

China aims high in building landmark Xiongan New Area

China will set a high standard in building the Xiongan New Area, a landmark new economic zone near Beijing designed to integrate the capital with its surrounding areas.

China will speed up the drafting of plans for building the new area, said He Lifeng, head of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), highlighting “international standards,” “Chinese characteristics,” “reform” and “innovation” as key words in making the plan.

Speaking to Xinhua after the country announced it would set up the new area on Saturday, He called for pooling talent from China and other countries and drawing on international experience to build the area.

A circular issued by the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and the State Council described the move as a “major historic and strategic choice” that would be “crucial for the millennium to come.”

City planning for the Xiongan New Area must reach the standard of a first-class international city, and architecture there should fully embody elements of Chinese culture, He said in the interview.

Located some 100 kilometers southwest of downtown Beijing, the new area is home to Baiyangdian, one of the largest freshwater wetlands in north China. With more than 140 lakes and covering 360 square kilometers, the wetland is known as the “pearl” of the North China Plain.

A specific plan for pollution control and environmental protection of Baiyangdian will be drafted as part of the blueprint, said He.

The decision to establish the new area is part of a greater strategy, which China initiated in 2014, to jointly develop Beijing, the port city of Tianjin and Hebei to improve the region’s economic structure, environment and public services, and bridge the gap between the capital and the industrial and rural areas surrounding it.

Beijing, home to over 21 million people, is trying to curb population growth and relocate industries and other “non-capital functions” to Hebei in the coming years as part of its efforts to cure severe “urban ills.”

Beijing’s growing population, which is approaching the target of 23 million for 2020, has resulted in traffic congestion, soaring property prices and excessive burden on resources, said the NDRC head.

Establishing the Xiongan New Area is “a very important integral part” of measures to transfer non-capital functions out of Beijing, said He.

Beijing will focus on its “capital functions,” serving as the country’s

political center, cultural center, and center for international exchanges and science and technological innovation, according to previous plans.

A number of wholesale markets in the city's central areas have been shut down or relocated, and some of Beijing's city administration will be moved out of the city center to the southeastern suburbs in Tongzhou, which is called Beijing's "subsidiary administrative center."

Innovation will be the fundamental driver in building and developing the Xiongan New Area, and policies will be put in place to bring innovative elements to the area, said He.

The new area will create a favorable environment for innovation and attract innovative talent and teams to help build it into a "high ground" for innovation and a new science and technology city, the official said.

The NDRC chief pointed to reform as a key to development, saying that new administrative, investment and financing models will be tried in the new area.

A long-term and stable funding mechanism will be put in place, and private funds will be encouraged to participate in building the new area, He added.

The central government is also mulling specific support policies and will provide policy and funding support for the new area's major projects in transportation, ecology, water conservation, energy and public services, said the NDRC head.

The New Area will span three counties that sit at the center of the triangular area formed by Beijing, Tianjin, and Hebei's provincial capital Shijiazhuang. It will initially occupy 100 square kilometers and eventually cover 2,000 square kilometers.

The new area will be of the same national significance as the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone, established in the 1980s, and the Shanghai Pudong New Area, set up in the 1990s, said the circular on Saturday.

Shenzhen has grown from a fishing village into a bustling cosmopolitan city, while Pudong has turned from a wetland into China's financial hub.

In the interview, the NDRC head didn't give a timetable for the building of the new area.

[Pollution check steps up as smog](#)

[covers areas N. China](#)

China's environmental inspectors intensified pollution checks around Beijing as a new round of smog hit the region.

The new round of air pollution will continue in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region between April 3 and 7, with the cities of Tianjin, Tangshan, Langfang, Puyang and Anyang issuing orange alerts, the second highest in the country's four-tier warning system.

To ensure policies on fighting air pollution, the Ministry of Environmental Protection said on its website that seven teams have been sent to Beijing, Tianjin as well as the cities of Shijiazhuang, Tangshan, Baoding, Xingtai and Anyang in neighboring Hebei and Henan provinces.

Inspectors found several companies in Tianjin and Baoding had failed to meet requirements for cutting pollutants, while some vehicles in Beijing failing to meet emission requirements.

The ministry urged local authorities to address the problem.

China has been under growing pressure to address air pollution as smog frequently smothers the country's cities.

The government aims to cut the density of inhalable particulate matter in major cities by at least 10 percent by 2017.

[Man caught in Yunnan for cross-border drug trafficking](#)

A man was caught in southwest China's Yunnan province carrying drugs from Myanmar to China, according to local police Monday.

The man, surnamed Wang, was driving a red car to Mangshi city last Tuesday morning, when border police stopped him and found him very nervous. After a thorough check, they found 17 lumps of methamphetamine in the car boot. They later seized a further ten lumps from the seat.

The methamphetamine weighed 13.45 kilograms in total. Wang told police that a man in Myanmar asked him to carry it to Kunming, capital of Yunnan, and offered to give him 500,000 yuan (about 72,500 U.S. dollars) after the trip.

The investigation is ongoing.

Mangshi is the capital city of the Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous

Prefecture, which is near the opium-producing Golden Triangle. Border police in the prefecture seized 1.6 tonnes of narcotics, completed 668 drug-related investigations and arrested 662 suspects in 2016.

Mandarin speaking rate to rise to 80%

China plans to increase the rate of nationals speaking standard mandarin Chinese to 80 percent by 2020, according to a plan issued by the Ministry of Education and State Language Commission.

The plan calls for improved mandarin speaking abilities among teachers, especially new teachers, who must meet national mandarin speaking standards before being enrolled by schools.

The plan also highlights training of teachers from ethnic minority regions. Methods including online remote teaching will be used to ensure all ethnic teachers speak standard mandarin.

Currently, the number of those speaking standard mandarin is above 70 percent, but there is still a huge gap between different regions and groups of people.

The rate for speaking mandarin exceeds 90 percent in large cities but is only 40 percent in many rural areas.

Chinese honor deceased during Tomb-Sweeping Day

A total of 5.3 million Chinese visited 150 major cemeteries to honor their deceased relatives Sunday, the first day of the three-day holiday for the Tomb-Sweeping Day which falls on Tuesday.

The number of people visiting burial sites across the nation increased by 34.2 percent year on year, according to the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA).

The cemeteries deployed 33,000 service staff, 76.6 percent more than a year earlier, to maintain order during heavy traffic, helping disperse 899,000 vehicles, up 43.5 percent year on year.

Tomb-Sweeping Day, or Qingming, falls early April, when Chinese people commemorate their deceased loved ones by visiting tombs and offering

sacrifices.

Modern and more eco-friendly ways of honoring the deceased have emerged in recent years, such as “Internet tomb-sweeping” and sea-burials.

The ministry said no severe accidents were reported on the day.