

A million-tree mission



Zhao works on Bagua Hill in Jilin province. [Photo/China Daily]

After spending almost half his life chopping down trees in Jilin province, Zhao Xihai decided it was time to make a change.

In 1989, the former logger and explosives worker formulated a plan to mitigate some of the damage he had done to the environment over the years – he would plant 100,000 trees before turning 70.

In the first spring following his retirement, Zhao bought 46,000 seedlings and set about planting them on a barren tract of land on Bagua Hill, 3 kilometers away from his home.

He set himself the goal of planting 1,000 seedlings per day, waking at 4 am each morning to walk to the hill, armed only with a shovel and some painkillers for his chronic stomach problems.

Every day for 46 days, come rain or shine, Zhao went to the hill to plant more trees, eating only small bites of snacks for sustenance and drinking from nearby streams.

He succeeded in completing his task in the time allocated, despite passing out from hunger and exhaustion one rainy day and having to be carried home by a neighbor.

Once the first 46,000 seedlings had been planted, Zhao continued with his task – albeit at a slower pace.

He persisted even after having a blood clot on the brain in 2004, which left him walking with a stick, telling his son: "I will not stop planting as long as I can move."

By 2007, Zhao had achieved his goal of planting 100,000 trees, but he did not stop there. Joined by his 36-year-old son Zhao Jingchun, who had recently been laid off, he set himself a new mission – to plant 1 million trees, including a number of rare or unusual species.

Within four years, the pair had managed to cultivate 750,000 seedlings, inspiring Zhao Xihai to present his son with a flag honoring his dedication and symbolizing the passing of responsibility to the younger generation.

In March last year, Zhao Xihai was hospitalized after his blood clot returned. He lost the ability to talk and now requires 24-hour care.

His son has vowed to continue his legacy, however, and is on schedule to plant his 1 millionth tree this year, according to Jilin's Hongshi Bureau of Forestry.

Some have questioned why Zhao Jingchun continues to plant trees when he has no income and a 13-year-old son to support. The entire family is also reliant on Zhao Xihai's pension.

"Planting trees will be beneficial for generations to come, therefore it is worth all the hardships – that's what my father would say," he said.

[Deputies call for action to stop sexual abuse of minors](#)

Deputies to the NPC and experts attend a seminar on Thursday to call for immediate action against sexual abuse of minors. [Photo by Chen Weisong/China.org.cn]

As the number of child sexual abuse cases has risen in recent years, some deputies to the National People's Congress and various experts held a seminar on Thursday ahead of China's annual two political sessions to call for immediate steps to stop the scourge.

The deputies proposed solutions including making sexual abuse awareness education compulsory in schools, and establishing a proper custody system for minors.

They said children should be taught about what constitutes a "safe touch" and know it is safe to tell teachers or other staff about abuse.

At the seminar, a survey report on child sexual abuse cases in 2016 was

released by Girls' Protecting, a charity fund initiated by dozens of female journalists in 2013.

The survey found that 433 cases of sexual abuse involving children under 14 were publicly reported in 2016, equating to an average of 1.21 cases a day, an increase of 30 percent year on year.

Wang Xuemei, co-founder of Girls' Protecting, said the number of reported child sexual abuse cases significantly increased in the past three years, demonstrating it had become quite an acute social issue drawing more attention from society and the media.

However, many cases still go unreported because of the shame that comes with the act and complexity of the cases.

The survey report showed that of 778 victims whose cases were made public in 2016, 719 were girls, making up 92.42 percent, with a small number of boys. The perpetrators were mostly men.

"These figures awaken us to the gravity of the issue," said Sun Xiaomei, an NPC deputy and a professor at China Women's University. "The focus should be placed on building a protection net through coordinated efforts from families, schools and society."

Li Yifei, an NPC deputy and principal of a middle school in Inner Mongolia, stressed the problem should be solved by a combination of law, education, moral and culture building.

According to the survey, in 2016, the youngest victim was aged less than 2, and 125 were under 7.

Girls' Protecting pointed that children who are sexually molested are mainly aged between 12 and 14, reinforcing the fact that underage girls are easy targets of sexual abuse and there is a severe lack of awareness education for them.

The survey found more cases occurring in rural areas than in cities.

"Sexual abuse is a special topic when it comes to children's protection," said Tong Xiaojun, dean of the Institute of Children Studies at China Youth University of Political Studies. "There is currently no system in place to address the issue, certainly not in rural areas."

He added that whether left-behind children in rural areas are more prone to sexual abuse is yet to be determined.

Lan Chuntao, an NPC deputy and a teacher at a high school in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, said: "The government should boost investment in rural areas. Moreover, I hope rural children can live with their parents who work in cities, thus reducing their vulnerabilities to sexual abuse."

