

SINO-RUSSIAN NAVAL DRILL P.20 | CONTAMINATED CAPSULES P.24

BEIJING REVIEW

VOL.55 NO.18 MAY 3, 2012

北京周報 WWW.BJREVIEW.COM

ALONE ON THE FARM

Young and modern farmers needed
in the countryside



RMB6.00
USD1.70
AUD3.00
GBP1.20
CAD2.60
CHF2.60

ISSN 1000-9140



18>

9 771000 914123

JPY188 邮发代号2-922 国内统一刊号: CN11-1576/G2

CHINA AFRICA

中國非洲
A news monthly covering China & Africa



An Africa-oriented English monthly covering China and Africa published by BEIJING REVIEW, ChinAfrica is the only one in China featuring news, views and analysis for an African audience.

12 issues a year at a subscription rate of 180 yuan

Subscription hotlines: (8610) 6831 0644, 6899 6223, 6899 5808

Postal Distribution Code: 2-916

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BEIJING REVIEW

A News Weekly Magazine
Published Since 1958

iPad APP

http://www.bjreview.com

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Published every Thursday by

BEIJING REVIEW, 24 Baiwanzhuang Lu,

Beijing 100037, China.

Overseas Distributor: China International Book Trading

Corporation (Guoji Shudian), P. O. BOX 399,

Beijing 100044, China

Tel: 86-10-68413849 Fax: 86-10-68412166

E-mail: fp@mail.cibtc.com.cn

Website: http://www.cibtc.com

General Distributor for Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan:

Peace Book Co. Ltd.

17/FI, Paramount Bldg, 12 Ka Yip St, Chai Wan, HK

Tel: 852-28046687 Fax: 852-28046409

Beijing Review (USPS 2812) is published weekly in the United States

for US\$64.00 per year by Cypress Books,

360 Swift Avenue, Suite 48, South San Francisco, CA 94080

News Postage Paid at South San Francisco, CA 94080

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Beijing Review*,

Cypress Books, 360 Swift Avenue, Suite 48,

South San Francisco, CA 94080

Cultivating Modern Farmers

Despite industrializing at an unprecedented rate over the past three decades, China remains basically an agrarian country in terms of the huge size of its farming population and the country's vast rural areas.

China relies on agriculture to feed its 1.3 billion citizens, and over the years steady efforts have been made by the Chinese Government to promote agricultural development and raise the living standards of farmers.

An acute problem, however, has emerged for the agricultural sector in recent years.

As the income gap between the country's urbanites and their rural counterparts grows ever wider, more and more young farmers have chosen to flow into cities to find better lives and employment, leaving behind in their hometowns the elderly, the physically weak and women to take care of the farmland. With urban wages generally becoming the main source of revenue for many rural households, farm work has become an increasingly low priority for rural residents.

Continuing migration has led to a drastic reduction of farm hands willing to work in the fields. This "hollowing-out" of farm laborers is said to be one of the biggest obstacles the country must overcome if it aims to build a modern agricultural sector and drive up rural development.

To address the shortage of qualified farm labor, concrete measures must now be taken by the authorities concerned. These include stepping up social security and healthcare networks in rural areas, providing preferential policies to farmers such as giving out more farm subsidies, bank loans and offering further tax cuts. Ultimately, the government must work to reduce the income disparity between urban and rural areas.

Only when the living and working conditions in the countryside improve will farming become an attractive profession in the eyes of the younger generation.

China, however, not only needs more young farmers to remain on the land, but also needs to train its farmers in modern agricultural techniques and give them access to the best technology and science available in the industry.

For thousands of years, agriculture in the country depended almost entirely on the natural climate and individual practical experience, with the vast majority of the rural populace being traditionally illiterate. But in today's world, farming is more and more hi-tech and knowledge-based. Knowledge and technologies remain the key to building a vibrant agricultural economy, and only education and training will allow China to cultivate a crop of farmers who will spur a much-needed agricultural revival. ■

WRITE TO US

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Please provide your name and address along with your submissions. Submissions may be edited.

北京周报 英文版 2012年 第18期 ISSN 1000-9140 广告许可证 0171号

北京市期刊登记证第733号 邮发代号2-922 国内统一刊号: CN11-1576/G2 国内零售价: 人民币6.00元

CHINA...RMB6.00 U.S.A...USD1.70 AUSTRALIA...AUD3.00 UK...GBP1.20 CANADA...CAD2.60 SWITZERLAND...CHF2.60

JAPAN...JPY188 EUROPE...EURO1.90 TURKEY...YTL5.00 HK...HKD9.30 NEPAL...RS40



Holy Trip

A rare piece of the remains of Sakyamuni Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, is transported to Hong Kong from east China's Jiangsu Province on April 25 for public worship.

