

CROSSHAIRS ON INFLATION **P.30** | EU TAXES GLOBAL FLIGHTS **P.14**

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## INTO THE BLOGOSPHERE

Government uses the power of micro-blogging to facilitate transparency



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## A New Interactive Platform

In 2011, the number of government-initiated micro-blogs grew exponentially. The number of verified micro-blog accounts backed by government agencies and officials on Sina Weibo, China's biggest Twitter-like micro-blog service, doubled within six months and reached 17,000, covering almost all Chinese administrative organs. Government departments in every province, municipality and autonomous region on the Chinese mainland now maintain micro-blogs.

The rapid development of government micro-blogs is part of an explosion of interest in micro-blogs which began in 2010, dubbed the "Year of the Micro-blog in China." The government has been using micro-blog accounts to increase transparency and connect with the people. According to the 28th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China published by China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), the number of netizens in China had reached 485 million by the end of June 2011 and the number of micro-blog users had surged by 208.9 percent to reach 195 million from 2010's 63.11 million.

Micro-blogs have a 140-character limit per post and can be updated through computers and mobile phones from virtually anywhere at anytime, which enables government agencies to promote social services and government officials to interact with ordinary citizens.

Government micro-blogs are playing an increasingly important role in promoting government work and supervising government activities.

In 2010, for example, the Shanghai Metro opened its official micro-blog, which provides information on train operations and passenger flow in the country's most complicated subway system. During the difficult period preceding the 2012 Spring Festival holiday travel surge, the Shanghai Metro has been posting information on road and rail conditions four times an hour.

During emergencies such as the July 23 high-speed train crash and the rush to purchase salt and water after the March 11 Japan earthquake in 2011, government micro-blogs also played an important role in quelling rumors and alleviating the public's anxiety by publishing accurate information in real-time. During the 2011 Spring Festival, more than 800 police micro-blogs nationwide collaborated to provide live updates on the latest security development and transportation.

The rise of government micro-blogs is a symbol of the further modernization of China's administrative system. These micro-blogs are changing the way information is disseminated in the country and are also changing the way government departments receive and process information.

Ultimately, however, government micro-blogs are just a communication tool. To ordinary people, much more importance lies in the service system behind the micro-blog. Only by publishing timely, accurate information, solving problems, and being transparent, considerate and highly efficient, can government micro-blogs truly serve the public. ■

### WRITE TO US



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## Celebrating the Spring

Folk artists in traditional costumes dance for locals in Huairou District, Beijing, on January 15, part of the celebration for the upcoming Spring Festival, or Chinese Lunar New Year, which falls on January 23 this year.

It is a tradition in China that various folk activities are usually held during the festival period, such as lion dance, dragon parades and folk singing and dancing.

**“Responsible U.S. politicians should be willing and able to preserve and promote the development of Sino-U.S. relations.”**

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Weimin, at a regular press conference in Beijing on January 11, responding to accusations voiced by some candidates running in the Republican Party Primary Election in the United States that China has stolen U.S. jobs

**“If our southern neighbors collaborate with the adventurous states by substituting their oil for Iran’s oil, Tehran will consider such a ‘green light’ to the West as an unfriendly gesture.”**

Iran’s OPEC Governor Mohammad-Ali Khatibi, warning against any crude boosts by Persian Gulf states to compensate for the potential Western embargo on Iran’s oil exports on January 15

**“Deliberations regarding the bond swap are difficult, but there will be a positive outcome with good faith.”**

German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle, expressing confidence over the Greek debt swap deal at a joint press conference with his Greek counterpart Stavros Dimas during a visit to Athens on January 15

**“It is hard to imagine cross-Straits relations without the ‘1992 Consensus’.”**

Cher Wang, Chairwoman of HTC Corp. in Taiwan, at a press conference in Taipei on January 13, one day ahead of the Taiwanese leadership election

## Taiwan Commitment

The Chinese mainland will continue its efforts to promote the peaceful development of relations across the Taiwan Straits, said a spokesperson of the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council after the Taiwan leadership election on January 14.

Kuomintang Chairman Ma Ying-jeou was re-elected as Taiwan's leader and pledged to work to improve cross-Straits ties during his four-year tenure.

"We are willing to join hands with Taiwan in all walks of life on the basis of continuing to oppose the 'Taiwan independence' and sticking to the '1992 Consensus,' to break new ground for the peaceful development of cross-Straits relations and make common efforts for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation," the spokesperson said.

## Hepatitis Vaccine

China has approved a hepatitis E vaccine, which it claims is the first effective vaccine for the virus.

The vaccine received the certificate for medicine production in December 2011, according to the State Food and Drug Administration.

A team of researchers from Xiamen University and Xiamen Innovax Biotech Co. Ltd. in southeast China's Fujian Province worked for 14 years to develop the vaccine, and the 863 program, a government-funded hi-tech industry development initiative, began to sponsor the research in 2005, said a statement released by the Ministry of Science and Technology.

The country would offer the vaccine to high-risk members of the population and work with international organizations to introduce it

to other countries, the statement said.

