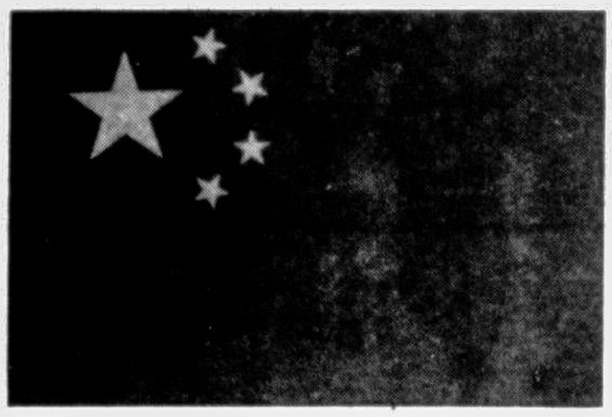


National Day of China

Jiang Zemin
President of the People's Republic of China

China's Tourism: Once a Pain, Now a Pleasure

by Wen Chihua

NO other change sums up the success of China's reform and opening up period more eloquently than tourism. Domestic tourism never existed until the early 1980s while people were too poor and prevented by rather rigid population management from traveling. Likewise, the country was so politically isolated that it saw few foreign tourists.

How things have changed. In Tiananmen Square in central Beijing, hundreds of foreign tourists mingle with tens of thousands of domestic visitors. And the latter group take hardly any notice of the former; whereas early foreign visitors often drew even more attention from locals than the attraction itself.

Zhaxi, a Tibetan, visited Beijing in autumn 1998. But for years he thought he would never be able to afford to leave the pastures of his home town, the Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture of Aba in Sichuan Province.

Traveling to Beijing was a long trip for the 55-year-old. He first endured a three-day bus-ride to Chengdu. From there he took a train to the Chinese capital.

Zhaxi was reported to be the first Tibetan pilgrim of his family to Yonghegong, or the Lama Temple, in Beijing. In total it cost him about 2,000 yuan (US $230) to make his pilgrimage, which shows that disposable income is the prerequisite for tourism in China.

People in town and country have become richer during the reform period. Millions of farmers started moving around the country — but it was hardly tourism — in the early 1980s. They were job hunting in the cities. Most made money and some even spent part of their hard-earned cash on letting their families make that long-dreamt-of journey, to their local provincial capital, or even Beijing.

At that time few urbanites had the opportunity to travel for pleasure either. If travel occurred, it was for the purpose of business. To turn meetings into pleasurable experiences, organizers shrewdly chose resorts such as Beidaihe, Guilin or Lushan as venues.

Luo Di, a 70-year-old research fellow from the coastal province Zhejiang in eastern China, always knew that there was another world outside of his study. He dreamed of traveling abroad for years. But it was more than a little difficult until lately. As late as 1997 Chinese citizens were for the first time allowed to travel on their own expense to certain countries. Luo and his wife decided to have a look at Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia.

The 10-day trip cost the couple 36,000 yuan (US $4,337) — equal to three years' of their salary. Despite such high costs, some 5.32 million Chinese tourists paid for their own overseas tours in 1997. To date, outbound destinations are increased from the original three to seven, ranging from Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia to Australia, New Zealand, Korea and the Philippines.

Tourism is not only fun and freedom, but now a vital part of China's economy. The central government, in its Ninth Five-Year Plan, (1996-2000) has marked tourism a tertiary industry that should be given vigorous support.

A total of 700 million Chinese — more than half the country's 1.2 billion population — made a journey for one reason or another in 1998. En route or at their destinations they spent about 239.1 billion yuan (US $28.8 billion) and contributed 70 per cent of 343.9 billion yuan (US $41.32 billion) to the country's total tourism revenue.

"By 2000 the China National Tourism Administration estimates that the country's earnings from tourism will comprise 5 per cent of GDP, compared to 3.7 per cent in 1998," says He Guangwei, chairman of the country's top tourism policy and management body.

Such a large number on the move shows that travel is not the preserve of China's white collar workers. "Peasants"

Continued on page 9

Zhu Rongji
Premier of the People's Republic of China

MESSAGE

On this auspicious occasion of the 50th founding anniversary of the People's Republic of China, I wish to take this opportunity to extend on behalf of the Government and people of the People's Republic of China the sincere wishes and facilitation to the Government and people of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

Since the founding of new China in October 1st, 1949, substantial success has been achieved in China's economic development notably after implementation of reform and opening up in 1979. From 1979 to 1997 China's average annual GDP growth rate came to 9.8 percent, and its over all economic strength ranked seventh in the world. The production emancipated and overall national strength has increased markedly. The output of several major industrial and agricultural products leads first in the world in terms of absolute figures. In the first half this year, the national economy grew at the rate of 7.6%, keeping the rising momentum. At present, China enjoys political stability and economic growth. The livelihood of the Chinese people has been greatly improved. Reforms of the state-owned enterprises, the financial system and government institutions have been progressing smoothly. Measures to expand domestic demands, adjust structures and increase export are producing results. The Chinese economy promises a bright future.

