

Netizen in custody for spreading salt rumors

By YU RAN
CHINA DAILY

SHANGHAI — A netizen surnamed Chen in Hangzhou, East China's Zhejiang province, was held in custody for 10 days and fined 500 yuan (\$76) by local police on Sunday for spreading salt rumors online last Tuesday.

Working at a computer company, the 31-year-old man posted a hoax on a local online forum, saying that the radiation leaked from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Japan had polluted the sea off the coast of eastern Shandong province. He encouraged people to store salt and dried kelp. He also said they should try to avoid eating seafood for a year.

The post spread rapidly on the Internet and caused local residents to panic, according to the police.

Chen said he received the false information when chatting with a friend online.

In Shanghai, the local police said on Friday last week that two men will be faced with prosecution for disseminating rumors that said the city will be severely contaminated by the nuclear leak in Japan, Shanghai-based news portal Xinmin.cn reported.

Among the other causes of the panicked purchases of salt were rumors contending that eating iodized salt could prevent people from being harmed by radiation leaked from a Japanese nuclear plant.

Supermarket shelves in places like Zhejiang, Guangdong, Jiangxi and Sichuan provinces and in large cities like Beijing and Shanghai were nearly devoid of salt by Thursday.

However, by Saturday last week, some consumers who had realized that the hoarding of salt would not be useful in countering a leak of nuclear radiation had started to return to supermarkets to try to get their money back.

A university professor believes insufficient releases of reliable and timely information by the government also contributed to panicked purchases of salt in China.

"The panic perhaps could have been avoided if the government had released enough reliable information in response to the recent series of disasters in Japan," said Qiu Liping, a professor in the sociology department at Shanghai University.

He added that food safety is perhaps the largest concern in China at present.

A related rumor spread on the Internet on Sunday said that a man from Cixi, in Zhejiang province, died from eating too much iodized salt. Cixi authorities proved that story to be false.

"The public feels anxious because it doesn't receive enough scientific knowledge from day to day," said Qiu.

Qiu said the elderly and the middle-aged were among those most likely to buy salt in response to the rumors. Many of them had picked up the false information from gossip.

"I got my earthquake fears from another old lady in the market, who made me believe that Shanghai will be severely affected soon," said Lu Hui-zhen, an 82-year-old local resident who was stopped by her daughter from taking all her savings out from a bank and moving inland.

"The government should find a good way to release accurate and accessible information after emergencies," Qiu said. "This will ensure citizens believe the authorized information instead of rumors."

Illegal broadcasting report doubted

Official admits existence of private TV stations but questions number

By LI XINZHU
CHINA DAILY

SHANGHAI — Officials in the Anhui Provincial Administration of Radio, Film and Television admitted on Monday that a large number of unauthorized broadcasting stations have been able to make illegal profits but said the misdeeds are not as serious as reports allege.

Guangzhou Daily reported on Monday that nearly 1,000 unauthorized broadcasting stations had been found to be operating in the central and northern parts of Anhui

province. Most of them had earned huge profits by broadcasting, without permission and in defiance of Chinese laws, violent and pornographic programs to residents in rural areas.

Guangzhou Daily also quoted a netizen who claimed that each station could bring in from 500,000 yuan (\$76,220) to 900,000 yuan in annual returns by investing less than 50,000 yuan in equipment.

According to the Regulations on Broadcasting and Television Administration issued by the government in 1997, private broadcasting or

radio stations are not allowed in China.

Guangzhou Daily also mentioned that local officials had been lured by the prospect of making huge profits into taking stakes in the illegal stations. That, the newspaper reported, is one of the reasons why eradicating the illegal stations will be difficult.

Not all agree.

Xie Changlu, a researcher with the social management department of the Anhui Provincial Administration of Radio, Film and Television, said the number of unauthorized broadcasting stations mentioned in the report was inaccurate.

Even so, he refused to disclose the specific number, saying, "it is very hard to count"

since broadcasting equipment that has been turned off cannot be detected.

Xie said many details in the report — especially the numbers — have not been confirmed by the administration department.

"We've been working on this issue for more than 10 years," he said.

"Those are not broadcasting stations, but unauthorized broadcasting points built out of simple equipment, including a computer or DVD player and a signal emitter," he said. "We won't deny the existence of such points, since finding and banning them is the biggest part of our regular work."

Xie said it is difficult to discover where the points

are hidden.

"Some operators have even moved their equipment to boats to avoid being detected by us," he said.

Unauthorized broadcasting points mainly exist in rural areas or in the countryside, out of the reach of cable TV, according to an anonymous staff member in the Anhui Provincial Administration of Radio, Film and Television.

Xie also denied that the profits of running an unauthorized broadcasting point could be as high as 800,000 yuan to 900,000 yuan, as the report said.

"It is not possible at all," he said, "Depending on their coverage, I would assume the profit wouldn't exceed 200,000 yuan a year."

Most of the programs distributed by unauthorized broadcasters consist of light entertainment and are aimed at attracting larger audiences, Xie said.

Zong Xulin, a 46-year-old resident in Nihe county of Anhui province, said he receives several of the channels.

"They usually broadcast dramas that aren't very well-known," said Zong, whose home is an area that does not get cable TV. "Those channels always contain lots of medicine advertisements."

"The ads either come from illegal medicine manufacturers who want to promote their sales or local villagers who would like to see their names on TV."



A woman and her daughter arrive in Dalian airport in Northeast China's Liaoning province last Sunday. Many Chinese parents living in Japan fear the harm the recent radiation leaks might do to their children and have brought their families back to China.

PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

People fleeing disasters nearly book up HK hotels

By MICHELLE FEI
CHINA DAILY

HONG KONG — Hong Kong ran short of hotel rooms after many of those fleeing earthquake-stricken parts of Japan flocked to the special administrative region, which many used as a stepping stone on their way to the United States and Europe.

The hotels in Hong Kong, already crowded as the hotel industry moves into its peak season, were made even fuller by the sudden increase in the demand for lodging.

Before the disaster, many rooms in Hong Kong had been booked for the popular Rugby Sevens tournament that took place from March 25 to 27. Added to that were the many rooms reserved for several international meetings, according to Michael Li, executive director of the Federation of Hong Kong Hotel Owners.

By the beginning of March, the occupancy rate at Hong Kong hotels had climbed to more than 80 percent. It rose further this past week, when many Japanese companies became keen to shelter their employees, Li said.

"Dozens of booking requests were received each day from Japanese companies, which wanted to move staff members and their families," a spokesman for Langham Place Hotel Hong Kong told China Daily on Monday. "But we haven't been able to help because we have been running short of



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A SPOKESMAN FOR LANGHAM PLACE HOTEL HONG KONG

rooms these days."

The hotel, which lies in Hong Kong's bustling business district, Mong Kok, received requests from more than 10 Japanese companies this past week. The occupancy rate at Langham Place surged to nearly 95 percent on Monday, 10 percent higher than it had been in 2010, according to the hotel.

"The evacuations of parts of Japan gave our business the biggest boom that has ever been recorded, and the trend is likely to last for a while, at least for the coming week," said the hotel, saying Japanese companies had booked rooms for three to four days, or even weeks in some cases. Of the guests staying there, 6 percent came from Japan.

In general, most of the requests received in the past week were from Japanese banking or finance corpora-

tions. Li said many of the firms were trying to book rooms in four- or five-star hotels.

And according to Reuters, serviced-apartment chains in Hong Kong were flooded with booking requests from European and American investment banks looking to move their staffs out of Japan for two to four weeks.

Air Charter Service, a commercial aircraft-charter firm, urged those fleeing Japan to avoid Hong Kong and go to Singapore, Bangkok or other cities.

"We have helped 3,800 people evacuate from Japan and to Hong Kong by eight charters so far, mainly western people working in Japan as well as their family members," Gavin Copus, chief executive officer of Air Charter Service Asia Pacific, a large aircraft-charter firm, told Reuters on March 18.

"Most of them will stay in Hong Kong for a few weeks and then return to their home countries."

Copus said requests for rooms started coming in quickly after the recent series of disasters had struck Japan.

"We received the first call just half an hour after the first explosion happened in the nuclear reactor," he said.

"It takes three to five days for an aircraft to get landing permission in South Korea and two to three days in the Chinese mainland, while such a permission in Hong Kong, Singapore and Bangkok can be obtained within 24 hours."

Policy would give neighbors say over dogs

Residents say it will cause discord among pet owners and those nearby

By ZHOU WENTING
CHINA DAILY

JINAN — Residents in Jinan, capital of East China's Shandong province, will have to obtain permission from their neighbors before they can have their dogs licensed, according to a proposal contained in the city's new dog-raising regulation.

If the proposal takes effect, citizens will be able to get a pet license from the city's public security bureau only after winning approvals from their neighbors and a testimonial from a local neighborhood committee.

The proposed rule drew mixed reactions from the public.

"Dogs are an important issue in neighborhood relations," said Shao Yufei, who keeps a poodle in the apartment he rents in Lixia district.

"It's difficult for a person to win approvals from all of his neighbors, since people often have different attitudes toward dogs."

"And I'll maybe remember who refused to sign my application (if I'm turned down), which might lead to conflict between my neighbors and me," Shao said.

Residents also expressed confusion over the proper application of the word "neighbors."

"I don't understand whether it refers to the person living next door or those living in the whole building or even the whole community," said Shao, who lives on the top floor of a five-story building.

He added that residents living in high-rises will find it harder to obtain approvals. Proponents of the proposal

contend that it will subject pet owners to more uniform standards, although many worry that adopting the rule will, in reality, cause little to change for the better.

A Jinan resident named Zhang Ting said she is often annoyed by her discoveries of hair shed by the dog kept by her upstairs neighbor.

She said she fears that fleas carried by the dog will harm her 2-year-old daughter.

"But considering that we live near each other, I have no choice but to give my neighbor an approval," Zhang said. "Besides, if we don't agree, he can still secretly keep an unregistered dog."

Residents are also confused about what they should do if their neighbors refuse to let them keep a dog they have had for some time.

"Surely it doesn't mean that I have to abandon my dog," said a woman surnamed Wang, who lives in Lixia district.

Legal experts had similar concerns.

"No matter how the rules are modified, they should be modified in such a way that dog keepers can abide by them," said Yi Shenghua, a lawyer at Beijing Yingke Law Firm.

"Besides, a person's hobby of raising dogs should be respected by others, or the rule will only end up being a dead letter."

Yi suggested that residential communities be authorized to grant pet licenses, which would enable community police to intercede in specific cases.

"If a 80-year-old man lives next door, it's not right to raise a big wolfhound," Yi said.

Many cities have amended their dog-raising regulations. For example, Guangzhou and Chengdu and other cities allow households in certain areas to have only one dog. And Shanghai will institute a one-dog policy in May.

Wang Qian contributed to this story.



FILE PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

A woman in Jinan, Shandong province, takes her dog outside for a walk. Local residents may have to get nod from their neighbors before they can obtain pet licenses if the city passes a new regulation on raising dogs.