

Activist unhappy with zoo's explanation

An animal welfare campaigner has accused the head of a Hangzhou zoo of failing to properly answer accusations over abuse of its tigers.

Hu Chunmei triggered widespread outrage when she shared edited footage online of a performance involving white tigers at Hangzhou Safari Park, which she recorded on Jan 12.

The two-minute clip features a confrontation between a tiger and a handler, which ended with the animal falling off the stage into a pool of water, and images of a tiger with a wound on the right side of its nose.

The footage has been shared thousands of times on Sina Weibo and other social media platforms, with many netizens criticizing the park.

In response, a manager at the zoo who was identified only as Ma gave an interview on Monday to Qianjiang Evening News, a local daily, in which he denied the animals had been abused.

However, Hu, head of the Saving Performing Animals Project run by the China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation, a private NGO based in Beijing, said she was not satisfied with his explanation.

"He showed a photo of a tiger to the newspaper, saying that it was the one that fell into the water and that it was in a very good condition. But it's not the same tiger. Its stripes are clearly different than the one in the video," she said.

"The zoo manager also said the tiger that fell into the water was the same one with the wound on its face. He's not telling the truth. When the tiger falls in the video, the one with a scar on its nose can be seen on the other side of the stage."

Ma was quoted by the paper as saying the wound was an "inflammation of lymph nodes below the skin" and that the reason the animal had no canine teeth was because it was "in a dental transitional period". All the tigers in the show were under the age of 3, he added.

Calls to the management office at Hangzhou Safari Park went unanswered on Tuesday.

The tourist attraction, which is in Fuyang district of Hangzhou, the capital of Zhejiang province, has been in operation since 2002 and is the largest wildlife park in East China, covering 2.66 square kilometers.

A statement issued on Monday by the Zhejiang Forestry Administration said the park had been ordered to suspend all animal performances.

HK returns armed vehicles to Singapore

Hong Kong customs officials announced on Tuesday that nine Singaporean armed vehicles seized two months ago will be returned after the completion of an investigation.

The Singaporean vehicles were impounded by customs on Nov 23 "because there was a suspected breach of Hong Kong law", said Roy Tang, commissioner of customs and excise of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

The armed vehicles were inside a cargo ship from Taiwan that was passing through Hong Kong. They were on their way back to Singapore following a military drill in Taiwan.

Tang said that customs has finished its investigation. The case may lead to criminal prosecution, according to a news release from the Hong Kong government.

"Import, export and transshipment/transit of strategic commodities in breach of licensing requirements are criminal offenses punishable under the Hong Kong law," he said, adding that the military vehicles and the associated equipment will be returned to Singapore.

In a statement released on Tuesday, Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong had thanked Hong Kong Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying for resolving the matter.

"This is a positive outcome," the Singaporean ministry said.

On Jan 17 in Beijing, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying urged the Singaporean government to stick to the one-China principle when she was asked about the seizure of the vehicles.

China attaches great importance to its relationship with Singapore, and at the same time, China's stance on the one-China principle is firm and unchanged, she said.

Jia Duqiang, a senior researcher in Southeast Asia studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said that by seizing the vehicles, China sent a signal to Singapore that the city-state should stick to the one-China principle, especially as Taiwan authorities led by Tsai Ing-wen are challenging Beijing on sovereignty.

Returning the vehicles is a positive sign for the China-Singapore relationship, he said, adding that bilateral ties have been frustrated in recent months as a result of what he called Singapore's "improper remarks" on China's stance on the South China Sea issue.

In July, Singapore asked "all parties to fully respect" the ruling of an

arbitration case on South China Sea territorial disputes. China insisted that the ruling is “null and void”, and has no binding force.

Mother and daughter jailed over vaccines

A mother and daughter have been jailed for selling vaccines without a license in east China’s Shandong Province.

Pang Hongwei was sentenced to 15 years in prison for illegally purchasing vaccines which she stored in warehouses in Jinan and Liaocheng, and then sold to clients between June 2013 and April 2015, according to Jinan Intermediate People’s Court.

The court said the vaccines had been improperly stored and that Pang had earned nearly 75 million yuan (US\$11 million).

In 2009, Pang was sentenced to three years in prison with a five-year probationary period for illegally trading vaccines in Heze, another city in Shandong. In April last year the case was retried, as required by the provincial higher people’s court, and her sentence was extended to six years without probation.