The hepatitis E virus is spread by fecal matter via tainted water and food. According to the World Health Organization, one third of the global population is estimated to be at risk of infection by the virus and countries in South and East Asia report about 6.5 million infection cases every year.

In China, incidences of hepatitis E have increased significantly and it has become the most common of all the strains of hepatitis infection reported among adults.

## Food Security

China's national food safety risk assessment center has acquired over 800,000 sets of statistics since its establishment in October 2011, said Vice Minister of Health Chen Xiaohong on January 13.

So far, the center has released six "blacklists," including 64 illegal food additives and 22 abuse-prone food additives, following food safety risk assessments.

According to Chen, China's food safety risk monitoring network has covered 244 cities and 716 counties, targeting food contaminants and food-related diseases. There have also been nearly 20,000 drinking water-monitoring sites instituted across the country.



**SPEED COMPETITION** Title winner Liu An (left) of China in competition during the 500-meter men's speed skating event at the Winter Youth Olympic Games 2012 in Innsbruck, Austria on January 14

## Manager Awarded

**Sun Li**, President of China National Aviation Fuel (CNAF), was awarded the Most Valuable Figure in Management 2011 at the 11th China Annual Management Assembly in December 2011.

The CNAF is the largest state-owned aviation fuel supplier. It integrates the purchase, transportation, storage, quality management, sales and into-plane service of aviation fuel in China.

Sun has been working in the petrochemical industry for over 30 years. He became president of the CNAF in 2006. Under Sun's leadership, the CNAF became the largest aviation fuel supplier in Asia and the fifth worldwide with a sales revenue of 153.1 billion yuan (\$24.24 billion) in 2010. By actively promoting the transformation of development mode, Sun aims to turn the CNAF into a world-class aviation fuel company.



**SPACE JOURNEY** A Long March 4B rocket blasts off from the Taiyuan Satellite Launch Center in Shanxi Province on January 9, sending *Ziyuan-3*, a high-resolution remote-sensing satellite for civilian use, into orbit







ZHOU JIE

**ARID LAND** Buffaloes forage on the dry riverbed of the Ganjiang River in central China's Jiangxi Province on January 12. A lingering drought has caused a severe water shortage in Jiangxi, threatening water supplies of more than 1 million people

## Dinosaur Discovery

Chinese and Japanese scientists have announced the discovery of a new dinosaur species, 13 years after the prehistoric creature's skeleton was unearthed during highway construction in east China's Zhejiang Province.

The dinosaur is a new species of Ornithischians, also known as "bird-hipped" dinosaurs because of their bird-like hip structure. They lived in the Cretaceous period about 100 million years ago.

Scientists have named the new species "Yueosaurus Tiantaiensis."

The new species is the southernmost specimen of a basal ornithomimid dinosaur found in Asia, and it is also the first one from southeast China, according to a paper published by British magazine *Cretaceous Research*.

Before Yueosaurus, only four Ornithomimid species had been found in Asia—in northeast China's Liaoning and Jilin provinces, the Republic of Korea and Mongolia.

## Internet Population

The number of Internet users in China, already the largest in the world, is estimated to have reached 505 million as of November 2011, up from 485 million at the end of June, said the China Internet Network Information Center.

The Internet penetration rate rose to 37.7 percent in November, up 3.4 percentage points from the end of 2010.

The value of China's e-commerce market surged 72.7 percent year on year to 71.6 billion yuan (\$11.3 billion) in the third quarter of 2011, according to statistics from the Shanghai-based Internet consulting firm iResearch.

## Accident Casualties

Coal mine accidents killed 1,973 miners in China in 2011, down 19 percent year on year, while the number of coal mine accidents dropped 14.4 percent to 1,201, said Luo Lin,

## Director Honored

**Jiang Wen**, China's renowned actor and director, won the Best Director Award from the Hong Kong Film Critics Society on January 9 for his box office winner movie *Let the Bullets Fly*.

Jiang, 49, graduated from the Acting Department of the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing in 1984. Jiang's representative acting works include *A Native of Beijing in New York*, *During That War*, *Letter From an Unknown Woman* and *The Lost Bladesman*. His directing works include *In the Heat of the Sun*, *During That War* and *The Sun Also Rises*.



Minister of the State Administration of Work Safety, at a national work safety conference on January 14.

Last year, more than 75,000 people were killed across China due to accidents, a 5-percent year-on-year drop. A total of 4,799 people were held responsible for fatal accidents last year, of whom 808 people were investigated for criminal liability.

The country aims to reduce its accident-related death toll by no less than 2.1 percent in 2012, the target for coal mine accidents is a reduction of no less than 2.6 percent, Luo said.



ZHANG XU

**HOT COMMODITY** Customers for the iPhone 4S queue up in front of an Apple shop in Beijing hours before the smartphone's Chinese mainland release on January 13



**FIRST ARRIVAL** A Nippon Airways' Boeing 787 Dreamliner aircraft takes off to return to Tokyo at the Beijing International Airport on January 14. This is the first Boeing 787 Dreamliner aircraft operated commercially arriving at the airport

## Businesswoman Investigated

**Ding Shumiao**, a businesswoman in north China's Shanxi Province, was deprived of membership of the 10th Shanxi Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference on January 7.

