

# China's school bus donation to Macedonia derided

LOUISE WATT - Associated Press - Associated Press

China's donation of school buses to tiny Macedonia has touched off derision online, where Chinese have called the gift ill-considered given their country's poor safety record and a recent crash that killed 19 preschoolers.

The Chinese government's gift of 23 buses was made Friday at a ceremony in Macedonia's capital.

The Macedonian government said in a statement on its website that each bus has 35 seats, meets all safety requirements and will be used for students primarily in rural areas. An accompanying photo showed three yellow buses with the red-and-yellow Chinese and Macedonian flags painted on the side.

News of the donation ignited a torrent of criticism, with 500,000 comments posted by Monday to China's most popular Twitter-like micro-blog service run by Sina Corp. Many asked how could China make the donation to a foreign country when Chinese schools contend with shoddy transport?

Zhang Ming, a politics professor at Renmin University, suggested the donation was a betrayal to the Chinese people.

"One does not have to go through exams to get qualifications (to be a traitor). When one climbs up there and becomes a big official, one will have them," he wrote.

Zheng Yuanjie, a children's literature writer who is often sarcastic in his postings, wrote on Sina Weibo that the foreign ministry had donated the buses to Macedonia in order to "urge local governments to give decent buses to schools" in China.

As many pointed out, the donation comes less than two weeks after the death of the 19 preschoolers drew a harsh spotlight to the condition of Chinese school buses and chronic underfunding of school systems. The 19 children died when a minivan-turned-school bus crammed with 64 people crashed into a truck.

Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao promised Sunday that new rules on school bus safety would be drafted within a month and said central and local governments will bear the cost of bringing buses up to standard.

The fracas shows how the authoritarian government gets out of step with popular sentiment, and, while that has not mattered in past decades, the government can come across as looking foolish in the Internet era.

While the statement from the Chinese Embassy in Macedonia was still available

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online Monday, a similar statement had been removed from the website of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Global Times newspaper said in a commentary Monday that the rhetoric of public criticism had become stronger and "sometimes even aggressive" in recent years. "Although it is hard to say whether each of these criticisms are reasonable and appropriate, the government needs to learn how to live with it," it said. "Some 'disturbance' from the public is not bad to the government" as it is necessary for quality governance," it said.

On Saturday, a school bus carrying 39 people in Liaoning province rolled over, injuring 35 students, including two 7-year-old girls with serious head injuries, the China Daily reported.

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