

Forestation efforts seen as examples for others

China has found workable solutions to desertification, as shown by successful projects like Saihanba National Forest Park, which is important for China and the rest of the world, according to the UN's top environmental protection expert.

Since 1962, when workers started planting trees, the forest coverage in Saihanba National Forest Park, 150 kilometers from Beijing in Hebei province, has soared from 12 percent to 80 percent, according to National Development and Reform Commission data from 2016.

Saihanba, the largest manmade forest in the world, forms a natural barrier against sandstorms that protects the health of millions in the capital and nearby regions.

"The transformation of Saihanba is the result of more than 55 years of hard work by several generations of experts. ... That is a triumph of patience and determination," Erik Solheim, executive director of the United Nations Environment Programme, said in an interview. He has personally witnessed the successful outcome of efforts similar to Saihanba's recently in the Kubuqi Desert of the Inner Mongolia autonomous region.

The total area of greenery in the desert, the seventh-largest in China, has expanded by more than 6,000 square kilometers in the past three decades, according to data from the regional government.

"It's a case of getting the science right, and being able to think big and take that vision forward with determined leadership," Solheim said, explaining that the patience to think long-term also is necessary, which has been proved in the 55-year effort at the Saihanba Forest Farm.

"Desertification is not just a major problem for China. Nations like Iran and Iraq face similar problems, as do countries in the Sahel region of Africa, and even parts of the United States. In areas of the Middle East, desertification is also a huge public health issue. We know that this kind of environmental degradation also drives instability and conflict."

In addition to the efforts in Saihanba and the Kubuqi Desert, China has taken comprehensive measures to reduce desertification over decades, shrinking its total desert area at a rate of 2,400 sq km a year, Vice-Premier Ma Kai said at a July forum.

Solheim said in promoting the greening process, governments need to set up clear goals and a necessary framework, so private sector companies, NGOs and local communities can nurture the innovative technologies and business opportunities.

"In the successful stories of Saihanba and the Kubuqi Desert, they are really

just well-rounded business plans, and they show long-term economic benefits can outweigh the costs of the huge amount of work required,” he said.

Saihanba Forest Farm has developed in a sustainable way, with economic growth relying on tourism, tree seeding, wind power generation and logging—with the green sectors bringing in 100 million yuan (\$15.1 million) last year, outweighing the revenue from past logging operations, data from the National Development and Reform Commission show.

“The success of projects like Saihanba and Kubuqi can form a component of China’s drive to build an ecological civilization and to take that message around the world, for example as part of the Belt and Road Initiative,” he said.

[Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor hopes to boost legal cooperation between Hong Kong, mainland](#)

Chief Executive of China’s Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor on Thursday expressed the hope to boost legal cooperation between Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland.

While meeting with President of the Supreme People’s Court of China Zhou Qiang at the Chief Executive’s Office, Lam welcomed Zhou to attend the Fourth Seminar of Senior Judges of Cross-Strait and Hong Kong and Macao.

She expressed gratitude to the Supreme People’s Court for its continuous support to the mutual legal assistance between the two jurisdictions as well as to Hong Kong as an international legal and dispute resolution service center in the Asia-Pacific region.

Lam said that with its talent and extensive experience in international legal and dispute resolution services, coupled with its dual advantages of “one country, two systems,” Hong Kong could provide multi-faceted and professional legal and related services to Chinese mainland enterprises to complement the Belt and Road Initiative and the development plan of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

South-to-north water diversion benefits 50 mln Chinese

More than 50 million people in northern China have benefited from a massive water diversion project that pumps water from the Yangtze River in the south to the draught-prone north, authorities announced Thursday.

Since coming into operation in late 2014, the middle route of the south-to-north water diversion project has transferred 9.6 billion cubic meters of water, benefiting 53.1 million people as on Wednesday, according to the Office of the South-to-North Water Diversion Project Construction Commission of the State Council.

The middle route of the project carries water through canals and pipes from Danjiangkou reservoir in central China's Hubei Province to the cities of Beijing and Tianjin, and the provinces of Hebei and Henan.