The remains of Buddha are called *shelizi* in Chinese. They were formed from the ashes of cremated Buddhist masters, and are highly sacred objects.

In July 2008, a monument was found in the underground palace of the Bao'en Temple of Nanjing, capital of Jiangsu Province. Under the monument was an iron case, where a miniature gold pagoda was found. Experts concluded that the case contained the *shelizi* of Sakyamuni's skull, one of Buddhism's most sacred relics. In June 2010, the relic was presented to the world after more than 1,000 years' burial under the ground.

“China has made solemn representations to the Philippines over the additional ships sent to Huangyan Island by the Philippine side. China urged the Philippines to take positive steps to restore peace and harmony in the waters off Huangyan Island.”

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Weimin, at a routine news briefing in Beijing on April 24

“Such cooperation was conducted on the basis of mutual benefit. It was cooperation not only in capital, but also in technology, management and market, and was sincere people-to-people communication and exchanges as well.”

Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, saying that the combination of Geely and Volvo was an “example of success” for cooperation between the two nations' enterprises when visiting the China-owned but Gothenburg-based Volvo Cars Corporation in Sweden on April 24 during his four-nation tour in Europe

“Weak recovery will likely resume in major advanced economies, as lingering structural challenges, including low industrial capacity utilization rates, high unemployment rates and large public debts, are weighing down the growth.”

World Bank chief economist Justin Yifu Lin, commenting on the global economic recovery in a recent interview with Xinhua News Agency prior to the spring meetings of the IMF and the World Bank

“It is good to have two [debates] to enlighten the French. I have nothing to hide, there are no lies, no concealment.”

French President Nicolas Sarkozy, also the candidate of the Union for a Popular Movement who is seeking re-election, saying yes on April 24 to a second debate proposed by four major radio groups in France between the two rivals who will square off in the second round of the presidential election



SHINSHING YI/REUTERS

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY Chinese marines attend a flag-raising ceremony in Qingdao, east China's Shandong Province on April 23, to celebrate the 63rd anniversary of the founding of the Chinese navy

New Visa for China

A new visa category titled "talent introduction" has been added to a draft law on China's exit and entry administration as part of the country's efforts to attract talented individuals from overseas.

The draft law was submitted on April 24 to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, China's top legislature, for its second reading.

Preferential Loans

More than 1.3 million Chinese women had received interest-deducted loans to set up their own businesses as of the end of 2011, a senior official from the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) said on April 19.

Under a specialized assistance program introduced in mid-2009, the government offers subsidized interest on small loans to eligible female candidates in both rural and urban regions.

Last year, the government issued subsidies amounting to 2.3 billion yuan (\$365 million), with the total amount of loans

Money on Health

China's Ministry of Health said on April 23 that its 2012 budget would amount to 80 billion yuan (\$12.69 billion), representing a year-on-year increase of 13.3 billion yuan (\$2.1 billion).

According to a statement released by the ministry, medical services will get the lion's share, 10.9 billion yuan (\$1.73 billion), in or-

der to improve the capacity of major clinical departments at public hospitals.

Meanwhile, 236 million yuan (\$37.5 million) will be allocated to education. Another 1.7 billion yuan (\$270 million) will go to research projects, which include the development of new drugs and the prevention and control of major infectious diseases such as AIDS and viral hepatitis.

London's Volunteer

Song Dalong, a senior student at the Medical School of Qingdao University in east China's Shandong Province, was chosen as a volunteer for the 2012 Olympic Games in London, the only university student volunteer recruited from Shandong.

Song has worked as a volunteer for several previous sporting events, including the 11th Chinese National Games in 2009, the 16th Asian Games in 2010 and the 26th Summer Universiade in 2011.

Besides volunteering at sporting events, Song has also helped the needy receive medical treatment through the Li Ka Shing Foundation, and he has also actively participated in other social welfare work.

"I enjoy helping others, which is why I continue to pursue new opportunities to be involved," said Song.



NANA/REUTERS

HAPPY INTERACTION Children and soldiers in Dalian, northeast China's Liaoning Province, play games with a globe in activities marking World Earth Day, which fell on April 22

offered reaching 55.6 billion yuan (\$8.83 billion), said Song Xiuyan, Vice Chairwoman of the ACWF.

Survey on Reading

An average Chinese person read four books, 100 newspapers and 6.67 magazines last year, according to a survey released on April 23.

Only 1.2 percent of those surveyed thought they were well-read, while 50.7 percent admitted they didn't read enough, said the Chinese Academy of Press and Publication, organizer of the survey.

The comprehensive reading rate for

people aged 18 to 70 reached 77.6 percent, a slight increase of 0.5 percentage points.

