



Green Olympics: A Pledge to Honor for Beijing

BY YANG JIANXIANG, China Features

His eyes opened for a second and closed again. Still in bed, Wo Niu reached out for the tiny alarm clock on the desk. He squinted at its round surface. The black short hand pointed at seven. It WAS time to get up! But how come it looked so dark outside?

Wo Niu dressed up and approached the window. He smelled a strong scent of mud and got some idea: the dust storm must have hit again. Still, Wo Niu was shocked when he went out of the building and saw the ground covered by a solid layer of yellow sand. And the cars parking around, of varied colors before, now all looked the same, just like scattered mounds of loess.

It was on the morning of April 16, 2006. The Beijing Meteorological Station later said the dust storm, the 8th for this year, was the worst in recent years. An estimated 336,000 tons of dust and sand had fallen on the city proper overnight.

Frustrated, people questioned the "intensified" environmental protection efforts reportedly made by the government in recent years. Some voiced worry that the scenario of a Green Olympics in 2008 might not materialize.

Addressing the public concerns, experts with the State Forestry Administration (SFA) said climate conditions varied from year to year. The dust storm did not necessarily indicate the environment was getting worse. Afforestation efforts had been fruitful. And historical records showed dust storm was not likely to occur in Beijing in August and September.

"The 2008 Green Olympics will not be affected by the dust storm," said Liu Tuo, director of SFA's Desertification Control Office.

In Moscow on July 13, 2001 Beijing was awarded by the IOC the right to host the 29th Summer Olympic Games. In its bid China pledged to stage a "green" event that will contribute to the protection of the environment. The task is formidable, but Beijing looks determined to live up to its words.

Returning from Moscow, officials in Beijing immediately reviewed the city development and environmental protection planning. They vowed to attain the city's environmental improvement goals -- previously set for the year 2010 -- three years ahead of schedule. The city was to conduct the giant project in line with the concept of sustainable development, through protecting the environment and resources, and maintaining the ecological balance, said a document prepared by the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Games of the XXIX Olympiad (BOCOG).

According to BOCOG, much progress has been made in the past few years and some of the "green goals" have already been achieved.

In 2005 Beijing spent a total of 17.9 billion RMB yuan (2.2 billion U.S. dollars) on the environment. Relocation work commenced for the city's two major polluters, the Capital Iron & Steel Group and the Chemical Industry Area in the southeastern suburbs. By the end of the year, all 20-ton furnaces and those of smaller sizes in the urban areas were made to use clean fuels. And larger furnaces were required

to employ pollution treatment facilities to meet the emission standards.

Meanwhile, the city imposed the stage-3 National Emission Standards on motor vehicles. Automobiles meeting the new standards, which are compatible with the Euro-3 Emission Standards, generate 50% less emission than vehicles conforming to the stage-2 standards.

Thanks to sustained and effective afforestation efforts, Beijing's forest coverage reached 50.5% and urban green land coverage also climbed to 42.5%.

Last year Beijing had 234 days that reported good air quality, measured by the grade-2 national norm, five days more than in 2004.

Improvement of the environment was also seen in the rise of sewage treatment rate from 2% in 1990 to the present 70% in urban areas, and from 30% in 2004 to the present 40% in rural areas. And the safe treatment rate of domestic wastes reached 94% in the eight urban districts and 40% in the suburbs.

Beijing needs to construct 12 new sports facilities for the Olympic Games. In order to

engage the "green concept" and minimize the negative impact of the event on the environment, BOCOG has worked out a number of guidelines for the design and construction of the new venues. "The green standards in the guidelines are stricter in general than the existing national standards," BOCOG Venue Planning and Environment Department Executive Director Yu Xiaoxuan said.

Many new constructions or renovations relating to the Games have adopted "green technologies" or highlighted a thrifty use of resources. A total of 100,000 square meters of ETFE (ethylene-tetra-fluoro-ethylene) foils would be pasted on the exterior of the walls and roof of the National Aquatics Center, dubbed the "Water Cube". The structure is expected to help save half of the energy for lighting during the day, experts said.

A centralized AC system to be installed in the Wukesong Indoor Stadium would economize energy consumption by cooling according to the actual needs. Solar energy would be used to power air conditioning on the baseball

ground and also for lighting in other parts of the Stadium. And an optical fiber lighting system would transmit the daylight to the underground parking area.

Buried underneath the National Indoor Stadium were 8,000 tons of waste steel scraps supplied by the Capital Iron & Steel Group. The heavy material served the float-combating purpose well and the utilization solved the problem of proper disposal. In the Olympic Village, another 3,000 tons of steel scraps were used to construct the roadbed. Manhole covers made of cement glass fiber composite materials were used in the Village to replace traditional ones made of cast iron, to save the non-renewable iron resources. And solar energy was exploited to supply hot water for construction workers and also for lighting on the construction sites and in the offices.

