning.

In response to the growing criticism, the Beijing propaganda department has told the media to refrain from any reference to shortcomings in the city government's handling of the bad weather, and comments and articles have been suppressed or blocked.

This has been the worst flooding in China in 61 years. The storm that hit Beijing on the night of 20 July caused at least 77 deaths.

First-hand accounts by residents on the Internet – in blogs and on social networks – rapidly facilitated the emergence of mutual assistance mechanisms that helped offset the lack of measures taken by the authorities. It was above all on Weibo (the Chinese equivalent of Twitter) that victims were able to organize an effective solidarity network.

Several Chinese newspapers criticized the water drainage system as ineffective. They contrasted the major damage to the capital's flooded streets – which were modernized for the 2008 Olympics – with the almost non-existent damage in the Forbidden City, which was much better protected by drainage built centuries ago.

Recognizing the scale of the disaster on 21 July, after a meeting about the flooding, the Beijing municipal committee's propaganda department announced the need to maintain a degree of "stability" in public opinion. Propaganda department chief Lu Wei said this stability depended on the media and ordered them to report only "achievements worthy of praise and tears," including acts of heroism by the emergency services or individuals.

北京市委宣传部：关于昨日北京暴雨的舆论引导，要多报道暴雨无情人有情，包括中央媒体也要执行。各团委、团支部：对北京暴雨的正面报道和消息，组织好评论、跟贴、转发工作，已登记的公开微博用户及团员个人用户ID、新注册用户账号均需做好汇报表格。

Comments on microblogs such as Sina Weibo disappeared or were blocked. Those who did not remove their own comments from Sina Weibo found that Weibo's moderators had prefixed them with the words "Permission denied."

The blogger Li Chengpeng's article "Totem" reporting that, although the Beijing city authorities had spent 6 billion yuan on trucks, only civilian cars were seen rescuing victims, can no longer be accessed on his blog. 北京市互联网宣传管理办公室：李承鹏的《图腾》一文必须删除。

A sarcastic comment by seasoned Chinese journalist Gong Xiaoyue (龚晓跃) about the government's handling of the situation was also removed. It said: "Many thanks to this once-in- 5,000-years government for allowing us to experience so many worst-in-a-century things in such a short period of time".

"紫薇同学还是那么凌厉。那谁说的？多谢这五千年一遇的政府，让我们在短暂的一生里居然经历了这么多的百年一遇。"

US Deputy Secretary of State Michael Posner said that, during annual talks between the United States and China in Washington, he raised the cases of activists, lawyers and bloggers who had been the victims of government harassment and repression.

China is on the 2012 Reporters Without Borders list of countries that are "[Enemies of the Internet](#)" and is ranked 174th out of 179 countries in the [2011-2012 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).

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