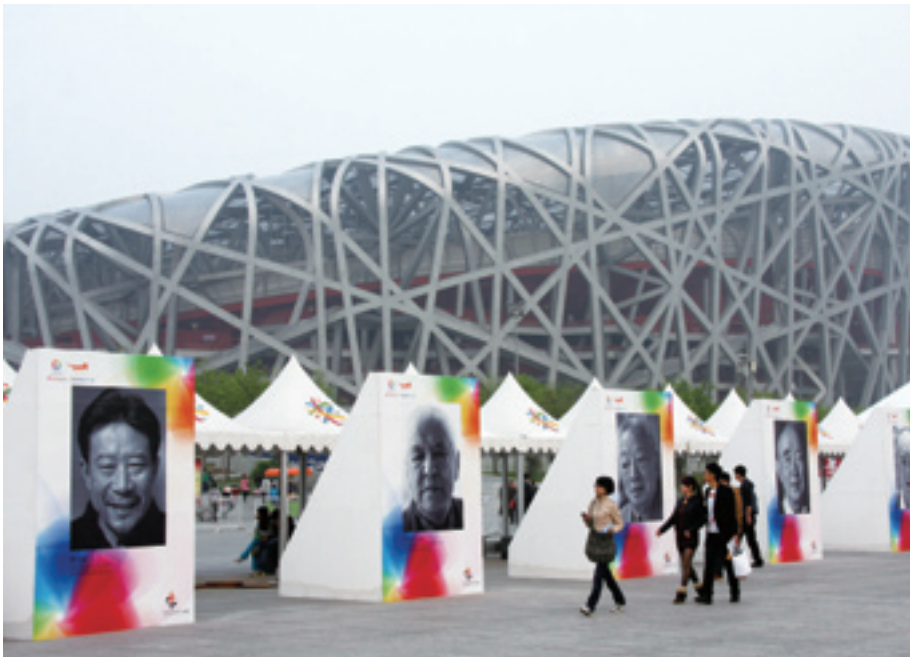
Overall, however, the survey shows a decline in the number of Chinese people who read both newspapers and magazines.

Those reading online increased by 11.1 percent on figures from 2010, with an average of 47.53 minutes being spent reading on the Internet every day.

Moreover, 27.6 percent of those surveyed preferred reading on their mobile phones, 4.6 percentage points higher than last year. People spent an average of 13.53 minutes reading on phones daily, and 20.75 yuan (\$3.29) for the service annually.



PHOTO POWER An exhibition of more than 100 award-winning pictures at the Zoom-in on Poverty Global Photo Contest opens in Hong Kong on April 23



MOVIE CARNIVAL Portraits of 50 Chinese film artists are shown in the Olympic Green during the second Beijing International Film Festival, which kicked off on April 22

Island Protection

A national plan on island protection and exploration has officially gone into effect, the State Oceanic Administration (SOA) said on April 19.

Approved by the State Council, or China's cabinet, the plan focuses on strengthening protection of sea islands' ecosystems, gradually standardizing exploration and improving the habitation environment by 2020.

The SOA has urged its local branches to finish the formulation of corresponding island protection regulations at provincial level this year.

Astronomical Observatory

A remote area in southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region has been recommended by the East Asia Core Observatories Association as the location for a new international astronomical observatory.

The planned observatory will enable scientists from China, Japan and the Republic of Korea to build large-scale telescopes and carry out joint research programs, said Yao Yongqiang, chief researcher with the National Astronomical Observatories of the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Yao said a possible location for the new observatory will be in the mountains of Tibet's Ngari Prefecture, at an altitude of 5,100 meters.

The location near the town of Shiquanhe, with easy access to road transport and little cloud cover and humidity, would be ideal for observation activities, he said.

Water Shortage

Beijing is expected to face a water shortage of 1.3 billion cubic meters this year, accounting for a third of the city's annual water usage, according to local water authorities.

"The municipal government will work to keep the capital's water consumption within 3.7 billion cubic meters this year, as only 2.4 billion cubic meters will be supplied by local water resources," said Cheng Jing, head of the Beijing Water Authority, on April 25.

Beijing has been plagued by droughts for 13 consecutive years, with its fast-paced economic development and ever-growing population exacerbating the water shortage.

The available per-capita water resources in Beijing have dropped to 100 cubic meters, about one 10th of the internationally acknowledged warning level, according to Cheng.

Local authorities have tightened water management policies by setting a ceiling for the city's annual water consumption at 4 billion cubic meters by 2015.

Slow Tax Growth

China's first-quarter tax revenues grew at the slowest pace in three years, as a result of the country's cooling economy.

Tax revenues totaled 2.59 trillion yuan (\$410.4 billion) in the first quarter, up 10.3 percent year on year, or 22.1 percentage points from the same period last year, said the Ministry of Finance.

The eased pace came as China's industrial value-added output and profits, key measures of industrial performances, both saw slower growth in the first two months.

