

Chinese broadcasters are told to cold-shoulder BBC

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The BBC's ambitions in China, one of the fastest-growing television markets in the world, could be undermined by the Chinese government's anger over a recent documentary about the Tiananmen Square Massacre.

The Chinese authorities are understood to have ordered state-owned broadcasters in the country not to cooperate with BBC Worldwide, the corporation's commercial arm, after officials were angered by the film, made by the respected reporter Kate Adie to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the pro-democracy protests. It is understood that domestic broadcasters, including China Central Television (CCTV), have been told not to cooperate with BBC Worldwide in buying programs or becoming involved in coproductions. BBC News is believed to be unaffected by the row, however.

BBC Worldwide is expanding aggressively in developing markets, including China, as the corporation seeks to supplement the £3.6 billion (US\$6.1 billion) a year it receives from the license fee paid by everyone in the UK who owns a TV set, with commercial income.

Those efforts have become more important since the BBC received a lower than expected license fee settlement from the Labour government in 2007 and in the light of recent promises by the opposition Conservative party to freeze the fee if it comes to power next year.

BBC Worldwide has offices in Hong Kong. Its coproduction with CCTV last year, *Wild China*, was a huge success.

BBC sources said they had heard that the Chinese authorities had told broadcasters not to cooperate with BBC Worldwide, although a spokesman said nothing had been communicated officially and they were still speaking to clients in the country.

"BBC Worldwide has not received any official notification of a such a ban," he said.

A press officer at the Chinese foreign ministry in Beijing said he had not heard of any such decision.

Adie managed to secure a tourist visa to enter China, after having previously been refused one, in order to film the documentary *Kate Adie Returns to Tiananmen Square*, which aired in June. She had reported on the massacre for BBC News in 1989.

Hundreds of demonstrators are thought to have been killed when the army broke up the protests, and thousands more were arrested. The Chinese government refuses to discuss the protests, habitually referring to them as "the June 4 incident."

The BBC also has ambitions for children's programming in China that can be easily translated into local languages.

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BBC Worldwide also publishes a number of local versions of magazines based on its TV shows, including Top Gear about cars, in the country.

Top Gear is one of several programming strands earmarked for growth by BBC Worldwide executives, along with BBC Earth (the collective brand for all the BBC's natural history programming), the Doctor Who sci-fi series and Lonely Planet, the print and online tour guide business the corporation controversially acquired two years ago.

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