Ding was removed from the post because she was involved in the corruption case of former minister of railways Liu Zhijun. She is now under investigation for possible violation of laws.

Ding, 56, was born to a poor family in the province. With a sharp business sense and close relationships with many government officials, Ding managed to turn herself into a billionaire.



## People.cn's IPO

The China Securities Regulatory Commission (CSRC) on January 13 approved the initial public offering (IPO) by *People's Daily's* online news portal, People.cn, which will become the first publicly listed state-level news platform.

People.cn plans to raise about 527 million yuan (\$84 million) on the Shanghai Stock Exchange, according to a preliminary prospectus posted on CSRC's website.

*People's Daily*, one of the country's biggest newspapers by circulation, is the largest shareholder in People.cn. It has 66.01 percent of the portal's equity.

People.cn plans to invest more in its Internet services, improve its infrastructure

and strengthen its news reporting team.

The company is facing "serious challenges" from Sina.com.cn, Sohu.com, QQ.com and other commercial news websites, the prospectus said.

People.com.cn, People.cn's chief website, was placed at No. 64 in a ranking of China's most popular websites on January 13, according to data from Chinarank.org.cn, which ranks other websites. Its main competitor, the commercial website Sina.com.cn, ranked No. 4 on the list and Sohu.com came in at No. 6.

## Slower Trade Growth

China aims to expand its foreign trade by around 10 percent year on year in 2012, sig-

nificantly slower than in 2011, as the country faces a "grim situation" in boosting its exports, said Zhang Xiaoqiang, Vice Chairman of the National Development and Reform Commission, at a forum held on January 14 in Beijing.

China will suffer from weak external demand, increasing trade competition and disputes, the appreciation of the renminbi and rising costs for domestic enterprises, Zhang said at the annual meeting of China's economy 2011-12 organized by the China Center for International Economic Exchanges.

China's foreign trade surged 22.5 percent in 2011 from a year earlier to reach \$3.64 trillion, according to the General Administration of Customs.

The growth of China's foreign trade

## Numbers

# \$3.18 trillion

China's foreign exchange reserves topped \$3.18 trillion by the end of 2011, down from \$3.2 trillion at the end of September, said the People's Bank of China, the central bank.

# 382

The anti-monopoly bureau under the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) has reviewed 382 cases (approving 371, blocking one and imposing conditions on 10) since the country's Anti-Monopoly Law took effect in 2008, according to the MOFCOM. Last year, the bureau reviewed 168 cases.





**GRAND PRESENCE** China's Hisense booth at the 2012 International Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas, Nevada, which ended on January 13

has slowed down over the past few months. Compared with January of 2011, year-on-year export growth in December was down by 24.3 percentage points to 13.4 percent and import growth down by 39.2 percentage points to 11.8 percent.

## Missed Sales Targets

More than half of China's top 20 property developers failed to meet their sales targets in 2011, because of the waning transaction volume and the toughest-ever tightening policies in the residential sector.

In a list of China's top 20 property developers by sales, released by China Real Estate Information Corp., only eight realized their sales targets, while 10 failed to reach their

targets, according to a *Southern Metropolitan Daily* report. Those who missed their sales goals include China Vanke Co. Ltd., the country's largest developer by market value, Shanghai-based Greenland Group, and the Hong Kong-listed Longfor Properties Co. Ltd. Two companies did not make their 2011 sales targets public.

Analysts predict that the low transaction levels are unlikely to change this year and that property developers will feel a sharper chill.

## Largest Call Center

Construction of a national call center that is set to be the world's largest began on January 12 in Luoyang, central China's Henan Province.

The China Mobile (Luoyang) Call Center is part of the efforts of China Mobile, the world's largest mobile phone operator, to integrate its provincial and regional services and set up national calling centers in China, said Li Yue, President of China Mobile.

The new center, with a cost of 4 billion yuan (\$632.6 million), will create 60,000 jobs, said Li.

## Offshore Wind Farm

China will construct an offshore wind farm with an installed capacity of 300 megawatts in Leting County, north China's Hebei Province, making it the country's largest such project.

The feasibility report for the wind farm has recently passed expert reviews that were commissioned by the National Energy Bureau.

Under the program, the wind farm, built with a total investment of 5.76 billion yuan (\$914 million), will comprise 100 units of 3-megawatt offshore turbines.

The approval authority will complete relevant procedures to sanction the project at the end of this year, and the project will be connected to the grid before the end of 2015.

When it goes into operation, the wind farm will generate 752 million kw hours of electric power annually.