China's GDP expanded 8.1 percent year on year in the first quarter, marking the fifth consecutive quarter of slowing growth, according to the National Bureau of Statistics.

Meanwhile, property-related tax income

retreated significantly in the first quarter, which is largely the outcome of sagging sales due to the government's persistent control efforts.

The ministry also attributed the slower growth to the country's easing inflation and tax-reduction policies.

Loan Rates Liberalization

As China progressively introduces policies favoring a market-based currency exchange rate, it is also moving to accelerate the liberalization of interest rates, probably starting with lending rates.

In an interview with *Caijing* magazine, Zhou Xiaochuan, Governor of the People's Bank of China, said the government needs to relax controls on lending rates first.

Zhou said the government should then

liberalize deposit rates gradually by encouraging the development of alternative liability products and widening the fluctuation band for deposit rates.

He said officials are trying to reach a consensus on reforms and are waiting for an appropriate time to act.

Offshore Yuan Trade

The Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) said on April 23 it would work on boosting offshore trading of China's currency, the yuan, in Europe.

Xu Jinlei, General Manager of ICBC London, said the branch would work to develop itself into a European center of off-shore yuan trading, syndicated loans, trade finance, and capital and precious metal trading, to provide high-quality financial service for clients worldwide.

He made the comments during the inauguration ceremony of ICBC's new headquarters in London.

The ICBC, the biggest lender in China, now has 244 overseas branches in 34 countries and regions and has expanded its presence in Africa after purchasing 20 percent of South Africa's Standard Bank Group.

Auto Deal

Auto giant Volkswagen on April 23 sealed a deal to build a new factory in China, where it plans to invest 14 billion euros (\$18 billion) in five years, as visiting Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and German Chancellor Angela Merkel attended the signing ceremony at the corporation's headquarters in Wolfsburg.

The Volkswagen deal involves opening a plant in northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region that will be capable of producing up to 50,000 vehicles a year starting in 2015.

With 27 percent of its cars sold in China in the first quarter of last year, Volkswagen sold a record 633,000 vehicles in China in the first quarter of 2012.



NEW AIR ROUTE The direct air route from Singapore to Wuhan, capital of central China's Hubei Province, is opened on April 24

Numbers

\$1.77 trillion

China's net foreign financial assets had hit \$1.77 trillion as of the end of 2011, said the State Administration of Foreign Exchange.

13.6%

China's centrally administered state-owned enterprises reported a net profit of 181.37 billion yuan (\$28.77 billion) in the first quarter, down 13.6 percent year on year, said the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration.



GREEN BUZZ China's major local carmaker Chery unveils the @Ant concept electric personal car at the 2012 Beijing International Automotive Exhibition held from April 23 to May 2

Freight Train Export

A Chinese train maker announced on April 23 it has exported two electric trains to Belarus, marking the first time China-made freight trains have been exported to Europe.

It also represented the first export of Chinese high-power electric trains overseas, said Datong Electric Locomotive Co. Ltd., a subsidiary of China North Locomotive and Rolling Corp. Ltd.

In 2010, Datong Electric Locomotive won a bid to provide 12 electric trains to Belarus. They are set to be delivered this year. Designed to reach a speed of 120 km per hour, the trains will be used for freight transportation.

Camera Makers' Ambition

Camera makers, such as Canon and Sony, have seen dramatic growth in China's high-

end camera market and plan to expand operations in smaller cities this year, industry executives told *China Daily*.

According to a report released by China Electronics Chamber of Commerce, by the end of 2011, in large and medium-sized cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, about 75 percent of the population already had cameras, so there is little room for low-end camera growth in those cities.

Although professional cameras are more expensive in China, it has a faster growth rate compared with developed economies such as the United States and Japan.

"China has already become the largest market for selling our latest high-end camera 5D Mark III, which started to sell last month and has almost sold out now," said Howard Ozawa, President and CEO of Canon China.

Ozawa said sales revenue in China is expected to reach \$10 billion by the end of 2016. High-end digital single lens reflex cam-

Devoted Writer

Chinese contemporary writer **Bai Xianyong**, 74, recently published a new book to commemorate his father Bai Chongxi, a famous Chinese Kuomintang general. In the book, Bai published 500 pictures of his father, recording important moments in history.

Bai was born in 1937 in Guilin, south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. He has published a number of books, including *Lonely Seventeen*, *Taipei People*, and *The New Yorker*.

Bai has volunteered in promoting the *kunqu* opera, China's oldest opera with a history of more than 600 years, for more than two decades. He adapted *Peony Pavilion*, a classic of *kunqu*, and it received great success. His version is called the youth edition of the play because the performers are younger and it is targeted at young audiences. First staged in Taiwan, the youth edition has toured China's mainland and Hong Kong, the United States, Britain, Greece and Singapore. He also delivers courses on ancient art in universities.



eras account for about 50 percent of the total sales of all Canon cameras in China, which is much bigger than other countries, said Ozawa.

