

TO THE POINT

Quenching thirst of the north

By YAN XIZAO

Late Chairman Mao Zedong got a belated gift yesterday, one day after his 109th birthday.

His fellow townsman Premier Zhu Rongji launched a project that will fulfil a dream the chairman had since 1952 — to divert water from south to north.

In the thirsty north, the project is expected to be a life-saver.

The Yellow, Huaihe, and Haihe river valleys, the three major water systems in North China, collectively account for only 7.2 per cent of the country's overall water resources. But they supply water to 38.5 per cent of the nation's arable land and 33.7 per cent of its population. Per capita water resources in the area are only one-fifth the national average.

In the water-rich south, however, floods routinely make the headlines, one year after another.

It was these floods that led the idealistic Mao to pledge that "man will ultimately triumph over nature."

Taming the wild rivers was an important part of that crusade. But inadequate financial and technical backup frustrated Mao's ambition.

These days, experts put a price tag of nearly 500 billion yuan (US\$60 billion) on the whole water-diversion scheme.

But the project now draws upon significant financial and technical resources as well as extensive feasibility studies over the past decades.

The east route, channeling water from the Yangtze in Jiangsu Province through Shandong, Henan and Hebei provinces to Beijing and Tianjin, will prove the most cost-effective route of the planned three. It takes advantage of a deserted ancient canal and natural lakes and river courses.

When the water corridor is finally completed, the water crisis along its route will ease considerably. We have little reason to doubt that from a technical point of view.

But there is one crucial point we have to keep in mind — we are not taming nature. There are natural laws we have to respect.

While improving ecological conditions in the north, we have to be conscious of the flow-on consequences for the Yangtze area.

Equally significant is the need for water conservation and pollution control along the new waterway.

Water scarcity is a nationwide problem. Changes in geographical distribution do not increase our overall water supply.

Unless the diverted water is used efficiently, the expensive project will not prove its true value.

Putting a price on education

By XIAO JIAO

China's education still needs more money despite the government's support for the sector.

The Minister of Education Chen Zhili announced on Thursday that the central government's expenditure on education hit an all-time high in 2001, reaching 3.19 per cent of China's gross domestic product.

Since 1998, the education budget's share of total government spending has increased by one percentage point annually, said the minister.

More than 90 per cent of Chinese people now enjoy a nine-year compulsory education system. The college entrance rate has reached 15 per cent.

In terms of infrastructure, there have been more dorm buildings and dining halls for college students built or rebuilt in the last three years than in the past 50 years.

The government's efforts have made a difference but there is no room for complacency.

China's spending on education, though on the rise, is smaller than that of many other countries.

The amount of funding each individual student receives is even more limited, given the country's huge population. The sharp rise in tuition fees in recent years reflects the fact that the government's spending on education still lags behind the needs of schools.

Moreover, most education funding is allotted to universities and schools in cities, while schools in rural areas are often left out in the cold.

Primary education in rural areas is mainly funded by local governments, many of which are cash-strapped.

The government needs to increase its support for education, although the money will be difficult to find since China's limited public coffers have to fund countless economic and social undertakings.

The government should enact favourable policies to encourage non-government sources to invest in education, which will help relieve the shortage of public funds.

 China Daily welcomes letters from readers on all local, national and international subjects. Preference will be given to short ones. Letters should be mailed to: Letter-to-the-Editor, China Daily, 15 Huixian Dongjie, Beijing, 100029 or e-mailed to: opinion@chinadaily.com.cn

Uncertainty surrounds Korean Peninsula

By HU XUAN

The situation on the Korean Peninsula in 2002 is in a period of re-adjustment, characterized by both positive changes and volatility.

That even the naval conflict between the two sides in June did not derail bilateral ties indicates that neither wants a serious showdown.

But the re-surfacing of the nuclear issue of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) was a reminder that the Peninsula remains one of the world's most capricious flashpoints.

Since US President George W. Bush took office, Washington's hard-line stance towards Pyongyang has resulted in an exchange of hostile gestures, ending the thaw in south-north relations that began in 2000.

Bush's designation of the DPRK as part of the "axis of evil" after September 11 as well as a potential target of US pre-emptive strikes worsened the situation.

However, confrontation is in neither's interest.

Despite its claims that it is capable of engaging and winning two simultaneous wars, a major distraction in the Far East does not help the United States.