The project has supplied 2.6 billion cubic meters of water to Beijing, serving 11 million people.

Currently about 70 percent of Beijing's water supply comes from the project. The city's per capita water resources have increased from 100 to 150 cubic meters. Previously the city's water supply came mainly from underground water.

Officials with the office said as a result of the project, underground water levels have started to rise in some areas suffering from over exploitation in Beijing and Tianjin.

The project has also helped improve the agricultural production and river and lake environments by supplying water to farmland and rivers.

China steps up efforts to support innovation

China will roll out a series of measures to boost innovation, according to a circular issued by the General Office of the State Council.

A total of 13 reform measures will be carried out in eight comprehensive innovation pilot areas, including the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, Shanghai and the Pearl River Delta, and then further promoted nationwide.

According to the circular, the government will enhance the support for

innovation by small and medium-sized enterprises by offering one-stop investment and financing information.

One-stop service for patent examination, rights protection and verification will also be offered to enterprises, said the circular.

In the meantime, the government will streamline the procedures for foreigners to apply work permits in China, and encourage foreign students to find career opportunities, start their own businesses and apply for work and residence permits.

The circular also stressed the need to accelerate the transformation of military production into civilian use.

[World's oldest panda dies aged 37](#)

Basi, the world's oldest captive panda, has died at the age of 37, equivalent to more than 100 human years.

Basi died Wednesday morning at the Strait Panda Research and Exchange Center in Fuzhou, capital of Fujian Province in eastern China.

Chen Yucun, director of the center, said Basi had died of multiple illnesses, including liver cirrhosis and renal failure.

"Basi's body will be put in Basi Museum, which is being constructed for people to forever remember her and share the spirit of the harmonious development between humans and nature," Chen said.

Basi became ill in June, and doctors had since tried every means to help prolong her life.

In 1990, Basi was chosen as the model for Pan Pan, the mascot of the Beijing Asian Games, and became a household name.

Many netizens called her Granny Basi, though others preferred to call her Pan Pan.

Basi celebrated her 37 birthday in January. In August, the Guinness World Records confirmed her as the world's oldest living captive panda.

She was very talented and liked weight-lifting, riding a bicycle and playing basketball.

Basi was born in the wild in 1980. At the age of four, she fell into an icy river and was rescued by local villagers from the Basi Gorge in the county of Baoxing in southwest China's Sichuan Province. People named her after the gorge and sent her to the Fuzhou center, where she has lived ever since.

She survived severe illness several times, thanks to the care of her devoted keeper Shi Feining, who died aged 44 in 2016.

Shi took good care of Basi for 27 years, especially during the panda's recovery from high blood pressure and cataract surgery.

The average lifespan of wild pandas is 15 years, while those in captivity usually live longer due to better nutrition and living conditions.

Experts believe the fact that Basi had such longevity while living in Fuzhou, a very different place from a panda's natural habitat, has important scientific research value.

Fuzhou is very hot in summer. The Strait Panda Research and Exchange Center provides air-conditioning and ice to cool the pandas' living environment.

Chen said the center had invested 20 million yuan (3 million U.S. dollars) to build a summer resort for pandas in Guling Hill in Fuzhou, where the average summer temperature is less than 30 degrees Celsius.

"But Basi had been too old to move. She did not go to the resort this summer," Chen said.

"Rest in peace. You will become another legend in another world," said one post left on Weibo, a Twitter-like service.

"Wish you well in the Panda Planet," another Weibo user said.

Basi died without ever breeding.

Very low birthrates have been one of the major factors threatening the survival of the giant pandas, as is habitat loss, though the species was downgraded from "endangered" to "vulnerable" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature in September last year, thanks to protection efforts by Chinese scientists.

Giant pandas live mainly in the mountains of Sichuan and neighboring Shaanxi and Gansu provinces.

The number of pandas living in the wild was fewer than 2,000, and around 400 were living in captivity as of the end of 2013, according to data from China's State Forestry Administration.