

## North China city criticized for worsening air quality

China's top environmental watchdog has criticized authorities of Shijiazhuang, capital city of Hebei Province, which neighbors Beijing, for worsening air quality and insufficient efforts in environmental protection.

The air quality in Shijiazhuang has worsened sharply since October 2016 and most pollution indicators deteriorated in January and February of this year, the Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) said Monday after a recent inspection team to the city led by Chen Jining, minister of environmental protection.

In January this year, PM2.5 density in Shijiazhuang surged 51.5 percent from a year earlier to 200 micrograms per cubic meter, the MEP said in a statement.

Chen attributed the situation largely to lax environmental efforts of local governments, especially those at the county and township levels, inefficient management, a cluster of highly polluting enterprises and poor implementation of response measures to tackle severe pollution.

Chen urged more efforts in locating the source of pollutants, reducing pollutant emission, strengthening supervision over key enterprises, pressing ahead with industrial upgrading and improving efficiency of environmental protection.

Chinese cities suffered from more days of air pollution in January, with Shijiazhuang being the worst polluted among the nation's 74 major cities, the MEP said last week.

China is intensifying efforts to fight pollution and environmental degradation after decades of growth left the country saddled with problems such as smog and contaminated soil.

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## The NHS and social care

Today Parliament will debate social care and the NHS. Although it will not come across like this, in practice all the main parties are in agreement. All want a high quality free at the point of use NHS. All want extended and caring support for frail and elderly people to live at home or in well run care homes. All agree the amount spent on these services needs to carry on increasing, as it has been doing under successive governments.

So what is the row about? The disagreements come about over the amount of the increase in money, and whether any kind of reform or better management is needed to ensure the spending is well made. Traditionally governments seek reform and try to impose some limit on the amount of the increase in cost, whilst Oppositions demand more money and criticise reforms. It is always easy to criticise past reforms, as it is very difficult for any group of Ministers and senior officials to achieve major change in the NHS, whilst social care is supervised by a wide range of Councils with varying degrees of competence, and widely differing views.

I Agree with those who say we do need to spend more on the NHS and social care. I also think the government and Councils responsible do need to work closely with the senior staff to try to get better value for money and to raise the quality of what is being achieved where it is not good enough. Quality and value for money need not be a variance with one another. Doing things right first time, and avoiding mistakes, saves a lot of money as well as providing a much better outcome for the patient. Jeremy Hunt's mantra of putting patients first and having full transparency on what hospitals achieve is part of the solution.

There are many ways more efficiency can reduce the strain on resources. Collecting all the fees owing from overseas visitors and foreign governments would provide useful additional revenue. Controlling the release of supplies could cut down on waste. Requiring the return of robust longer term medical equipment for cleaning and reuse would reduce costs. Having more permanent staff and fewer temps and locums would also cut the bills. Putting together prompt and decent social care packages would allow freeing beds in hospitals for others and would cut the costs of caring for the patient discharged from hospital. .

All these things are easy to see from the outside and easy to write down. We also need to ask why have good people managing the NHS seen this and not done them? There needs to be leadership from the official heads of the NHS that all these things matter, with follow up where they do not occur. Managers also need to work with doctors and nurses over their terms and conditions, to try to reduce the perceived advantage in working as a contractor, locum or temp rather than as a full time member of the team on the permanent staff.

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**Old town agrees to improve services**



Lijiang Old Town [File photo]

The Old Town of Lijiang, a national 5-A scenic spot in Southwest China's Yunnan province, posted a statement on its official micro blog on Saturday afternoon, saying it was willing to accept punishment by the China National Tourism Administration and work to resolve issues with the services it provides.

"We apologize for our insufficient work. We are open to tourists' criticism and suggestions, and will make things right," said the government of Gucheng district, where the town is located, in the post.

The post came after the National Tourism Administration issued warnings to three 5-A scenic spots on Saturday morning, including the Old Town of Lijiang, demanding rectification of issues within six months.

The other two scenic spots are Jingpo Lake in Mudanjiang city, Heilongjiang province, and Laohutan Ocean Park in Dalian, Liaoning province.

Peng Decheng, director of the administration's Planning and Finance Department, said the number of tourist complaints about Lijiang has remained high, with frequent incidents relating to tourists' personal safety or property.

"Local residents have had serious conflicts with tourists," Peng said. "The scenic spot has failed to maintain quality equipment and services."

In recent years, there have been many reports of tourists being overcharged or being forced to shop in Lijiang.

