

# Dissident wary of global protests

## China observed

Andrew Burrell

Li Dan is one of China's bravest dissidents. The AIDS activist has been detained and beaten by Chinese authorities, had his office broken into, his computers stolen and was forced to watch helplessly as a school he established for orphans was shut by government officials.

But Li has a warning for those activists and idealists around the world who have latched on to this year's Beijing Olympics as a golden opportunity to hammer the Chinese government over its human rights record.

Instead of beating China into submission, he says the constant hectoring from overseas may prove counter-productive for dissidents such as himself who take immense personal risks within China to push for reform.

Li, an astrophysics graduate, earns a meagre 3000 yuan (\$464) a month running a charity that helps some of the millions of people left behind in China's economic boom — mainly AIDS victims who were ignored by governments after contracting the disease from contaminated blood transfusions.

His parents, his wife and his friends have all pleaded with Li, 30, to find a job that is safer and better-paid but he has no plans for a career change.

One night last August, Li was in central Beijing when he says he was grabbed from behind, blindfolded and thrust into a car.

For the next 24 hours, as anxious friends and family members tried in vain to contact him, Li says he endured beatings and psychological torment at the hands of police.

"I have no idea where the police took me," he says during an interview in a busy restaurant less than a kilometre from Beijing's glittering new Olympic stadium, the Bird's Nest.

"They tried to brainwash me. They kept talking with me to make me realise that what I have done is wrong."

Li's supposed offence was to help organise a major international HIV/AIDS conference that was to



China is putting more pressure on internal activists as a result of international human rights protests.

Photo: AFP

have taken place in the southern city of Guangzhou in August last year.

The brochures had been printed, the hotel venue booked and scholars from three continents were flying into China when police abruptly cancelled the event and hauled in Li for interrogation.

Li does not seem angry when discussing his detention, which has never been reported in local or foreign media.

But two days after the interview, his composure was sorely tested when a friend and fellow activist, Hu Jia, was convicted of subversion and sentenced to three years in prison.

Hu, 35, has been a thorn in the side of the Chinese authorities for years, starting off as an AIDS campaigner and later broadening his attacks to include Beijing's policies in the troubled province of Tibet.

The government's patience with Hu ran out last year when he wrote an internet article accusing China of failing to live up to its Olympics pledge to improve human rights.

It was a sign that while China has permitted more criticism in areas such as environmental policy and has even released several activists from prison in recent months, linking issues to the Olympics remains a no-go zone.

At the moment, China is

particularly sensitive to scrutiny of its human rights record after the riots in Tibet last month prompted a wave of international criticism and calls for boycotts of the Games.

Li, in fact, believes his AIDS conference was cancelled mainly because the government opposed the involvement of foreign experts and human rights groups, including Amnesty International.

Another factor, he reckons, was that the conference happened to coincide with celebrations surrounding the one-year countdown to the Olympics, when the government wanted to banish any negative coverage.

"The government was worried that foreign countries might use it [the AIDS issue] to attack China," he says.

Li believes Hu's conviction was partly in response to the chorus of criticism from global human rights groups this year and will serve as a weapon to silence other activists in China.

But while supporting the rights of activists to speak out, he says many choose the wrong time to do so. And for him, the lead-up to the Olympics in August is a very bad time to further aggravate the government.

Li says he will use the rest of 2008 to build grassroots support for his organisation rather than speaking out publicly.

"I gained a new understanding after my arrest," says Li.

"It made me realise that the government can easily stop the activities of NGOs, which don't have much power in China.

"It is a meaningless waste if we just want to fight with the powerful government.

"So we should use this year, this sensitive year, to strengthen our power and to consolidate our base. We've arranged a lot of training programs this year."

Li also says life will become easier for Chinese activists when foreign groups start to tone down some of their strident criticisms and perhaps even acknowledge recent Chinese progress on human rights.

If this happens, he hopes government repression of China's "weak" activist groups will abate.

In the meantime, Li admits the potential consequences faced by Chinese activists, including himself, remains a serious issue.

"You never know if they will beat you to death," he murmurs.

