

Cooperation results in significantly improved air quality

Joint cooperation on environmental protection in the past three years between Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei province has resulted in significantly improved air quality in the region.

China has promoted the integrated development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region in recent years, relocating nonessential functions from Beijing and restructuring the economy in the region, with environmental protection, traffic management and industrial upgrading being prioritized.

In the past three years, the three local governments have expanded cooperation on information sharing, including holding joint emergency meetings, as well as standards drafting, policy-making and joint financing.

Yu Jianhua, chief engineer of the Beijing Environmental Protection Bureau, said the authorities of the three areas formed a mechanism in March 2015 to jointly cope with violations of environmental laws.

At the beginning of last year, Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei unified emergency response standards for severe air pollution.

In April, the three governments unified petroleum emission standards for vehicles.

"Beijing has invested in Hebei's environmental protection, helping to cut coal use," Yu said.

According to the bureau, Beijing has invested 962 million yuan (\$139 million) in an air pollution control fund in Hebei in the past two years. Tianjin contributed 800 million yuan to the fund during the same period.

The results have been significant, with the industrial province of Hebei cutting coal use by 3.2 million metric tons in the past two years.

Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei have reduced coal consumption by 40.3 million tons in the past three years and cut iron production capacity by 40 million tons, which has contributed to the improved air quality.

China sees biggest overseas returning

wave in recent years

Chinese students celebrate their graduation from Columbia University on May 20, 2015. [photo/Xinhua]

At the National Science and Technology Awards Conference held in Beijing on January, 2017, Ren Xiaobin and his team won the second prize in the 2016 National Natural Science Award.

“It is the best time to do scientific research in China,” said Ren. “China has a larger stage which provides more chances and room for growth. We can expand our ability and achieve greater value of life.”

No one would expect Ren to achieve so much from nothing in only nine years. As one of the second batch of experts enlisted in the national “Recruitment Program of Global Experts”, or Thousand Talents Program, he returned from Japan to establish the Frontier Institute of Science and Technology in Xi’an Jiaotong University and lead a group of young people to conduct research on intelligent material.

Ren is just one of the many outstanding examples of many overseas returnees. Since the program was introduced in 2008, more than 40,000 high-level talents have come back to homeland and have found jobs.

The number of returnees at professor level has been more than 20 times than that of the total number between 1978 and 2008, forming the biggest overseas returning wave since the founding of the People’s Republic of China.

“We are close to realizing the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation than any time in the history and we are eager for talents than

any time in the history,” said President Xi Jinping at the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Western Returned Scholars Association.

“Most overseas Chinese want to come back to China,” said Wang Huiyao, vice-president of the Western Returned Scholars Association.

As China is improving its national strength, the ratio of the number of going abroad and returning people has fallen from 3.15:1 in 2006 to 1.28:1 in 2015. Talents are coming back at an unprecedented speed.

According to official statistics, more than 70 percent of project leaders working at key national research projects are overseas returnees. A large number of academicians at Chinese Academy of Sciences and at China Academy of Engineering are overseas returnees.

Experts estimate that China will transform from the biggest brain drain country into one of the main brain reversal countries in the world in five years.

The change of research environment is a major reason why overseas scholars are choosing to do research in China.

Shao Feng is in charge of a laboratory named after his name at the National Institute of Biological Sciences, Beijing. Two months ago, a research paper produced by his laboratory was published by world-known medical magazine Nature Microbiology, achieving a major breakthrough in the field of bioscience.

Shao said the key to success is that the laboratory is run in a similar mode to international scientific research institutes, breaking the constraints such as budget report, assessment standard, which are usually seen in the traditional management of scientific research.

Favorable policies, exploding high-tech industry, innovative atmosphere and sustainable investment are appealing to more and more overseas students.

Currently, there are more than 300 overseas returnees’ pioneer parks and about 24,000 enterprises in the parks across the country, with about 24,000 overseas returnees being employed.

“Many ask me why I came back. My answer is simple: I’m still young and I want to pursue my dream,” said Zhu Xiang, 30, who turned down the offer of a research institute in France to start his own business in China.

Zhu with his friends established a mobile medical platform at an incubator in Tsinghua University and now has millions of users. He thinks the fast-growing China now has a very good platform for overseas returnees to realize their aspiration.

Home schooling without permission illegal

The Education Ministry released a notice on its website on Wednesday, stressing that parents or guardians are not allowed to educate children at home without permission from education authorities.

According to the Compulsory Education Law, all school-age children must attend primary and junior middle school.

Schools and local education authorities shoulder the responsibility of finding those children who do not go to school and persuading them to attend, the notice said.

“For children who cannot attend school due to reasons such as poor physical health, their parents or guardians should report to the local education authorities and ask for a delay in enrollment,” the notice said.

“They cannot give children home schooling as a substitute for school education if they fail to gain permission from the authorities.”

