

THAILAND



A sedated tiger lies on a stretcher as officials begin to move tigers from Thailand's controversial Tiger Temple, a popular tourist destination which has come under fire over the welfare of its big cats in Kanchanaburi province, west of Bangkok, Thailand. CHAIWAT SUBPRASOM / REUTERS

State wildlife officials remove tigers from Buddhist temple

By AGENCIES in Bangkok

Wildlife officials in Thailand on Monday began removing some of the 137 tigers held at a Buddhist temple following accusations that the monks were involved in illegal breeding and trafficking of the animals.

The director of Thailand's Wildlife Conservation Office, Teunjai Noochdumrong, said three tigers were tranquilized and transported on Monday in an operation involving about 1,000 state personnel that is expected to continue for a week. The animals will be taken to

three government animal refuges elsewhere in Thailand.

The temple, a popular money-earning tourist attraction in the western province of Kanchanaburi, has been criticized by animal welfare activists because of allegations it is not properly set up to care for the animals and flouted regulations restricting their trade.

The monks resisted previous efforts to take away the tigers, and impeded the effort again on Monday morning despite the massive show of force by the authorities. They relented after police obtained

137 tigers

were maintained by monks at the temple in the western province of Kanchanaburi.

a court order. More than 300 officials remained at the temple overnight to ensure the tigers remained safe.

The temple recently made arrangements to operate as a zoo, but the plan fell through when the government determined that the operators failed to secure sufficient resources.

Monday's raid was the latest move by authorities in a tug-of-war since 2001 to bring the tigers under state control.

"We have a court warrant this time, unlike previous times, when we only asked for the temple's cooperation, which did not work," said Adisorn Nuchdamrong, deputy director-general of the Department of National Parks. "International pressure concerning illegal wildlife trafficking is also part of why we're acting now."

AP—REUTERS

AFGHANISTAN

New hopes and old fears arise as first cement factory reopens

By REUTERS in Jabal Saraj, Afghanistan

After a break of 20 years, Afghanistan's first cement factory is again clanking noisily in the countryside near Kabul as crushed-up limestone rocks rattle along a battered conveyor belt to the newly restored kiln.

In an area desperately short of industry and jobs, workers hope the relaunch of the plant, built by Czech engineers in 1957 and shut by the Taliban in 1995, heralds the revival of an industry shattered by decades of war and destruction.

"By selling our products and improving the factory's production, we can avoid having our young generation go abroad," said factory worker Amir Mohammad. "If there are job possibilities, they can stay with their families and look after their children."

But the outdated state-owned plant 75 km outside Kabul also shows how far there is to go before that promise can be achieved and there are serious questions whether the plant has a viable future unless it is thoroughly modernized.

Jabal Saraj, which now employs 150 workers, is a small factory with daily capacity of 100 metric tons and equipment that is at least 40 years out of date, the US Geological Survey said in a 2011 report.

"We've tried our best and got the factory running using its old machinery," said Abdul Wakil, one of a group of former workers who have returned to help get the plant working again. "As long as we have electricity, it will work."

Talks with a private operator to develop a separate, larger plant at Jabal Saraj



By selling our products we can avoid having our young generation go abroad."

Amir Mohammad, cement factory worker

have run for months, but for now, the government has decided the old plant still serves a purpose, a spokesman for the country's mines and petroleum ministry said.

Drop in demand

"This old factory is useful and has a profitable production capacity," Mohyaddin Noori added. "It provides job opportunities."

Afghanistan's only other major cement manufacturer, the Ghori cement plant, has daily capacity of more than

1,000 metric tons, but domestic industry is dwarfed by the millions of tons of imports from neighbors, including Pakistan and Iran.

That fierce competition makes it tough to find domestically produced cement in Kabul's main wholesale markets, even despite the fact that domestic cement's bulk and relatively low cost should penalize foreign cement, trucked in hundreds of miles.

"We have only Pakistani cement," said trader Ershad Shinwari. "Afghan-made cement is not coming to us."

Demand for building materials has fallen since international forces left in 2014 but the market has not collapsed and director Mohammadi hopes for domestic growth.

"There is huge demand for cement in Afghanistan," he said. "We've got the factory working, so it will give investors a chance."

For the moment, however, Jabal Saraj relies on government subsidy to survive. The economics may be tough, but it is people nearby who are mainly looking for work.



A man works at the newly reopened Jabal Saraj cement factory in Jabal Saraj, north of Kabul, Afghanistan, in April. AHMAD MASSOOD / REUTERS

Pengzhou special

Emerging city clinches cooperation for growth

By LIYU in Chengdu liyu@chinadaily.com.cn

Pengzhou, a county-level city in Southwest China's Sichuan province, has built friendly cooperation ties, or sister-city relationships, with 11 foreign cities, including Ipswich in Australia, Mürzzuschlag in Austria, and Vercelli in Italy, ranking it first in Sichuan province in terms of the total number of sister-city relationships established.

