

Blueprint promotes public fitness

New measures aim to boost participation in exercise, sports

By XU WEI
xuwe@chinadaily.com.cn

The central government has unveiled a new five-year blueprint to enable greater public participation in physical exercise, rolling out measures to increase the number of sports facilities, promote fitness activities at the grassroots level and offer more guidance to sports participants.

Analysts said the new set of measures will help solve bottlenecks that kept the public from engaging in such activities, adding that the blueprint is of milestone significance in charting the course of the nation's sports development for the new era.

The plan to promote public fitness released by the State Council, China's Cabinet, on Aug 3, has set a target of increasing the percentage of China's population who take part in physical exercise on a regular basis from 37.2 percent at the end of 2020 to 38.5 percent by 2025.

It also aims to increase the number of public fitness facilities in counties, districts, townships, villages and communities, enabling residents to have access to such facilities within 15 minutes of commuting.

To achieve this, the plan pledges to further increase the amount of land that will be made available for exercise and introduce measures to use both idle land in urban areas and rental land in order to plan and develop facilities that are close to communities.

The nation will build or renovate over 2,000 sports parks, public fitness centers and gymnasiums, equipping over 5,000 townships with fitness facilities, according to the plan. It will also develop a number of ice rinks and use digital technology to upgrade more than 1,000 stadiums.

"Participation in fitness activities is vital to public health and an important way to raise the level of fitness among the people. It will also contribute to the Health China Initiative and help develop the nation into a sports power," said Cao Keqiang, a professor with the School of Economics and Management at the Shanghai University of Sport.

According to a survey result released by the General Administration of Sport in November, there were over 3.54 million sports grounds covering 2.92 billion square meters nationwide as of 2019. The nation's per capita area in terms of sporting grounds reached 2.08 square meters.

Cao said China has witnessed a rapid spike in the development of sports facilities in recent years, and that growth could continue over the next five years.

He also said a major highlight of the policy document is that it prioritizes efforts to bring more sports events to the grassroots level, and such efforts will allow even more people to participate in fitness activities and sports tournaments.

An official with the General



Administration of Sport said in an online statement that the latest blueprint emphasized new policy measures, including enabling the construction of more stadiums to better meet public demand and promoting the development of soccer at the county level.

To offer more guidance to the public, the document has also lowered the job requirements for fitness coaches, with measures to further boost the number of professionals and improve their level of services, the official said.

To invigorate the vitality of non-governmental sports organizations, the plan said support in

terms of land availability, coaches, training and official assessments will be extended to high-caliber public fitness organizations devoted to soccer, basketball, volleyball, table tennis, badminton, cycling and running.

The document also underlined the importance of promoting fitness activities among key groups, including the young and the elderly, introducing measures targeting problems such as myopia and obesity among children.

To ensure the fitness level of schoolchildren, the blueprint stressed the need to ensure that students can exercise for at least

one hour both in school and off campus, with steps to integrate and refine sporting events for children.

Efforts will be made to make fitness facilities more adapted to seniors and to organize special competitions for them, it said, adding that fitness activities will also be promoted among farmers and women.

Zheng Zhiqiang, a professor of sports industry and governance at Jimei University in Xiamen, Fujian province, said the number of people involved in fitness activities has increased in recent years, which means the prevention of sports-related injuries and the

alleviation of chronic diseases through sports intervention are more important than ever.

He said the alignment between public fitness, competitive sports, school sports and the sports sector has also become even more critical.

Zheng also emphasized the need for greater participation from women and the disabled.

"Judging from international experience, the involvement of women in fitness activities will have greater influence over a family than that of men, and sports are important channels for the disabled to improve their quality of life and work," he said.

Policy Digest

Ministry rolls out rules for business districts

The Ministry of Commerce released a guideline on Aug 11 regarding the development of business districts in Chinese cities, saying that large-scale demolition and reconstruction should be avoided.

The guideline said that the overall scale of business districts in a city must be determined according to the city's economic development level, population and its demand for consumption.

The number of newly built or expanded commercial buildings in oversaturated business districts located in urban centers must be strictly controlled, while efforts should be prioritized to promote business development in communities, it said.

It noted that the development of urban business districts should follow the law of business development. Further, builders should refrain from only pursuing the construction of tall buildings and avoid large-scale razing and reconstruction.

Business districts should coordinate with a city's functions and living environment while commercial activities provided by such areas should match residents' demands, it added.

The guideline also mandated efforts to explore the establishment of a governance model for urban business districts that would involve government guidance, self-discipline and consistency among business proprietors and industries, and supervision and feedback from society.

