

# Online protesters make deadly point in vow to avoid suicide

China

Leo Lewis Beijing

Incensed by government opaqueness and unconvinced by the recent "suicide" of a market salesgirl, ordinary Chinese have swarmed online in a new form of protest — issuing public vows that they will not kill themselves. The

unusual pledges, which began appearing on China's Twitter-style microblog sites yesterday and are multiplying fast, ooze embittered contempt for the authorities.

Pitched between darkly humorous and deeply touching, many promise that they will not take their own lives, no matter how grim life becomes. The pledges are designed to ridicule the police and make it clear that, if the writer is ever found dead and the authorities give a verdict of suicide, the outside world will know that police are lying.

"I am not optimistic or active. I don't have mental problems. My IQ and EQ [emotional intelligence] are both low, and so are my education and income. I still make this promise that I will not kill myself," wrote one pledge on Sina Weibo, joining more than a thousand others seeking to baffle the powers-that-be.

Others drip with irony. "I am confident in myself, the state and the future of the nation. I strive every moment. Therefore I will never be pessimistic and world-weary, and will never commit suicide," wrote He Zhihua, another Weibo user.

The true purpose of the promises is to further highlight the death of Yuan

● An anti-corruption purge by President Xi Jinping appeared to have claimed another important scalp yesterday as state media reported that an official at China's top planning agency was being investigated for "serious disciplinary violations" (Leo Lewis writes). Liu Tienan, deputy chairman of the National Development and Reform Commission, was recently accused by an influential business magazine of improper dealings and abusing his position to enrich family members.

Liya, a 22-year-old migrant worker from Anhui province whose body was found at the foot of the six-storey market in which she worked.

Officially, her death was suicide, but many fellow migrant workers toiling in the cramped corridors of the Jingwen clothing market in central Beijing, believe that she was gang-raped by security guards and killed. That line of speculation took hold instantly among the community of migrant workers in the Chinese capital who suffer from various forms of discrimination.

The fact that the woman's parents and boyfriend were unable to gain access to security tapes fuelled the outrage. Hundreds took to the streets last week in a protest of a sort that is common elsewhere but rare in Beijing.

Police and paramilitaries were quick to move in and a reinvestigation was ordered by the president, Xi Jinping — but a day later, police came back with the same verdict: suicide. Last Friday, a woman was detained for "spreading rumours" about the case.

Knowing that state censors were keen to squash any hint of activism over Ms Yuan's death and that physical protest would be instantly crushed, the anti-suicide pledges are an attempt to beat Beijing's gag. Chinese internet users are directing protest towards a Government which is used to exerting complete control over information.

"I hereby promise not to commit suicide under any circumstances, for the Communist Party, for the country or for the people," wrote one weibo user called PY-Liu. "If I commit suicide, then it's definitely fake."