

POLICY REVIEW



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

Community soccer on target for goal

Government will offer incentives to encourage building of more pitches

By **XU WEI**
xuweix@chinadaily.com.cn

To play a game of soccer, Wang Hongxuan must drive 40 minutes to one of Beijing's suburban parks and contribute toward an entrance fee of 500 to 800 yuan (\$71 to \$115) before he can get a run on the pitch with his teammates.

"It was never easy to find a pitch in a metropolis like Beijing," the 28-year-old said. "At times, you arrived there only to find that the owners had rented the ground to someone else."

Most soccer pitches, except for those at schools and colleges, were artificial turf, which could increase the chance of injury, he added.

In an effort to make more soccer pitches available to people like Wang, the National Development and Reform Commission has urged

local authorities to make full use of the fields already built to host matches and develop soccer-related sectors.

In a statement released after a meeting in Beijing on July 30, the NDRC and the General Administration of Sport said operators must establish flexible long-term mechanisms to enable social use of their pitches.

The authorities said closing the gates of soccer pitches to users and forbidding the playing of soccer games will not be allowed.

The meeting came after a stadium in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, made headlines last month for banning soccer games on its pitch, citing security concerns. The ban was later canceled, and the pitch is now open to the public for fixed hours each week.

The central government mapped out a plan four years ago to build

20,000 soccer pitches for use by members of the public by this year as part of a package of measures to build the country into a soccer superpower by 2050. The initiative will increase the number of pitches nationwide to 70,000.

The plan also said pitches at schools and those owned by businesses should be open to community use, either for free or at low cost, and the government would offer monetary incentives to encourage the building of more pitches.

An NDRC official said in May that the country is on course to meet its target of building 20,000 pitches by the end of this year, adding that over 16,000 pitches had been built by the end of last year.

However, officials at last month's meeting said some provincial-level areas were lagging in meeting their targets, and governments in those areas must step up policy and land use support to deliver the planned numbers.

They also urged local authorities

to conduct across-the-board inquiries into the soccer fields already built, investigate cases where numbers are falsified and make sure the newly built grounds are open to society.

Some experts said the surging demand for soccer pitches must be met with input from both the public and private sectors.

Huo Jianxin, a professor of sports industry at Capital University of Physical Education and Sports, said encouraging more participation from private capital is a key step to solve the shortage of pitches, especially in urban areas.

"If the country's goal is to ensure that the public can enjoy soccer games near their communities, then the government should green-light more businesses to invest and run soccer fields," he said.

Another solution to the shortage, he said, is to allow more green space to be transformed into soccer pitches.

Huo said only using land designated for sports grounds to build

soccer pitches would be far from sufficient, and encouraging the use of green space for pitches will give a significant boost to the sport.

Zheng Zhiqiang, a professor of sports industry and governance at Jimei University in Xiamen, Fujian province, said the cost of maintaining a soccer pitch, especially a grass one, is higher than the construction cost because it requires sustained, long-term input.

"That is why many pitches have been closed to communities," he said. "It requires professional expertise to run a football pitch, and that expertise is lacking among many operators."

Zheng also highlighted the need to introduce more private capital to the building and operation of soccer fields.

"It is impossible that playing fields that feature investment by private capital will be left unused," he said. "But the government must also ensure that they are affordable and offer high standards of service."

Policy digest

Key role for bases that focus on innovation

China will take a series of measures to improve the leading role of demonstration bases for mass entrepreneurship and innovation to further stabilize employment and add impetus to economic growth.

The country will develop demonstration bases into important platforms for entrepreneurship and employment, pioneers of integration and innovation, and important nodes for global entrepreneurship, according to a guideline released by the State Council on July 30.

The guideline urged efforts to implement relief policies for startup businesses, improve services for promoting the resumption of work and production at startup and innovative enterprises, and strengthen financial support for entrepreneurship and innovation.

To facilitate employment promotion through entrepreneurship, the guideline called for reinforcing policy support for businesses started by people returning to or moving to the countryside, and improving the skills of college students in innovation and entrepreneurship.

Meanwhile, large companies and various entities in demonstration bases were encouraged to create job opportunities.

The guideline also stressed the integration of different sized firms, the coordination of production, education and research, and cooperation between different types of demonstration bases to stimulate innovation.

China will facilitate the establishment of bilateral and multilateral platforms for entrepreneurship, support demonstration bases to deepen opening-up, and enhance international cooperation to ramp up global entrepreneurship, it said.