**CROSSING THE SEA** A steel box girder of the Jiaxing-Shaoxing Bridge is lifted by a crane on the Hangzhou Bay, east China's Zhejiang Province, on January 13. The bridge is expected to be completed by the end of 2012



# 83.9%

Last year, 83.9 percent of ships built in China were exported, indicating the Chinese shipbuilding industry's heavy reliance on overseas demand for growth, according to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

# 5 billion yuan

China National Gold Group Corp., the country's largest gold producer, said its profits surged 57 percent year on year to 5 billion yuan (\$791.13 million) in 2011.



XINHUA/AFIP

## HAITI

Haitians mark the two-year anniversary of the 2010 earthquake that left 300,000 people dead on January 12 near Port-au-Prince



XINHUA/AFIP

British Royal Marines board a suspected pirate ship off Somalia's coast on January 13. They captured 13 suspects in the anti-piracy operation

## SOMALIA





XINHUA/AF

## COSTA RICA

A car drives along a road near the Turrialba Volcano, 83 km from San Jose, on January 13. The volcano's eruption prompted authorities to issue an alert for surrounding areas



XINHUA/AF

## INDIA

Pedestrians walk in front of an Adidas store in New Delhi on January 11. The Indian Government has allowed foreign brands such as Adidas and Ikea to open wholly owned shops in India

## AUSTRALIA

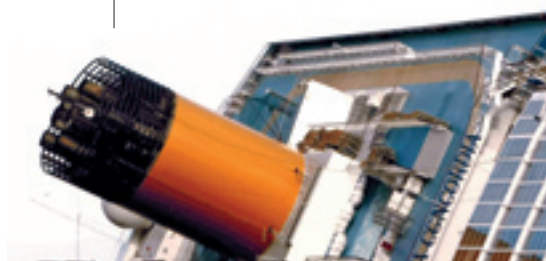


XINHUA/AF

A reptile keeper collects eggs as his colleagues try to control an American alligator at the Australian Reptile Park near Sydney on January 13. The park collects newly laid eggs to artificially incubate them

## ITALY

A helicopter evacuates a man after he was rescued from the Costa Concordia on January 15. The cruise ship, with more than 4,000 passengers on board, ran aground and keeled over off the Italian coast two days earlier



XINHUA/AF



## COVER STORY

# JUMPING ON THE ONLINE BANDWAGON

Government agencies endeavor to make the fast expanding micro-blogsphere more transparent

By Yin Pumin

China's government agencies and officials seem to have been struck by micro-blogging fever.

The number of verified government-run micro-blog accounts on Sina Weibo, China's leading Twitter-like micro-blogging service, stood at nearly 20,000 at the end of October 2011, according to a report released by Sina Weibo and the Web portal People.com.cn on December 12, 2011. The figure was 5,000 at the beginning of the year.

"If we regard 2010 as the beginning of the micro-blogging boom in China, 2011 can be said to have ushered in the era of government micro-blogging in the country," said Chen Tong, Editor in Chief of Sina, at the 2011 Government Micro-blogging Summit. In addition to Sina Weibo, Sina also runs China's largest online news portal.

"These government micro-blogs have enabled direct interaction between government departments, officials and Sina Weibo's 250 million registered users," Chen said. "The micro-blog is micro by virtue of its 140-Chinese-character-per-post limit, but it is macro in terms of its impact on public affairs."

### Better interaction

The first official government micro-blog in China was registered by the provincial gov-

ernment of southwest China's Yunnan Province on Sina Weibo in November 2009, soon after the website went online.

Since then, more and more government agencies and officials have joined the micro-blogging community. The rapid growth of government micro-blogs is in fact changing the whole dynamic of the relationship between the government and the public in China, which has the world's largest population of Internet users, 500 million, and more than 300 million micro-bloggers.

In a seminar on October 15, 2011, Wang Chen, Minister of the State Internet Information Office, suggested that government departments and officials use micro-blogs more frequently to release authorized information in a timely manner and step up service-oriented communication with the public.

"The government used to distance itself from ordinary people and usually issued only directives and commands. Ordinary people had little or no chance to have themselves heard by senior officials. But now the government is willing to listen to public complaints and is becoming better at interacting with Internet users," said Wang Yukai, a professor at the Beijing-based Chinese Academy of Governance (CAG).

On November 28, 2011, the Shanghai

Municipal Government launched its micro-blog, called Shanghai City, on Sina Weibo. Within two weeks, the micro-blog, officially verified as originating from the Information Office of the Shanghai Municipal Government (IOSMG), already had more than 410,000 followers.