Sony plans to penetrate lower-tier cities this year by holding customer experience events in small cities and accelerating the development of online stores, said Chen Ning, General Manager of Sony China's Digital Imaging Products Division.

646.8 billion yuan

China's tourism revenues rose 22.9 percent to 646.8 billion yuan (\$102.67 billion) in the first quarter, said the National Tourism Administration.

23.58 billion yuan

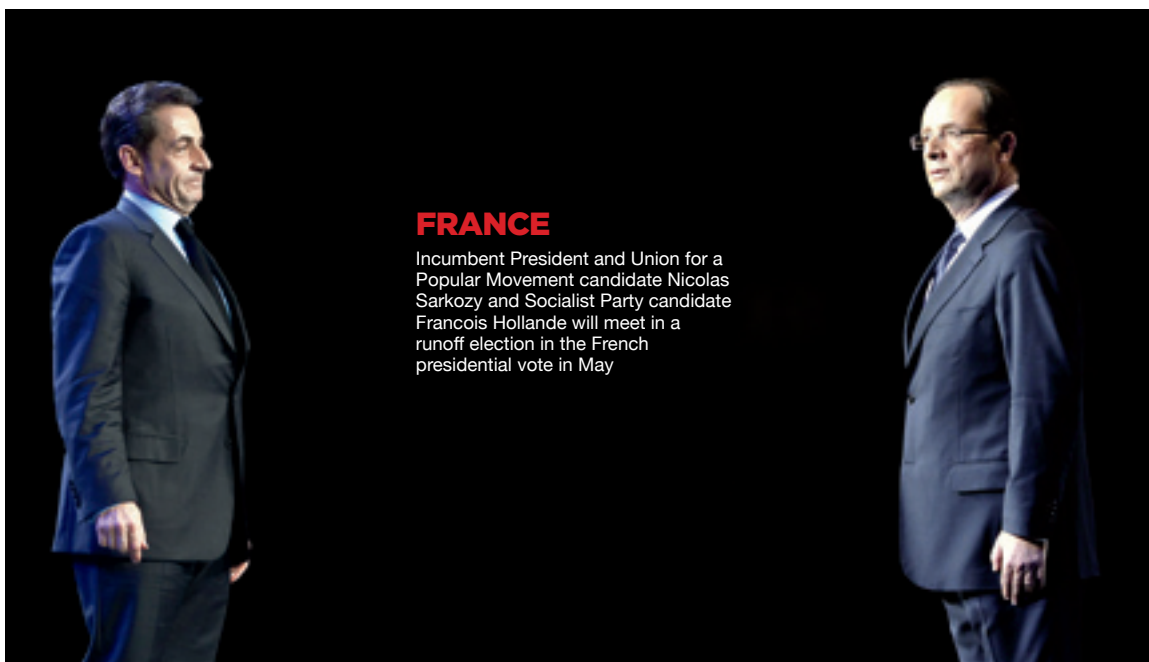
Lottery sales in China rose 24 percent year on year in March to hit 23.58 billion yuan (\$3.75 billion), said the Ministry of Finance.



INDIA

India tests a new long-range Agni V missile on April 19. The missile is capable of delivering a one-ton nuclear warhead

XINHUA/AFEP



FRANCE

Incumbent President and Union for a Popular Movement candidate Nicolas Sarkozy and Socialist Party candidate Francois Hollande will meet in a runoff election in the French presidential vote in May

XINHUA/AFEP





XINHUA/AFIP

A Shinto priest leads a group of Japanese lawmakers to offer prayers for the country's war dead at the controversial Yasukuni Shrine, which includes memorial tablets of 14 Class-A World War II war criminals, in Tokyo on April 20 during the shrine's three-day spring festival

JAPAN



XINHUA/AFIP

A fireman fights a massive fire at La Primavera forest in Guadalajara on April 22

MEXICO



XINHUA/AFIP

RUSSIA

A man paddles a boat in the flooded town of Kadom in the Ryazan region, some 430 km east of Moscow, on April 23. At least 1,179 people in the 803-year-old town were affected by the flooding



XINHUA/AFIP

Rescue workers and local residents search the site of a plane crash in Rawalpindi on April 20. All 127 passengers on board and the crew members were killed in the crash when the plane attempted to land in bad weather near Islamabad on April 20

PAKISTAN



COVER STORY

FEEDING A POPULO

A shortage of labor and land holds back Chinese agriculture By Yin Pumin

China's grain imports in 2011 surpassed 61 million tons, indicating that its overall self-sufficiency rate in grain was less than 90 percent.

For the past few years, China has insisted that, to ensure national food security, 95 percent is the bottom line of the country's grain self-sufficiency requirement.

