

GEO-POLITICS

China's war on golf will be short lived

On March 30, Chinese authorities announced the closure of 66 out of the 400 golf courses built after a 2004 nationwide moratorium tried to impose limits on the development of new courses.

Banned in 1949 because of its association with western bourgeoisie values, golf has made a huge comeback since its reinstatement in 1984. China now boasts 600 courses including the world's largest golf facility: The Mission Hills Golf Club.

There's a lot of money to be made from golf courses. Membership fees range between US\$15,000 to \$300,000 averaging out around US\$53,000. In a country whose average per capita income is less than US\$6,000, golf is rightly seen as a "rich mans' game".

The reason for the moratorium was that many courses were developed on land expropriated from peasant farmers. Raising suspicions of shady dealings, government officials that approved the confiscations of land are seen hitting the green regularly causing the disenfranchised farmers to wonder how officials, living on a public servants' salary, could afford a membership without having profited from kickbacks and bribes.

TREND FORECAST: The closures and promised investigations into official corruption will provide encouraging headlines that the government is doing something about the problem. However, as with all crackdowns on corruption, once the subject fades from memory, investigations will be quietly dropped, the doors will quietly reopen, and it will be back to business as usual.