A more shocking fact revealed by the report is that offenders are largely people close to victims, with teachers making up 29.33 percent, neighbors

24.33 percent, relatives and friends 12 percent, family members 10 percent.

Girls' Protecting has provided sexual abuse awareness education to more than 1,400,000 children along with more than 400,000 parents in 28 provinces in China by the end of last year.

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[Illegally parked rental bikes seized](#)



Bicycles, mostly from the bike-sharing company Mobike, were parked at a parking lot on Wednesday. [Photo/China Daily]

Authorities in Shanghai's Huangpu district have seized more than 4,000 rental bikes, most of them improperly parked, highlighting the poor management of bicycles rented over the internet and the shortage of parking areas, especially in downtown areas.

There are also concerns that the problems faced by Shanghai may quickly spread to other cities as competition intensifies.

At a parking lot on Zhizaoju Road, thousands of rental bikes were laid out in rows with their wheels connected by iron chains. Some web users described the venue as a graveyard of bikes.

Zhou Lan, deputy director of the urban management department of Huangpu, said the seizure serves as a countermeasure to fight illegally parked bicycles, instead of merely revenge on bike-sharing companies.

Zhou said that the regional government authorized two independent institutions to help with the proper parking of nonmotor vehicles, and to tow

away those outside designated areas on sidewalks.

A small number of properly parked rental bicycles were seized to make way for other nonmotor vehicles.

It's estimated that in Huangpu, there are about 150,000 nonmotor vehicles – more than half of them electric bikes. But there are less than 1,500 nonmotor vehicle parking lots in the district, while the number of rental bikes has surged to more than 20,000.

Citywide, it's estimated that more than 280,000 rental bikes have been put on the streets. Guo Jianrong, secretary-general of the Shanghai Bicycle Association, said that by June, the city is expected to have 500,000 rental bicycles.

"The association is busy drafting three new sets of standards: the management standard for shared bicycles, for shared electric bikes and for their service providers," Guo said.

But for the time being, the struggle between bike-sharing startups and the regional government is continuing as business leaders in the sector said they won't reduce the number of bicycles in big cities.

"We will continue to put more bikes in operation in Shanghai, depending on user demand," said a spokeswoman for Mobike, the pioneer and now dominant player in the bike-sharing sector.

She said that Mobike has a management team of about 100 in Shanghai, plus 400 front-line operators.

In a news release on Thursday, the company said that it is collaborating with Baidu by taking advantage of its cloud computing service to fix the accuracy of the position of its parked bikes, which will help with management of the bikes.

A reward plan is also in the pipeline to encourage users to park bikes properly, the company said. Regarding the seized bikes, Mobike said that it will communicate with the urban management department and is willing to cover some of the department's management costs.

[China outlines its positive sea role](#)



Wang Guoqing, spokesman for the fifth session of the 12th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, made the comment at a press conference. [Photo/Xinhua]

China values freedom and safety of navigation in the South China Sea more than any other country, a spokesman for the top political advisory body said yesterday.

Wang Guoqing, spokesman for the fifth session of the 12th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, made the comment at a press conference, citing the fact that China was a major trading nation as well as the largest littoral country of the South China Sea.

Certain countries outside the region alleged China threatens freedom of navigation, an entirely "pseudo proposition," he said.

Since China had recovered the South China Sea islands at the end of World War II, there had never been a problem with navigational freedom in the region.

The South China Sea islands are an integral part of China's territory, Wang said, adding that it was "perfectly normal" for China to build facilities, including those for necessary defense purposes, on its own territory. International law entitled sovereign states to do so.

China, Wang reiterated, resolutely defended the freedom of navigation that every country enjoys in the South China Sea according to international law.

"We have set up cooperation mechanisms with many other countries to ensure safe navigation," he said. The civilian facilities China has built on the South China Sea islands, such as lighthouses, had played a positive role in guaranteeing navigation safety and humanitarian rescue, Wang added.

He also said the Belt and Road Initiative was advancing steadily, bringing investment and jobs to participating countries.

More than 100 countries and international organizations had joined the

initiative and over 40 of them had cooperation agreements with China, he said.

Chinese businesses had helped to build 56 economic and trade cooperation zones in 20 countries along the Belt and Road, with total investment exceeding US\$18 billion, helping to generate over US\$1 billion in tax revenue and more than 160,000 jobs.

Wang said the CPPCC National Committee would do more work in 2017 to promote cultural and people-to-people exchanges with countries along the Belt and Road. The initiative was proposed by China in 2013 and aims to become a trade and infrastructure network connecting Asia with Europe and Africa along ancient trade routes.

In the spirit of regional connectivity, China is working in aviation, power, rail, road and telecommunications projects with participating countries.

The CPPCC will open its annual session at 3pm today in Beijing, he said.

More than 2,000 members from different sectors across the country will discuss major political, economic and social issues concerning the country's development during this year's session, which is scheduled to conclude on March 13.