In history, the Chinese nation has experienced enormous hardships, yet ethnic unity and national unification have always been the mainstream in records of the Chinese civilization. Complete reunification of the country is a lofty goal that Chinese people have cherished from generation to generation. The return of Hong Kong to the motherland has proven that the reunification of China serves Asian stability and prosperity. The forthcoming return of Macao on December 20 of this year to the motherland marks another step towards China's reunification. However, recently the Taiwan authorities have overtly spread the fallacy of "state to state relations" across the Taiwan Straits, virtually an activity aimed at separating the country. This has met with strong condemnation of all Chinese at home and overseas, including our Taiwan compatriots, and universal opposition of the international community. To solve Taiwan question in accordance with the basic principles of "peaceful reunification and one country, two systems" represents the common aspiration of the entire Chinese people and the overwhelming historical trend of China's development.

Bangladesh and China are close neighbors enjoying a profound friendship dating back to ancient times, a friendship that has withstood the test of international vicissitudes. Over the past 24 years since the establishment of diplomatic ties, thanks to the loving care of the leaders of our two countries and joint efforts of the two sides, Sino-Bangladesh relations enjoying an all-around growth and bilateral cooperation based on mutual benefit have produced fruitful results.

I am very happy to see that this has been another year of very close friendship, very cordial relations and increased mutual beneficial cooperation between our two countries. This year has witnessed many exchanges of high level visits between our two sides, which bring our two nations and two peoples even closer. In particular, the official visit to Bangladesh of this April by his Excellency Li Peng, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of China has reinforced our bilateral friendly relations. The cornerstone of the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman International Convention Center to be built by interest-free loan rendered by the Chinese Government has just been laid down. The Fifth Sino-Bangladesh Bridge, symbolizing the traditional friendship between the two countries has also been under construction. In international affairs, we always share common views on the important issues. We have helped each other, trusted each other, understand each other and supported each other. The Chinese Government appreciated the Bangladesh Government's adherence to the "one-China" policy and its support of China on issues such as human rights.

It is gratifying to note that bilateral relations between China and Bangladesh are consistently growing and expanding through many areas of cooperation. At the moment, China has already invested in several sectors of Bangladesh's economy such as in transport, power generation, telecommunication, manufacturing and construction. I firmly believe that the deep and enduring bond of friendship and cooperation between China and Bangladesh will continue to flourish for the prosperity and well-being of the peoples of the two countries in the coming years. When the new century is coming, let's join our efforts to bring a more healthy and vigorous Sino-Bangladesh friendly relationship into the 21st century.

Long live Sino-Bangladesh friendship.

Wang Chungui
Ambassador of the People's Republic of China
to the People's Republic of Bangladesh

China: In Search of Green and Clean Land

by Xu Zhengfeng

IT is a typical day in Beijing, with a fuzz caused by coal burning vehicle emissions and construction site dust.

A policeman walks with a hand over her mouth. A boy picks black dirt from his nose. Everyone gets a dirty collar within an hour. Cars creep along with their windows shut.

In the last 20 years, China has moved up and eventually become top of virtually every economic performance table in the back of international financial magazines. Economy-wise, the country's growth has indeed been impressive. Environmentally, however, China's green and pleasant land has become blotched with larger and increasing numbers of pollution blackspots. China had become the world's second largest waste-gas-emission country after the United States — but it only has a fraction of the cars owned by Americans. It's a simple question, but is environmental degradation the high price China has to pay for such rapid economic development?

Nature Warns

In 1998 China was given its clearest warning yet by nature that the nation's environment, if neglected, would seek revenge. Soil erosion caused by massive deforestation was blamed for causing serious flooding along the Yangtze and Songhuajiang rivers. Economic losses reached 200 billion yuan (US$24 billion), effectively denting China's GDP by 2.5 per cent. The catastrophes emphasized the true cost of China's timber industry, making the sector look, in hindsight, a false economy.

Within weeks the State Council, China's cabinet, banned logging of virgin forests in many river catchment areas, while ordering a speeding up of national tree planting programmes.

Ironically, as much of the country was being threatened by floods, the Yellow River could not muster the strength to make it to the sea. It trickled to nothing in Henan, with the entire province of Shandong left to cross. Hydrologists said deforestation was again to blame: it has reduced rainfall and caused serious soil erosion. More than half of the Yellow River basin suffers from soil erosion according to Chen Xiaoguo, deputy director of the Yellow River Management Committee under the Ministry of Water Resources.