This year alone, there have already been at least three incidents involving tourists being beaten in Lijiang. In one incident, a female tourist lost her purse and was disfigured after being beaten by a dozen people at a restaurant.

These high-profile incidents have attracted widespread public attention and put the town, well-known for its long history and as home to several ethnic groups, at the center of controversy.

Zheng Yi, mayor of Lijiang, said in a Government Work Report during the ongoing Lijiang People's Congress that Lijiang has gained a bad reputation for insufficient supervision and administration, as well as unsatisfactory services and public security.

Zheng requested that relevant departments shoulder responsibility and make efforts to solve the issues.

Liu Jian, a 31-year-old Beijing resident who traveled to the old town in September 2015, said: "I was lucky compared with some tourists who were beaten, as I was only overcharged there. But the experiences were enough to leave me with a bad impression.

"I'm glad to hear that the old town will start to rectify its issues and I hope it will be reformed."

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## [24 detained over Nanchang hotel fire that killed 10](#)



Emergency workers treat a victim after arriving at the scene of a fire at a hotel in Nanchang, Jiangxi province, on Saturday. [Photo provided to China Daily]

24 people have been detained by the police in Nanchang, Jiangxi Province in connection with a hotel fire on Saturday, which killed 10 people.



14 others were injured in the blaze and have been hospitalized, with three still in critical conditions.

The fire affected 1,500 square metres of the first two floors of the building, which also housed a karaoke bar which was under renovation.

An initial investigation has suggested that the fire may have been caused by the cutting of renovation materials.

Of those arrested, two are said to be contractors of the construction project, along with 14 construction workers, seven shareholders and one porter from the karaoke bar. Eight other suspects are still being sought.

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## [H7N9 virus might become drug-resistant](#)



A worker disinfects poultry cages at a market in Suichuan county, Jiangxi province, on Sunday. The county has ordered the closure of local poultry markets from Saturday to March 10. [Li Jianping/For China Daily]

The new strain of H7N9 bird flu virus confirmed earlier this month could become drug-resistant, experts say, while a leading specialist in respiratory diseases warns that it might be resistant already.

Human cases have been rising in China.

The new strain, two human cases of which were reported in Guangdong province, shows resistance to oseltamivir phosphate, a commonly used drug in the

prevention and treatment of flu, said Zhong Nanshan, a member of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, according to a report published on Sunday by Nanfang Daily, a newspaper in the provincial capital of Guangzhou.

Although the two patients are resistant to the drug, oseltamivir phosphate has been effective for most human H7N9 cases, Zhong was reported as saying. "This shows most H7N9 viruses have not mutated to the new strain," he said.

He Jianfeng, chief expert in infectious disease at the Guangdong Provincial Center for Disease Control and Prevention, said that although the new H7N9 strain shows resistance to the drug, the drug could still have an effect on the strain.

"Both patients have used oseltamivir phosphate before, so it is not known whether the drug resistance is caused by previous use of the drug or by a mutation of the virus," He told Nanfang Daily. "But the possible drug-resistant nature of the new strain deserves more attention."

Much of China has seen the H7N9 outbreak since the start of winter. In most cases, it has been linked to exposure to live poultry. In January alone, the Chinese mainland reported 192 human cases of the virus, including 79 deaths, making it the worst outbreak since the virus was first reported in China in 2013, according to the National Health and Family Planning Commission.

The total number of human cases this year increased to 296, including 94 deaths, as of Sunday, covering more than half of all provincial areas in China, China Central Television reported.

The new strain is more dangerous to poultry, but poses no new threat to humans, and it is not more infectious to humans at the moment, according to a statement by the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention on Feb 19. Current research shows that the H7N9 virus is not easily transmitted between humans, according to the World Health Organization.

Zhong could not be reached for comment on Sunday.

He Xiong, deputy director of the Beijing Center for Disease Prevention and Control, said the new strain does not result in increased risk of human-to-human transmission of the virus, but unlike other H7N9 viruses, it can cause diseases in poultry, which should be studied further.

Only two human H7N9 cases have been reported in Beijing this year, and both of them involve patients who are from other parts of China and were transferred to Beijing for treatment, He Xiong said.

"There may be sporadic cases, but the possibility of a large-scale outbreak in Beijing is slim, as authorities and the public are well prepared," he said, adding that scientists are still conducting research into the virus to ascertain whether it is linked to climate, to ensure better prevention and control.