

Welfare, free education on top of the agenda

By ZHAO SHIJUN

THE government of Tibet autonomous region has put great emphasis on improving social welfare in recent years, bringing more benefits to its residents. Since 2012, the government has used more than 70 percent of its budget in various social undertakings for improving people's quality of life.

Starting from this year, the government plans to invest 30 billion yuan (\$4.57 billion) in the construction and renovation of villages in the border areas.

Gyagang in Rutog county, Ngari prefecture, is one of the villages benefiting from this plan.

Gyagang is one of the pilots in Tibet's border village construction programme. The total investment in the village is 100 million yuan, for building houses and related infrastructure facilities.

Tsewang Gyurme was among the first to move into his new residence, which is a spacious house with brand new furniture and electrical appliances and decorations with Tibetan cultural elements.

Relocation

For people in high-altitude areas, where conditions are harder to make a living, the government offers another option for change.

On July 27, Tsejor, Party Chief of Barling township in Tsonyi county, delivered a farewell speech to six families who were about to move to Yangbajain in Damshung county, which is more than 400 kilometres away.

"With its lower altitude, Yangbajain is a better place for making a living and raising cattle, and the hot springs there are good for your rheumatic diseases," Tsejor said, adding that all they have to do is to adapt to the new environment.

Baling township lies more than 5,000 metres above sea level. Harsh conditions, like lower oxygen levels and fragile ecology, make life pretty hard there. Rheumatic diseases are commonly seen among local residents.

At the end of last year, the government of Tibet decided to move residents in areas with altitudes of more than 4,500 metres to lower-altitude areas. The plan involves 1,200 households in five prefectures.

The altitude of Yangbajain is about 4,300 metres above sea level. The new settlement is only 750 metres away from the renowned Yangbajain Hot Springs Resort.

According to Phurbu Tashi, deputy chief of the government of Damshung, the county has built five new settlements for the immigrants and all the projects were completed earlier this month.

In Yangbajain, the newcomers will be mainly engaged in such businesses as sheep and cow herding, fodder and fertiliser production as well as tourism, according to Phurbu Tashi.

Better education

Dekyi Wanggyal was a student from Driru county. She was admitted to Tsinghua University in Beijing this summer.

She is from a low-income family, with her parents supporting four children. However, Dekyi Wanggyal said she has never worried about her schooling, thanks to the government's free education policy.

Tibet now offers free education for 15 years to students from kindergarten to senior high school. Free accommodation and meals are also offered to rural students.

Dekyi Wanggyal won't worry about financing her studies at university, as the higher education costs for students from low-income families can be covered by the government, too.

Statistics show that there are 1,984 schools in Tibet at present, offering education to about 700,000 students.

In addition, some schools outside Tibet also provide schooling to Tibetan students in the form of Tibetan classes.