

## CHINA

# Courts find thousands not guilty

Preventing wrongful convictions crucial in human rights protection, officials say

By CAO YIN

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A total of 8,491 criminal defendants across China were declared not guilty between 2013 and the end of June this year because evidence in their cases was not sufficient to convict them.

The Supreme People's Court, the country's top court, released the number at a news conference held by the State Council Information Office on Thursday, highlighting the importance of protecting human rights in the process of handling criminal cases.

"Chinese courts have strengthened the protection of human rights in recent years to ensure that defendants can be given legal aid and a legal defense as well as ensuring that innocent people are not punished," Jiang Wei, vice-president of the top court, told the news conference.

He said stronger protection of human rights is key to improving people's sense of security.

While paying more attention to preventing wrongful convictions, he added that courts nationwide have also intensified the fight against crimes involving people's livelihoods to keep the public safe and maintain social stability.

"We've solved a number of cases related to illegal fundraising, telecom fraud, disturbing pandemic control, infringing personal information and pollution, with harsher punishments for offenders, as we wanted to provide residents with a safe living and working environment," Jiang said.

In addition, courts at all levels gave more legal support to promoting family harmony and protecting workers' rights, said He Rong, executive vice-president of the top court.

She said Chinese courts have issued 9,227 personal safety protection orders, similar to restraining orders in the West, to those subjected to domestic violence, adding that more than 4.47 million employment-related disputes had been concluded since 2013.

"Furthermore, we've also focused more on dealing with cases of environmental protection, hoping to offer a healthy, comfortable and beautiful environment for residents," He said.

He said the measures show the people-centered approach of Chinese courts, adding they will continue to solve problems that people care about most and contribute to promoting the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects.

## Hot skills



Sparks fly during a welding competition in Anlong, Guizhou province, on Thursday. Lathe workers, welders and electricians competed in the province's first skills competition.

LIU CHAOFU / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Big catch



Workers net silver and bighead carp on Qiandao Lake in Chun'an, Zhejiang province, on Thursday. More than 60 metric tons of carp were harvested by the Qiandao Lake Group, a local fishing and agri-tourism company. WANG JIANCAI / FOR CHINA DAILY

# Expansion of sites collecting legislative opinions boosts grassroots participation

By CAO YIN

The number of stations in China collecting legislative opinions from grassroots areas has grown from four to 22 in the past six years, and they are playing a major role in implementing the "whole-process democracy" called for by President Xi Jinping.

The establishment of the stations was an initiative launched by the Legislative Affairs Commission of the National People's Congress Standing Committee, the country's top legislature, in 2015 to gather suggestions on lawmaking from residents and then resolve their problems through legislation.

The first stations were in Shanghai's Hongqiao subdistrict and the standing committees of the local legislatures in Xiangyang, Hubei province, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, and Lintao county, Gansu province.

People from all walks of life can visit the stations and offer advice to the legislatures. The one in Xiangyang had provided more than 1,100 suggestions on 58 items of national-level legislation by April, and 149 of them had been accepted by the top legislature.

The success saw the Legislative Affairs Commission decide to establish more stations. Tong Weidong, an official from the commission, said they are "a bridge between legislators and residents and are also a good reflection of China's whole-process democracy."

In November 2019, Xi, who is also general secretary of Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Mili-

tary Commission, undertook an inspection tour in Hongqiao, where he first put forward the concept of whole-process democracy.

China is marching on a political development road of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and its people's democracy is a whole-process democracy, Xi said while exchanging ideas with residents during the inspection.

He highlighted the development of the concept in his keynote speech at a grand gathering in Beijing on July 1 to mark the CPC's centenary.

To further implement the central leadership's requirements and diversify the sources of legislation, Tong said the commission had set up 22 stations for gathering legislative opinions at the grassroots level by July, covering two-thirds of the country's provincial-level regions.

He said the stations not only help people from various walks of life participate in legislative affairs, but also give lawmakers more chances to better understand what people most need.

