

[Beijing Getting Thirsty](#)

By Jason Miks

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I [mentioned a while back](#) that Chinese media outlets had taken the unusual step of calling for reform of the hukou system, which obliges citizens to register their residency in a certain location. As I noted, from 1958, the government started to use the system to control the movement of people between rural and urban areas, meaning that in recent years many of the millions of migrant workers heading to big cities have been unable to access key government services as they were still registered with their hometowns.

So I wonder what the response will be to the authorities' (in this case Beijing's) latest wheeze to control the migration of labourers into the city—walling them out.

According to [the South China Morning Post](#):

'Restricted access to some Beijing suburban villages may be extended to the whole city, the capital's party chief said after visiting a walled-off village on Saturday.

'Dashengzhuang, in Xihongmen town in Beijing's Daxing district, has guards at its entrance and people are only allowed in after showing a pass which includes the holder's name, sex, ethnic background, hometown, occupation, identity card number and mobile phone number. The village is closed between 11pm and 6am.'

It sounds draconian (and obviously is). But the authorities there could have a very good reason soon to restrict access to Beijing—the city is running out of water. According to the official [Xinhua News Agency](#) late last month, a delay to a water diversion project is accelerating what is already described by the agency as a 'crisis' in the capital.

According to the article, Wang Jianhua, a scientist with the China Institute of Water Resources and Hydropower Research, said in May the delayed project is extremely important for alleviating the city's current water shortage, estimated at 400 million cubic metres.

Part of the problem, it seems, is that the city simply isn't designed to accommodate a

population of more than about 18 million (it currently stands at about 17.5 million). Unfortunately for the planners, the population is expected to grow to 21 million, or perhaps as much as 25 million. Xinhua didn't put a time frame on these projections, but considering that the population jumped an estimated 500,000 in 2009, it's not hard to guess the kind of strains the city could experience—and soon.

<http://the-diplomat.com/china-power/2010/07/08/beijing-getting-thirsty/>