A peaceful environment is essential to the success of the DPRK's economic reforms started in July.

Both sides have shown a degree of restraint in handling bilateral relations.

Recognizing Washington's decisive role in its security environment and its relations with Seoul and Tokyo, DPRK made great efforts to seek detente with the United States.

It responded positively to Seoul's Sunshine Policy and continued its reconciliation efforts.

Pyongyang also tried to resume talks on the normalization of bilateral ties with Japan, another key ally of the United States in Northeast Asia.

In spite of the June 29 naval conflict between the two Koreas, their ministerial meetings resumed in August.

Realizing its relationship with Pyongyang would not substantially improve without a positive attitude from Washington, Seoul also tried hard to push for the resumption of talks

between the DPRK and the United States.

Of all the contacts between Pyongyang and Washington, the three-day visit by US special envoy James Kelly, assistant secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs, to Pyongyang in October was the most significant.

This was the first US high-level visit to the DPRK under the Bush administration.

The nuclear issue re-emerged in the wake of Kelly's visit, putting a brake on the positive development of the peace process on the Korean Peninsula.

In mid-October, Washington exposed, and Pyongyang acknowledged, the existence of the north's nuclear weapons programme.

Pyongyang's latest move of removing UN monitoring equipment from a nuclear reactor and reviving a separate plutonium producing programme frozen under a 1994 accord was said to be in retaliation to the US termination of heavy oil supply.

What deserves noting is that, though they seem to be playing the game of brinkmanship, both Pyongyang and Washington are very cautious and signalling to each other that what they really want is dialogue.

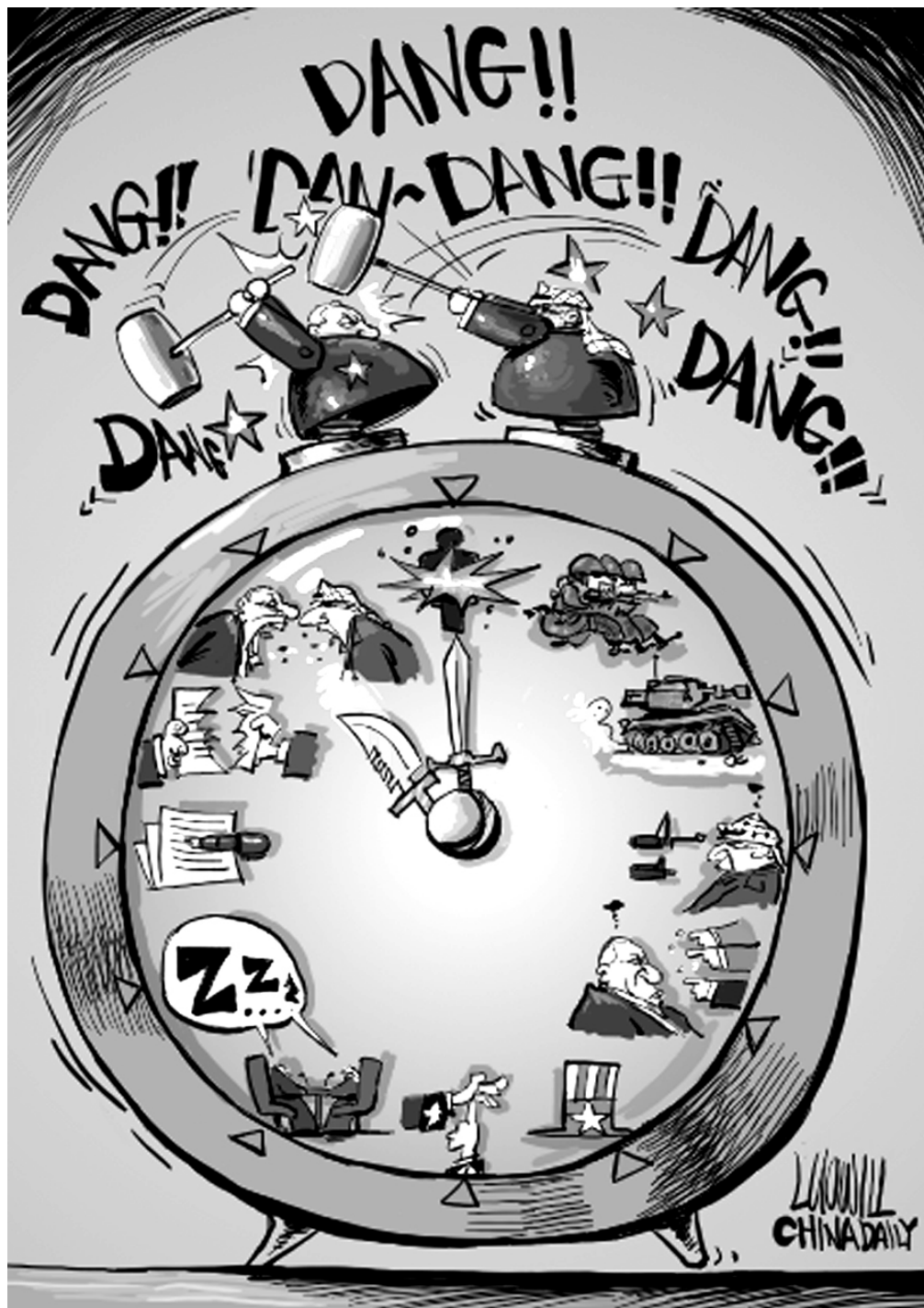
Bush on November 17 stated that the United States had no plans to use aggression towards the DPRK.

