

A6 OPINION

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A huge stink about plans to burn trash

Wang Pan and Li Jianmin

WHEN hundreds of people in a south China city took to the streets last week to protest a planned garbage incinerator project, they highlighted a growing problem for China's booming cities.

The protestors in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong Province, were demanding the local government scrap the incinerator plant, which, they claimed, would release carcinogens.

"The incineration of household garbage can generate cancer-causing substances like dioxin," resident Guo Lin said. "It is really absurd. How can the government come up with such an idea? More than 300,000 people are living around the proposed incinerator plant."

The government and residents have been divided on whether to build the plant since late September when the plan was first unveiled.

"The Panyu District is home to 2.5 million people and almost 600,000 tons of household garbage are created every year," said Ye Wen, deputy director of the Panyu District Bureau of Urban Utilities and Landscaping. "Our current waste disposal capabilities cannot cope with the increasing amount of household garbage."

The new incinerator is planned for the site of a former landfill in Huijiang Village, with a designed handling capacity of 2,000 tons daily. It would also be a trash-fired power plant.

"After years of deliberation, the municipal government has decided to develop trash-fired power plants as they do not occupy much land and can utilize resources very efficiently," said Xu Jianyun, deputy director of the Guangzhou Municipal Committee of Urban Administration.

He said the city, with a population of more than 10 million, generates up to 12,000 tons of household garbage each day. "If new waste treatment facilities are not built, Guangzhou will face a huge garbage crisis over the next two years."

Lu Zhiyi, deputy secretary-general of the Guangzhou municipal government and a strong supporter of the incinerator project, dismissed pollution fears. "With modern technology, the waste discharge of the incinerator is able to meet national and international standards," he said.

But residents disagree. "We have collected a great deal of information about waste-to-energy plants on the Internet, in books and field surveys, all showing that they are heavily polluting and have been abandoned in many countries," resident Zhao Hui said.

"We can learn from developed countries and solve the problem through garbage classification and land-filling. Why do we have to use incineration?" he said.

In addition to health and pollution fears, residents worry about the value of their properties.

It is a dilemma not only for the Panyu District and Guangzhou, but for cities across China, as protests against government plans to build waste incinerators have also been reported in Beijing, Shenzhen in Guangdong Province and cities in Jiangsu Province earlier this year.

"The government and public are quarreling over many technical issues," said Wang Zechu, a counselor for the Guangdong provincial government. "Both government officials and residents fail to provide convincing environment and health data related to the incinerator."

Local residents say they should have been invited to discuss the incinerator from the outset when the project was proposed.

The Panyu district government has halted the controversial project and will launch a half-year consultation process with the public, the media and experts to look for a better way to treat household garbage.

(The authors are Xinhua writers.)

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Coke and McDonald's aren't modernization

Editor's note: Shanghai Daily reporter Yan Zhen had an exclusive interview with Surendra Shrestha, a director of the United Nations Environment Program, in Shanghai last week, on the global fight against greenhouse gas emissions. Here are some excerpts.

Q: Why are many countries slow to act against greenhouse gas emission that have been proved the culprit in global warming?

A: There are some countries, like China, (the Republic of) Korea and Japan that have shown low-carbon economy also means job opportunities, new technologies. But for some bigger industries, it's difficult for them to change and they don't want to change.

If you and I act today, the benefit is global and it could be seen in 100 or 200 years from now. It's difficult for people to conceive why I should do it and why not him?

But in fact, that's the same with what we do in our home. Two kids are fighting, but parents would say, hey, what you are fighting for? Sometimes people just forget that we should go to the global level.

Q: The United Nations will hold a Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen next month. What's your expectation?

A: We may not achieve a legal framework, but there must be an agreement that we have to change our lifestyle into a low-carbon format.

Q: Is there a way to curb global warming at the moment?

A: Yes. If you look at the total climate change-inducing greenhouse gases, CO₂ is half the story. It could be different issues if we look at the other half of the greenhouse gases. For

example, we have been successful in reducing ozone, through the Montreal Protocol.

There are other gases that contribute to climate change, for example black carbon, which comes from the transport sector, especially the diesel side, and rural households.

That part is up to 30 percent of CO₂ standard.

But globally, we haven't focused on that side yet.

If we focus on non-CO₂, we can get immediate benefits and up to 50 percent of the CO₂ equivalent. That is something that can happen tomorrow.

Leaders should focus on that, which is quicker and cheaper.

In CO₂ reduction, lots of technologies have to be developed, but in non-CO₂, the technologies already exist. We need political work, technology and money.

Q: How do you judge China's CO₂ reduction efforts?

A: China's plan is more than most countries have done or what they are planning to do.

There are a few countries that are doing more, but China is such a big economy and is making change in that big economy. It takes time.

Can it do more? Yes. I think it can, but it's already ahead of many countries.

China doesn't need to follow the development path of other countries — build industries, pollute the atmosphere, land, harm the people, get rich and then try to clean it. You don't need Coke and McDonald's to show you are developed, you don't need to copy that format.