In addition to Sina Weibo, the Shanghai Municipal Government also opened accounts on other major Chinese micro-blogging

Verified G

Institutional Accounts: 9,778

Institutional Micro-bloggers

35

Provincial/Ministerial Level

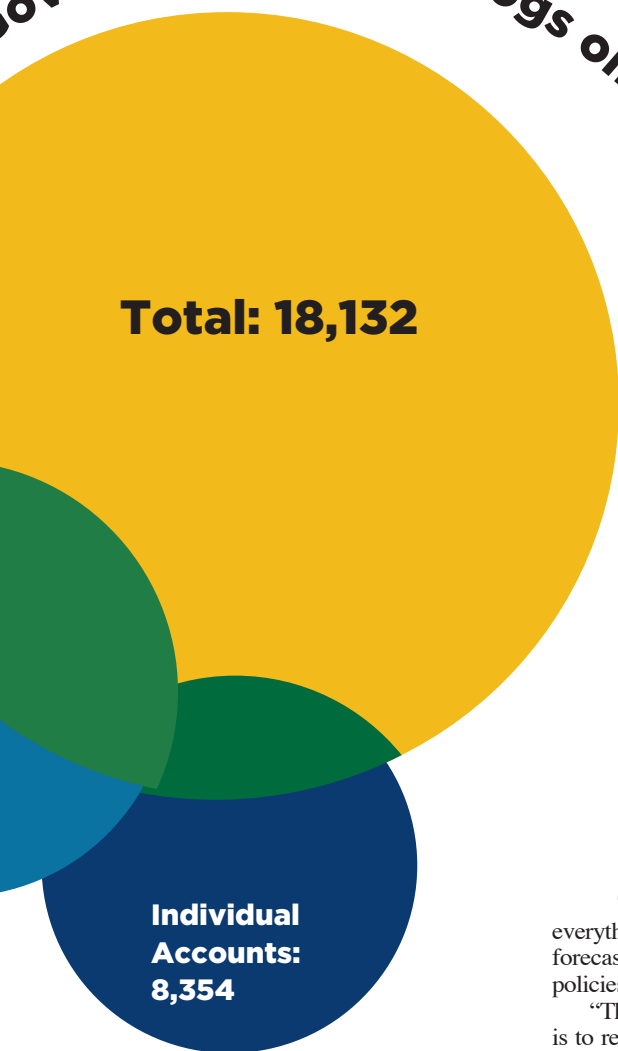
429

Department/Bureau Level

2,515

County/Division Level

# Government Micro-blogs on Sina Weibo (October 31, 2011)



Sub-County/Sub-Division Level



Individual Micro-bloggers



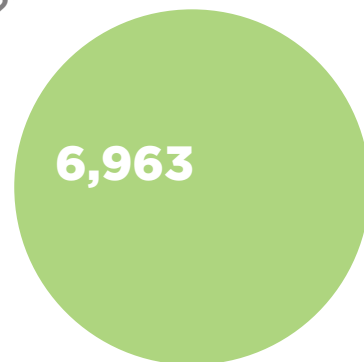
Department/Bureau Level



County/Division Level



Sub-County/Sub-Division Level



websites, and in total they have attracted more than 1 million followers.

The Shanghai City micro-blog covers everything from vegetable prices and weather forecasts to permanent residence registration policies and creative recipes.

"The aim of the Shanghai City micro-blog is to release prompt authoritative government information, provide practical information to local residents, interact with netizens and respond immediately to the most hotly debated social issues," said Zhu Yonglei, Director of the IOSMG.

According to the IOSMG, more than 600 government agencies and 300 government officials in Shanghai have verified micro-blog accounts. The official account of Shanghai's metro operator, which has more than 1.15 million followers, was fourth on the list of the top 10 government micro-blogs on Sina Weibo in 2011.

Liao Shengqing, Director of the Communication Department at the Shanghai-based Fudan University, attributes the boom to a change in the style of the government's operation.

"The administration used to follow a strict hierarchy, and everything went from the top down. But nowadays the administration is becoming more flat, indicating that some previous barriers are being removed and messages can spread faster," he said. "The team working on the Shanghai City micro-blog is, as far as I am concerned, working in the interest of local residents, on which they should keep focusing in the future."

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was the

first Central Government department to have a micro-blog. Its account "Waijiao Xiaolingtong" (Diplomacy Source) went online in April 2011, and has had nearly 1.25 million followers.

In addition to releasing information about top Chinese leaders' diplomatic activities and providing contact information to overseas Chinese when emergencies occur, the micro-blog also shares with netizens the experiences of diplomats working abroad and introduces norms of courtesy and good behavior in international dealings such as proper table manners.

"It is hoped that more government departments will join in and open their own official micro-blogs," said Gong Yufeng, who oversees the micro-blog of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Government micro-blogs have also helped more people, especially residents in economically developed regions, participate in public affairs.

Last year, the government of Nanhai District in Foshan City, south China's Guangdong Province released real-time information about local elections on its official micro-blog, in the hopes of putting the whole

(Source: 2011 Chinese Government Micro-blogging Report, released by Sina Weibo and People.com.cn)

process under broader public supervision.

"Micro-blogs have played a significant role in improving the government's decision-making process, reducing mistakes and curbing corruption," said Wang Yukai at the CAG.

Zhu Huaxin, Secretary General of the Department of Public Sentiment Monitoring of People.com.cn, said that government micro-blogs provide a platform that encourages the country's silent majority to express their opinions, and those concerns can now come to the attention of decision-makers faster than ever before.

