

World

Under the scab of Tiananmen, China still bleeds

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MATP

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IN the past week, Beijing has again demonstrated that on its dismal calendar of "overlapping scabs and sores", the June 4 anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre is the date it most fears.

The Pulitzer Prize-winning former Beijing correspondent **Ian Johnson**, in his book *Wild Grass*, writes that **China's** mental calendar has become a series of scabs and sores as victims of government suppression try to commemorate their disasters each year.

China had a vigorous pick at the scab this week when a Foreign Ministry spokesman revealed it had arrested Hong Kong journalist Ching Cheong, a respected correspondent for Singapore's *Straits Times*, on charges of spying.

Beijing denies, but no one else doubts, that the 55-year-old Ching's real crime was his interest in an underground manuscript of secret interviews with the former Chinese premier and former Communist Party leader Zhao Ziyang.

Zhao was ousted for siding with the students in 1989 and died in January after spending 16 years under house arrest.

Ching had been a reporter for the Communist Party-controlled *Wen Wei Po* newspaper in Hong Kong, but quit in disgust along with many others after the 1989 Tiananmen massacre.

Ching's wife, Mary Lau, said her husband was detained in April after being tricked by security agents into travelling to Guangzhou on the mainland to collect the Zhao manuscript.

Based on a series of interviews taped by a Zhao associate, the manuscript is believed to include denunciations of former Chinese leaders Li Peng and Jiang Zemin.

Ms Lau said her husband's arrest was meant to scare other journalists and publishers away from the document.

Lu Jianhua, a Ching associate and sociologist at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, **China's** leading government think tank, has also been detained, along with another academy employee.

The Straits Times expressed shock at the apying allegation, saying it would need incontrovertible evidence to be swayed from its belief that Ching had conducted himself with the "utmost professionalism" and always acted in the best interests of the newspaper.

The Hong Kong Government ducked for cover. Donald Tsang, who is the frontrunner in the leadership election set for July 10, defended his decision not to meet Ms Lau, saying it was important "not to get too emotionally involved".

Also this week, a mainland reporter was jailed for 10 years for revealing state secrets to overseas organisations after disclosing to a website the propaganda ministry's instructions to media not to report on June 4 matters last year.

Analysts said the June 4 event was still "political dynamite" in **China** because it had been comprehensively buried, and opening up the issue could split the party between reformers and hard-liners.

Tiananmen reverberates

June 3-4, 1989: Hundreds are killed in suppression of anti-government protests around Tiananmen Square

June 6, 1989: Government admits 300 died and 400 are missing

May 1991: "Tiananmen Mother" Ding Zilin, in a foreign TV interview, denounces the Government's suppression of June 4 political movement and calls for the publication of names of all those killed, including her 17-year-old son. She is later detained for 40 days

May 1995: Ding and 46 scholars write to **China's** leaders demanding a more tolerant political environment. "Tiananmen Mothers" first write an annual open letter calling for official reassessment of the massacre.

September 1997: Letter by sacked premier Zhao Ziyang calling for the re-examination of 1989 "counter-revolutionary movement" circulates informally at National Party Congress

1998: Zhao's former secretary Bao Tong is released from prison, calls for June 4 to be declared a "national day of shame". Bao Tong has been under house arrest ever since

May 1999: Two family members of victims formally request criminal investigation of the massacre to establish who is legally responsible for the loss of life

March 2002: Human Rights in **China**, in an open letter to the Chinese Government, calls for former premier Li Peng to stand trial for the massacre

February 2004: SARS whistleblower Jiang Yanyong writes to **China's** leaders, describes how he treated massacre victims in hospital and calls for a revision of the party's verdict

March 2004: Three "Tiananmen Mothers" are detained by National Security Bureau before the annual party congress for five days.

June 1, 2004: Dr Jiang is detained for seven weeks.

January, 2005: Zhao Ziyang dies; dissidents barred from his funeral.

May 2005: Hong Kong journalist Ching Cheong is arrested on charges of "spying" after trying to obtain Zhao Ziyang interview manuscript critical of 1989 leaders.

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Photo Table

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