

Chinese leaders 'have failed to shield environment from economic growth'

One of China's top environmental experts has hit out at his country's rulers **for failing to shield the environment** from "the wild pursuit of economic growth".

A couple wearing a mask and a scarf visit the Pudong Lujiazui financial area in Shanghai Photo: REUTERS

By Tom Phillips, Shanghai

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Professor Qu Geping – who became the first director of **China's** environmental protection agency in 1987 – told Hong Kong's South China Morning Post that **greater accountability** was needed for Beijing to win its war on pollution.

"I've always felt ill at ease whenever I was recognised for my contribution to China's environmental protection, because the country now faces so many environmental problems," Prof Qu said. "But looking back, there was not much more I could have achieved as an individual. **Without actions from the whole government and without changing the system, nothing could be done.**"

"I would not call the past 40 years' efforts of environmental protection a total failure," added Prof. Qu, who is now 83 and has received a number of prizes for his work. "But I have to admit that governments **have done far from enough to rein in the wild pursuit of economic growth and failed to avoid some of the worst pollution scenarios we, as policymakers, had predicted.**"

Prof. Qu's interview came as Chinese authorities grappled with the damaging fallout from an ongoing period of severe pollution in Beijing and other major cities.

Record levels of air-pollution in the Chinese capital have prompted public anger and calls for greater transparency in the state-run media. On Sunday, the official Xinhua news agency reported that **Beijing authorities would introduce "unprecedented" new regulations** to slash pollution levels.

In the wake of Beijing's so-called "airpocalypse", state media has looked overseas for inspiration in its battle against smog, with lengthy reports on the fight against pollution in London and the Turkish capital Ankara.

In a piece about 1952's Great Smog of London, Xinhua noted that pollution had been a "far bigger killer than [Jack the] Ripper ever was." "How did London get into that position and what did it do to tackle it?" Xinhua added, pointing to "clean air legislation" introduced by parliament in the 1950s and 1960s.

Speaking to the South China Morning Post, Prof. Qu blamed a lack of government accountability for China's current environmental predicament.

Asked why Beijing's attempts to reconcile rapid economic growth with environmental protection had not been effective, Prof Qu replied: "I think it is because there was no supervision of governments." "It is because the power is still above the law."

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