"It is a revolutionary change for the country's officials at every level," he said. However, he added that officials have a long way to go in terms of creating opportunities for frank, equal and timely exchanges that will allow the administration to take full advantage of the potential of micro-blogs.

## Adjusting for demand

Although the number of government micro-blogs almost quadrupled in 2011, these blogs are not evenly distributed throughout the country, according to the report released by Sina Weibo and People.com.cn.

Economically developed regions, including east, south and north China, have more government micro-blogs than in less developed central and west China.

There are also differences between government departments even in developed regions such as Beijing.

According to Wang Hui, Director of the Information Office of the Beijing Municipal Government, while some local government departments are now used to actively communicating with the public via micro-blogs, many others still follow the traditional method of simply releasing information, which is not timely or interactive.

"On the other hand, some government departments have multiple micro-blog accounts, making it difficult for the public to get a clear overall picture of what the government is doing," Wang Hui said.

In response, the Beijing Municipal Government launched its news release platform, called Beijing Weibo Press Conference Hall, on Sina Weibo on November 17, 2011.

Twenty-one departments under the Beijing Municipal Government have joined the platform, and six spokespersons from government departments have opened personal accounts.

All the departments involved are required to release their latest policies and regulations through this platform, and Internet users are able to interact with designated spokespersons of the departments to discuss issues that concern them.

"The Beijing Weibo Press Conference Hall is a convenient e-government platform that collates information from many adminis-

HELPER IN NEED: A member of the Chinese International Search and Rescue Team searches for survivors in quake-hit Ofunato, Japan on March 17, 2011. More than 1.25 million people follow the team on Sina Weibo, China's leading micro-blogging service



trative departments and facilitates interaction between officials and the public," Wang said.

Despite the growing popularity of government micro-blogs, Shan Xuegang, Deputy Secretary General of the Department of Public Sentiment Monitoring of People.com.cn., said that government micro-blogs have further room for improvement, especially in their operation, maintenance and style of language.

A major complaint of ordinary micro-bloggers is that some government micro-blogs, despite opening to much fanfare, are hardly ever updated, and others simply release bland press releases to the public.

The Beijing Municipal Health Bureau opened its official micro-blog on November 17, 2011, and has had more than 40,000 fol-

lowers. But it seldom receives feedback from netizens and its posts are rarely forwarded or linked to by other bloggers.

"We are confused about how to interact with netizens and are still looking for ways to operate in this new age of information technology," said Zhang Jianshu, Director of Information Services at the bureau.

"The government is no longer talking down to the people but interacting with them on an equal basis," said Zhao Feng, who is in charge of Ping'an Beijing, the micro-blog of the Beijing Municipal Public Security Bureau. The account topped the list of the top 10 government-run micro-blogs on Sina Weibo in 2011.

According to Zhao, Ping'an Beijing has established a 24-hour micro-blog operation





**HOT BLOGGER:** Du Shaozhong (center), Deputy Director of the Beijing Municipal Environmental Protection Bureau, is the first government spokesman in Beijing to communicate with the public with a micro-blog



**GOING ONLINE:** Officials launch the micro-blog of the Higher People's Court of Henan Province on July 7, 2011

system with 10 officers replying to netizens' questions in shifts. The officers are required to use more everyday language in their posts as micro-blogs are widely considered a faster and more relaxed communication platform.

"We also present some regular features, including information from police labs and crime scenes to make our posts interesting and facilitate interaction between followers and officers," Zhao said.

In addition, Zhao said that government departments and officials should take a tolerant stance toward dissenting comments on micro-blogs even if they are critical and sometimes biased. According to him, Ping'an Beijing has never deleted replies since its launch.

In January 2011 Du Shaozhong, Deputy Director of the Beijing Municipal Environmental Protection Bureau, became the first government spokesperson in the city to use a micro-blog to talk directly with the public.

"Public doubts and criticism help government departments improve their work," Du said, adding that officials should not be afraid of receiving negative comments online.

### Trust building

"What to post, when to post, and how to reply to a post are real challenges for government micro-bloggers who represent their offices in the eyes of the public. For example, how to choose the right words to quell public doubt via a 140-character micro-blog when an unexpected accident happens is extremely important and difficult," said Wang Sixin, a law professor at the Communication University of China (CUC) in Beijing.

However, the government still lags behind in terms of its ability to deal with emergencies on the micro-blogsphere.

"Recent Internet sensations and outcries following major accidents and disasters have highlighted the failure of some government agencies to respond to public concerns online in a timely manner," said Li Weining, Deputy Director of the Institute of Public Opinion on the Internet at CUC.

For example, a high-speed train crash occurred in Wenzhou, east China's Zhejiang Province, on July 23, 2011, which left 40 dead and 191 injured. The first report about the crash appeared on Sina Weibo more than two hours earlier than media reports on the Internet, according to official Xinhua News Agency. In the first 24 hours following the accident, more than 3 million messages were sent on Sina Weibo by eyewitnesses and people who were near the crash site, but no official statement from the government could be found on the platform.