The development of subway and light rail transport has quickened in Beijing not only for speedy traffic, but also for the reduction of car-related pollution. At present construction is underway for subway lines No.4, 5 and 10, as well as two special lines connecting the airport and the "Olympic Green", the official name for the Olympic park. Their combined mileage reached 115 kilometers. By 2008 Beijing would have 202 kilometers of subway in operation, hopefully carrying 10% of the city traffic.

Apart from implementing strict emission standards, Beijing plans to make 90% of its public transport vehicles and 70% of local taxis adopt clean energies by the end of 2007.

Regarding the 4,000-plus vehicles to be recruited by the Games for dedicated use, BOCOG said they were expected to give zero or little emission, with the help of hybrid or fuel cell technologies.

BOCOG released the Green Olympics logo on September 24, 2005. Five days later, its Environmental Management System passed ISO auditing and certification.

In 2005 the "Green Olympics, Green Action" Promotion Team delivered more than 180 lectures in 15 districts and counties across Beijing. The audience exceeded



70,000 in number. Green-Olympics-themed contests involving paintings by children and DV shootings by college students became popular events among the local residents. Some of the works even impressed the IOC officials. Pal Schmitt, chairman of IOC's Sport and Environment Commission, was quoted as saying that Beijing "will be able to achieve its goals for Green Olympics."

BOCOG signed a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations Environment Program on November 18, 2005. The two sides agreed to effectively cooperate in the gathering and sharing of environmental information, and promotion and education of environmental protection.

All the green efforts are intended to bring about a successful Olympic Games, through which the Chinese hope to showcase their wisdom, culture and technological development. However, "the Green Olympics is not the end of a story, but just the beginning," BOCOG's Yu

Xiaoxuan said. "The effects would be lasting and leave a precious legacy of environmental protection to China and the world."

There is still much work to do. Before 2008, Beijing needs to construct a second natural gas pipeline, and further lift its green land coverage to 48%, sewage treatment rate to over 90%, and use-of-recycled-water rate to 50%.

To BOCOG, the Green Olympics is getting closer every day. Included in its list of future work are the Olympic torch relays, and the Game's opening and closing ceremonies. "The arrangements will make sure that these events are not going to cause damage to the natural habitats for animals, to areas for water conservation, and to protected cultural heritage sites such as the Great Wall," Yu Xiaoxuan said.

All venue construction will be completed around the end of 2007, to be followed by decorations. BOCOG would make efforts to secure that the materials used for decoration are also "green", and the job is done with quality, Yu said.

An air quality security program is being developed by the city government. During the Olympic Games, Beijing will restrict the use of motor vehicles and stop all construction work. The neighboring areas of the capital city will be invited to "take coordinated action" to reduce discharge of pollutants and improve waste disposal.

"The greatest difficulty for BOCOG is the lack of experience," Yu Xiaoxuan said, "foreign successes may not readily be copied. We need to learn first, and then bring our own innovative thinking into play. We must be successful, otherwise we cannot face the people who have entrusted this important mission to us."

On October 28, 2005, a sub-station was set up in the Olympic Green to monitor the air quality. When the Games take place in less than two years, experts say, the environment would definitely be better, not only because August in Beijing is typically rainy, damp and free of strong winds, but also the "green efforts" will certainly pay off by that time.



PUBLIC HEARINGS

Driving the engine of democracy in China

GONG YIDONG

He nods his head and beams when others refer to him as a "public hearing expert". Indeed, Cui Yansheng merits the title: In the last six years, the 69-year-old has attended 21 public hearings in Hangzhou, capital of East China's Zhejiang Province. In other words, he missed only one meeting.

"It occurred to me that democracy was, in fact, within arms' reach when I attended the first hearing in 2000," recalls Cui, who has lived in this city for more than half a century.

The 1996 Law on Administrative Punishment officially introduced the public hearing system, a brand-new notion to most Chinese. Under the law, any Chinese citizen can appeal to the authorities if fined "a significant sum of money" or for example, if his driving license were revoked.

A public hearing system was added to the Law on Pricing in 1998: a hearing must be held by authorities before fixing the price of certain public services, especially utilities.

Borrowed from the West, the idea quickly took off in China. "I deem the hearing system a highly functional platform for the presentation of our voice," says Cui, who before retirement in 1998 was an engineer at the Hangzhou Machine Tool Group.

Cui can still recall his first hearing about improving the administration of public gardens in Hangzhou, a famous travel destination in China. That summer, Cui cycled through the city collecting visitors' opinions and then surprised everyone by presenting them at the hearing.

