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BANGLADESH: FACEBOOK ACCESSIBLE AGAIN BUT PRESS FREEDOM STILL UNDER THREAT

'Facebook' is again accessible in Bangladesh after "offensive" cartoons were removed. The famous online social network was blocked on May 29 after the publication of cartoons depicting the prophet Mohammad was deemed offensive to the religious sentiments of the Muslim majority of the population. In Bangladesh, Muslims represent 90 percent of the population. In the meantime, media freedom remains in a critical state. On June 1, the government shut down a national daily newspaper, the *Daily Amar Desh*. The government has already shut down two broadcasters and a number of newspapers. The Asian Human Rights Commission said that the National Security Intelligence acted without an arrest warrant or a detention order. The agency has called on the United Nations Human Rights Council to intervene. (ASIANEWS)

INDIA: A BIBLE FOR EVERYONE IN BHOPAL

The Archdiocese of Bhopal in central India has launched a project to ensure all its faithful have a personal copy of the Bible to embolden them to give "daily witness" in the Hindu dominated area. Under the "Bible 4 U" program, Bhopal Archdiocese will supply a Hindi version of the New Testament to all its 15,000 Catholics, and the complete Bible to every Catholic family. Bhopal Archbishop Leo Cornelio said Christians should draw inspiration from the Bible especially in the midst of suffering. Since the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party came to power seven years ago, Christians in Bhopal have suffered over 150 violent attacks against them and their institutions. Of the 60 million people in Madhya Pradesh state, of which Bhopal is the capital, Christians form less than one percent while Hindus make up the majority. (CNUA)

KOREA: CATHOLICS TUNE IN TO TRADITIONAL HYMNS

Korean traditional hymns are gaining popularity with local audiences. Agnes Kim Eun-ok, who heads a support group for a Korean Catholic hymn choir, said that she has noted a surge of interest after a concert series began in 2007. So far the last of such concerts was held on June 27 at Ilsan Church in Goyang northwest of Seoul where 300 people attended. Backed by a traditional orchestra, choirs from Seoul and Kwangju archdioceses, Suwon and Uijeongbu dioceses joined the concert singing Korean hymns. To further promote traditional hymns, Fr. Paul Mary Kang Su-gun said, a choir for Korean hymns will be organized in each diocese. The priest directs the Institute of Korean Hymns. (UCANEWS)

SRI LANKA: FAITHFUL WELCOME BAN ON 'ILLEGAL' WORSHIP SITES

Sri Lanka's religious community welcomes a construction ban on illegal places of worship. Prime Minister Disanayaka Mudiyansele Jayaratne, who also heads the Buddha Sasana Ministry and is Religious Affairs Minister, announced the ban on June 23, saying all new places of worship need government approval, or they will be declared illegal and building work suspended. He said the move was to promote and protect religious harmony. (UCANEWS)

CHINA: DALAI LAMA USING TWITTER TO SKIRT CENSORSHIP AND TALK TO THE CHINESE

The Dalai Lama held his first online chat on May 21 with Chinese web users via Twitter. Bypassing Chinese censorship, Tibet's exiled spiritual leader held an hour-long session from New York to explain his points of view directly to the Chinese. This is the first time that the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize laureate took part in an event of this kind and length of time. During the chat, the spiritual leader was asked questions that are of interest to the Chinese like those about Tibet's future and the Dalai Lama's reincarnation. In China, the Dalai Lama is described as a dangerous separatist and terrorist, and his statements are routinely censored. Mainland authorities blocked Twitter in mid-2009, but some 80,000 mainlanders have managed to circumvent the "Great Firewall of China" and skirt government Internet censorship. (ASIANEWS)

TAIWAN: CHINESE LANGUAGE EDITION OF MOTHER TERESA BOOK

The Daughters of St. Paul in Taiwan have published 2,000 copies of the Chinese language edition of the book "The Joy of Loving: A Guide to Daily Living with Mother Teresa" to pay homage to the beatified nun and prepare for her 100th birthday on August 26. The book aims to spread the beautiful words of Mother Teresa on the wider scale, said Sr. Huang Su Ling. The Paulines have published various works of the Daughters of Charity nun in Chinese language including "Come Be My Light -- The Private Writings of the 'Saint of Calcutta'," "Finding Calcutta," and "Raccolta delle parole di Madre Teresa." Mother Teresa died on September 5, 1997 and was beatified by Pope John Paul II on October 19, 2003. (FIDES)

PRIESTS REPORT ON DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY USAGE

The Internet has become a frequently utilized tool in homily preparation, evangelization and pastoral support, a recent study shows. The PICTURE (Priests' Information and Communication Technologies Use in Their Religious Experience) study was presented on May 31 at Vatican Radio. The study aimed to take a snapshot of the actual use that priests make of technology, in order to be more effective in reaching the heart of the greatest changes in the cultural world. The study was carried out by the NewMinE (New Media in Education Lab) of the Università della Svizzera Italiana in Lugano, Switzerland, in collaboration with the School of Institutional Social Communications of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome, and with the support of the Congregation for Clergy. The study referred to Benedict XVI's message for the 2010 World Communications Day, which focused on the theme, "The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word." Some 4,990 priests from 117 countries responded to the survey that began on November 15 and ended February 28. It was distributed through bishops' conferences, religious congregations and Catholic news agencies in seven languages. (CBCI)

