

China launches 8,000 water clean-up projects in H1

China launched nearly 8,000 water clean-up projects in the first half of 2017 with projected total investment of 667.4 billion yuan (\$100 billion), the environment ministry said on Thursday.

The projects were devised as part of a 2015 action plan to treat and prevent water pollution, and cover 325 contaminated surface water sites across the country, the Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) said in a notice.

A total of 343 contaminated sites had been identified, meaning that 95 percent had drawn up plans to bring water quality up to required standards, it said.

However, it noted that some regions were still behind schedule when it came to meeting their 2017 water pollution goals.

Across the country, 1,762 companies have taken clean production methods to prevent water pollution, accounting for 84.6 percent of companies needing to make the transformation.

China has also changed 75,000 underground oil tanks to two-layer tanks or added seepage prevention measures.

With China desperate to increase supplies to guarantee future food and energy security, it promised in 2015 to make significant improvements in its major waterways and curb untreated wastewater from highly polluting sectors like mining, steelmaking, textiles, printing and oil refining.

The MEP said this month that overall water quality had improved in the first half of 2017, although some regions registered an increase in substandard samples over the period.

China grades its water in six bands, with the lowest "below grade 5" considered unusable even for industrial or irrigation purposes and described as "black and stinky" water.

Of 2,100 "black and stinky" sites identified, 44.1 percent had completed treatment projects in the first half of the year, the ministry said, noting that the provinces of Hebei, Shanxi, Liaoning and Anhui had fallen behind.

In a bid to protect rural water supplies, China also identified 636,000 square kilometers of land that would be made off limits to animal husbandry, and it shut 213,000 livestock and poultry farms in the first six months.

The ministry also said 809 new household sewage treatment facilities were built in the first half, but the regions of Tianjin, Jiangxi, Inner Mongolia, Guangxi, Xinjiang, Hubei and Guangdong were behind schedule, it said.

China said on Wednesday that it has already appointed 200,000 “river chiefs” throughout the country as part of a new system aimed at making local officials more accountable when it comes to improving water quality and curbing pollution.

Group works to ensure lawyers’ rights

A process launched in March by the All China Lawyers Association has helped dozens of lawyers safeguard their rights.

The association and its local branches have received 224 complaints in which lawyers claim their rights were infringed upon since March. Jiang Min, vice-president of the association, said on Thursday that 60 have been solved, with lawyers’ rights being protected. The remaining cases are still in the pipeline, he said at a news conference on Thursday in Beijing.

Most complaints are about lawyers’ human rights and defense rights being harmed; lawyers being kept from clients or from reviewing case files; or lawyers being stopped from collecting evidence, Jiang said.

Some lawyers claimed that they had been interrupted while making defense statements in court, or being forced from courtrooms altogether, he said.

The Ministry of Justice said that in recent years, a growing number of violations has occurred nationwide, attracting attention from the public and media.

That’s why the lawyers group at the national and local levels established two centers in March—one for the protection of lawyers’ rights and the other to handle complaints and reports against lawyers.

“If we find cases involving the lawyers’ legal rights being seriously harmed, we’ll immediately set up a joint investigation team to conduct further investigation and coordinate relevant departments to timely look at the case and give feedback about the processing result,” Liu Shoumin, another vice-president of the association, said on Thursday.

One typical case occurred on July 11, when Wang Yantao, a lawyer from Hebei Shili Law Firm, waited in line at the gate of a district court in Handan, Hebei province, and quarreled with the bailiffs.

Wang said three bailiffs pulled him into the security room and six bailiffs assaulted him and locked him up until the court’s vice-president arrived at the scene and had him freed.

Wang lodged a complaint to the Handan City Lawyers Association, and eventually reached the national association, which reported the case to the

Ministry of Justice.

Xiong Xuanguo, vice-minister of justice, told the association to report the case to the Supreme People's Court (China's top court) and required the Hebei provincial department of justice to investigate. The top court notified the Hebei provincial high court, which ordered the local court in Handan to investigate.

On Aug 9, the district court made a public apology to Wang and compensated him. The team leader of the bailiffs was punished and the six bailiffs were fired, the court said.

Jiang from the association said its leaders will encourage local branches to share with each other successful experiences and common problems.

Tibetan patrols risk their lives to save wildlife

Every time the patrol passes the Sonamdaje monument on Kunlun Mountain, members stop to pay their respects.

Sonamdaje, a former official in northwest China's Qinghai Province, was shot dead by poachers when patrolling the Hoh Xil region in 1994.

With an average altitude of over 4,600 meters, the region is an ideal habitat for endangered Tibetan antelopes and other wildlife such as Tibetan gazelles and wild yaks. It was added to the world heritage list last month.

The area was beset by poachers in the 1980s, who hunted Tibetan antelopes for their hide to be made into expensive shahtoosh shawls. Each shawl, priced up to US\$50,000, cost the lives of three to five antelopes.

The antelope population declined sharply from 200,000 to 20,000 due to illegal hunting.

Local people began riding yaks to patrol the mountain in 1992. When the Hoh Xil nature reserve was set up in 1996, a 16-person patrol was set up. Currently, over 70 people are employed to patrol the mountains.

The patrols are dangerous. In addition to steep mountainous roads and inhospitable wetland and marsh, members face the threats of guns and wild animals.

Zhao Xinlu has been patrolling the area for 20 years. He recalls catching an armed gang of poachers. "We were not as well-equipped as they were, and the seized rifles were all loaded," he said.

