

## Rural poor to receive scientists

China will dispatch 18,000 scientific and technical workers annually to help poor villagers become technology-savvy in the battle against poverty.

According to a plan drafted by the Ministry of Science and Technology and the State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development, under privileged residents in remote areas or regions inhabited by minority nationalities will mainly benefit from the arrangement.

The personnel will train about 2,300 people every year and assist in the application of new technologies, so that farmers could increase their incomes and be lifted out of poverty, according to the ministry.

About 100 scientific and technological parks will be set up in poor areas to the poverty relief effort, the ministry said.

It added entities in the eastern part of the nation, which is more developed, including institutes of higher education, scientific research units, and science and technology parks in agriculture, will be encouraged to cooperate with counterparts in the west on precision poverty relief.

Xu Nanping, vice minister of science and technology, said the move aimed to mobilize the science and technology field to play its part in the fight to eliminate poverty.

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## Scientists striving to save rare pangolins



Police check a pangolin seized in a smuggling case in Jiangmen, Guangdong province.[Cai Yanhong/For China Daily]

When social media posts about endangered pangolin being eaten at banquets triggered public fury in China last week, a wildlife protection specialist saw a ray of hope.

"I hope the scandal will become a turning point in our search and rescue of the critically endangered animal," said Zhou Canying, head of the Wildlife Protection Association in Changsha, Hunan province.

Zhou and her team have trekked the mountains of Hunan for more than a year, but not spotted a single pangolin.

Earlier this month, a screen-shot of a micro blog post went viral that allegedly showed officials in southern China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region inviting investors from Hong Kong to eat pangolin at a banquet.

"The public rarely pays so much attention to pangolins, and I hope the incident will lead to new breakthroughs in its protection," Zhou said on Saturday, which was World Pangolin Day.

The species, which has evolved over 80 million years, was once abundant in tropical and subtropical areas of Asia, including Hunan.

But things changed drastically in the past two decades: People used excessive pesticides; trees were replaced with different varieties that produced more profitable lumber; and the remaining pangolins were caught and sold to dealers.

A survey by the provincial forestry department in 2001 confirmed that the

wild pangolin population in Hunan was zero.

Pangolins are the most illegally traded mammal worldwide, with about 1 million being sold over the past decade.

In China, the animal's scaly skin is used as an ingredient in traditional Chinese medicine, and is believed to ease swelling and promote lactation. Their meat is also considered a delicacy by many.

Wu Shibao, a wildlife conservation specialist and professor at South China Normal University, said that about 300,000 pangolins are consumed in China each year.

Zhou said she has seen only one living pangolin outside a lab.

"It was at the end of 2015. Someone had saved the animal from illegal dealers and left it at a temple in Changsha. It was dying and had blood-stains on its mouth," she said.

Despite Zhou's efforts to save it, the animal died in less than two weeks. When researchers dissected it, they found gypsum in its stomach, a material used by dealers to make it heavier so it can be sold for more money.

"It was pregnant, too," Zhou said.

"I hope more people will join us to protect pangolins from such a miserable fate," she said.

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## China criticizes several cities' response to air pollution

China's Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) on Sunday named and shamed several cities in north China for not doing enough to cope with air pollution.

In an inspection on 18 cities in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region and neighboring areas, the MEP found several problems in their response to air pollution, including inadequate planning and poor implementation.

Cangzhou city in Hebei province was criticized for failure to draw up a detailed list for business shutdowns on heavily polluted days, which made it hard to achieve desired emission-cut effects.

Local authorities in Dezhou city did not revise emergency response schemes in time, and Jiaozuo city did not initiate traffic controls when the city was on red pollution alerts, according to the ministry.

The inspection also found a county under Baoding city was lagging far behind in its task to upgrade coal-fired boilers, and several companies in Beijing, Dezhou and Zhengzhou were criticized for breaching emission rules.

China is intensifying efforts to fight pollution and environmental degradation after decades of growth left the country saddled with problems such as smog and contaminated soil.

A total of 720 people were detained and 6,454 held accountable in China for environment-related wrongdoing in 2016, according to earlier official information.

China has a four-tier color-coded warning system for air pollution, with red being the most serious, followed by orange, yellow and blue.

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## Greenhouse vegetables harvested on S. China Sea islets

Chinese staying on a group of islets in the South China Sea have lately harvested tomatoes and leafy vegetables they grew from a new greenhouse.

The authorities of Sansha City, Hainan Province, announced over the weekend the first harvest of Yongle islets greenhouse farm. Yongle, composed of 13 islets, lie some 40 sea miles southwest to the Sansha municipal government seat on the island of Yongxing.

Yongxing built its own greenhouse farm last year.

The Yongle harvest ended the area's shortage of vegetables, which used to be supplied by ferries. In time of tropical storms or rough waves, ships were halted and the people on the islets might go days without eating vegetables, an important part of the healthy Chinese diet.

The greenhouse, covering 567 square meters, was built with materials that can withstand heat, storms, gales, and erosive seawater. The ceiling is equipped with solar panels absorbing excessive sunlight to produce electricity.

Inside the greenhouse, a cooling and moisturizing system runs by the hour during the day to make the environment favorable for vegetables to grow.

The first few harvested vegetables include tomatoes, red spinach and water spinach. The farm's managers expect output to reach 200 kilograms a week after they expand the farming scale.

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## China to start construction on 35 railway projects

It is full steam ahead for China's railway sector as construction on 35 new railway projects will start in 2017 as the country plans to expand the network, according to a recent report in Xinhua-run Economic Information Daily.

Construction will begin on 2,100 km of new rail line, 2,500 km of double-track lines and 4,000 km of electrified railways this year, the report cited unnamed authorities as saying.

To achieve the targets, China Railway Corp. (CRC) has been assigned a budget of 800 billion yuan (116.8 billion U.S. dollars) by the central government, the same as in 2016.

The vice minister of transport, Yang Yudong, disclosed earlier that China will spend 3.5 trillion yuan on railway construction during the 13th Five-Year Plan period (2016-2020).

By 2020, China will have increased the length of high-speed railways in operation to 30,000 kilometers, connecting more than 80 percent of its big cities.

By the end of 2016, China had a 124,000 km railway network, featuring the world's largest high-speed rail network of more than 22,000 km.

While the vast network has enhanced connectivity in large swathes of the country, construction lags behind in the less developed western regions. The government wants to address this gap.

Much of this year's construction projects will happen in China's central and western regions, to support the wider poverty-relief campaign, according to CRC.