"Micro-blogs have shortened the principle of responding within the 'golden 24 hours' to within an hour after an emergency occurs. Government micro-blogs will inescapably be the focus of the public looking for news on developments after a major public event or emergency," Li said.

His remarks were echoed by Wu Hui, a professor at the Party School of the Communist Party of China Central Committee. Wu said that the faster the government responds, the higher the possibility that it will win public trust and support, and the chance for misleading rumors to emerge will be reduced.

More importantly, Huang Shengming,

## Government Micro-bloggers

In 2010, government micro-bloggers were mainly opened by departments and officials of public security, tourism, publicity and justice. In 2011, the distribution was more even and covered other fields such as education, culture and sports.

The Beijing Municipal Public Security Bureau, the Chinese International Search and Rescue Team and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were the top three government micro-bloggers on Sina Weibo, in terms of both followers and other indicators.

The top 10 government department accounts had **10.3 million** followers with a total of **46,000 posts**, while the top 10 accounts of individual officials had **10.8 million** followers with **44,000 posts**.

In addition, the number of verified accounts of government departments and individual officials on Tencent Weibo, another major micro-blogging service provider in China, exceeded **18,000** at the end of September 2011, with nearly **300 accounts** operated by high-level government agencies and senior officials.

a media studies professor also at CUC, said that the authorities should efficiently address and respond to problems and concerns posted by Internet users. He suggested that tangible evidence of responses to public feedback should also be provided on the micro-blogs to assuage public doubts about their efficacy.

However, using micro-blogs alone is not nearly enough for the government to solve its communication problem, said Wang Sixin at CUC.

"More offline work should be done to respond to the feedback the government is receiving and further online communication efforts are necessary," he said. "The government should also engage in more face-to-face communication with citizens to help address their concerns." ■

# Unfriendly Skies

Airlines around the world are angry over new EU emissions tax on flights to Europe By Yu Lintao



FLYING AT HIGHER COSTS: A plane lands at Brussels, Belgium. The new European regulations on carbon emissions by airlines came into force in January despite widespread opposition

**T**he European Court of Justice dismissed a lawsuit by a group of U.S. airlines on December 21, 2011, and upheld that airlines based outside the EU must abide by EU legislation which imposes a carbon cap-and-trade scheme on international flights that take off or land at European airports. Early this year, Chinese airlines announced they will refuse to pay any charges under the scheme.

In addition to the United States and China, other nations have also raised complaints, with some critics claiming the EU is intervening in the competition between Airbus and Boeing.

The ruling was the final European-level judgment on the EU's carbon tax on airlines using European airports, which took effect from the beginning of 2012.

Although the United States has failed in its challenge to the new tax, Chinese airlines are planning to follow the United States and file a suit against the EU. The China Air Transport Association (CATA) has asked all its member airlines not to comply with the EU plan.

So far the Chinese Government has kept a cautious attitude toward the issue. Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Weimin said China

hopes the EU will act with caution and settle the issue in a positive and pragmatic way through consultation with relevant countries.

Chinese analysts say the move not only infringes on national sovereignty and violates international aviation treaties, but also is a trade barrier in the name of environmental protection, and at the cost of the interests of travelers and the international aviation industry.

Before this, 26 non-EU countries including China, the United States, Russia, India, Japan and Brazil made a joint declaration in opposition to the EU's Emissions

Trading Scheme (ETS) last September and protested to the International Civil Aviation Organization.

"Except for the EU members, no countries support this [carbon emissions tax on airlines]," CATA Deputy Secretary General Chai Haibo was quoted by *Financial Times* as saying.

## Controversy

The EU carbon tax plan requires all airlines flying to and from the 27 EU countries to buy permits for the carbon emissions they generate during entire flights.

"The tax scheme is unfair," said Shen Jiru, a research fellow with the Institute of World Economics and Politics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). "It charges airlines money for carbon dioxide emitted during their entire flights, not only within EU airspace but also outside its airspace. It runs counter to the customary international legal principle that each state has complete and exclusive sovereignty over the airspace above its territory."

The extension of the ETS to international aviation is also a case of unfair competition. The EU can use the money it collects from other countries' airlines to subsidize its own aviation industry or its aircraft manufacturing sector. That will be an obvious breach of the WTO principle of free trade, Shen said.

Even if the tax is levied, the EU should return part of the tax dues to countries along the routes outside the EU, Shen added.

Zhang Min, another research fellow with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said the EU's unilateral assertiveness on the aviation carbon tax is a major strategy on addressing its sovereign debt crisis and developing low-carbon industries. Since the EU holds a world-leading position in low-carbon technology, its carbon tax scheme on airlines would help it to set a precedent for carbon taxes on other high-carbon industries.

"Next, the EU will probably make new rules for the establishment of a carbon emissions trade market, which will severely hit industries and enterprises with high carbon emissions," Zhang said.

In addition, Zhang claims these rules would possibly constitute new non-tariff barriers for other countries to develop their green economies and be tantamount to so-called "low-carbon trade protectionism."