Olympic test for Rudd, page 68 ■

## China cuts NZ tariffs

Beijing has agreed to a sweeping program of tariff cuts on New Zealand exports to China with some taking effect later this year. The deal outlines an ambitious plan to boost trade between the countries that eventually will result in the elimination of tariffs on 96 per cent of NZ's exports to China, but also has immediate effects. **NZPA**

## Credit profiles decline

The credit profile of companies in the Asia-Pacific region deteriorated in the first quarter because of higher funding costs, according to Moody's Investors Service. Eighteen per cent of the companies rated by Moody's in the region outside of Japan had negative rating implications, compared with 13 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2007. **Bloomberg**

## Santana sings for VW

Volkswagen, the biggest overseas car maker in China, boosted first-quarter sales in the country 33 per cent after adding a new version of the Santana, the nation's best-selling vehicle. The company sold a total of 268,200 locally made and imported vehicles in China, Hong Kong and Macau, including 221,420 Volkswagen brand cars. **Bloomberg**

## Crystal ball dented

Thailand's Prime Minister, Samak Sundaravej, has lashed out at a famous fortune teller for predicting his new government's downfall in another military coup. Mr Samak used his Sunday TV show to criticise Varin Buaviratler, whose clients are rumoured to include ousted prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra's wife and the man who overthrew Mr Thaksin, former army chief Sonthi Boonyaratglin. **AFP**

## Kiwis count drought cost

Drought will slow New Zealand farm production this year and trim economic growth by about 0.5 percentage points, according to the NZ Treasury Department. Farm production is expected to be 1 per cent lower than last year, compared with a December forecast of 3 per cent growth. **Bloomberg**

## Renault Samsung pays

Renault Samsung Motors, the South Korean affiliate of France's Renault, plans to pay a dividend to the French car maker in April, the first since being acquired out of bankruptcy in 2000. Renault Samsung will make payments totalling 41.4 billion won (\$46.2 million) this month. **Bloomberg**

## Asians lead way

Asian New Zealanders are better educated, with higher qualifications, and are linguistically more accomplished than the average citizen, a new study shows. An Asia New Zealand Foundation report says 28 per cent of the Asian population has a university degree, against 20 per cent of the total population. **NZPA**

## Koreans more worried

South Korea's consumer confidence declined for a second month in March as rising costs and plunging sharemarkets unnerved households. The sentiment index fell to 99.7 from 103.1 in February, the National Statistical Office said. A reading lower than 100 indicates pessimists outnumber optimists. **Bloomberg**

## Konica goes Dutch

Japanese office equipment maker Konica Minolta Holdings said it would develop and market office printers and production print systems with Dutch firm Oce. The companies plan to jointly develop technology for the light to mid-range production print market. **Reuters**

# Jury tries sky-high industrial espionage

Global satellite technology provides riches for smart pirates but there's a lot at stake in this US trial, writes **Neil Chenoweth**.

Allegations of hacking and satellite piracy that have hung over News Corp's technology arm, NDS Group, for six years will finally be put before a jury when the trial begins in Los Angeles tomorrow.

In one of the largest industrial espionage cases to go before US courts, satellite broadcaster EchoStar Communications is seeking damages of \$US1 billion (\$1.08 billion) from NDS, an Israeli-based company 72 per cent owned by News that makes the smartcards that encrypt News Corp's global satellite network.

In an indication of the high stakes, EchoStar's reclusive chairman, Charlie Ergen, is a last-minute addition to the witness list in a move that is expected to throw a spotlight on the role of News Corp chairman Rupert Murdoch in the case.

Court documents show that Mr

Ergen, who has a personal fortune of more than \$US12 billion, will give evidence about negotiations he had with Mr Murdoch in 1997 to merge their US satellite interests, only to see Mr Murdoch walk away from the deal citing differences over which smartcard they would use.

Mr Ergen insisted that EchoStar's security cards, produced by NagraStar, had never been hacked. EchoStar claims that it was after this disagreement that NDS hacked the cards in a laboratory in Haifa, Israel.

An NDS employee, Chris Tarnovsky, is alleged to have made substantial profits selling pirated cards through dealers in Canada before he released the source codes on an internet site. NDS vigorously denies this.

Mr Tarnovsky worked for NDS for 10 years before leaving the group last year, three days before he was deposed by EchoStar lawyers. In an interview last month, Swiss journalist François Pilet reported that Mr Tarnovsky confirmed that he hacked the card but said he would not have released the source codes on the internet for free.

The charges have inched through

the courts for six years after French media group Canal Plus first raised allegations in 2002 that NDS had hacked its smartcards. Canal Plus claimed Mr Tarnovsky had also posted the source codes on a pirate website.

Canal Plus dropped the court case after News agreed to buy its Italian pay TV arm, Telepiu.

The *Australian Financial Review* first revealed the size of EchoStar's damages claim in February. NDS

## The case reflects continuing battles against satellite piracy.

representatives told German magazine *Infosat* that the *AFR*'s \$US1 billion figure was wrong and the real claim was "much less".

NDS did not reply to repeated queries from the *AFR*. The size of the claim is under seal in the California court, but was detailed by NDS lawyers in a related action last August before the Supreme Court of British Columbia.

The NDS lawyers wrote: "EchoStar claims approximately \$US1 bil-