

Year of the Rooster to bring multiple missions

China is set for the first working day of the Year of the Rooster as the week-long Spring Festival holiday ends Thursday.

It will be an energetic start for people and their families to achieve their dreams, and the nation will take a step closer towards the dream of creating “quanmian xiaokang,” a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way by 2020.

However, this year’s steps are set to be challenging, particularly for the Communist Party of China, which was founded in the Year of the Rooster, 1921 to be precise.

The Party will convene its 19th national congress this year, and it needs to accomplish several missions so that the Year of the Rooster is one of good luck.

After lifting more than 700 million people out of poverty in the past 38 years, the country still has about 45 million people living in poor conditions.

Poverty relief is high on the agenda for governments at all levels. Not a single family living in poverty will be left behind, but the closer the country gets to fully eliminating poverty, the more difficult the final steps become.

China’s 13th Five-Year Plan outlines priorities for national development from 2016-2020 and proposes support for poor villages to develop signature products and services. Guidelines were also issued calling for enhanced collaboration between developed eastern regions and under-developed western regions to meet poverty-reduction targets.

These efforts have been translated into encouraging signs. At least a further 10 million people will become members of the well-off society this year.

This year is also a crucial year for pushing forward reform across the board.

Hundreds of measures were designed and released during the past four years to address issues such as urbanization, innovation and the market’s role in resource allocation. Now the roadmap has taken shape and the focus for the coming years will be on delivery.

Supply-side structural reform will continue to be an economic goal for 2017, including cutting excess capacity, implementing agricultural reforms, boosting the real economy and nurturing new growth.

The restructuring of China’s economy and the upgrading of industry is expected to generate huge new demand.

Time is of the essence for reforms in state-owned enterprises as well as in finance and social security. Such sectors concern the development of the country, whose GDP growth stood at 6.7 percent in 2016, a three-decade low, but outpacing most other major economies.

In major political reform, China will establish a national supervisory commission and create a law on national supervision.

Amid efforts to build a clean CPC, the fight against corruption has gained "crushing momentum," netting both "tigers" and "flies," with no letup expected in the future.

On the global stage, China will stick to its commitment to encourage globalization and cooperation, despite difficulties.

In troubled times with a sluggish world economy and a changing geopolitical order, the wise choice is to move forward together.

China is preparing for a host of events of global significance this year, including a Belt and Road forum for international cooperation in Beijing in May, and the ninth BRICS leaders' summit, in southeast China's coastal city of Xiamen in September.

The attitude of openness, inclusivity and sharing is in sharp contrast to the retreat into protectionism and isolation from certain western countries.

This year will be a test of the wisdom needed to maintain sustained, stable and better growth in China-U.S. relations. Although the Trump administration has yet to formulate its China policy, the general trend of cooperation is irreversible and the only right choice for both countries.

Any conflict or trade war could deal a blow to the development of the world's two largest economies. The bottom-line is respecting each other's core interests.

Believing in a shared destiny for mankind, China will continue to expand its circle of friends.

As Michael Moller, head of the United Nations Office at Geneva, put it: "If things go well for China and the Chinese people, the chances are it's going to go well for a lot of other people around the planet."

Coincidentally, the first working day of the Chinese new year is "lichun," or the beginning of spring, the first of the 24 solar terms in the Chinese ancient calendar.

As we wave goodbye to winter, China stands with the world in wishing for a great spring.

It's hugely concerning to see increase in number of children killed or injured in road collisions – Daniel Zeichner

Statistics released today by the Department for Transport show there has been an increase in the number of road users either killed or seriously injured. The number of killed or seriously injured casualties (KSIs) increased by 6 per cent last year – to 25,160. By DfT's own admission, this change is statistically significant.

Between July and September 2016, the change was even more pronounced – KSI casualties increased by 8 per cent when compared to the same period in 2015.

All road user groups saw an increase in the number of people killed or seriously injured: car occupants, pedestrians, motorcyclists and pedal cyclists. There were also 2,070 children killed or seriously injured in the year ending September 2016 – an increase of 8 per cent.

Daniel

Zeichner MP, Labour's Shadow Transport Minister, responding to statistics released today by the Department of Transport, said:

"These statistics are worrying. We want everyone to feel safe on the roads, whether they are walking, in a car, on a bike, on a bus, or using a motorcycle. It's hugely concerning to see the increase in the number of children killed or injured in road collisions.