INDIA: FUNDAMENTALISM IS AGAINST RELIGION FREEDOM, SAYS COMMUNICATION BISHOP

“Religious freedom is the only authentic path to peace. The theme is most important for India and for the whole world: a decisive reflection on the world today and respect for basic human rights.” This was how Cardinal Oswald Gracias, Archbishop of Bombay, president of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India and board member of the FABC-Office of Social Communication commented on the theme chosen by Pope Benedict XVI for the World Day for Peace on 1 January 2011, “Religious freedom, the path to peace.” The Cardinal had in mind the context of India where several states face two serious issues: Hindu religious fundamentalism and anti-conversion laws. “In India’s multireligious and multicultural society, certain groups misunderstand religion. They exploit it for other ends and make it a reason for conflict, disturbing the harmony of society. The local Catholic Church seeks to build good relations with everyone, fostering dialogue and respect for freedom: this is the effective path to peace, the supreme good. In this way, we Christians strive to offer our contribution to build up the human family,” Cardinal Gracias said. (FIDES)

KOREA: ALTERNATIVE ART SCHOOL LAUNCHED

Cardinal Nicholas Cheong of Seoul presided over a blessing ceremony on June 28 of the first alternative art high school for girls opening in March 2011. Founded by Fr. Bernard Hong Mun-taek, the Flowerday Morning Art High School will target talented girls whose families cannot afford expensive art school tuition fees. In a three-year course, they will be taught painting, sculpture, computer graphics, pottery, metal craft and natural dyeing. The students will live in a dormitory and receive high quality art education free of charge. Fr. Hong has gathered enough supporters to finance the school, which is located in Yeoncheon, Gyeonggi-do province, 60 kilometers north of Seoul. (UCANEWS)

THAILAND: SMS BIBLE SERVICE AIDS BUSY CATHOLICS

The archdiocese of Bangkok has launched an SMS Bible service in mid-June for lay people to boost their spiritual growth. About 100 lay Catholics have signed up for the service, said Kaewilai Chitampai, a staff member of the archdiocese’s IT department which offers the service. Subscribers pay a yearly subscription to receive a biblical passage on their mobile phones daily. The service has been offered to Religious people over the past two years, but now it is being extended to lay persons as well. It is hoped that the service will reach more young people, a staff member of Thailand’s Catholic Bible Committee said. (UCANEWS)

KOREA: SEOUL CHURCH IPHONE APPLICATION AIMS TO SPREAD THE WORD

The weekly bulletin from the archdiocese of Seoul will be available on iPhone from July onwards. The final updating of the application can be downloaded from Apple’s AppStore for free, said a spokeswoman from the archdiocese’s culture and communications department. Smartphones are fast becoming popular in South Korea, the Church needs to adapt itself to the change, she added. South Korea had around two million smartphone users, including nearly a million iPhone users, as of June 2010. The population of 50 million has a total of 49 million mobile phone subscriptions. The archdiocese also offers readings from the Bible, hymns and information on saints as well as extracts from its radio broadcasts and some Catholic weekly magazines, on iPhone and iPod. (UCANEWS)

INDIA: ONLINE CATHOLIC BIBLE IN HINDI, ESPECIALLY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The Holy Bible in Hindi can be read on line at <www.biblemitr.com>, a site created by the Catholic archdiocese of Bhopal, in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. The new website also offers prayers, readings and theological reflection in Hindi. It is the work of a group of priests, religious and lay volunteers aiming to help spread the Word of God in India on the Internet. The initiative hopes to bring the Bible closer to young people especially, and will be used for youth pastoral activities. Hindi, used by at least 500 million Indians, is the sub-continent’s most widely spoken language. (FIDES)

INDONESIA: DIALOGUE IS NOW KEY WORD OF ISLAM

Indonesian Islam seems to confirm its move towards moderation, dialogue, and pluralism after new leaders of the two largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia, *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) and *Muhammadiyah*, were elected recently. Muhammadiyah runs universities and has about 40 million followers, mainly in urban areas and among the middle classes. Re-elected for a second five-year term, its leader, Din Syamsuddin, has confirmed his intention to promote dialogue with other religious communities, the society, and the political world. In March 2010, NU’s newly elected president, Agil Siradj Sais, declared his intention to follow the example of former NU leader and Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid. Founded in 1926, NU expresses traditional Islam and is historically more open and tolerant towards other religious minorities. Both organizations now agree to condemn and isolate Islamic extremist fringes (like the Islamic Defence Front, FPI) in Indonesia, which make headlines for instigating intimidation or violence. (FIDES)

INDIA: BLASPHEMOUS GRAFFITI AND DRAWINGS OF CHRIST AND THE POPE

Blasphemous graffiti and drawings of Christ and the Pope were found on June 19 on the walls of government buildings, schools and various parts of Shillong city, capital of Meghalaya, northeast India. In Don Bosco Square, beneath the statue of the Saint founder of the Salesians, a large community in this city, a drawing of a crucifix was found. At the top, instead of the inscription INRI, bore the figure of 92 m Rupees (about 1.7 million Euro). This was a reference to the embezzlement of funds on the part of the government in favor Don Bosco Youth Centre. The walls of schools showed the Pope disguised as a “wanted” criminal, with the words “arrest this man.” The offensive drawings were soon removed by local police. The Salesians lodged a complaint against the “deliberate and malicious act aimed to offend the religious feelings of believers and insult their religion.” The Archbishop of Shillong, Mgr. Dominic Jala, condemned such acts and expressed “concern for this sign of intolerance towards the Catholic Church.” (FIDES)

