

China sees first drop in number of impoverished counties

With 28 counties casting off poverty this year, China shortened its list of poorest counties for the first time in more than 30 years, a concrete step toward delivering on the country's goal of completely eliminating poverty by 2020.

An anti-poverty official said Wednesday that 26 more counties will soon announce their withdrawal from the list after Lankao and Jinggangshan had the "impoverished" label removed at the beginning of the year.

Southwest China's Chongqing and Tibet and northwest China's Xinjiang each saw five counties removed from the list of the poorest. The rest come from regions including Hebei, Henan and Jiangxi.

Xia Gengsheng of the Leading Group Office on Poverty Alleviation and Development under the State Council said that since the first group of 331 poorest counties was included on the list in 1986, the number had been on the rise.

Although some areas managed to rid themselves of poverty, more fell into the impoverished category.

A county can be removed from the list if less than 2 percent of its population lives below the poverty line, defined as a per capita annual income of 2,300 yuan (348 U.S. dollars) at 2010 prices. In western regions, counties must have less than 3 percent of people living in poverty to be removed from the list.

At the end of 2016, there were 832 impoverished county-level regions across China.

Xia said the 28 counties went through rigorous evaluation, including assessments from third-party institutions and then examination by both central and local governments.

"Another 100 or so counties filed withdrawal applications this year," Xia said.

But removal from the list does not mean poverty relief efforts will fade away, according to Xia, who promised continued favorable policies, subsidies and financial support to ensure stable development of those areas in the transition period.

Poverty reduction has been high on the government's agenda and various means have been adopted, including e-commerce, relocation and improved infrastructure.

More than 60 million people have been lifted out of poverty in the past five

years in China, with the percentage of the country's population in poverty dropping from 10.2 to less than 4.

The country aims to eradicate poverty by 2020 by lifting the remaining 55 million rural poor out of poverty.

[2,400-year-old horse and chariot pit unearthed in China](#)

Archaeologists in central China's Henan Province have excavated a 2,400-year-old pit containing horses and chariots beside a tomb possibly belonging to a lord.

The No. 3 Horse and Chariot Pit is one of a cluster of tombs belonging to noble families of the Zheng State, a vassal state during the Spring and Autumn (770-476 B.C) and Warring States periods (475-221 B.C), near the city of Xinzheng.

Since February, four chariots and 90 horse skeletons have been unearthed from the pit, the largest of the three within the cluster that have been excavated so far.

The total number of horses buried in the pit may exceed 100, said Ma Juncai from the provincial cultural heritage and archaeology institute, who led the excavation.

"As the main tomb has been looted and no written records have been found yet, it is difficult to identify the tomb owner," he said, adding it may belong to a Lord from the late Spring and Autumn Period judging from the size of the tomb and the details of items found inside.

Bronze artifacts have also been discovered in the pit, which Ma said provides important information on technology, production, social status and funeral practices of the period.

Ma said he believes the chariots were for daily use by a Lord and his wife.

One of chariots is significantly larger and more extravagant. Measuring 2.56 meters long and 1.66 meters wide, it is equipped with rain and sun protection and decorated with bronze and bone artifacts.

Li Hongchang, director of the Zheng State Horse and Chariot Pit tourist site, said that it is believed that during the Zheng State horses were usually killed first, then placed into a pit beside the owner's tomb with dismantled chariots added on top.

Excavation of the tombs and the surrounding 20 hectares of land has already

found 18 large pits containing horses and chariots and more than 3,000 tombs.

[China reports lowest urban unemployment rate since 2008](#)

The registered unemployment rate in Chinese cities stood at 3.95 percent at the end of the third quarter, the lowest level since 2008, official data showed.

China created 10.97 million jobs in the first nine months, 300,000 more than the same period last year, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MHRSS) announced on Wednesday.

The job market has remained stable with the unemployment rate at its lowest level since the global financial crisis in 2008, Lu Aihong, a senior MHRSS official, said at a press briefing.

The registered unemployment rate is calculated based on the number of unemployed people who register with human resource authorities or employment service institutions.

The figure, 0.09 percentage points lower than the same period last year, was flat with that in the second quarter and slightly down from 3.97 percent in the first quarter.