"Funding cuts to the police by this Tory Government have seen resources being diverted from road policing which inhibits the effective enforcement of penalties for dangerous drivers. If we are to make our roads safer, it's crucial that road safety targets are reinstated and that police forces have the resources they need."

Only Labour will rewrite the rules of our economy and deliver the investment needed to rebuild and transform our country – John McDonnell

John McDonnell MP, Labour's Shadow

Chancellor, commenting on today's growth forecast from the Bank of England, said:

"While we welcome today's growth forecasts, projections for wage growth in coming years have been cut. This will come as little surprise to those whose incomes are still below where they were ten years ago as a result of a rigged economy under the Tories.

"Yesterday the Resolution Foundation warned of the worst period of income growth for middle and low earners since the 1960s. After seven years of

Tory failure, there is little sign of an end to the pressure on living standards for most of the population."

"Only Labour will rewrite the rules of our economy and deliver the investment needed to rebuild and transform our country so that no one and no community is left behind."

Fire kills 39 people in China's Spring Festival holiday

A total of 13,796 fires occurred during China's week-long Spring Festival holiday that ends Thursday, killing 39 people and forcing the evacuation of 10,523 others, the Ministry of Public Security said.

The fires resulted in direct economic losses of 44.63 million yuan (about 6.49 million U.S. dollars), marking a 54.1 percent drop compared with the same period last year, the ministry said in a statement.

The number of fires and fire casualties decreased by 11.8 percent and 26.4 percent respectively year on year, it said.

No fire claimed more than five lives during the holiday, it noted.

Fires are usually caused by setting off fireworks and firecrackers during the

holiday as the Chinese believed the noise will drive away bad spirits and bring good luck.

However, sales of fireworks have dropped in recent years in cities amid pollution concerns and government restrictions. Nationwide, 444 cities have banned fireworks and 764 other cities imposed restrictions on setting off fireworks, according to the ministry.

Update from the Environment Agency

I have received the following update from the Environment Agency:

Maintenance programme

- In 2015/16 we carried out river maintenance at 15 locations in your constituency. This work took place along 14.5km of rivers including the Loddon, Swallowfield Ditch, Emm Brook and the Kennet. It included removing obstructions, tree and shrub maintenance and carrying out selective weed and vegetation clearance. In 2016 / 17 we are carrying out a similar maintenance programme. The attached map shows the main locations and types of work we're doing.

Emm Brook and South Wokingham Distributor Road

- We have been engaging with Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) over the design of the South Wokingham Distributor Road (SWDR) since the early planning stages, and we will continue to work with WBC as the plans progress. The aim is that the SWDR reduces downstream flood risk from the Emm Brook, notably in locations which have historically been affected by river flooding. The developer anticipates completing the design for the relief road and residential development this calendar year with a view to start construction of the different elements of the scheme in 2018 and 2019.

Planning consultations and permitting

- Since April 2016 we have commented on 78 planning applications within Wokingham. In line with our remit our responses ensured that the layout of development sites, where there is a risk of flooding from rivers, is appropriate; for example, siting dwellings where there is a low risk. Redevelopment does occur within floodplains and in these situations we provide advice so that floor levels are set above flood levels. In the vast majority of cases the local planning authority will take our advice on any flood risk objections. However if planning permission, for a major application, is given against our advice and the effects of flood risk are significant, we would use a call in process (through the Secretary of State) to reconsider whether planning permission should be

granted. We did not call in any applications in 2016 in Wokingham.

Swallowfield Temporary Defence Deployment Plan

- In 2016 the Government funded 32km of additional temporary barriers nationally (bringing our total national stock to 40km) to protect local communities during flooding. We have a draft deployment plan for Swallowfield where our assessments show there is potential to protect the community. We are consulting with partners and the community to finalise the arrangements

Appraisals for future flood risk improvements

- Our future programme for permanent flood defences includes Swallowfield and Lower Earley. We will appraise whether options such as flood walls and embankments are viable in these locations. River modelling is needed to make these assessments and we will test these options once the modelling is available. We will have the outcomes from the appraisal in autumn 2018.

Local Partnership Meetings

- The Berkshire Flood Partnership is made up of all Berkshire Lead Local Flood Authorities, Thames Water and ourselves. The next meeting is on 7 March 2017. The meeting is chaired by Cllr Jesse Grey of Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.

We also meet with the Loddon Valley Residents Association and Loddon Basin Flood Action Group