The intermediate court ruled that Pang will serve 19 years in prison in total for the two cases. In addition, all her property will be confiscated.

Sun Qi, Pang’s daughter, was sentenced to six years in prison for assisting her mother and being involved in the sale of vaccines worth over 42 million yuan between September 2014 and April 2015. She will have more than 7.4 million yuan of her property confiscated, the court ruled.

Public warned of H7N9 avian flu after nine deaths

Chinese disease control experts said that the public should stay on alert for H7N9 avian flu, which has caused at least nine deaths this year.

H7N9 has entered its peak season and direct contact with live poultry remains the main source of infection, said a statement by Zhejiang provincial disease control and prevention center Tuesday.

Genetic analysis showed that there had been no mutations of the virus, but since late Autumn last year the epidemic had been reported in a wide range of areas, it said.

The virus was more active in 2016 than in the same seasons in previous years. A total of 44 cases were reported last year in Zhejiang, causing two deaths.

H7N9 is a bird flu strain first reported to have infected humans in March 2013 in China. It is most likely to strike in winter and spring.

At least nine people died from the virus since the start of this year, according to disease control centers in Henan, Guangdong and Hunan provinces.

On Tuesday, health authorities in Henan province announced two deaths from the virus, respectively on Jan. 23 and 24. Both patients had worked at restaurants prior to the infections.

[Xi pushes poverty alleviation](#)



Chinese President Xi Jinping talks with villagers and local cadre at the home of villager Xu Haicheng in Desheng Village, Xiaoertai Township of Zhangbei County in north China's Hebei Province, on Jan. 24, 2017. Xi Tuesday pushed for increased efforts on poverty alleviation during an inspection tour to the city of Zhangjiakou. [Photo/Xinhua]

President Xi Jinping Tuesday pushed for increased efforts on poverty

alleviation.

He stressed the importance of precision in the battle against poverty, saying that poverty alleviation should focus on targeted people and industries, and use the right tools to produce results.

Xi made the remarks during a tour of the city of Zhangjiakou in northern China's Hebei Province, where he inspected an impoverished village, visiting and chatting with poor families, discussing how they could shake off poverty.

"Fighting poverty is the fundamental task in building an all-round moderately prosperous society," Xi said.

He called for more efforts to help the poor develop industries that could grow in a sustainable manner, set up sustainable mechanisms for poverty alleviation, and create ways for them to achieve prosperity.

Poverty relief is high on China's 2016-2020 agenda, and the government has vowed to lift everybody out of poverty by 2020. By the end of 2015, China still had 55.75 million people living in poverty.

Since the start of the reform and opening-up in 1978, China's economic boom has helped lift more than 700 million people out of poverty.

"Poverty alleviation is getting more and more difficult as it progresses to the end," Xi said.



Chinese President Xi Jinping (C) walks with grassroots cadre at the home of villager Xu Haicheng in Desheng Village, Xiaoertai Township of Zhangbei County in north China's Hebei Province, on Jan. 24, 2017. Xi Tuesday pushed for increased efforts on poverty alleviation during an inspection tour to the city of Zhangjiakou. [Photo/Xinhua]

He stressed the importance of making sure every poor family had a program for increasing income and every poor person had a way of casting off poverty.

The president pointed to relocation as an important supplementary approach in fighting poverty and highlighted the role of ecological compensation, which would not only help improve the ecological environment but also boost incomes.

Stressing the importance of education in poverty alleviation, Xi said, "Making sure children of impoverished families enjoy access to high-quality education is a fundamental solution to poverty."

During the tour, Xi also inspected a dairy company in Zhangjiakou, where he urged for more efforts to create a globally competitive dairy industry with safe, high-quality products.

He said that the most rigorous standards, the strictest regulation, the harshest punishment and the most serious mechanism of accountability should be adopted to ensure food safety.

Xi also listened to local officials briefing on the local economy at a meeting, where he said cutting excessive production capacity in the iron and steel sector was crucial for Hebei, a major steel producing province, to improve its industrial structure and create new growth engines.

Xi called for efforts to ensure outdated production capacity was eliminated and "zombie enterprises" phased out.

During the tour, Xi also urged for efforts to make the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games a "remarkable, extraordinary, excellent" event.

The Zhangjiakou site of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games is the best natural ski area in northern China.