Policies look to lure workers to rural areas

The central government has rolled out a series of supportive policies to attract fresh college and university graduates, young migrant workers and veterans to work and start businesses in rural areas, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs has said.

In a written reply to a proposal about how to enhance the attractiveness of agriculture that was raised in March during the fourth session of the 13th National People's Congress, China's top legislature, the ministry said the policies include tax cuts and exemptions for entrepreneurs and the establishment of industrial parks to provide convenient, low-cost services for startups.

Efforts are also being made to encourage talent to return to their hometowns, to cultivate high-quality farmers and to use the internet to expand the market for agricultural products, the ministry said.

In addition, the ministry plans to boost policy support and improve services for entrepreneurs to motivate more young people to contribute to the country's rural vitalization.

New guidelines target autonomous driving

Authorities have released a set of guidelines regulating road testing, autonomous driving and other issues related to the development of the nation's intelligent connected vehicles.

The guidelines, jointly issued by the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Industry and Information and the Ministry of Public Security, will take effect on Sept 1.

China has established 16 demonstration zones for ICVs with more than 3,500 kilometers of roads open for testing. Over 700 licenses have been issued for testing smart vehicles, and these vehicles have so far accumulated total testing mileage of 7 million kilometers.

According to the guidelines, smart vehicles that have been proven to be safe and reliable after testing will be allowed to participate in demonstrations carrying people or objects.

Areas for testing and demonstrations are being expanded to include highways and urban roads.

Under the guidelines, road testing refers to the autonomous driving activity of ICVs on designated sections of roads. Demonstrations refer to ICV trial operations carrying people or objects on those sections.

Incentives expected to inspire athletics enterprises

By XU WEI

In its latest push to underpin the growth of the sports industry, the State Council, China's Cabinet, has unleashed a slew of incentives for sporting businesses, underscoring the need to promote the digitalization of the sector and spawn more new products and business models.

The new support measures will serve as a confidence boost to enterprises in the industry and will help domestic players grow bigger and stronger, business leaders and analysts said.

The government is aiming to increase the gross output of the sports sector from 2.94 trillion yuan (\$454 billion) in 2019 to 5 trillion yuan by 2025, according to a recent blueprint promoting public participation in physical exercises.

The document pledged steps to

develop a modern sports industry system powered by the integrated growth of high-end manufacturing and modern services sectors.

To promote the digital transformation of the sector, sporting businesses will be encouraged to take advantage of cloud computing, digitalization and smart technologies. The nation will foster a number of high-tech, high-growth and "hidden champion" companies involved in fitness facility supply, tournament organization and the research, development and manufacturing of fitness equipment.

The government will encourage the growth of companies tied to outdoor sports and smart sports so as to give rise to more new products and business models.

The nation will designate model cities in a bid to encourage local authorities to innovate policies and

establish mechanisms to promote sports consumption.

Shawn Lee, CEO of Cowell Group, a producer of fitness equipment in Xiamen, Fujian province, said the latest policy document has given businesses in the sector a high degree of confidence.

"We firmly believe that there is immense untapped potential for the domestic market for fitness equipment," he said.

Lee said the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo, which concluded last week, and the upcoming Beijing Winter Olympics in February are also major influences on public enthusiasm for sports.

Last year, Cowell's sales volume increased by at least 50 percent year-on-year thanks to robust market demand and the company's efforts to improve sales with e-commerce, he said.

"We expect the public to maintain high enthusiasm for exercise in the post-pandemic era, with fitness venues becoming more diversified and the willingness to spend on sports becoming stronger," he said, adding that the company sees the next five years as a major window of opportunity for its growth.

Zhu Ding, vice-president with sportswear producer Xtep, said the rollout of the official measures will create more space for the growth of the sector.

"It is very significant in the promotion of a high-quality sports industry and the effort to raise public awareness on fitness and health," he said.

"With policy support, the rise of domestic brands and the increase of consumer spending power, sportswear producers can grow bigger and stronger more easily with high-

er degrees of standardization," he added.

Inspired by the latest document, Zhu said the company's design, research, development and sales will focus more on teenagers.

Cao Keqiang, a professor with the School of Economics and Management at the Shanghai University of Sport, said enabling wider participation in sports and cultivating public fitness habits remain a fundamental way of promoting consumer spending and spurring the growth of the sports sector.

He noted that China's sports sector is still at an early stage of development, and there is immense room for growth.

"For the government, in addition to support measures in policies and funding, it is more important to deepen reform to streamline administration, improve compliance oversight and services and give full play to the role of the market in order to shore up the growth of the sector," he said.