## "Except for the EU members, no countries support the carbon emissions tax on airlines."

—Chai Haibo, Deputy Secretary General of the China Air Transport Association

Zhou Chengxiong, a research fellow with the Institute of Policy and Management at the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), said the tax scheme is in fact a "green tariff" and its main purpose is to help Airbus to defeat Boeing.

For quite a long time, U.S.-based Boeing has taken a dominant share in the large passenger jet market. In 2006, Airbus' new A380 entered service with an oil consumption less than one fifth of the Boeing 747.

"With the help of the carbon tax on airlines, the A380 will be much more competitive than the Boeing 747," Zhou said.

## Impact

For international airlines, the tax means more operational costs, which will inevitably trickle down to the consumer, meaning more expensive air fares.

On the China-EU route, for example, based on statistics from the China Beijing Environment Exchange, a flight from China to Europe might increase 300 yuan (\$50) per ticket.

The CATA estimated that the EU scheme might cost Chinese airlines about 800 million yuan (\$123 million) on European air routes for carbon emissions in the first year and about 17.6 billion yuan (\$2.77 billion) from 2012 to 2020.

"Instead of reducing carbon emissions, the EU is using environmental protection as an excuse and easy tool to make profits without specifications on carbon emissions reduction standards on engines or fuel," said Chai of the CATA.

As an issue essentially related to climate change, Chinese critics said the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" should be followed in the carbon tax plan of

the EU. Therefore, the EU plan should not be applied to developing countries.

The principle requires that industrialized countries, with abundant financial resources and advanced technologies, should shoulder their historical responsibilities and make tangible moves to deal with their high per-capita carbon dioxide emissions. The principle is the cornerstone of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, adopted in 1992 and ratified by 192 countries.

"The unilateral extension of the ETS to non-EU airlines violates the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol, which stipulate that developed and developing countries have common but differentiated responsibilities in coping with climate change," said Shen of the CASS.

Although according to the carbon tax scheme, the EU will grant airlines a certain quota for free carbon emissions based on the records of their flights to and from Europe, it is utterly inadequate.

"Based on existing records, the total free emission quota for four Chinese airlines that have routes to Europe will be no more than that for a single established European airline," said Lu Lingfei, Deputy General Manager of Air China's Strategy and Development Department.

Chinese airlines eyeing expanding their operations to Europe may suffer more than their counterparts in developed countries.

Some Chinese critics also believe, in the long run, the EU tax scheme is a wake-up call for China. China's aviation industry should develop in a more sustainable manner by improving fuel efficiency and better arranging airline routes.

The EU carbon tax plan is consistent with China's long-term goals of saving energy and reducing emissions. But industrial upgrading should be conducted gradually; or it might cause a shock to the international aviation industry and damage the interests of passengers, said Zhou of the CAS.

"China should pay more attention to energy conservation when developing its own large passenger aircraft. It should step up research on alternative fuel to reduce carbon emissions," said Shen. "It should also set its own standards on carbon emissions trading." ■



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### A Good Place to Be: The New Gloria Hotels & Resorts Website

We are delighted to announce the launch of the new Gloria Hotels & Resorts website at: [www.gloriahotels.com](http://www.gloriahotels.com). The revamp is an important step toward further consolidating Gloria Hotels & Resorts as a hospitality industry leader. The new site presents Gloria Hotels & Resorts with a sleek, attractive and corporate design and provides visitors with an easy-to-navigate user interface. All of the group's hotels and resorts are integrated into the website and visitors can easily make rate enquiries or book rooms via an integrated platform and, more importantly, without incurring any extra fees.

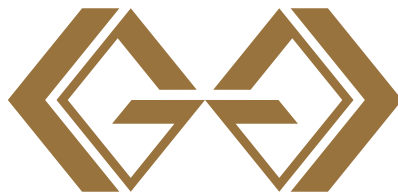
In order to better serve customers, Gloria Hotels & Resorts has also included separate website sub domains for its Gloria Training Center ([www.gloriatc.com](http://www.gloriatc.com)), its loyalty reward program ([www.gloriapartner.com](http://www.gloriapartner.com))

as well as its careers site ([careers.gloriahotels.com](http://careers.gloriahotels.com)) in the revamped site. These separate sites let users access non-reservation related information in a more efficient and targeted manner.

An additional sub domain is dedicated to

Owners & Developers ([dev.gloriahotels.com](http://dev.gloriahotels.com)). This site features Gloria's corporate profile in more details and gives potential investors and developers an overview of the management models and services that are the basis of Gloria Hotels & Resorts' success over the past 20 years.

As Gloria Hotels & Resorts approaches its 20th anniversary in 2012, Executive Vice-President Willie Ooi said: "The new website is an important step in our strategic plan to further reinvigorate brand awareness of Gloria Hotels & Resorts and make it easier to book rooms at our hotels and resorts. We are going through an exciting phase of growth and development and our expanding list of hotels is testament to the fact that our market position is getting stronger by the day. With our new website, we aim to serve our customers even better and hope to attract new audiences to our wide range of brands and hotels in China and beyond."



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