Soil erosion affects one-third of the nation's land and is justifiably rated as the No. 1 issue among the country's gamut of environmental problems. Silting up has made Dongting Lake, China's second largest, shallower and smaller. Hubei in central China, once known as "Province of a Thousand Lakes," now has just 600 remaining.

Another big headache is desertification — the spread of desert — that is swallowing up arable farmland equivalent in area to a medium-sized country each year. China's total desertified area now reaches 262 million hectares, more than a quarter of the country's territory.

Repairs on Many Fronts

On last March 12 hundreds of thousands of citizens dug holes, planted and watered saplings on what was China's 18th Tree-Planting Day. The campaign was initiated in 1982 at the recommendation of the late Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping. Estimates say that two billion trees are planted on each Tree-Planting Day. A recent programme titled "Protecting the Mother Rivers" calls on people to donate "five fen (0.6 US cent) for a sapling" or "200 yuan (US$24) for a mu of forest" (a mu is one-15th of a hectare).

But while environmentally-aware individuals and entire enterprises might take action to save nature and protect society, what is really needed is government policy which prevents the culprit sectors of the economy from using and abusing nature for quick profits. For this reason the State Council's logging ban was a watershed. It ruthlessly locked away logging tools and vehicles and even went as far as destroying roads accessing the forested regions.

But last year was not the first time that the government bit the bullet and started to punish the economy for what damage it did to nature.

Major environmental protection programmes carried out in recent years include the shutdown of hundreds of heavily-polluting small paper mills along the Huaihe River in central-east China, and strict effluent-discharge restrictions on factories around Taihu Lake in east China and Erhai Lake in Yunnan, southwest China.

Refuges for Nature

The fight against desertification and soil erosion in China started a long time ago. In 1978 a massive programme named "Northern Afforestation Project" was launched to create a green belt across the full width of China's arid northern territory, from the central Asian region of Xinjiang to northeast China. The green belt, with its middle section running parallel to the Great Wall, soon became know as "the Green Great Wall." With a length of 4,400 km and a width of 560km, the green belt shields the farming lives of 150 million people and prevents 20 percent of the nation's desertified land from spreading further. Besides, the vast belt has become a haven for wildlife.

Nature reserves in their own right have also been established. By 1998, a total of 926 nature reserves dot the map of China, their combined size amounting to 7.64 percent of China's total land area. "This exceeds the world average level of 7 percent," says Xie Zhenhua, director of the National Environmental Protection Agency.

With the aid of the Global Environment Fund, China vows to further expand cooperation with the international community for protecting and developing nature reserves. With support from the Fund, the area of tropical rain forests in Xishuanbanna, Yunnan province, has been expanded from 198,000 hectares in 1988 to 243,000 hectares now.

Yunnan in southwest China is known for its great biodiversity. The province has so far set up more than 200 protection bases for endangered and rare plant and animal species, and its 15 nature reserves have joined the "World Biosphere Network," according to Hao Jianxiu, a vice-minister in charge of the State Development Planning Commission.

Kunming, the provincial capital of Yunnan, is playing host to the '99 World Horticulture Exposition from May to October this year. The Expo, the largest ever held, should help China forge a smoother link between development and nature. The Expo's theme is "Man and Nature Marching into the 21st century."

Acknowledgment

According to the People's Daily, China's leading newspaper, one-third of the country's territory is pestered by soil erosion; 70 per cent of its urban rivers are polluted; and 15-20 per cent of animal and botanical species are in danger of extinction. Each year, pollution-caused losses amount to 8 per cent of the country's GDP on average.

Indeed, there is wider and more open acknowledgment of the folly of neglecting the environment.

During the last decade, some of China's richest urban residents have swapped their bikes for cars. Presently there are 18 million motor vehicles in China, and 1.3 million in Beijing, three times the number in the early 1990s. From the mid-1980s, tail gas replaced coal-burning emissions as the main source of city pollution. Starting from 1988, 46 key cities began to announce weekly air quality indexes, and from this May 1 on, Beijing reports its air quality daily.

In 1995, the Air Pollution Prevention Law was amended and put into effect with stricter stipulations. Owners of motor vehicles in big cities are compelled to carry out technical improvements to meet hasher tail gas standards. The percentage of up-to-standard motor vehicles has risen to 70 per cent from the previous 40 per cent.

Continued on page 9

The Railway Sector Gears up for the 21st Century

by Yang Zheng

CHINA'S railway sector has geared up for still greater development in the forthcoming century. As Fu Zhihuan, minister of railways, put it, "the entire railway sector is being restructured in a way commensurate with its role in the nationwide endeavor to build up a truly modernised China in the 21st century."

More Railways

Railways currently open to traffic in China have a combined length of 66,000 km, and the figure is expected to exceed 70,000 km in just a few years.

The country now ranks first in Asia in terms of the length of railways. "But when the figure is divided by the Chinese population, the result is five centimeters, the length of a cigarette," Chief Engineer of railways Hua Maokun said in an interview with China Features. "Besides, the railway system is somewhat irrational, as most railways are in the coastal regions in east China."

