

Xinjiang

1>General Introduction

Xinjiang on the northwestern border in the interior of Central Asia was set up as an autonomous region on October 1, 1955. It has an area of more than 1.6 million square kilometers, one-sixth the size of China and larger than any other province or autonomous region, and a population of 12.83 million, of which 22 per cent live in the cities and 78 per cent in the farming and pastoral areas. Of its total population, 5 million are the Uygurs, the principal nationality there, 5 million are the Hans, and the rest are the Kazaks, Mongolians, Huis, Xibes, Kirgizes, Ozbeks, Tajiks, Russians, Manchus, Daur and Tatars.

2>Topography

Xinjiang is divided into five topographical zones: 1) The Tianshan Mountain Area, mostly 3,000--5,000 meters above sea level, consists of several ranges running parallel from west to east across the middle part of the region. The Tianshan range divides Xinjiang into two vastly different natural geographical regions, northern and southern Xinjiang. The numerous intermontane basins and valleys are important farming-pastoral areas. The area around the Hami and Turpan basins is customarily called eastern Xinjiang. 2) The Altay range lies in the north and northeast. 3) In the south are the Karakorum, Kunlun and Altun mountains and the Pamirs. 4) The Junggar Basin between the Tianshan and Altay ranges has the Curbantunggut Desert in the middle. 5) The Tarim Basin south of the Tianshan range makes up more than half of the region's total area and has the Taklimakan Desert in the middle. Deserts make up about 22 per cent of the area of Xinjiang. Mount Qogir, towering 8,611 meters above sea level over the China-Pakistan border, is the highest peak in the region. Aydingkol Lake in the Turpan Depression with its surface 154.43 meters below sea level is the lowest point in China. There are 20-some larger rivers in Xinjiang, including the Tarim, Ili, Ertix and Manas. Lop Nur is its largest lake.

3>Climate

Situated deep in the interior of Asia and unpenetrated by the air currents from the oceans, Xinjiang has conspicuous continental climate, with highly changeable temperature, sharp difference in temperature between day and night, abundant sunshine, intense evaporation and little precipitation. The mean annual temperature of northern Xinjiang is 4°-8°C. and that of southern Xinjiang 9°-12°C. The arid south has a mean annual precipitation of 25-100 mm., while the greater part of the north has 100-500 mm.

4>Communication

Railways

The project to quicken train speed on the Lanzhou-Xinjiang Railway, one of the major projects

in China's third drive to upgrade train speed, is expected to be completed by October 1, 2000. The Lanzhou-Xinjiang Railway, which extends more 2,000 kilometers from Lanzhou City in Gansu Province in the east to the Alataw Pass, the westernmost point on the Chinese section of the second Eurasian Bridge, is an artery linking China's west and east and the only railroad leading from Xinjiang to the rest of China. The dual-track route of the Lanzhou-Urumqi Railroad has been open to traffic. Construction of the Korla-Kashi section of the Southern Xinjiang Railroad, also a major project, is in full swing. An investment of 2.4 billion yuan has been completed in the westward extension project of the Southern Xinjiang Railroad. On December 29, 1998, tracks were laid to Xiggar. A total of 826.9 kilometers of tracks were laid, 101 kilometers more than that in the annual plan. On December 1, 1998, the Korla-Aksu section was put into trial operation. In 1998, the Urumqi Railway Bureau transported 29.142 million tons of freight, increasing 3.9 percent over that in the previous year.

Highways

Highways now reach 99 percent towns and villages in all counties and prefectures. A road-transportation network comprising seven national highways and 62 regional main highways links Urumqi with Gansu and Qinghai provinces in the east, the Tibet Autonomous Region in the south, and Central Asian countries in the west. In 1998, the length of major highways open to traffic reached 32,701 kilometers.

Waterways

Seasonal steamers and barges can sail on the Ili and Ertix rivers.

Airports

Xinjiang leads China's other provinces and autonomous regions in the number of airports and the length of civil aviation routes. The Urumqi International Airport, one of China's six major airports, has flights to West Asian and European countries. Air routes lead from Urumqi to Lanzhou, Xi'an, Beijing, Shanghai as well as Xinjiang's Hami, Korla, Kuqa, Hetan, Kashi, Aksu, Yining, Karamay, Fuyun, and Altay. The Urumqi International Airport now is under expansion. In 1998, the Xinjiang Airline Company shipped a freight volume of 298.7734 million tons/kilometers, a passenger volume of 1,340,600 people/times, and a mail volume of 26,862.4 tons.