A dozen years ago, Zhao and his team seized over 500 antelope skins, but the smell of blood soon attracted a pack of wolves.

"They followed us to our vehicles and surrounded us at night," he said. "We fired shots into the air to scare them away."

The antelope population is now back over 60,000.

"Ten years ago, tourists asked me what the antelopes look like. Now they ask whether an antelope is male or female," said Lodro Cering, while feeding a baby antelope with a bottle of milk.

In the protection station where Lodro works, seven baby antelopes are being cared for.

Every June, when it is time for antelopes to give birth and migrate, patrollers save ill or orphaned animals. Since 2001, they have saved over 500.

Besides professional patrollers, thousands of local villagers are employed as part-time rangers to clean up garbage and protect local wildlife.

Herder Dawa, who is paid 1,800 yuan (US\$270) a month, said: "Although we were asked to keep less cattle to help the environment on the grassland, our income has increased thanks to the new job. It's great to see the grassland turning cleaner and the wildlife population growing."

However, Hoh Xil is now facing new challenges posed by climate change, said Budro, head of the Hoh Xil nature reserve administrative bureau. "The thawing icebergs have led to overflowing local lakes, forming new lakes totalling about 200 square kilometers," he said.

Inclusion in the world heritage list has raised the standards for Hoh Xil.

Lodro said: "In the future, we will not only patrol mountains, but also work as ecological observers to help heighten local people's environmental awareness."

Never dated and don't want to get married

Not every person wants to get married – indeed for some Shanghai singletons, it's the last thing they want.

More than 57 percent of unmarried respondents to a survey in Shanghai said they had never dated, and 13 percent said they wanted to keep their single status forever.

The IT industry had the largest percentage of single men, 16.74 percent, said the survey by recruitment website Zhaopin.com, which was published yesterday. The survey interviewed 3,502 singles in Shanghai.

Most single male respondents in the IT industry ticked the box that “they don’t grasp the skills of how to catch the hearts of women.”

Many high-earning single women in the finance industry tagged themselves as “extremely difficult to be pleased and demanding.”

Although 13 percent of respondents said they just wanted stay single, nearly 40 percent expressed an eagerness to bid farewell to their single status.

Wang Yuru, deputy director of the Shanghai Psychological Counseling Association, said “some singles do not view marriage as an important thing in life and some forsake marriage because they don’t want a child.”

Jessy Chen, a 34-year-old human resources worker, said she did not mind whether or not she found a partner.

“If I can meet my Mr Right, I will marry, but if I don’t meet anyone who suits me, I will keep single for the rest of my life.”

Chen has never dated and spends her spare time traveling, meeting friends and shopping.

Looks, character, and moral quality were the top three criteria for single respondents on what they want from potential sweethearts, accounting for 24.7, 22.3 and 22 percent respectively, according to the survey.

In total, 12 percent of those surveyed believed the reason for their single status was because they were “ugly,” while 24 percent of men among them still demanded any girlfriend should have a beautiful face.

In total, 25 percent of singles born after 1990 said they put looks first, while 30 percent born after 1970 and 1980 gave moral quality the top priority.

More than 40 percent of single men said they had been put under pressure to marry by their parents, while 36 percent of women said they had the same experience.

The survey was released before qixi – the seventh day of the seventh month on the lunar calendar that is also known as Chinese Valentine’s Day, which falls on August 28 this year.

Meanwhile, a report by China’s biggest dating website jiayuan.com revealed some qixi “nightmares” for singletons.

Top of the list was meeting their ex on the street accompanied by their current boyfriend or girlfriend, being pressured to find a partner by their parents, and being surrounded by lovebirds during qixi.

Chinese scientists supercharge virus to kill cancer cells

Chinese scientists have found a compound that appears to enhance the ability of a virus to target and kill liver cancer cells while sparing healthy cells. The discovery offers new hope for treating the world's second-most common form of cancer, according to a study published on Wednesday.

A therapy using viruses that selectively kill cancer cells—called oncolytic viruses—is rapidly progressing through clinical evaluation, but the therapeutic efficacy in humans has been less than expected in preclinical studies, the study said. It was published in the US journal *Science Translational Medicine*.

Oncolytic virotherapy involving the M1 virus, a mosquito-borne pathogen that mainly causes mild illnesses in horses, is believed to have potential for the treatment of hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC), the most common type of liver cancer.

In order to boost the virus's antitumor effects, Yan Guangmei, a professor at Sun Yat-sen University, together with colleagues, screened 350 small molecules to identify compounds that can enhance viral killing of cultured HCC cells.

The researchers found that Eeyarestatin I—an inhibitor of the protein VCP, which may help trigger cell malignancy—increased the potency of the M1 virus by as much as 3,600-fold against the HCC cells.

The dual regimen had no effect on noncancerous cells, they said.

In multiple mouse models of HCC, a combination of M1 and Eeyarestatin I was found to shrink tumors and significantly prolong survival.

Researchers further demonstrated that the combination was safe and well-tolerated in monkeys.

"We can describe the M1 oncolytic virus as a guided missile that automatically targets tumor cells, and the addition of the VCP inhibitor is just like binding the missile to powerful explosives with the ability for auto-selection," Yan said.

"The outcome is evident with such a strong combination," he said.

Yan said the team plans to submit a clinical trial application for the combination therapy strategy in 2018.