Further opening-up to stabilize foreign trade

China will further stabilize foreign trade and investment through expanded opening-up, and push ahead with trials of innovative development in trade in services in an effort to take the country's opening-up to a higher level, the State Council decided at an executive meeting on July 29.

A statement released after the meeting, which was presided over by Premier Li Keqiang, said the government placed great emphasis on maintaining stability in foreign trade and investment.

The meeting said that foreign trade businesses will be supported in strengthening resilience against risks. For example, a "credit insurance plus guarantee" model will be encouraged to increase business credit for foreign trade companies.

It also decided that central, western and northeastern provinces will be encouraged to tap into their strengths and host relocated labor-intensive industries focused on foreign trade.

New forms of business, such as cross-border e-commerce, overseas warehouses, and enterprises that provide comprehensive foreign trade services, will receive more support, according to the meeting.

To create a more investment-friendly policy environment, the meeting said that key foreign investment projects will receive greater support in terms of land use, and the accreditation of high-tech foreign-invested companies will be made easier.

Seventeen regions — including Shanghai, Hainan province, Beijing and Xiong'an New Area — have been running trials on the innovative development of trade in services since 2016.

In keeping with regional development strategies, the meeting decided to expand the trials to 21 provincial areas.

POLICY RESPONSE

Transport sector to embrace information technology

By **MO JINGXI**
mojingxi@chinadaily.com.cn

A number of ministry-level departments, including those responsible for transport, emergency management, human resources, and health, have responded recently to issues of public concern.

Use of smart trains and ships to be promoted

China will promote new infrastructure construction in the transport sector to advance its transformation to digitalization and the use of artificial intelligence, according to a guideline issued by the Ministry of Transport on Thursday.

The country aims to make remarkable achievements in transport infrastructure by 2035, with advanced information technology playing a key role, it said.

Data centers and network security systems will be established for the transport sector, and the use of smart trains, self-driving vehicles and smart ships will gradually be promoted.

Vowing to expand the application of new energy and new mate-

rials, the guideline also called for the building of smart roads, intelligent railways, and smart ports and airports.

By using blockchain technology, China will intensify oversight of electronic documents, online businesses and hazardous substances, the guideline said.

Call for inspections of chemical storage sites

Immediate inspections of China's hazardous chemical storage sites are needed in the wake of last week's explosion in Beirut, according to a video conference on production safety held on Wednesday.

The meeting was jointly held by the Office of the Work Safety Commission of the State Council and the Ministry of Emergency Management.



A news release published on the ministry's website said the meeting emphasized that the inspections should focus on ports, piers, logistics warehouses and chemical industrial parks.

It also required a system to register information concerning the sale, purchasing license approval and flow of civil-use explosives.

The meeting noted that lessons from each accident were learned with lives and blood, but recommended rectification measures raised in the investigation reports of some major accidents had often been ignored.

The ministry said it had already carried out special checks on more than 7,600 hazardous chemical companies and 22,000 major hazard sources.

Free vocational training for Yangtze fishermen

The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security has called for tailored vocational training for fishermen affected by a 10-year fishing ban in the Yangtze River Basin that came into force this year.

At least one vocational training course will be offered, free of

charge, to fishermen who request it, along with training subsidies for the duration of the course, according to a notice issued by the ministry on Aug 4.

Training in aquaculture and aquatic products processing will be provided for older fishermen whose skill-sets are limited. They may also obtain training in areas such as household management, elderly care, and security guard work, the notice said.

Middle-aged and young fishermen, meanwhile, will receive training in online retailing, auto repair and electrical work, it said.

The ministry also advised that full play be given to new occupations such as livestreaming salesperson and e-commerce and express delivery.

Smoking ban in medical institutions by 2022

China aims to ban smoking in all medical institutions by 2022, according to a notice published on Aug 3.

The notice, jointly issued by the National Health Commission and the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine, said the establishment of smoke-free medi-



cal institutions is important for guiding the public to live in a healthy way.

Institutions that have already begun establishing smoke-free facilities should continue with their efforts, and those that have yet to begin should start as soon as possible, it said.

According to the notice, medical institutions at all levels will be encouraged to ask patients about their smoking history during their first visit, and primary-level medical institutions should be able to provide consulting services on quitting smoking.

Regular reviews will also be made to assess the establishment of smoke-free environments in medical institutions, it said.

Xinhua contributed to this story.