Pyongyang also hinted that as long as the United States could assure it of security and sovereignty, the DPRK would abandon the pursuit of nuclear weapons.

This indicates that the nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula is far from sparking a war and there still is room and time for bargaining and compromising.

At a ceremony celebrating his victory in the presidential election on December 19, the south's president-elect Roh Moo-hyun stated that he supported a peaceful solution to DPRK's nuclear issue through dialogue and that he would continue Kim Dae-jung's Sunshine Policy.

Achieving peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula is not only what the two sides want but also what their neighbours hope for. China, Russia and Japan have all appealed for a peaceful solution, urging the parties to come back to the negotiating table. Unless this stumbling block is removed, peace on the Korean Peninsula will remain fragile.



LUO JIE/China Daily

TO THE EDITOR

Do not forget aggression history

Editor, Recently, it was reported that teachers in Nanjing donated 300,000 yuan (US\$36,000) to build a special road with the footprints of a victim of the Nanjing Massacre to commemorate the 300,000 people who were killed in the tragedy.

It is more than half a century since Japan surrendered in 1945, but we must never forget the atrocities committed by the Japanese aggressors against the Chinese people.

After the Lugouqiao (Marco Polo Bridge) Incident broke out in 1937, Japanese imperialists began their all-out war of aggression in their attempt to conquer the whole of China. They were frenziedly pursuing in China the policy of "burn all, kill all, and loot all," throwing the Chinese people into misery. In the Nanjing Massacre alone, more than 300,000 people were killed and countless houses were burnt to ashes.

The wheel of history has rolled on since those days when we Chinese were bullied.

However, as the old saying goes, "Forgetting the past means betrayal." Nowadays, Japanese authorities still shut their eyes to history, and acknowledge little. Many times, without sparing a thought for our feelings, Japanese leaders have been to the Yasukuni Shrine to pay homage to fallen soldiers, including Hideki Tojo and 13 others who were executed as war criminals. New history textbooks even whitewash the history of Japan's invasion of China.

Such denials by the Japanese authorities will do great harm to the feelings of the Chinese and no good to Sino-Japan relations. While strongly condemning Japan's wrongdoings, we must be on guard against the revival of Japanese militarism at any moment.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations between China and Japan. So it is necessary to call on people to review their history in order to prevent such a tragedy as the Nanjing Massacre from recurring.

Wu Qiong
Changsha

Reconsider war against Iraq

Editor, It is probably much harder for US President George W. Bush to respond to those across the world who take to the streets with banners opposing the war against Iraq than to the UN, his allies or even Saddam Hussein.

Ordinary people care for nothing more than stability.

They are not going to fight for the "absolute advantage" between nation states, nor for the politics of "regime change" or "semi-colonialism," at the cost of their precious peace.

Oil prices may be a big concern for Americans. However it is an exaggeration to claim they are protecting the whole human race from destructive and chemical weapons. They are not even mentioning where those weapons are really from — can Bush deny the Reagan administration's support of the Iraqi acquisition and use of chemical weapons to prevent an Iranian victory in the war between the two sides?

