



Government and Policy

Construction ban still par for the golf course

By WANG QIAN (China Daily)
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Golfing industry has huge potential despite laws against building greens

BEIJING - Banned since 2004 in China for being "too bourgeois", golf-course construction has been secretly booming, senior land superintendents said on Tuesday.

Li Jianqin, head of the law enforcement and supervision department with the Ministry of Land and Resources, warned that an approved plan to build golf courses in Hainan province as it becomes a global resort does not mean others can ignore the ban.

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The central government imposed a moratorium in 2004 to protect the country's shrinking land resources from becoming golf courses, and all courses opening after 2004 are illegal, he added during a press conference in Beijing.

Detecting illegal courses is top of the agenda for the ministry, Li said.

In 2008, Yitong Coalification Co Ltd in Erdos in Inner Mongolia was found to have built a golf course and related entertaining buildings on a 60-hectare piece of land.

On May 25, 2009, Shenyang Lixiangxincheng Property Company and Shenyang Aerolite Mountain Forestry Sports Ltd Co were fined nearly 15 million yuan (\$2.2 million) for building a golf course, and all the buildings were demolished with about 7.4 hectares of land reclaimed.

In November 2009, Xinde Real Estate Development Company in Wuhu, Anhui province, was fined more than 15 million yuan for building a 284-hectare entertainment center including a 32-hectare golf course.

On Nov 30, 2009, the Ministry of Land and Resources publicized two illegal golf courses in Hebei and Zhejiang provinces and the misused land has been reclaimed.

With barely one-tenth of a hectare of farmland per capita in China, it is too extravagant to build a golf course that occupies 40 to 50 hectares of land and uses at least 3,000 cubic meters of water every day just for grass maintenance, experts said.

It is estimated that China has at least 20 million potential golfers, with the golfing industry, including the courses and equipment manufacturers, netting a whopping 60 billion yuan in 2009.

As people in China become richer, the country is providing a huge potential market for the golfing industry.

The 2010 Hurun Report, released on April 1, said there were about 55,000 rich people with a wealth of more than 100 million yuan across the country.

A permanent membership for a golf club in Beijing costs 300,000 to 1 million yuan, much higher than in most of Europe.

Such a high price does not scare Chinese golfers. An employee of the Beijing International Golf Club said the club hit its limit of 500 permanent members last year and many more are on the waiting list.

Although golf has been regarded as a game for the privileged since its introduction to the country in 1984, some universities like Peking University, Tsinghua University and the University of International Relations have optional golf classes for students at low prices.