

Execution vans in China

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CHINA WATCH

Beijing rolls out
death on wheels

Mobile execution vans that dispense lethal injection deemed 'more humane'

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Hailed by Chinese media as a significant advancement in China's judicial system, Beijing recently rolled out 18 mobile execution vans.

The government took them for a test drive last Thursday, executing two farmers from Yunnan province who were convicted of heroin trafficking, according to Beijing Today.

The newspaper reported the men "benefited" from a "more humane method of dispatch" and that Liu Huafu, 21, and Zhou Chaojie, 25, died peacefully within one minute of receiving lethal injections in one of the new vans.

Earlier that day, Yunnan's legal authorities approved the use of 18 specially converted vans to be distributed among the province's 17 intermediate courts. In photographs, the vehicles look like ordinary police vans except they are marked with the word "court."

Yunnan Provincial High Court president was quoted as praising the death-on-wheels system.

"The use of lethal injection shows that China's death-penalty system is becoming more civilized and humane," Zhao Shijie said.

But efficiency and cost were foremost on the minds of Yunnan officials, according to the paper.

"With lethal injection, only four people are required to execute the death penalty: one executioner, one member of the court, one from the procuratorate and one forensic doctor. A dozen guards are also required to keep watch around the van," the paper said. "In contrast, many more guards are needed for firing squads, both around the site and along the route from the prison. If the case is well-known and complicated, security needs to be further enhanced and extra expenses are incurred."

Professor Wang Shizhou of Beijing University said it was a "very sad development.

"It will encourage more executions," he predicted.

In his annual report to the National People's Congress, the president of China's Supreme Court reported 819,000 Chinese have been either condemned to death or jailed for more than five years since 1998. This represents a 25 percent increase from the previous five years.