The notice was released against a backdrop of an increasing number of students being educated at home or attending small, private teaching institutes.

Research conducted by the 21st Century Education Research Institute estimated that the number of children who receive home schooling rather than attending school in China has risen from 2,000 in 2013 to 6,000 today.

Wang Jiajia, who led the research, said the legality of home schooling had long been controversial in China, but that the increasing number of parents and children wanting to do so demonstrated that the unified, standardized education provided in the nation's schools cannot meet everyone's needs.

Reports that the Government is considering a concession on parliamentary engagement and a vote on the negotiations are welcome – Smith

Baroness

(Angela) Smith of Basildon, Labour's Leader in the House of Lords, in

response

to reports of potential government concessions on the Article 50 Bill, said:

“Reports

that the Government is considering a serious concession on parliamentary engagement and a vote on the negotiations are welcome.

“What

happens next is a pivotal moment and will determine the tone and trust in the weeks, months and years to come on this issue.

“Ministers

have rightly conceded the need for a vote before the deal is concluded and we welcome that.

“Our

amendment on a vote on the outcome of negotiations has been drafted by taking note of what happened in the Commons, including ministerial comments, as well as expert advice from peers in the Lords debates. The Government will have heard the senior cross bench peer and former Supreme Court judge Lord Hope’s speech about the need for further legislation should this Bill not be amended.

“We

believe we would win that vote. The Government of course could try to overturn it in the Commons.

“But

rather than Ministers just holding to the line that they won’t amend the bill but will make a statement on the record, it would be a positive and mature signal for future progress of legislation if having accepted the principle they write this into the bill.”

Ends

Statement to Parliament: Debate on the armed forces and investigation and prosecution of historical cases

Mr Speaker, I am grateful to the Right Honourable Member for North Belfast and his colleagues for bringing this motion to the House today and for initiating this very important debate.

So can I be clear from the outset.

Operation Banner, as the House is aware, lasted for nearly 30 years.

It was the longest single continuous deployment of the Armed Forces in British military history.

During that period over 250,000 people served.

The Armed Forces and the RUC combined lost over 1,000 men and women to terrorism. There were over 7,000 awards for bravery. And the Royal Ulster Constabulary was rightly awarded the George Cross.

So as this Government's Northern Ireland manifesto at the last election made clear, "we salute the remarkable dedication and courage of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and our Armed Forces in defending the rule of law and in ensuring that the future of Northern Ireland would only ever be determined by democracy and consent."

Quite simply without their contribution what we know today as the Northern Ireland peace process would never have happened.

All of us, across this House and throughout our United Kingdom, owe them a huge debt of gratitude.

Just as we owe them an enormous debt for the work and sacrifice they have made in other parts of the world referred to in the motion before us, in Kosovo, in Iraq and in Afghanistan.

Wherever they operate we quite rightly regard our Armed Forces as the best in the world.

The Government asks them to put their lives on the line in order to defend us and our way of life.

In return they rightly expect the fullest possible support from the Government.

And that is something that this Government, through my RHF the Defence Secretary and his colleagues, is determined to provide.

We will never accept any kind of spurious moral equivalence between those who sought to uphold the rule of law and the terrorists who sought to destroy it.

For us, politically motivated violence in Northern Ireland was never justified, whether it was carried out by republicans or loyalists.

We will continue to reject attempts to place the state at the heart of every atrocity or somehow to displace responsibility away from those who carried out terrorist attacks, namely the terrorists themselves.

And we will not accept attempts to denigrate the contribution of the security forces and seek to give any kind of legitimacy to violence.

But being the best in the world does mean operating to the very highest of standards. We expect nothing less and I know that our Armed Forces would not

have it any other way.

As the Noble Lord Stirrup put it in a recent debate in the Other Place, "The need to act lawfully is not a side consideration for the Armed Forces; it is an integral part of the ethos and training."

We believe in the rule of law and the police and Armed Forces are charged with upholding the law. They cannot operate above it or outside of it. Where there is evidence of criminality it should be investigated without fear or favour.

But in our view what characterised the overwhelming majority of those who served was discipline, integrity, restraint, professionalism and bravery.

And we should be proud of them.

Mr Speaker, as my Right Honourable Friend the Prime Minister also made clear in the House yesterday, it is also appalling when people try to make a business of dragging our brave troops through the courts.

In that context the motion before the House welcomes the Government's decision to wind up the Iraq Historic Allegations Team following the Solicitors' Disciplinary Tribunal hearing, and the consequent decision to strike off Phil Shiner.

This called into question the credibility of a large number of the IHAT's remaining caseload ... which will now revert to the Royal Navy Police.

To be clear, the Government has a legal obligation to ensure that criminal allegations against the Armed Forces are investigated.

But we also remain determined to ensure that our legal system is not abused ... as it clearly was by Mr Shiner ... falsely to impugn the reputation of our Armed Forces.

