



## On the road to modernization

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### Introduction

China is on her way to become a modernization through the assistance of fast growing economy. The unexpected government administration's modernization has been shown in the most recent China National Petroleum Corporation's (CNPC) chemical plant explosion in Heilongjiang Province (located at the northeast of China, west of Korea, south of Russia). The local government denied any contamination 3 days ago (November 22) but sent a delegate of senior official to the affected cities to apologize. It is a great step moving forward. Next time, I hope there would be no denial.

### The incidence

On 13<sup>th</sup> November, 2005, a CNPC benzene production No. 101 Plant located at Daqing where is at Songhua River (means the river of pine flower) exploded. The government official and CNPC claimed that the explosion generated no contamination. There was no untreated water being discharged to the Songhua River which feeds the water supply of two major down stream cities Jilin City and Harbin. In fact 100 tons of contaminants included the poisonous and carcinogen benzene and nitrobenzene were leaked into the river. On November 22, the official denied the lethal situation, however the water supply was interrupted. The bottled water was sold up to 4-5 times of the regular prices. Stocks at the supermarkets were emptied.

Benzene is a by product of distillation of crude oil. It has its chemical usage as a product. At the refinery, benzene is also used a solvent or chemical agent to product various products. This hydrocarbon is one of the most active organic compounds that make it poisonous to human and animal. The effect is accumulative. When ingested or contacted, the hydrocarbon could not be excreted. It will be accumulated between cells. At a certain level, the toxicity would surface either as poison or cancer. Benzene also has a very strong adhesive characteristic that allows it to contaminate the soil and accumulates. As the result, the underground water system that feed the wells becomes toxic.

### Government has two mouths

This is the Chinese saying for government's double talk. They can present fact in two polarized ways and no body can challenge it. This attitude has been demonstrated in this explode incidence. In the past, the event could be covered up. This means no clean up will be carried out and the people drinking the water will suffer.

In a way, the CNPC and the provincial government have increased the transparency and disclosed the true with an apology.

Today (November 25), 71 tons of mineral water had been delivered to the Harbin residents accompanied by Jiao Zhengzhong, vice-governor of Jilin Province who delivered the apology in person.

This is progress; a good sign. On the other hand, transparency was not there at day one. Truth may not fix the water shortage and water supply interruption. It maintains the trust of people. Now in the people's mind, a question will always be asked: is there another side of the story. Honesty is the foundation of a good government because it could stimulate trust which stimulates dialogue which fortifies cooperation which shortens emergency response time which reduces cost.

A modern government should like an organization. The state head is the Chief Executive Officer. The administration should be run with high transparency. One should not use national security as excuse for covert missions.

Since the Tinanman event, China has changed to increase the government's transparency. The respect of human right is part of the modernization through transparency. By denying the human right that opens different interpretation of the charter. It will revert the state to the *two mouths government*.

Transparency is not just for present. It is also for the past. What happened should be recorded truly. Traditional Chinese historians have few examples to do the job properly. This should be changed.

## Resources

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