"It was a really heated debate, quite different from the symposiums I had seen before. But I was pleased to see the hearing worked the administration ultimately cancelled ticket fees."

Neither Cui nor Hangzhou is the

sole case. More than 2,000 hearings had taken place across the nation by the end of 2005. They covered a wide range of topics: educational fees, ban on fireworks, air ticket pricing and even resettlement compensation for households moved out of prime inner city real estate.

The hearing system fosters "awareness of public participation," says a professor of the China University of Political Science and Law. "People are more willing to cooperate with the authorities in implementation of a public policy if they can contribute to the policy-making process," says Ma Huaide.

Both administration and citizenry are shifting mentality. Recollecting his own experiences, Cui says his "overall quality" has improved a lot. He subscribes to nine daily newspapers and several magazines to keep tabs on the latest developments in society.

"I'm neither a National People's Congress (NPC) nor a Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) representative, but I can state with confidence that I'm a qualified spokesman for the people around me," he says. The NPC and the CPPCC are China's top legislature and top advisory body, respectively.

A newborn baby to China, the hearing system has probably worked for the public good: a provincial hearing in South China's Guangdong Province successfully slashed an increase in bus ticket prices by 30 percent during the Spring Festival, or the Chinese lunar new year; college students in Beijing are guaranteed a hearing if they are expelled for being caught plagiarizing in examinations; representatives to a hearing on cooking gas prices vetoed an account totaling three million yuan (\$400,000) prepared by the local company in Nanjing, capital of East China's Jiangsu Province, after they found it was cooked.

Perhaps more important than the short-term results is the enthusiasm for public affairs generated

by the hearing system. Chinese have grown gradually more accustomed to speaking out their views at hearings, rather than stepping back or passively receiving orders from the above, says Prof. Ma.

In April 2005, Yuanmingyuan Garden, the "Old Summer Palace" built in the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) but plundered by the British and French during the Second Opium War (1856-1860), made a move that induced an unprecedented hearing.

The previous year, the administration of the Yuanmingyuan Garden made a bold decision to spread 133 hectares of plastic films underneath the lakes in the park. They claimed that the project was intended to prevent water seeping into the earth. The majority of the public, however, were suspicious that the administration took the action from ulterior economic interests, risking irreparable havoc on the historic site.

Amid public outrage and doubt, the State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA) organized an environmental assessment hearing, the first of its kind in China. It attracted 73 representatives from all walks of life: a teacher, policeman, lawyer, non-governmental organization (NGO), public servant and researcher. Most participants opposed the project during the three-hour hearing.

Following further investigations and an evaluation report by Tsinghua University, SEPA gave a serious warning three months later to the Yuanmingyuan Garden administration and ordered them to remove the films immediately.

Li Dun, a sociologist from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, commended the hearing as "a historic milestone in environmental protection that set a good model for democratic policy-making in China."

The government also realized the unparalleled usefulness of hearings. Pan Yue, deputy director

of SEPA, dubbed the hearing "a symbol of socialist democracy".

Aside from its roles in administration and public-policy making, the hearing system is increasingly used to help map out legislation.

Addressing the National People's Congress (NPC) in March last year, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao highlighted the importance of setting up a proper mechanism involving a hearing to promote public participation in legislation.

In September 2005, three NPC special committees organized a national hearing to discuss the correct income tax threshold for the Law on Personal Income Tax. Twenty-eight representatives from 18 provinces turned up at the hearing. After a full day's discussion, the threshold starting point was raised from 800 yuan (\$100) to 1,600 yuan (\$200).

A dozen municipalities and provinces have also turned to hearings to collect public opinions before formulating local statutes and regulations. The hearing system has paid off as it makes the administrative organs more transparent in their working style, says Prof. Ma.

"People observe with their own eyes the process of administration and legislation brought out from the backstage, or even from under the table, to front and center," he says.

In spite of such achievements, observers argue the hearing system in China still has too many loopholes.

For one thing, the selection of representatives to a hearing is not scientific, according to Ying Songnian, a professor from the China National School of Administration.

"China is embracing a multi-faceted society, but there are not many mature interest groups representing a different voice," he says. In some cases, the representatives are randomly designated by the sponsor at their own will, "whose independence is thus incredible," Yings says.

Take a hearing held in Beijing last year for example. All 20 representatives voted unanimously for an increase in the price of electricity. Embarrassingly, previous online surveys carried out by Sohu.com and Sina.com, two influential online portals, showed more than 80 percent of voters opposed the same proposal.

Moreover, minutes and memorandums of hearings should be made public, including the representatives' presentations in detail, according to Ying.