"But now the volume of imported grain has reached 10.7 percent of the domestic grain output. I am afraid this will affect grain security if the imported amount keeps increasing," said Chen Xiwen, Director of the Office for the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee's Leading Group on Rural Work, in March.

The supply of other major agricultural produce in China also depends increasingly on the international market. According to Customs statistics, China imported about 4 million tons of corn from the United States and 52.6 million tons of soybeans from overseas markets in 2011.

To avoid becoming too reliant on imports,



MECHANICAL AGRICULTURE: Farmers harvest their rice with combines at the Friendship Farm in northeast China's Heilongjiang Province in September 2011

US COUNTRY

Chen suggested that the country increase its grain output by protecting arable land and further improving agriculture through science and technology.

Preserving farmland

Despite the country's enormous demand for grain, farmland in China has shrunk over the past decade.

According to the Ministry of Land and Resources (MLR), China's farmland has shrunk by more than 8 million hectares since

1997. In August last year, China had less than 121.7 million hectares of arable land, MLR figures showed.

To ensure grain security, China has set a "redline" to guarantee its arable land never falls below 120 million hectares.

Land use sanctioned by local governments to construct projects such as golf courses, railways and industrial parks, is an obstacle to the nation's farmland preservation, according to the ministry.

"Local governments' reliance on land

transfer as a major revenue source poses a threat to the country's grain security," Chen said. He pointed out that some local governments are using the name "land reform" to expropriate arable land, causing the amount of available arable land to decrease in quantity and quality.

According to the MLR, the area of land use projects that violate state farmland preservation policies surged 11 percent year on year to 16,400 hectares in the first nine months of 2011.

Environmental pollution from the excessive use of agricultural chemicals and the inappropriate disposal of heavy metal has also taken its toll.

Heavy metal pollution has so far damaged approximately 10 percent of the country's farmland and caused the loss of 12 million tons of grain every year, according to research by the Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS).

In 2011, China restored a total of 300,000 hectares of farmland and developed 4 million hectares of high-quality farmland, according to MLR data.

The ministry plans to add 27 million hectares of high-quality farmland throughout the country by the end of 2015. "The Central Government has attached great importance to preserving farmland and local governments have also enhanced their efforts to protect farmland in recent years," Xu said.

Less attractive business

Li Qiang, Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Tsinghua University, said that the outflow of young labor, including those with technological abilities from rural areas has also become a main obstacle to China's agricultural development.

In recent years, with continuous price hikes, the cost of farming has risen. The rising cost of labor, land and agricultural materials such as pesticides and fertilizers has squeezed the profits of farmers and greatly affected their willingness to plant crops, although the Central Government has taken measures since 2006 to lower taxation on the farming sector, increase farmers' income and support construction of agricultural infrastructure.

"Since farming is less profitable these days, more and more young farmers have left home seeking jobs in cities," said Zheng Fengtian, a professor at the School of Agricultural Economics and Rural Development of the Renmin University of China in Beijing.

Statistics from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed that China's urban population exceeded its rural population for the first time at the end of 2011, accounting

for 51.27 percent of the country's total.

Official figures show that China now has about 150 million migrant workers, 60 percent of whom are aged 30 or under. This group of laborers, born in the 1980s and 1990s, are better educated than their parental generation.

However, a survey conducted by Beijing Normal University last year showed that only 7.7 percent of young migrant workers and 13.3 percent of older workers want to return to the countryside. The proportion of the population engaged in agriculture dropped to 38.1 percent in 2011, according to NBS figures.

"A large amount of arable land is being farmed by women and the elderly left behind in rural areas," said Tang Rennin, Deputy Director of the Office for the CPC Central Committee's Leading Group on Rural Work.

With capable farmers moving to cities, more and more rural farmland is being left uncultivated. An MLR survey showed that about 2 million hectares of arable land in China are in disuse each year.

On March 26, the Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research of the CAS released a report on rural development, urging the country to make full use of rural land and infrastructure abandoned by farmers who move to cities to find work.

"The untended land and infrastructure are becoming a major obstacle for the coordinated development of urban and rural areas," the report said.

The institute's surveys showed that a huge amount of rural land that was originally taken over for housing building now lies idle, and the use of land in many areas is highly inefficient.

The report estimated that 7.6 million hectares of land can be released for reuse if the country improves its rural construction land management and releases untended areas for farming and forestry.

"Up to one third of the land in traditional agricultural regions is not in use, being occupied by empty houses and abandoned farmland," said Liu Yansui, author of the report.

The number of rural residents could fall to 280 million by 2020, from 300 million now, according to the report.

The report urged the government to incorporate the management of "hollow villages" and optimized distribution of rural land into its general strategy to protect farmland and

improve people's livelihoods.

According to the report, 16.5 million hectares of land have been allocated to farmers as residential land, which can be used by farmers to build houses, but they are not allowed to transfer it to others if they move.

