



**CLIFFSIDE COMMUTE.** Children wearing their school backpacks climb a cliff on their way home from school in Zhaojue county, in Sichuan province. A village in China's mountainous west where school children must climb a 2,625-foot-high bamboo ladder secured to a sheer cliff face may get a set of steel stairs to improve safety. (Chinatopix via AP)

## Chinese kids who climb cliffside ladder home will get stairs

BEIJING (AP) — Just to get home from school, they climb 2,625 feet toward the sky — on a ladder made of bamboo secured to a sheer cliff face.

After pictures surfaced of the challenging trek faced by schoolchildren in a poor corner of China's mountainous west, their village may be getting some assistance by way of a safer, more modern piece of infrastructure: a solid set of steel stairs.

The hardship faced by residents in the village of Atuleer in Sichuan province underscores the vast gap in development between China's prosperous, modern east and parts of the remote inland west that remain mired in poverty.

The bamboo ladder is the only means of access to the village to which the 15 children between six and 15 years old return every two weeks from the school at which they board. The 72 families who live there are members of the Yi minority group and subsist mainly by farming potatoes, walnuts, and chili peppers.

A news release from the Liangshan prefectural government that oversees the county said a set of stairs would be built as a stop-gap measure while officials consider a longer-term solution.

It quoted local residents as saying that in addition to the safety issue, the ladder-only access exposed villagers to exploitation because traders knew they would be unable to carry unsold produce back up the cliff.

"The most important issue at hand is to solve the transport issue. That will allow us to make larger-scale plans about opening up the economy and looking for opportunities in tourism," county Communist Party secretary general Jikejingsong was quoted as saying in the news release.

The dramatic photos that appeared online earlier show children wearing colorful backpacks climbing the 17 separate ladders accompanied by a pair of adults. The photos garnered even more attention after appearing on the front page of the English-language *China Daily* and other newspapers.

A team of 50 officials from the Zhaojue county government's transport, education, and environmental-protection departments travelled to the area to assess safer alternatives, the *Global Times* reported. It said the county is considering building a road to the village, although the cost would be exorbitant for such a poor region.

China pulled almost 700 million people out of poverty following the implementation of economic reforms in the early 1980s and says less than 10 percent of the population still suffers from extreme privation.

Most of China's poorest people are from long-marginalized minority groups or are farmers and herders living in the mountainous southwest, where rope bridges, aerial runways, canoes, and cliffside ladders remain crucial to accessing the outside world.

## Chinese detergent maker sorry for harm done by racist ad

BEIJING (AP) — A Chinese laundry detergent maker has apologized for harm caused by the spread of an ad in which a black man "washed" by its product was transformed into a fair-skinned Asian man.

Shanghai Leishang Cosmetics Ltd. Co. said it strongly shuns and condemns racial discrimination but blamed foreign media for amplifying the ad, which first appeared on Chinese social media in March but was halted after it drew protests in late May following media reports.

"We express regret that the ad should have caused a controversy," the statement read. "But we will not shun responsibility for controversial content."

"We express our apology for the harm caused to the African people because of the spread of the ad and the over-amplification by the media," the company said. "We sincerely hope the public and the media will not over-read it."

The ad for Qiaobi laun-



**MARKETING MISFIRE.** Two scenes from a detergent ad by Shanghai Leishang Cosmetics Ltd. Co. are shown on computer screens in Beijing. The Chinese laundry detergent maker has apologized for harm caused by the spread of an ad in which a black man "washed" by its product was transformed into a fair-skinned Asian man. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)

dry detergent drops shows a black man entering a room and attempting to flirt with an Asian woman. He is carrying a pail of paint, wears dirty clothes, and has a soiled face. She feeds him a detergent drop and stuffs his body into a top-loading washer. When the cycle completes, a fair-skinned Asian man in a clean white t-shirt emerges to the delight of the woman.

When speaking to the Chinese nationalist newspaper *The Global Times*, a Mr. Wang of Leishang said the critics were "too sensitive" and the issue of racial discrimination never came up during production of the video.

The ad's content rekindled discussions on racial discrimination in China, where prejudices against blacks are likely to be dismissed.

## In Mongolia, Kerry hails 'oasis of democracy'

By Bradley Klapper  
*The Associated Press*

ULAN BATAR, Mongolia — U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry is hailing Mongolia as an "oasis of democracy" on his rare, high-profile visit to the Asian country.

Noting Mongolia's difficult geographical location between undemocratic China and increasingly authoritarian Russia, Kerry also welcomes its parliamentary elections in July.

Mongolia has been democratic for 25

years. It wants to safeguard its sovereignty and has reached out to Washington as part of its "third neighbor" policy.

The U.S. is reciprocating interest at a time it also is cultivating closer ties with southeast Asian nations threatened by China's rise.

Kerry's brief stop in the homeland of Genghis Khan, famous for its traditional *ger* dwellings, came before his trip to Beijing for annual U.S.-China strategic and economic talks.

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