In a recent move, the city agreed on a series of measures designed to boost growth through international cooperation at a meeting with a French delegation on May 19.

Han Yi, Party chief of Pengzhou, along with other local government officials, met with a visiting mission from Seine-et-Marne in France's Ile-de-France region, to discuss possible cooperation in the fields of tourism, trade, culture, agriculture and environmental protection.

The meeting was concluded with the signing of a memorandum of friendly cooperation, which will lead to the establishment of an official cooperation relationship between the two sides in 2017, and will see Seine-et-Marne become Pengzhou's 11th foreign partner town in the same year.

Jean-Jacques Barbaux, president of the general council of Seine-et-Marne and head of the French delegation, was impressed by both Pengzhou's natural environment and its development potential.

"Pengzhou is both a young and old city," he said. "It has 4,000 years' history as well as fashionable modern styles. Bailu town in Pengzhou is very French, and makes us feel at home and comfortable. There is a Chinese saying that though they are born a thousand miles apart, souls which are one shall meet."

Bailu town established a friend-

ly cooperation relationship with Moret-sur-Loing, a former commune in Seine-et-Marne, last year. The Pengzhou government invited Moret-sur-Loing to participate in the third Tianfu Ancient Town Art Festival in Chengdu this year, and asked the town to send a troupe to perform at the festival. It also hopes Moret-sur-Loing will establish an office in Bailu to coordinate bilateral cooperation projects.

Moret-sur-Loing will also open a French restaurant and bakery in Bailu, according to the local government.

Pengzhou sent a delegation to New Zealand, Vanuatu and Australia in early May, during which city mayor Dong Li and Owen Gavika, mayor of Luganville in Vanuatu, signed a memorandum of friendly cooperation.

The memorandum makes Luganville the first city in a South Pacific Island nation to establish a friendly cooperation relationship with a city in Sichuan.

Pengzhou's government has been active in its search for domestic and foreign investors and trade partners through a number of influential trade and investment fairs and exhibitions in China.

In recent years, Pengzhou has attracted 23 large-scale projects in a range of sectors, with investors agreeing to spend about 6.41 billion yuan (\$1.05 billion) on those projects.

The city has also attracted technical and business talents to engage in research and development work and set up new ventures there.

Wang Tao is one such talent who is realizing his dream in Pengzhou. With a doctorate in chemical and biological engineering from the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom, Wang is now president of three healthcare technology companies in Pengzhou.

Wang was born in the city and has a deep emotional bond with his hometown.

He returned through a government talent-hunting program, called Jinpeng Yingcai, or talents



Pengzhou reaches a memorandum of friendly cooperation with Seine-et-Marne in France's Ile-de-France region. Seine-et-Marne will become Pengzhou's 11th foreign partner town in 2017. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Left: Longxing Temple, built from 405-418 during the East Jin Dynasty and with more than 1,600 years of history, has an array of pagodas. The major pagoda stands at 81 meters, making it Asia's tallest diamond-throne pagoda with Buddhist relics. Right: Wang Tao (right), an overseas returnee to Pengzhou, with a staff member of his company.



in golden Pengzhou, after gaining his doctorate.

"Pengzhou can make good use of Chengdu's technology and talent resources. I can find the right people for my businesses at Chengdu's key universities," Wang said.

With the government's help, Wang's companies are negotiating with major local hospitals, telecommunications companies and banks to cooperate on big data mining projects and applications in public health.

Last year, Pengzhou attracted a number of senior-level professional talents, including Wang, and launched a venture capital fund totaling 500 million yuan to support innovation and growth of new businesses.



Pengzhou is known as the "hometown of peony". The earliest written record detailing the planting of the flower was found in the city in Tang Dynasty (618-907).

A potted history of Pengzhou

Pengzhou is 25 kilometers to the northwest of downtown Chengdu, capital of Sichuan province. It covers an area of 1,421 square kilometers, and has a population of 810,000.

It is the core zone of Chengdu-Deyang-Mianyang economic zone, and is also an important part of the Longmen Mountain ecology tourism belt.

The city is a national vegetable planting base and is rich in herbal medicine resources. As a cradle of the ancient Shu Kingdom, which appeared in what is now Sichuan about 3,000 years ago, Pengzhou has a long history.

Pengzhou's annual GDP grew at 16 percent each year over the past five years. Its GDP hit 33.36 billion yuan (\$5.13 billion) in 2015, and the average GDP per capita was \$6,122. Main industries are petrochemical, biopharmaceuticals, aircraft engines, home textiles and clothing.