"Most villagers would return the land if they could receive compensation," said Liu Weidong, a researcher with the institute.

Survey results in east China's Shandong Province show that about 90 percent of villagers think abandoned residential land is a waste of resources, while nearly 60 percent said they would be willing to return the land if they were adequately compensated.

In a pilot project being carried out in southwest China's Chongqing, villagers can trade their residential land after reclamation.

However, Li Maosong, Director of the Agriculture Information Office of the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, believes it is very likely that most of the idle land in rural areas, especially those that

are not far from cities, will be developed for construction of residential housing and shopping centers, instead of being used as farmland.

"More and more rural residents are shunning agricultural life and heading for cities. Therefore, it is impossible to develop much of the idle land for agricultural production," he said.

Professionals needed

The growing exodus of rural residents has not only led to more and more farmland being left unattended, but it has also caused a brain drain in the countryside.

In March, 15 academicians with the CAS and the Chinese Academy of Engineering submitted a joint letter to state leaders, warning that China would face a dearth of farmers unless some strategic measures are taken to stop the new rural generation abandoning agricultural work.

"The most significant measure is to re-



duce the income gap between farmers and non-agricultural workers,” Zheng said.

China has strict price controls on grain. “In a country with nearly one fifth of the world’s population, grain price control is vital to social stability. But the policy today has become a hindrance to people sticking to farm work,” Zheng said.

Zheng suggested that the government should increase subsidies to farmers in order to encourage them to work the land.

Currently the subsidies given to grain farmers are about 1,200 yuan (\$190) per hectare. “The subsidy is too low,” Zheng said. “For those farmers who have a large area of farmland, the subsidies might be meaningful but in China, most rural residents are small-scale farmers.”

In early March, Premier Wen Jiabao said in his Government Work Report to the session of the National People’s Congress, that the Central Government will allocate 1.2 trillion yuan (\$190 billion) this year to develop



OFF THE FIELD: Migrant workers from the countryside look for employment vacancies at a job fair in Shanghai on February 9

the agricultural industry and the country’s rural areas, an increase of 186.8 billion yuan (\$30 billion) from last year.

The premier said that China would continue to raise the average minimum purchase price of wheat and rice by 148 yuan (\$23.46) and 320 yuan (\$50.72) per ton this year. In addition, he pledged that the government would continue to increase agricultural subsidies and special subsidies would be given to farmers if fuel prices rose, as fuel has become indispensable for mechanical farming.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, in the first two months of this year, the Central Government earmarked 132.5 billion yuan (\$21 billion) for various agricultural subsidies.

Zheng also calls on the government to introduce farming studies as part of compulsory education and provide agricultural training to the young rural generation after school.

“In major grain producing areas such as Henan Province in central China, less than 20 percent of local high school graduates go to college. It’s essential to offer farming skill training that meets local conditions while nurturing young people’s interest in agricultural production,” he said.

Tang with the Office of the CPC Central Committee’s Leading Group on Rural Work said that the country will train more professional farmers and lure others back from urban areas to contribute to agricultural production and the rural economy.

He said that a series of preferential policies, such as credit and tax supports, would be given to the young generation of farmers to lure them back to rural areas to develop modern farming or even set up private farms with

advanced technologies.

In its first policy document this year, which was issued on February 1, the Chinese Government pledged to provide more training on science and technology in rural areas to produce professionals in the agricultural sector to facilitate growth.

During his March visit to Henan, Premier Wen said that guidance offered by agricultural experts, as well as farmers’ hard work, is the key to a good harvest.

In Huoqiu, a county in east China’s Anhui Province, 32 professional crop-protection teams have been set up with training in agriculture to help farmers in their fields and offer advice. Many provinces are now attempting to learn from the experience.

With adequate techniques and marketing expertise, farmers can make significant revenue. In north Beijing’s Changping District, strawberry planting has become a prosperous business under the guidance of professionals and has brought wealth to local farmers. According to local authorities, farmers can earn 15,000 yuan (\$2,377) from a greenhouse each year.

Zhang Taolin, Vice Minister of Agriculture, said in March that, in order to guarantee the cultivation of new, hi-tech-minded farmers, the government will increase its spending on agricultural education and training.

“The future of farming depends on well-educated professionals who have a good grasp of agriculture and marketing techniques,” Zheng said. ■

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HUANG XIAOBANG

NEW SEEDS OF HOPE: An old farmer works at his farmland in the suburb of Nanning, southwest China’s Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, on May 14, 2011

COVER STORY

SUPER FARMER

A Chinese farmer uses economies of scale to increase agricultural productivity By Tang Weibin & Huang Yan

A large stretch of freshly plowed farmland bathes in the warm March sunlight in Longgang Village in Xiaogan City, central China's Hubei Province. Beside the field, farmers employed by the Chunhui Group are digging and repairing irrigation channels.