“China’s job market has remained stable with many indicators reaching their best level in history,” said Lu.

China has set an increase of 11 million jobs as its target for the whole year, which was basically accomplished as of September, Lu added.

The steady labor market came on the back of the sound social and economic development as well as concerted efforts by all departments in implementing job policies, Lu said.

To ensure stable employment, China has rolled out an array of pro-employment policies for graduates, redundant workers, the disabled and migrant workers, while the country’s entrepreneurial wave has helped fuel job creation, according to Lu.

At the same time, he admitted that a huge workforce will continue to put pressure on the job market, especially with structural problems becoming more prominent as China’s economy enters a “new normal.”

In the next stage, China will strive to ensure re-employment of workers made redundant during the country’s excess capacity cuts, help college graduates seek jobs, improve professional skills training, and support people in

setting up their own businesses.

Changes weighed to help farmers keep land rights

China will strengthen its protections of farmers' rights and interests by extending the current round of rural land contracts for another 30 years, if a draft revision of the Rural Land Contracting Law is passed by the nation's top legislature.



Farmers of an agricultural cooperative in Liuzhou, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, walk back home after a day's work in October. [Photo/China Daily]

The proposed change aims to maintain the long-term stability and consistency of rural land contracts. It was submitted at a bimonthly session of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress for its first reading on Tuesday.

The 30-year extension was mentioned in a report delivered by Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China, at the opening session of the 19th CPC National Congress on Oct 18.

Liu Zhenwei, deputy director of the NPC's Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, said the current law has played a key role in rural economic development, keeping order in rural areas and increasing the incomes of

farmers since it took effect in 2003.

“But to meet higher requirements of rural development, it needs a revision,” Liu said.

The draft revision will better define the use rights of rural land, so that farmers can enjoy “sufficient and guaranteed protection of their land rights”, he said.

Since the country adopted the household responsibility system in the early 1980s, property rights associated with rural land have been divided into two layers: the ownership right, referring to its collective ownership by a rural community (normally a village), and the use right that is held by an individual household that contracts a piece of land from the village.

The draft revision further separates the use right into the “contract right” and “management right”, according to Liu, who regarded it as a positive innovation.

The separation, as proposed by the draft, would allow farmers to retain contract right over their allowed land, and only transfer the management right if they choose to lease the land to others, mortgage it to banks or invest it in a cooperative in exchange for shares.

More than 30 percent of rural households have transferred their contracted land, totaling 31.9 million hectares, Liu said.

“In the past, we sometimes hesitated to rent more land out of concern that our business might suffer if the status of the land changed when the contract runs out. That’s because the current law limits our leasing rights to 30 years,” said Jin Weiran, who has rented rural land to plant vegetables in Rizhao, Shandong province, since 2007. “But now, I feel reassured.”

“Xi’s report and the draft revision means that what I paid in the rented land in the first several years can be rewarded after the land contract is extended,” he said.

Yu Liufen, Party chief of Yanbo village in Guizhou province, said land is the farmers’ lifeline, and they will no longer worry about uncertainties if the extension is approved.

[Half of newborn babies are second child in Jan.-Aug.](#)

In the first eight months of 2017, more than half of China’s newborn babies were the second child in the family, according to a health official.

From January to August this year, about 52 percent of the 11.6 million babies born have an older sibling, said Wang Peian, deputy head of the National Health and Family Planning Commission (NHFP), in a demography forum Monday in Beijing.

Figures provided by the NHFP showed that 18.5 million babies were born in hospital in 2016, the highest since 2000 and 1.3 million more than 2015, and about 45 percent of them had an older sibling.

In response to an aging population, since 2016 couples have been allowed to have two children, bringing to an end the one-child policy after almost 40 years.

Wang also said that even with an increased average age of expectant mothers, newborn and maternal mortality have fallen.

There will be changes to policies in tax, social security, housing, employment and others, and more support for the second child policy, said Wang.

In 2016, China allocated a total of 2.9 billion yuan (about 440 million U.S. dollars) for construction of maternity and pediatric hospitals at city and prefecture level.

By 2020, there will be around 89,000 new maternity beds in hospitals and 140,000 more obstetricians and midwives. More emergency centers for mother and child treatment will be set up across the country by the end of the year.