And we should all support the decisive action taken by my Right Honourable Friend the Defence Secretary in this case.

Mr Speaker, as many RH and HMs are well aware, addressing the legacy of the past has been one of the most difficult issues since the Belfast Agreement nearly 19 years ago.

What is clear today, as today's debate highlights, is the current structures in place are simply not delivering for anyone, including victims and survivors on all sides who suffered most during the Troubles.

The rawness of the continuing pain and emotion of families and survivors is stark.

And yet the need to make progress in this area is clear.

The legacy of the past continues to cast a shadow over society in Northern Ireland.

It retains the ability to destabilise politics.

And it has the capacity to be used by those who wish to fuel division promote terrorism to achieve their objectives.

Of course people are always going to retain their own views on the past, which will be shaped by their own experiences of it.

I acknowledge that that the Government's view of the troubles will not be shared by everyone and vice versa.

But where we should strive to reach consensus is on the structures needed to address it, and in a way that helps move Northern Ireland forward.

The inquest system was not designed to deal with highly-complex often linked cases involving large amounts of highly-sensitive material.

The Office of Police Ombudsman has to deal with historical allegations of misconduct rather than focusing on cases today.

The PSNI has to devote substantial resources to dealing with legacy cases when I know that they would prefer that it be spent on policing the present.

And taken as a whole, I recognise concerns that the current mechanisms focus disproportionately on cases involving, or allegedly involving, the state.

As a result leaving many victims of terrorism feeling ignored.

None of this is to criticise any individuals, not least the police and prosecuting authorities, all of whom uphold the law independently of government.

I support them in their difficult work.

Rather it is a recognition, which is widely accepted, that we need new and better structures for addressing these issues.

The status quo is not sustainable.

The Government has a duty to seek better outcomes for victims and survivors.

And we need legally robust mechanisms that enable us to comply with our international obligations to investigate criminal allegations.

The [Stormont House Agreement] was arrived at in December 2014 following eleven weeks of intensive cross party talks with the UK Government, the five largest parties in the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Irish Government on matters falling within their responsibility.

The Agreement contained the most far reaching set of proposals yet for addressing the legacy of Northern Ireland's troubled past ... the Historical Investigations Unit, the Independent Commission for Information Retrieval, the Implementation and Reconciliation Group, and an Oral History Archive.

A number of different options were discussed during those talks.

Amnesties were quickly dismissed by all the participants and are not the policy of this Government.

We believe that the so called legacy bodies set out in the Stormont House Agreement continue to provide the most effective way to make progress on this hugely sensitive but hugely important issue.

Delivering the Stormont House Agreement, including the legacy bodies, and also reforming legacy inquests was a key Northern Ireland manifesto pledge for the Conservative Government at the last election.

And we remain committed to this.

But in doing that I am also committed to the need to ensure that former soldiers and police officers are not unfairly treated or disproportionately investigated.

That is why any legislation we bring forward will explicitly set out that all of these bodies, including the Historical Investigations Unit (HIU), will be under legal obligations to operate in ways that are fair, balanced and crucially proportionate.

Terrorists were responsible for 90 per cent of all deaths in the troubles and any investigative processes have to reflect that.

Its caseload will also contain some of the most notorious atrocities resulting in the deaths of our Armed Forces, such as at Warrenpoint in 1979 and Ballygawley in 1988.

The HIU will look at cases in chronological order, meaning that it will be unable prioritise cases involving the state above those involving terrorists.

Any legislation establishing the HIU would include specific tests which must be met in order that a previously completed case is reopened for investigation.

This will mean specifically that new and credible evidence that was not previously available to the authorities is needed before the HIU will re-open any closed case.

We are looking at ways of ensuring that where prosecutions do take place terrorists are not treated more favourably than former soldiers and police officers.

And the bodies will be time limited to five years, ensuring that this process will not be open ended thereby helping Northern Ireland to move forward.

Mr Speaker, turning the Stormont House Agreement into detailed legislation has been and continues to be a long and necessarily complex process.

But a great deal of progress has been made in building the consensus necessary to bring legislation before this House.

And I believe that with hard work on all sides the outstanding areas of disagreement are bridgeable.

In September, I signalled my intention to move the process to a more public phase.

I had hoped that this would have taken place by now, but a continuing lack of consensus and then the political situation at Stormont have delayed that from happening.

But I remain committed to giving the public a say on these proposed bodies – and to building confidence in them from across the community.

So I want to take that forward as soon as possible after the Northern Ireland Assembly election a week today, so that we can make progress quickly.

But any approach to the past must be fair, balanced and proportionate.

It must have victims and survivors at its heart.

And it must be consistent with our obligations to those who served and in too many cases sacrificed so much to bring about the relative peace and stability that Northern Ireland enjoys today.