

China seeks breakthroughs in combatting smog

China will increase research on smog in its battle against air pollution in Beijing and surrounding areas.

Government agencies, including environmental protection authority, academies and institutions will work together to integrate resources, according to reports of a State Council executive meeting presided over by Premier Li Keqiang on Wednesday.

Scientists working on anti-smog research may be given extra funding from the central budget.

The work will focus on causes of the heavy seasonal air pollution, emission control and health.

The government hopes to improve air quality and explore transferable pollution control systems for all parts of the country which suffer from smog.

China is addressing air pollution with stricter measures on emissions and an emphasis on clean energy. Minister of Environmental Protection Chen Jining said earlier this week that Chinese cities reported more "good air" days in 2016.

Local parties taking 'brave' decisions on electoral alliances, says Lucas



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Caroline Lucas has responded to a decision by local Liberal Democrats not to stand in Brighton Pavilion.

She said:

'Tonight's decision by local Lib Dems is welcome, particularly after Greens stood aside in Richmond. They recognise that I will be fighting this government's extreme Brexit every step of the way and I thank them for their support.'

'In Brighton something amazing is happening. People are putting aside party allegiances and working together so we have the best possible chance of

delivering a fairer voting system and beating the Tories at the next election. Greens will be standing for election across this country and putting across our unique vision, but in a handful of places members of local parties are taking brave decisions for the common good. It's now up to the Lib Dem and Labour leaderships to sit down for talks about how we can make this movement for electoral alliances work. Let's not condemn this country to five more years of Tory rule.'

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This week's launch of STV's new television service STV2 is, I feel, a disappointing missed opportunity.

STV2 has been created by STV by weaving together several local TV franchises it successfully bid for covering Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Dundee and Ayr into one single output. The idea behind the local franchises had been separate, local TV output at each one and that STV has undermined the spirit of the local TV franchise deals by creating just one TV service spread across all 5 areas.

Katie Martin of STV's public relations and communications team advised me :

"STV2 will deliver a single schedule across Scotland that includes local material from all five local licence areas in line with individual licence commitments; all programming will air across the channel with no local opt-outs. Content will come from all areas with production bases and staff in all five licence areas and will be clearly marked as such, covering Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Dundee and Ayr."

This is not the local TV output that STV originally promised. Whilst some additional local output from Dundee on STV2 is a step forward, the station will be, as is usually the case with both STV and the BBC, dominated by Glasgow and Edinburgh. STV has fallen well short of what it originally promised and I am doubtful that what it is proposing truly meets the local and regional commitments of the Ofcom franchises covering Glasgow, Edinburgh,

Aberdeen, Dundee and Ayr that it won.

STV has attempted to create a second STV national service by the back door.

I am sure that there will be some good content on STV2 and I wish STV well with its venture, but for the many people who thought that, in winning in separate local franchises, we would see truly local and regional services in different parts of Scotland, STV has fallen short.

Bobby Hain, director of channels at STV, had confirmed "STV2 is the new channel for Scotland."

A new national channel has been created at the expense of local television and it is surprising that Ofcom, the regulator, has allowed this to happen.

3 investigated for damaging valuable tourist site

Three tourists are being investigated for causing damage to a valuable tourist spot in eastern China's Jiangxi Province, local authorities said.

The suspects from neighboring Zhejiang Province drill holes in a 128-meter-tall rock on Sanqingshan Mountain, a world natural heritage site, and used ropes to climb to the top of the rock on April 15, according to the site's administration committee. They also refused to listen to staff guidance at the site.

The rock, known as the "Giant Python of the Mountain," is of scientific and aesthetic significance after more than 300 million years of geological evolution, but has poor stability and is only 7 meters in diameter at the thinnest part.

Geological experts found that the rock had sustained damage from the tourists' drilling.

Further investigation is underway.

Additional UK government borrowing continues to reduce

The latest figures for UK government borrowing show it ended the most recent

financial year to March at £52 bn, a little below the March 2016 forecast. It confirms that the UK economy has done well over the last year, bringing in extra tax revenues from growth to pay more of the bills for public services. Total state debt stood at 86.6% of GDP on the official definition. If we adjust this for the debt the Bank of England has bought up, the figure falls to 65%.

This level of additional borrowing shows the recovery from the extreme levels of additional debt at the end of the last decade has gone reasonably well, though a bit slower than the original plans in 2010. These figures exclude future state pension liabilities, as they also exclude future tax contributions to pay for those pensions on the pay as you go model all governments have operated. The figures do now include the debts of Network Rail, guaranteed by the government, which the Labour government classified as private sector debt.

There is no need to raise taxes from here to reduce the deficit further. A bit more growth will be the best way of cutting borrowing, as more people get jobs reducing their need for benefits, and as more tax revenue comes in from the growing turnover of the economy.

The aim of policy should be to boost productivity and output by encouraging entrepreneurship, and ensuring government is run more efficiently to assist in economic improvement.