And it is obvious that the United States wants to seize two major oil production regions by force.

Even the oil price can be controlled through war by the United States, yet how many mothers will grieve forever for their young children lost in the forthcoming battles? Remember how many people mourned for those who lost their lives in Afghanistan?

Humanity should be protected from political ambitions, otherwise they could easily lead to Nazi-like brutality. Domestic problems, like uncertain economic prospects and the widening class gap in US society, should be a more pressing consideration of the Bush administration. If Bush declares that the War is the only solution to those problems, then he has to be brave enough to admit the declining democracy and rising imperialism of US foreign policy. If he does not, then he should stop misbehaving and disturbing world peace, and give the world a break!

Kate Kui
via email

2002: Africa takes steps to progress

JOHANNESBURG: Africa, the world's most poverty-stricken continent, took major steps forward in realizing its long-cherished dream of rejuvenation.

Two major events that will have a far-reaching impact on the lives of more than 800 million Africans this year were July's launch of the African Union (AU) and remarkable progress in the peace process in conflict-ridden countries, such as Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

The year has also witnessed economic advances in the world's second-largest continent, as implementation begins of its ambitious socio-economic programme, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

The NEPAD plan, based largely on ideas drawn up separately by South African President Thabo Mbeki, Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo and other African leaders, aims to secure US\$64 billion of annual investments for Africa, to attain an annual economic growth of 7 per cent over the next 15 years and to halve the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015.

"The task ahead of us is to ensure the success of these new initiatives," said Mbeki, who is also the AU's chairman.

The AU, with 52 member states, took the place of the 39-year-old Organization of African Unity set up to fight colonialism in Africa. Its creation was widely regarded as the biggest event on the continent in 2002.

Born at a time when Africans are entering into a new partnership with the rest of the world, on their own terms, to determine the best route for the continent's revival, it marks the beginning of an era of development for Africa.

Analysts maintain it represents a giant step toward realizing Africa's rejuvenation and has laid a firm foundation for the building of an Africa that is united in a common

programme of social, economic and political development.

At the same time, African leaders adopted NEPAD to initiate a host of projects that will spearhead the continent's social and economic regeneration.

The primary objectives of NEPAD include accelerating poverty reduction, eradicating inequality and fully involving Africa in the globalization process. AU sources say these are to be realized through people-centred development, the achievement of peace and stability, and worldwide support from both governments and private sectors.

As part of the efforts to carry out the NEPAD plan, the NEPAD secretariat has tabled US\$5 billion worth of continental projects and private sectors have been mobilized to take part in the programme.

One of the priority projects will bring power from a hydroelectric station at the Inga falls in the DRC to South Africa, via Angola and Namibia. Construction of the project, scheduled to begin in 2004, will take three years.

Another project is a fibre optic cable providing enhanced telecommunications links between African countries, as well as between the continent and the rest of the world.

Kathryn Sturman, a senior researcher from the South African Institute for Security Studies, said the major achievement for Africa would be the successful setting up and promotion of NEPAD by African leaders, which has won worldwide recognition and support from other continents.

Addressing the World Summit on Sustainable Development here in September, both French President Jacques Chirac and British Prime Minister Tony Blair gave a positive response to NEPAD by proposing a package of measures, such as project design and technical assistance for environmentally-friendly in-

frastructure and utilities projects, public and private partnerships, as well as mobilization of international and domestic funding.

"NEPAD is a welcome pledge by African leaders to the people of Africa to promote peace, to promote security, and to promote people-oriented development," US Secretary of State Colin Powell echoed.

Premier Zhu Rongji also expressed support for the programme, saying "With the establishment of the African Union, and the implementation of NEPAD, the African continent will take on a new look with historic changes and fresh contributions to world peace and development."

The Group of Eight industrialized nations committed US\$6 billion of annual development aid to Africa, and recently, the European

Union (EU) ministers and top officials from the Southern African Development Community held a two-day meeting in Maputo with a pledge of US\$98 million in the EU aid to the region.

Thanks to tremendous efforts by African leaders, with the support of the international community, a number of long-protracted conflicts, one of the major obstacles impeding the development of Africa, are coming to an end, providing a favourable environment for the continent's rejuvenation.

An end to the four-year clashes in the DRC appears to be in sight after all parties involved signed a pact in Pretoria, South Africa, on December 17.

Xinhua

China Daily Newspaper Group

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