Chunhui Group is an agricultural company that farms 6,667 hectares of land and boasts an annual production value of 2.5 billion yuan (\$396 million). It operates four agricultural cooperatives and one research institute. Because of the group's scale, its president Tan Lunwei is nicknamed a "super farmer." Tan used to be a businessman. He went into farming two years ago because of his insights into modern agriculture.

In 2007, Tan, then a real estate developer, entered the grain storage business. Since local purchases could fill only 80 percent of his granaries' capacity, every year he had to purchase grain from Henan Province, a major grain producer in central China.

But according to Tan, transporting grain was costly and the quality of grain was not guaranteed. Then, the idea of growing grain himself first occurred to him.

"When visiting villages, I was shocked to find that those working in the field were all aged in their 60s and most young farmers had moved to cities to work. Large parcels of land were lying in waste. Ten years later, these farmers will be too old to grow crops. Then who will produce grain?" Tan said. This



PHOTO: CHINA OUTLOOK

thought increased his determination to farm the land.

Scale production

When traditional agricultural production methods are challenged by rapid urbanization, agriculture must be modernized to ensure food safety, Tan said.

In March 2010, Chunhui Group's subsidiary Weiye Chunhui Rice Co. leased 1,333 hectares of land in the rural area of Xiaogan to grow rice.

In 2011, the group set up Longgang Land Shareholding Cooperative, which cov-

SOWING SEASON: A farmer from the Chunhui Agricultural Machinery Cooperative tills a field on March 6



A BIG PRIZE: Tan Lunwei stands next to a tractor awarded to him by the local government for his contribution to agriculture

PHOTO BY CHINA OVERSEAS NEWS

ered eight villages in Sancha Township in Xiaogan. Chunhui Group contributed agricultural machines, while villages contributed land. The cooperative is managed jointly and profits are shared.

Liu Shuntian, director of the cooperative, said that a few years ago many plots of arable land in local villages were left uncultivated, and at maximum, the idle land accounted for half of the total availability.

“Now through intensive management, crops have been planted in all the land parcels. We are very happy to see that,” Liu said.

Tan has also formed cooperatives with farmers in other places in Hubei such as Hanchuan, Yingcheng and Yunmeng. Through cooperative, long-term land leases or seasonal short-term leases, Chunhui Group manages nearly 6,667 hectares of land.

“We can realize mechanization and scale of production and increase labor productivity

by pooling land together,” Tan said.

In the compound of Chunhui Group is a spectacular array of agricultural machines, including tractors, rice transplanters, planters, harvesters and mist sprayers.

“These are not all our machines. We set up an agricultural machinery cooperative and farmers can contribute their machines as a share. The income from leasing machines in sowing and harvesting seasons is split according to share ownership,” Tan said.

On January 4, members of the Longgang Land Shareholding Cooperative got their first dividend. Wang Yulan, a villager in Longgang Village, said that she was paid 7,500 yuan (\$1,189) for renting out her 1.1 hectare of land last year, and she was paid an additional 5,500 yuan (\$872) for working as an agricultural worker in the cooperative for four months.

“Now I can earn a salary without leav-

ing my hometown. The deal is pretty good,” she said.

Tan is drawing a new blueprint. “In two to three years, we are going to add 33,333 hectares of rice paddies, so that we can further improve productivity and increase farmers’ income,” he said.

Science-oriented

The Chunhui Agricultural Academy is Chunhui Group’s research arm, running a large intelligent seed nursery. An imported seed germinator bought with 300,000 yuan (\$47,553) has significantly improved its seed germination rate and seedling quality.

In Chunhui Group’s rice paddies, a U.S.-produced computer-controlled land scraper is used to level the field, which can improve land productivity and save water and fertilizers. A solar-powered extermination lamp is used to kill insects. A security monitoring room has been built to monitor the 400 plus hectares of land near Longgang Village. The fields 10 km away and vegetables in the seedling greenhouse are all under the watch of surveillance cameras.

Tan said that an asset more valuable for Chunhui Group than machinery is agricultural scientists and technicians. Last year, Chunhui Group recruited more than 30 college graduates. They are assigned to work in the field, engaging in agricultural production and management.

Wang Jinwei graduated from the Agronomy Department of Xiaogan College. He said, “Here, I can put what I have learned into use, and realize my value in life.”

At an intelligent drying plant that can dry 480 tons of grain everyday, Tan said that many problems in traditional agricultural production can be solved by extending the production chain.

“At present, the profit from crop planting is still very low. Last year, I just broke even,” he said. “We should continue to complete the production chain, further process agricultural products, develop ecoagriculture and improve grain warehousing and logistic services.” ■

(The article first appeared in Chinese on Xinhuanet.com)

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