

Smog returns as Spring Festival ends

Many cities in northern China will face a smoggy weekend due to the windless weather, while smoke from firecrackers will worsen pollution in some areas, the national environmental authority said.

Air quality will start to decline on Thursday in many northern regions and reach a low on Friday, especially in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, the Ministry of Environmental Protection said.

Other regions, including in the south and northeast, will also be blanketed by smog, which is forecast to fall to light and moderate levels on Friday, the ministry added.

After Sunday, affected regions will embrace blue skies, though some cities will see pollution lingering due to firecrackers, the National Environmental Monitoring Center said.

Setting off firecrackers, a traditional way to celebrate the Lunar New Year, can cause air pollution to suddenly worsen.

As of 6 pm on Jan 27, Lunar New Year's Eve, only 19 of the 338 cities with regular air quality monitoring had hazardous levels of pollution. However, at 2 am on Saturday, after firecrackers had been set off that night, 183 cities had hazardous air pollution, among which 62 saw the air quality index reach its upper limit, the ministry said.

Air quality in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region and neighboring provinces was more severely affected by fireworks, the ministry said.

For example, Beijing saw the concentration of PM2.5 – fine particulate matter with a diameter less than 2.5 microns that is harmful to health – soar from 97 micrograms per cubic meter at 7 pm on Friday to 647 at 2 am on Saturday, dragging air quality to the most hazardous level within seven hours, said Li Yunting, head of air quality monitoring at the Beijing Environmental Monitoring Center.

Cities that banned fireworks found the move effective in controlling pollution, the ministry said.

For example, the average PM2.5 reading during the same period in Shanghai was 17, the ministry's data showed.

In addition to fireworks, coal consumption for heating and industrial production were still major sources of pollution during the holiday, the ministry said.

Wang Shuxiao, an environmental professor at Peking University, said while small plants suspended production during the holiday, emissions from large plants continued, making them a major source of pollution.

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.

[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.

[Wenzhou buildings collapse, many buried](#)

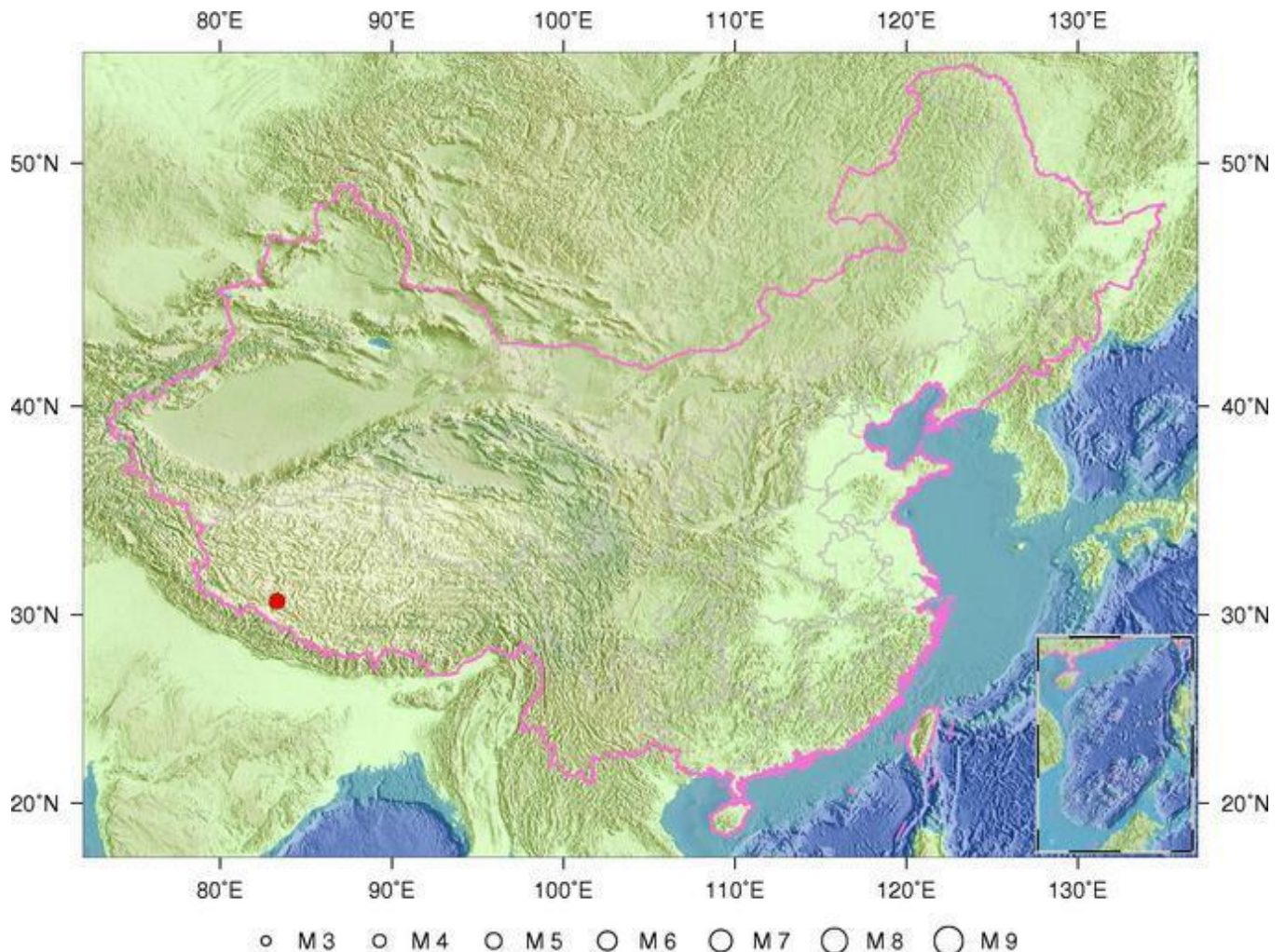
An unknown number of people were buried in the debris after three residential buildings collapsed Thursday morning in Wenzhou, a rich industrial city in east China's Zhejiang Province.

The buildings were about five stories tall and were inhabited with people, sources with the local government said.

The accidents happened at around 8 a.m. in Baizhangji township of Wencheng county.

Rescue work is going on.

5-magnitude quake hits Tibet; no casualties reported



A 5.0-magnitude earthquake jolted Zhongba County in Tibet on Wednesday, February 1, 2017. [Photo: China Earthquake Administration]

A 5.0-magnitude earthquake jolted Zhongba County in southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region at 6:07 p.m. Wednesday (Beijing Time). No casualties were reported.

The epicenter was monitored at 30.67 degrees north latitude and 83.34 degrees east longitude. The quake struck at a depth of 8 km, according to the China Earthquake Networks Center.

The epicenter, 124 kilometers from the county seat and 757 kilometers from Lhasa, is in an uninhabited zone and therefore the moderate quake caused no injuries and death of people and livestock, Wei Xince, deputy county governor, told Xinhua by phone.

Local authorities were checking damages to roads and makeshift livestock pens in the summer pasture.

Zhongba, which is in the western-most of Xigaze prefecture and borders Nepal, covers an area of 45,900 square kilometers and has a population of 24,800. It has an average altitude of over 5,000 meters.