The southwest will receive priority for railway construction. The region encompasses Sichuan, Yunnan and Guizhou, Guangxi, Tibet and Chongqing and covers about one-fourth of China's landmass. It is rich in mineral, forest and hydroelectric resources. Just one example: it furnishes more than 60 per cent of the exploitable hydroelectric potential verified across the country.

Construction is under way on ten railways and is starting on four more in 1999 in the region. This follows completion in 1997 of an 899-km railway from Nanning, capital of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, to Kunming, capital of the subtropical Yunnan Province now rising as an important tourist centre. Officials and experts hope that by 2002, the rail transport capacity in and out southwest China will double.

Coal accounts for 75 per cent of the energy consumption in China, and 70 per cent of the country's coal output is transported by rail. For this reason, construction of railways for transport of coal is also receiving priority.

The greatest cross-century coal transport projects was started in 1985 and is scheduled for completion in 2005. It calls for building a railway from the Shenfu-Dongsheng coalfield that sits astride Shaanxi and Inner Mongolia, to the Huanghuagang Port in Hebei. A 270-kg section of the railway, from Shenmu of Shaanxi to Shuozhou of Shanxi Province, was opened to traffic in 1995, and the 588-km section from Shuozhou to Huanghuagang, will be completed by 2003. This will be the second trunk rail line for coal transport, the first being the 653-km line from Datong in north Shanxi to the Qinhuangdao Port in Hebei, also with an annual carrying capacity of 100 million tons.

Restructuring of the Railway Sector

While building new railways, railway officials hold that the entire railway sector needs to be restructured in order to compete with the civil aviation and road transport sectors. Minister Fu disclosed that during the 1988-1998 period, the national air passenger volume increased 196 per cent, and the national road passenger volume, 75 per cent. The railway sector, however, registered a 20 per cent negative growth.

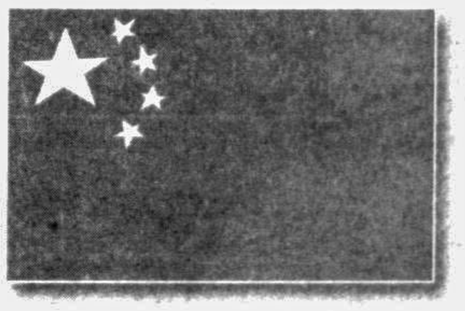
The first move is to increase the train speed. Through technological renovation drives in April 1997 and October 1998, the average speed of passenger trains increased from 80 km per hour to 140-160 on lines picked up for experiments. Scores of trains — trains that depart at dusk and arrive at dawn — are now on some of the trunk lines. The Xinshisu tilting train produced by the ABB Daimler-Benz is running between Guangzhou and Kowloon at 200 KPH, the fastest in China.

This, however, is far from being the end of the story. Construction is to begin in 2000 on the 1,300-km Beijing-Shanghai high-speed line for trains that run at a maximum speed of 250 KPH. Upon completion of the line, a single trip between the national capital and China's most important financial and industrial centre will take just six hours, instead of 12 along the existing Beijing-Shanghai Railway. Three more high-speed trunk lines are being planned for the next century — from Beijing to Guangzhou, from Beijing to Harbin and from Lianyungang on the east China coast to Xining. The Beijing-Guangzhou project is expected to reduce single-journey travel time from 24 to 10 hours.

The ministry is attaching equal importance to electrification of railways. China has 12,575 km of electrified rail lines, which account for 19 per cent of the combined length of all operational rail lines and handle one quarter of the rail-

Continued on page 9

OUR HEARTIEST FELICITATIONS
on the occasion of the
National Day
of the People's Republic of
CHINA



ALPHA AND ASSOCIATE COMPANIES

- Alpha Agro Ltd.
- Alpha Aviation & Services Ltd.
- Alpha Pharmaceuticals Ltd.
- Alpha Tobacco Mfg. Co. Limited p.l.c
- Bangladesh Health Home (Pvt.) Ltd.
- Bangladesh Leaf Tobacco Co. Ltd. p.l.c
- Erba Ltd.
- Erba-China Engineering Workshop Ltd.
- Himagar Ltd.
- Industrial Management & Consultants Ltd.
- Kanak Handicrafts Ltd.
- Mcgregor & Balfour (BD) Ltd.
- Northern Jute Mfg. Co. Ltd. p.l.c
- Sreepur Textile Millls Ltd. p.l.c
- Tamak Shilpa (Pvt.) Co. Ltd.
- Timberex (BD) Ltd.
- Virginia Flue-Cured Tobacco Co. (BD) Ltd.

Jatiya Scout Bhaban (9th-12th floor), 70/1, Purana Paltan Line, Kakrail, Dhaka-1000.