

Shanghai mayor vows more transparency

SHANGHAI: Mayor Han Zheng yesterday pledged to build a more transparent and credible administration after admitting that malpractices in combating unlicensed taxis had severely dampened the public's trust in the government.

"We must face public concerns and media inquiries over our inadequacies, and take the initiative to improve through effective and practical measures in order to build a just and corruption-free government," he said in his government report to the annual municipal people's congress that opened yesterday.

Han said the government would publicize information directly related to the interests of the people and standardize administrative enforcement by defining enforcement bodies, improving accountability systems and disclosing administrative penalties.

"We'll make public administrative fines and confiscations and manage them on a centralized platform, and prevent them from being used for the interests of related government departments," he said.

In a crackdown of unlicensed taxis that started around the year 2000, the Shanghai traffic law enforcement bureau seized approximately 50,000 illegal taxi drivers every year. Each was fined 2,000 yuan to 50,000 yuan (\$300-\$7,400).

But there had been no information available on how the money had been utilized, which critics said was a show of power abuse among local traffic law enforcement authorities.

District governments also offered public rewards of up to 600 yuan for tip-offs about illegal cabs. They even went further by employing civilians to act as baits to entrap innocent drivers.

On Sept 8, Zhang Hui, 32, picked up a man who said he was suffering from a stomachache and begged for a ride. Zhang was later cornered by a group of law enforcement officers, who fined him 10,000 yuan.

On Oct 14, 19-year-old Sun Zhongjie cut off his finger to demonstrate his innocence after being entrapped in a similar way. He cleared his name on Oct 26, when the district government apologized to him and admitted to the unethical practice.

Mayor Han said in order to prevent such scandals from repeating, the government would step up training for administrative enforcement officers, so that only the qualified get credentials to fulfill their responsibilities.

Xu Xiaoqing, vice president of Shanghai Lawyers' Association and deputy to the ongoing congress, said institutional improvement is the key to controlling power abuse.

"By decoupling revenue and expenditure of government departments through information disclosure, people can expect to see a cleaner and more transparent government," he said.

Source:China Daily