"It's a people-centered approach, showing that legislation comes from the people and is for the people," he added.

As of August, the stations had given more than 6,700 suggestions involving 115 draft laws and annual legislative plans to the top legislature, and many ideas had been accepted after review, Tong said, adding that more stations will be created and will be set up in more organizations besides the standing committees of local legislatures, communities and universities.

The commission has also worked toward developing whole-process

democracy by inviting more NPC deputies to participate in legislative research and sessions of the NPC Standing Committee.

NPC deputies have made more than 900 visits to Beijing to attend meetings of the NPC Standing Committee since March 2018 to give feedback on draft bills to committee members, said Zhai Wei, deputy director of the research office of the NPC Standing Committee's general office.

All NPC deputies gather in Beijing once a year to attend the NPC's full plenary session, the country's most important political event. When the full session closes, its standing committee generally holds a session every two months, making and amending laws as well as deciding on the appointment and removal of government personnel.

"We've also intensified efforts to keep in touch with the deputies to ask them to reflect on problems and ideas at the grassroots level in a timely manner, as what people demand is what we should solve," Zhai said.

For example, Li Zhanshu, chairman of the NPC Standing Committee, has held 13 symposiums involving deputies since March 2018, with more than 660 face-to-face talks with them, Zhai said.

While further promoting the building of the stations and helping NPC deputies play a role in developing whole-process democracy, Zhai added that the NPC Standing Committee will also urge government agencies to get closer to the people, listen to their suggestions and ensure they can effectively participate in national and social affairs.

# Fish ladder: Project helps safeguard balanced ecosystem

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"The migration season for fish in the Songhua River is from May to August. However, the channel has been blocked for more than 80 years, since the old dam was built in 1937," said Liu Yalian, chairwoman of the labor union of the Fengman construction bureau of State Grid Xinyuan, which runs the station. Installed capacity of the station reaches 1.48 million kilowatts of electricity, mainly offering power for Northeast China.

Interruption of fish migration may separate a species upstream and downstream, reducing genetic diversity. It may also change the habitats of some fish, affecting their growth and reproduction and threatening the environment, experts said.

The company began building the innovative fish transport system in 2018, in line with the national strategy to emphasize ecological preservation during development projects, Liu said.

The system — an elaborate fish ladder — began trial operations in July. It has enabled fish migration to resume, allowing some 50,000 fish to pass in July and August, including some rare and endangered species.

Du Xiaoyan, director of the science and education department at the Jilin Academy of Aquatic Science, said the fish ladder will ease the negative influence of dams on migration, and play an important role in promoting a diverse gene pool. It will support the breeding, growing and overwintering of fish, helping safeguard a balanced ecosystem in the Songhua River Basin, as well as sustainable development.

## Safety first

It takes four to seven hours to transport one bucket of fish. Oxygen is injected into the water, and the condition of the fish is monitored. Photos of the fish are taken by underwater cameras to tally numbers and identify species. These are uploaded to computers in real time.

The system was designed to avoid people touching or netting the fish, which can harm their chances of survival. "No fish has been found dead when the release gate is opened," Liu added.

Because it is automated, the system requires only two maintenance workers and four workers on the ship to complete the assisted migration. Operating costs are thus minimized and efficiency is enhanced.

"We didn't expect the system to function so well from the start, but seeing the massive number of fish of different shapes and colors jump into water, we felt happy," Liu said. "We even saw hundreds of ospreys gather there."

Challenges include stabilizing water currents at fish collection points. Water flows around a station can change drastically in the electrical regulation process, especially during peak output, said Zhou Binghao, senior engineer of the program from China Water Northeastern Investigation, Design and Research.

Precise monitoring of water levels is needed to judge when to open and close the sluices, he said. Equipment must be kept in top condition to make the system work, so unfixed items are stored in a warehouse during the winter.

"The success of this program will serve as an example for other large hydropower stations," Zhou said, adding that in the future, efforts will be made to optimize the system to attract more fish and reduce transport time.