"People have the right to know what the participants talked about at the hearing. Without real transparency, the hearing risks being a simple rubber stamp exercise."

Keeping files confidential is a practice at hearings opposed by a Tsinghua professor and attendee at a recent hearing on taxi fares in Beijing. The sponsor, Beijing Municipal Commission of Reform and Development, prepared a lengthy report before the meeting, Chen Jianmin recalls, but it was kept secret for 40 days.

"I don't see any point in hiding it. It makes no sense," she says.

Wang Xixin, a Peking University scholar of administrative law, goes further. The hearing system, he warns, now has a crisis of trust.

"Efforts should be made so that the hearing system does not get manipulated as a political showcase or deviate from the basic principles of democracy."

Cui Yansheng urges the government to listen earnestly to the views expressed at public hearings.

"I believe in the hearing system -- it's a convincing expression of ren min dang jia zuo zhu [the people are masters of the state], right?" laughs Cui. He is already making preparations for his 22nd hearing, in two months' time.

China Features

China to continue active use of foreign funds in coming five years

YU YUANJIANG

ALTHOUGH China will adjust its main purposes, concepts and industrial and zonal focuses of using foreign funds to adapt to the changing domestic and global situation, it will continue to actively and effectively utilize foreign capital while taking the initiative to avoid and eliminate various kinds of risks to secure national security during the 11th five-year development program period (2006-2010), according to Fu Shan, an official with the Department of Foreign Capital Utilization of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC).

Fu confirmed that a national program on using foreign funds during the 11th five-year development program period has just been formulated and issued by the NDRC. In accordance with the program, efforts will be made to thoroughly apply the "scientific concept of development", which stresses a more balanced and coordinated development and underlines environmental protection and saving of resources, and more attention will be paid to the "quality" instead of the "quantity" of foreign funds. Emphasis will also be laid on importing advanced technologies and experienced and high-quality managing personnel.

More attention should be paid to ecological balance, environment protection, and saving and comprehensive utilization of natural and energy resources, thus integrating the utilization of foreign funds with the upgrading of domestic industrial structure and the improvement of the technological level.

In attracting foreign funds in the period, Fu said, the focus should be direct foreign investment. Besides, it is necessary to encourage foreign

funds to take part in the reorganization or transformation of domestic enterprises in such forms as merger, share-purchase or re-investment. Except in those major fields and major enterprises which are related to national security, restrictions on foreign holding companies will be gradually lifted.

Meanwhile, Fu stressed, it is necessary to step up the pace of formulating and promulgating the Anti-Monopoly Law; give further details on policies towards those sensitive industries or major enterprises which are related to national security or have a significant bearing on national economy and people's livelihood; improve the industry-access system for foreign funds; strengthen examination and supervision of the merger cases which are related to the above-mentioned sensitive industries or major enterprises and involve foreign funds, so as to secure the state's control over the development of those strategic industries and major enterprises; and amend the Law on Enterprises' Income Taxation to introduce a unified taxation system for both domestic and foreign-funded enterprises.

Fu said efforts will be made to optimize and upgrade the foreign-funded industrial structure, encourage foreign investors to make contributions to the development of China's modern agriculture with emphasis on the development of ecological agriculture and high-tech-based and high-value-added farming, such as planting, breeding, comprehensive utilization of agricultural waste, tapping of biological energy, development and manufacturing of modern farming machinery and equipment, deep processing of farm produce, and import of modern farming technologies and managing systems.

Besides, foreign business people will continue to be encouraged to invest in such industries as electronic information, petrochemicals, chemicals and automobiles. They will be urged to take part in the reorganization and transformation of the country's traditional industries including machinery, light industry, textiles, raw materials, construction and building materials, and to invest in infrastructure facilities and environment-friendly projects, especially ecological and environmental projects in central and western China. Meanwhile, China will continue to actively and steadily open up its service sectors, such as banking, insurance, securities, telecommunications, commerce and freight transport, to the outside world.

Large multinational companies are encouraged to shift their high-tech and high-value-added processing and manufacturing sectors and their research and development institutions to China, and to set up production and manufacture bases, auxiliary bases and training bases in the country, so as to bring the effect of technological overflow into play and enhance Chinese enterprises' ability of independent innovation.

Since its accession to the World Trade Organization, China has entered a new stage featuring comprehensive international economic cooperation and competition in the utilization of foreign funds, Fu pointed out. During the 10th five-year development plan period (2001-2005), China actually used a total of about US\$383 billion of foreign funds, 34 percent more than in the ninth five-year plan period. The capital involved includes \$286 billion of direct overseas investment, \$38 billion of funds raised through Chinese enterprises' listing abroad, and \$46 billion of overseas credit.

China Features