Chinese bloggers take political satire offline

By Lindsay Beck
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BEIJING (Reuters) - Forget loners in pajamas and slippers pouring out their hearts in anonymous solitude.

China's bloggers are going offline -- and they're having a blast.

Among the best known is "Dai San Ge Biao," literally meaning 'wears three watches' but also a play on former leader Jiang Zemin's Three Represents, or "San Ge 'Da' Biao," political theory.

A bespectacled journalist by day whose real name is Wang Xiaofeng, he's not only busy writing diary-like posts on the Internet that run the gamut from ruminations on the state of China's media to a defense of some of Beijing's cruder slang, he's also made a movie.

Only "A Hard Day's Night," isn't really a movie, he insists.

"So what is it then? It's a bunch of bloggers who are so free their balls ache," he wrote.

Despite an army of cyber police who monitor for politically sensitive posts and regulations that aim to extend controls to personal blogs, his friends and supporters remain undeterred.

A recent screening before friends and supporters -- most of whom work in the media and themselves have blogs -- had the jubilant atmosphere of a bunch of kids skipping school.

The 50-minute film, made in a day with no budget and with basic equipment, tells the story of a man picked up by police and mistaken first for a bank robber and then for one of China's best known film stars, while he tries unsuccessfully to convince them he's only a blogger.

"There's no point, really, it was all just for fun," said one of the actors, who has a day job as a think-tank researcher.

ALL IN FUN

The emphasis on fun contrasts starkly to the situation in China's liberal media circles, which is still reeling from the news last week of the sacking of a top editor at the Beijing News, one of the country's most independent dailies.

It is also a change from the tone of some of Dai San Ge Biao's recent blog postings, which offer reflective year-end ruminations on the state of Chinese media.

"In China, most people in the media have to foster a perverse mentality, otherwise they will have to live feeling very depressed," he writes in one posting.

"Moreover, when you realize you have no way to change this reality, you will feel an indescribable sorrow."

And if he insists the movie is only for fun, it's a brand of fun that's in the best tradition of political satire.

The police are portrayed in turn as bumbling or brutal, and the Communist Party's slogans are skewered along the way.
In one scene, a character takes on the leadership’s repeated exhortations to build a ‘harmonious society’, declaring that the only harmonious society to be found in China is on the 7 o’clock state news.

"He’s hilarious -- and very sharp," said Xiao Qiang, director of the China Internet Project at the University of California at Berkeley and a follower of Dai San Ge Biao’s blog, which goes by the title "Massage Milk."

He’s also part of something new, Xiao says, in blogging not only as an individual, but as part of a community that is starting to make the leap from the virtual world to real life.

"He’s blogging with a group of friends," he said. "Blogging gives them this tool to communicate to the public. It’s a very effective organizing tool."

It also gives Dai San Ge Biao and his friends a way to get together and let off steam and perhaps to overcome some of the sorrow he describes in his blog.

"The laughter and the joy the two hours brought to everybody are something you cannot find in any other corner of China," he wrote of the screening.