"The emphasis on ecology shows that awareness of environmental protection is rising as national economic strength grows," he said.

Li Xintong, 21, who lives in Fengman district, Jilin, said: "I heard about the fish ladder and I think it's a great thing. There are more fish in the Songhua River with different variety. The surrounding environment also became better. I'm glad to see our ecological environment improving."

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# Concepts: Nation's model of democracy 'produces good results'

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Qin said today's China enjoys a whole-process democracy. People have the right to election, and people's congresses from the local level to the national level are similar to US state legislatures and Congress. Deputies are directly elected to people's congresses at county level. Those above the county level are indirectly elected. In addition, China has a unique system of political consultation for the people to exercise democracy.

Taking the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) as an example, Qin said more than 1,000 suggestions were summarized from more than 1 million online posts, with further adjustments made after deliberations by the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference National Committee.

China also has a long history of choosing talent based on merit and abilities, Qin pointed out. China introduced an exam system more than 1,000 years ago to select talent regardless of age or wealth. Today, China's officials are

also tested and start from the local level of government.

"President Xi Jinping became a farmer in a poor village in northwestern China at the age of 16. He was appointed Party secretary of Shanghai, the biggest city in China, at 54. The decades in between saw him work at various posts and in different places, and the populations he served varied from several hundred to several hundred thousand, and millions to tens of millions," Qin said in illustrating China's system.

"China's model of democracy has produced good results," Qin said. A 10-year survey by the Harvard Kennedy School has shown that the Chinese people's satisfaction with the CPC has been above 90 percent for each of the past 10 years.

"Isn't it obvious that both China's people-centered philosophy and President Lincoln's 'of the people, by the people, for the people' are for the sake of the people? Shall we understand China's socialist whole-process democracy as this: from the people, to the people, with the people, for the people?" Qin asked.

"China and the US are different in

their history, culture and political systems," Qin said.

"Our two countries should not and cannot change each other. Instead, we should break ideological barriers, discard the zero-sum mentality, respect other countries and accommodate each other without losing our own distinctions, so as to get along with each other in peace."

## Worries over 'competition'

Qin said he is worried that the US uses competition to define China-US relations.

"Competition on the US side often takes the form of confrontation, especially on major issues concerning China's core interests. If this does not change, it will undermine China's effort to promote our mutual trust and cooperation," said Qin.

In a letter to the online event, former US president Jimmy Carter expressed the hope that "this meeting will steer US-China relations in a more amicable direction in the years to come."

The conversation was joined by about 10 individuals, including scholars, former diplomats, experts



Qin Gang

hope for improvement were at the center of the online conversation.

Eric Yang, vice-president of the Harvard College China Forum, expressed such concerns.

"In more than one way, citizens in the two countries are not speaking the same language discussing the current and future state of the US-China relations," Yang said.

"As China continues to develop, I am concerned that the difference in perceptions will also grow to distort both sides' best intentions and diplomacy."

Bush China Foundation Chairman Neil Bush said the world's two largest economies need to cooperate on things like climate change, green development, food security, poverty alleviation, responses to current and

future pandemics, and all issues related to everything digital.

"There has been an onslaught of anti-Chinese sentiment in the US over recent years that has led to growing suspicions about China and her motives. It is with this backdrop that the job of the ambassador to the United States from China is so critical," Bush said.

## 'Low hanging fruits'

David Firestein, CEO and president of the Bush China Foundation, said he hopes to soon see "moderate improvement in both the substance and tenet of the relationship" especially in areas of "low hanging fruits" such as cultural and educational exchanges, and in trade by removing "the imbecilic and job killing" tariffs.

Some participants expressed the hope of seeing the reopening of both China's consulate general in Houston and the US consulate general in Chengdu.

Qin said that because it was the US that took the unilateral action to shut down the Chinese consulate, it will be up to the US to initiate the steps to reinstate the two consulates.