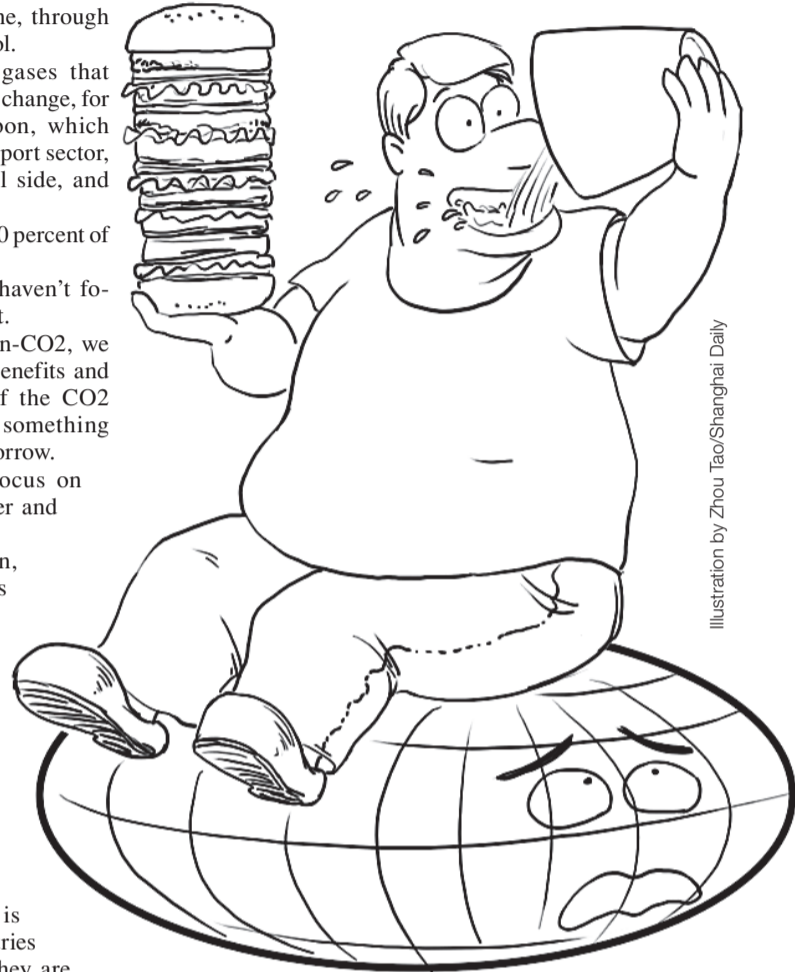


Illustration by Zhou Tao/Shanghai Daily



China doesn't need to follow the development path of other countries ... You don't need Coke and McDonald's to show you are developed, you don't need to copy that format.

— Surendra Shrestha

Climate talks: not just empty words

Li Huizi and Niu Qi

CHINA will try to make a constructive contribution to the Copenhagen climate summit next month and will not accept a conclusion with an "empty" declaration.

"The Copenhagen conference will be a milestone," said Li Gao, an official with the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), who has been a key climate change negotiator for China for years.

"We will try to make the summit successful and we will not accept that it ends with an empty and so-called political declaration," Li said last Tuesday at a forum, two weeks ahead of the long-anticipated summit.

Representatives of about 190 countries will attend the 15th Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) from December 7 to 18 in Copenhagen, Denmark.

The meeting is expected to renew GHG emissions reduction targets set by the UNFCCC Kyoto Protocol, the first stage of which is

to expire in 2012. It is also expected to further outline the post-2012 negotiation path.

Li said, "the Kyoto Protocol and the Bali Road Map have always been China's bottom line in international climate negotiations."

The Bali Road Map, agreed by UNFCCC parties in 2007, laid out a two-year process to finalizing a binding agreement in 2009 in Copenhagen. It covers climate-related aspects such as emission cutting, mitigation, forestation, adaptation, financing and technology transfer.

The current state of climate negotiations, he said, "has made some progress, but is seriously inadequate."

The United States has been under pressure from other nations in the run-up to Copenhagen, as the American Clean Energy and Security Act (ACES), aiming to mitigate climate change, is unlikely to be passed by the US Senate by the end of this year.

Despite all the difficulties ahead, Li said financing offered by developed nations and technological transfer had made some

progress, which paved the way for success for the conference.

Li said China "will not accept any separate legal document" that put the Kyoto Protocol aside. Although some developed countries such as the United States cannot publicly deny the validity of the Kyoto Protocol, they could use various hidden means to make it legally useless, and let another legal document, in line with their own interest, replace it.

Communication between developing and developed nations is important. Take the world's two largest greenhouse gas emitters. China and the US signed a memorandum of understanding encouraging cooperation on climate change and cleaner energy in July.

During US President Barack Obama's visit to China earlier this month, the two sides signed a joint statement in Beijing after talks between Obama and Chinese President Hu Jintao, agreeing that "the transition to a green and low-carbon economy is essential."

(The authors are Xinhua writers.)