

Pollution documentary attracts huge interest in China

March 2 2015, by Christopher Bodeen



In this file photo taken Saturday, Nov. 29, 2014, pedestrians wear masks against the pollution as they cross an overhead bridge over a busy highway in Beijing, China. A slick new documentary on China's environmental woes has racked up more than 175 million online views in two days, underscoring growing concern in the country over the impact of air, water and soil pollution. Costing about \$160,000 to make, the documentary won praise Sunday March 1, 2015, from new Chinese Environment Minister Chen Jining. (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan, File)

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more than 175 million online views in two days, underscoring growing concern in the country over the impact of air, water and soil pollution.

Hosted by former state television reporter Chai Jing, "Under the Dome" offers a well-produced look at the cost to the environment of 30 years of breakneck economic development.

Chai discusses the issues before a studio audience while standing in front of a screen showing videos of polluting industries, interviews with affected people and visits by her to sites in China and abroad illustrating the extent of the problem.

It also faults government regulators for failing to crack down on polluters and permitting the widespread burning of the most polluting types of coal, oil and gasoline.

Chai said she was moved to produce the 104-minute documentary out of concern for the effect of pollution on her infant daughter's health. Costing about \$160,000 to make, the documentary won praise Sunday from new Chinese Environment Minister Chen Jining, who said it reflected "growing public concern over environmental protection and threats to human health."

The documentary was posted online on Saturday. By Monday evening, it had more than 175 million views on popular video sites Youku and Tencent. Better produced than much of the stodgy fare on state television, it falls stylistically somewhere between a TED talk and Al Gore's 2006 Academy Award-winning documentary "An Inconvenient Truth."

The documentary prompted wide speculation over how much official support Chai received and whether the production was truly independent or just an example of slick, viewer-friendly state publicity.

Years of choking pollution in Beijing and other major cities has fed a groundswell of opposition to growth at any cost, and the slowing economy has allowed the government to take more measures to crack down on heavily polluting factories in the cement, steel and petrochemical industries.

In November, the government pledged to produce 20 percent of the country's total energy with non-fossil fuels by 2030, doubling its current level, while capping growth in carbon emissions by the same year, it not earlier.

"The environment is a sensitive issue that concerns the interests of all sides," said Yu Guoming, a journalism professor at Beijing's Renmin University, commenting on the documentary's popularity.

"Fighting pollution enjoys broad support from the public and ... can also be used as leverage to promote changes to the economic structure in the future," Yu said.

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