

# Chinese official stresses safeguarding ecological security

A Chinese official has called for more to be done to ensure ecological security as the country observed National Security Education Day on Saturday.

China faces multiple challenges in this regard, including water loss, soil erosion and smog, noted an unnamed official with the National Development and Reform Commission.

China has 2.95 million square kilometers of land suffering from water losses and soil erosion, and 1.73 million square kilometers of desertified land, according to the official.

To improve the environment, China needs to strengthen control and regulation over the use of land and resources, and implement green industrial policies, the official stressed.

Related laws and regulations should be improved to hold local officials to account when environment damage is incurred, the official said, calling for the building of a mechanism for paid use of natural resources.

China will also step up protection and restoration of the ecological system and address key problems such as water, air and soil pollution.

In addition, China will intensify monitoring of ecological security and actively engage in the global mechanism for improving the ecological environment, the official pledged.

China's environmental protection lags far behind its economic status, and decades of breakneck growth have left the country saddled with problems such as smog and contaminated waterways and soil.

Earlier this year, China's central authorities issued guidelines on an ecological "red line" strategy that will make certain regions protected. The zones will be clearly defined by the end of 2020.

China passed the National Security Law on July 1 of 2015, declaring April 15 the day to raise awareness of national security among the public.

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## China probes pink plateau lake in

# Qinghai



Qinghai Lake

Chinese officials and environmental experts are investigating a plateau lake that has turned pink.

The one-square-kilometer lake is part of Qinghai Lake complex in Qinghai Province. It is separated from the main lake by a sand strip.

Xinhua reporters confirmed that the surface of the small lake has turned pink, the mud and weeds under the water were also tainted, and there was an unpleasant smell.

Officials with the Qinghai Lake Preservation and Administration Office said a large amount of mud and weeds were tainted by a “pink-colored substance.”

Water samples have been sent to a lab in central Hubei Province for analysis, the officials said.

The officials were only alerted after a member of the public uploaded images of the pink lake to the Internet, sparking heated debate.

“The lake is surrounded by pastures and small settlements. There is no industry nearby, so we can rule out the hypothesis that the lake was polluted that way,” said a statement posted on the office’s website.

The lab tests are still ongoing.

Qinghai Lake, perched on the northeast part of Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau, covers 4,429 square kilometers, and is the country's largest salt lake and an important habitat for plateau birds.

The lake expanded in recent years thanks to the government-led preservation efforts, especially reforestation to keep desert and sands at bay.

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## **31.2 degrees! Hottest mid-April day in Shanghai over 120 years**

Shanghai recorded its hottest April day in 120 years Saturday, with temperatures reaching 31.2 degrees Celsius.

Shanghai's existing weather records show that the last time a mid-April day was 33 degrees Celsius was in 1896, according to Kong Chunyan, chief service officer at Shanghai central meteorological station.

The city has experienced a warm front and the southwesterly inland wind was not very strong. This, coupled with low humidity and low cloud coverage, resulted in temperatures rising very quickly, according to the local weather station.

Shanghai, which enjoys a subtropical climate, usually sees high temperatures during the June-September period. The city's highest temperature on record was 40.8 degrees in 2013.

Sunday will be foggy and cloudy with a chance of showers. The highest temperature will drop to 26 degrees.

"Conditions are not sufficient for another day of temperatures of 30 or above," said Kong.

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## **UN calls for total tobacco ban in China's public places**



Dr. Bernhard Schwartländer, WHO Representative in China, speaks at the launch ceremony for the report on April 14, 2017 in Beijing. [Photo by Chen Boyuan / China.org.cn]

The United Nations has urged that all public places in China impose a smoking ban to help reduce tobacco-related diseases that are hurting both China's health and economy.

While congratulating Shanghai on becoming the latest Chinese city – following Beijing and Shenzhen – to enforce a total smoking ban in public places, the UN remains hopeful that more cities following their examples.

"The Bill China Cannot Afford: Health Economic and Social Costs of China's Tobacco Epidemic", a report jointly launched on April 14 by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) stresses that stricter tobacco control could avert millions of deaths.

China is the world's largest tobacco producer, consumer and manufacturer. In 2014, Chinese smokers consumed 44 percent of the world's cigarettes, more than the next 29 cigarette-consuming countries combined, including Indonesia, Japan, Russia and the United States.

The report found that around 28 percent of adults (aged above 15) are currently smokers. An average smoker in China smokes around 22 cigarettes – more than one pack – each day; this is almost a 50 percent increase since 1980. The report warned that 1.38 million lives are lost in China each year from tobacco-related diseases.

"If nothing is done to reduce these numbers and introduce more progressive policies, the consequences could be devastating not just for the health of people across the country, but also for China's economy as a whole," warned

Dr. Bernhard Schwartländer, WHO Representative in China, at a ceremony launching the report.

The pervasive tobacco issue in China, as the report argues, is the low sales price of tobacco. Although the latest tobacco tax increase in 2015 led to a slight rise in the retail price of cigarettes, the price rise was far lower than the average increase in salaries, making cigarettes even more affordable.

“Raising tobacco taxes is one of the most cost-effective measures to reduce consumption, while also generating substantial revenue for health and other essential programs,” said Bert Hofman, World Bank Country Director of China, Mongolia and Korea.

The report argued that raising retail price of cigarettes by 50 percent could lead to 47 million fewer male smokers, 20 million fewer premature deaths over 50 years, and saving eight million people from falling into poverty because of tobacco-related medical costs.

The report also addressed the question of the cost of tobacco control, for it is often an argument raised frequently by the tobacco industry that the use of tobacco contributes to the China’s economy.

“We have seen this over and over again around the world. For the WHO, health and human life are of the highest value and no human life can be measured against the amount of tax revenue you earn from this kind of product,” said Dr. Schwartländer.

Despite its tax contribution, the tobacco industry ultimately creates negative effect for the China’s economy, said Prof. Hu Angang, dean of Institute for Contemporary China Studies at Tsinghua University.

Hu explained that the tobacco industry causes more financial losses, such as smokers’ medical bills, a less efficient workforce (due to health-related absences) and smoking-related accidents, than benefits through its tax contributions.

“We actually did not know this fact until we were undertaking UN-led tobacco control research,” he said, adding: “We used to think that the tobacco industry helped boost the economy more or less.”

UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) commit governments to take action to reduce tobacco use by one-third over the next 15 years in the belief that smoking is a main risk factor for the prevalence of non-communicable diseases.

The UNDP does acknowledge China’s progress in economic development and the subsequent poverty alleviation, according to Nicholas Rosellini, UN Resident Coordinator in China.

“The harmonious and human-centered development, which is the central goal of the Chinese government, requires leaving tobacco addiction behind,” said Rosellini.

Reliance on tobacco is inconsistent with poverty eradication and attaining sustainable development. The report concluded that tobacco control policies can be pro-poor and benefit people with the lowest income the most.

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## Chinese universities to offer big data majors

China has new 32 universities introducing undergraduate big data programs this year to address talent shortage, according to the Ministry of Education.

In 2016, Peking University, University of International Business and Economics and Central South University became the first three to recruit undergraduates to majors concerning data science and big data technology.

China encouraged universities to set up new degree programs to cater to social and economic development needs.

According to a report by McKinsey Global Institute, by 2018, the United States alone could be short of 140,000 to 190,000 people with deep analytical skills, as well as 1.5 million managers and analysts capable of using the analysis of big data in decision making.