

Mandarin speaking rate to rise to 80%

China plans to increase the rate of nationals speaking standard mandarin Chinese to 80 percent by 2020, according to a plan issued by the Ministry of Education and State Language Commission.

The plan calls for improved mandarin speaking abilities among teachers, especially new teachers, who must meet national mandarin speaking standards before being enrolled by schools.

The plan also highlights training of teachers from ethnic minority regions. Methods including online remote teaching will be used to ensure all ethnic teachers speak standard mandarin.

Currently, the number of those speaking standard mandarin is above 70 percent, but there is still a huge gap between different regions and groups of people.

The rate for speaking mandarin exceeds 90 percent in large cities but is only 40 percent in many rural areas.

Chinese honor deceased during Tomb-Sweeping Day

A total of 5.3 million Chinese visited 150 major cemeteries to honor their deceased relatives Sunday, the first day of the three-day holiday for the Tomb-Sweeping Day which falls on Tuesday.

The number of people visiting burial sites across the nation increased by 34.2 percent year on year, according to the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA).

The cemeteries deployed 33,000 service staff, 76.6 percent more than a year earlier, to maintain order during heavy traffic, helping disperse 899,000 vehicles, up 43.5 percent year on year.

Tomb-Sweeping Day, or Qingming, falls early April, when Chinese people commemorate their deceased loved ones by visiting tombs and offering sacrifices.

Modern and more eco-friendly ways of honoring the deceased have emerged in recent years, such as "Internet tomb-sweeping" and sea-burials.

The ministry said no severe accidents were reported on the day.

Recording of the week: Kébendo Jazz

This week's selection was prepared by Dr Graeme Counsel, the archivist for the Syliphone record label digitisation project funded by the Endangered Archives Programme.

Kébendo Jazz were one of Guinea's greatest orchestras, super-stars when many groups, such as Bembeya Jazz, were still in their infancy. Adapted from an ancient Mandé song, this recording from circa 1971 is an alternate version to that which appears on [Syliphone SLP 25](#). The song celebrates Guinea's grande artistes, with a reminder to "do what you have to do and do not worry about the hour of your death".

[Soumba performed by Kébendo Jazz](#)



This example is part of a large collection of [Syliphone record label recordings](#) from the Radio Télévision Guinée archives, created in the Republic of Guinea under the Presidency of Sékou Touré (1958-1984) following independence from France. The collection was digitised as part of the [Endangered Archives Programme \(EAP\)](#) project whose work contributes to the preservation of archival material that is in danger of destruction, neglect or physical deterioration world-wide.

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The state of the railways

Last year Network Rail announced another £232m of losses on financial derivatives, following a £982 m loss the previous year. The company sees that as a technical write down of derivatives which might change, but the last two years have been negative.

I am glad that after I raised this issue before, the government has asked the company not to take out new derivatives and has agreed more direct Treasury financing of what is in effect a nationalised company. Stopping additional risks and potential losses from this source is a step forward.

The Company also accepted in its last Annual Report that it did not have proper control over the costs of some major projects and has promised to do better in the future. It reported a £200m shortfall on its efficiency

targets. Only 89% of trains were on time, below target, and more than 3% were cancelled altogether.

As the relatively new management admit, the railway is short of capacity on busy routes at peak times. It needs to get on with modern digital systems to replace traditional signals, as this would be the cheapest way of raising capacity relatively quickly. What is odd is how in their enormous budget they do not seem to prioritise this sufficiently.

The Treasury has offered them more borrowings, but is also requiring that they step up their property asset disposals. There is still huge scope for property development on surplus or underused railway land, especially at main stations. Stations can be transport interchanges, shopping destinations and workplaces with office accommodation. Easy access from the train lines is a bonus, and helps generate footfall for the shops.

[1 missing after fishing boat collides with cargo vessel](#)

One missing after Chinese fishing boat collides with Panama-registered cargo vessel

A fishing boat carrying 10 people sank off eastern China's Fujian Province after colliding with a Panama-registered cargo vessel late Saturday, provincial marine authorities said Sunday.

The Panama vessel "KF PROSPERITY" was heading to Republic of Korea from Taiwan when the crash occurred around midnight Saturday near Kemen Port in the provincial capital of Fuzhou, said a statement issued by the Fujian Maritime Safety Administration.

The foreign vessel was requested to rescue the fishermen at the site. A helicopter and four other vessels, including two from Taiwan, joined the rescue Sunday morning.

As of Sunday noon, nine of the fishermen had been saved with one still missing.