

Central China province reports 20th H7N9 case in 2017

A new human H7N9 avian flu case was reported in central China's Hunan Province Sunday, the 20th in the province this year.

The 69-year-old female patient, surnamed Zou, was diagnosed in Changsha city, the provincial capital. She had contact with poultry before falling ill and is in a critical condition, according to the provincial center for disease control and prevention.

This is the second H7N9 case in Changsha. Five of the the 20 patients in Hunan died from the virus.

H7N9 is a bird flu strain first reported to have infected humans in China in March 2013. It is most likely to strike in winter and spring.

Chinese flock to cinemas during Spring Festival

Traditional Spring Festival celebrations include firecrackers, family reunions and temple fairs, but today it might be worth adding cinema to the list.

Chinese cinemas posted a record of 3.347 billion yuan (about 487 million U.S. dollars) in ticket sales during the seven-day holiday, from Jan. 27 to Feb. 2, according to industry figures.

China's box office sales also set a single-day record on Jan. 28, the first day of the Chinese Lunar New Year, at 805 million yuan.

The strong figures came after China registered weak growth in box office sales in 2016, when 45.712 billion yuan was reported, or a 3.73 percent annual growth.

HOT MARKET

As cinemas sprout up nationwide, with the number of screens exceeding 40,000, going to the movies has become a popular holiday pastime.

Full cinemas were found in big cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, but also in smaller cities across the country.

Wu Xiaoqi, 26, chose to spend half a day with her cousins in a cinema near

her home in southwest China's Chongqing Municipality when the holiday was drawing to its end.

"We were hanging out and then decided to see a movie since it was a good way to kill time," said Wu, who works in Beijing.

After watching "Kung-Fu Yoga," an action starring Jackie Chan, they decided to stay at the cinema.

"We had a lot of spare time then and my cousins were interested in the story of 'Journey to the West: The Demons Strike Back,' so we stayed in the theater to watch it," Wu said.

Directed by Hark Tsui and partly scripted by Stephen Chow, the fantasy-action tells the story of a monk bringing his three disciples to the west, a story immortalized in the Chinese classic novel "Journey to the West."

Both movies were popular across the country. "Journey to the West: The Demons Strike Back" took 1.153 billion yuan over the seven days, topping the holiday box office, while "Kung-Fu Yoga," earned 870 million yuan.

Though vastly different films, they share two things in common: comedy elements and famous stars.

"The holiday is an important battleground for the Chinese film market," said Rao Shuguang, secretary-general of the China Film Association. "Due to stiff competition, films screened during this period are more likely to be blockbusters."

MORE TO IMPROVE

Led by domestic blockbusters, homemade films took the lion's share of holiday earnings.

However, despite strong ticket sales, worries over the quality of domestic productions persist.

Influential entertainment website douban.com, rated both "Kung-Fu Yoga" and "Journey to the West: The Demons Strike Back" as less than 6 out of 10.

Some observers were also worried about the lack of imagination in domestic productions, complaining that the classic "Journey to the West," had been made several times before.

Observers have said that the film market could face a setback after its short term successes, and that filmmakers should focus on making high-quality films to guarantee the healthy market development.

Yin Hong, a professor at Tsinghua University, said filmmakers should not just be satisfied with targeting box office earnings, but that they also needed to improve the quality of their content.

He said that in order to match ticket sales with favorable reviews, domestic

films should make progress in a changing society.

China scientists develop diseases and insects resistant rice

A new rice variety, developed with genome-wide breeding chip technology, will be grown in northeast China's Heilongjiang Province, China National Seed Group announced Saturday.

The new variety is expected to be the first disease and insect resistant, and high-yield rice in the country, the company said at the signing ceremony with Rongzhong Capital Investment Group in Wuhan city, central China's Hubei Province.

"The use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers have caused environmental and food safety problems," said Zhang Qifa with Chinese Academy of Sciences. "But the genome-wide chip helps develop a new variety to cope with the problem."

In May 2012, scientists from China National Seed Group, Peking University and Huazhong Agricultural University selected more than 40,000 useful gene markers in countless gene data and developed the first genome-wide breeding chip in the world.

"It helped to improve the diseases and insects resistance of the current rice variety," said Zhou Fasong, leading scientist at China National Seed Group. "We have been identifying the genes in the past five years, and recently finally developed the new breed."

The new rice variety will be cultivated in Heilongjing Province in April.

China unveils first strategic plan for territory development



Farmers are seen busy working on farmland as the plowing and sowing season comes along, in Yongning County, northwest China's Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, Feb. 29, 2016. (Xinhua/Wang Peng) (File photo)

China has issued its first strategic plan for territory development and preservation, outlining the protection of arable land reserves and islands.

The plan, issued by the State Council Saturday, demands the retaining of 1.825 billion mu (about 121 million hectares) of arable land by 2030 and reiterates the red-line of holding 1.865 billion mu by 2020.

Urban areas must occupy no greater space than 116,700 sq km by 2030, according to the plan.

The timetable also suggested that the country create 1.2 billion mu of high-standard farmland and bring an additional 940,000 sq km of eroded soil under control.

China, the world's third largest country by size, has a landmass of 9.6 million sq km and nearly 3 million sq km of maritime area.

The plan calls for enhanced restoration of ecology on the nation's islands, serving as base points of territorial sea and the environment-friendly development of uninhabited islands.

It also said that infrastructures on islands with development plans, and remote ones, must be improved as a major task in protecting the natural resources and environment of islands.

The plan said that development of tourism projects on remote islands would be encouraged, and the ocean economy would own a greater share of the country's growth.

China will establish 10 to 20 demonstration zones during the 13th Five-Year Plan period (2016-2020) to test ocean economy polices, according to the country's top economic planner.

By 2030, the country will get closer to becoming a maritime power given its enhanced ability in oceanic development and protection, according to the plan.

The nation had more than 11,000 islands by the end of 2015, with Zhejiang, Fujian and Guangdong having the largest number, according to the State Oceanic Administration survey.

Since 2010, the nation repaired damaged islands with 3.6 billion yuan (about 525 million U.S. dollars) from the central budget, 2.6 billion yuan from the local budget and 300 million yuan from enterprises, in a total of 169 projects.

The plan also envisions better water quality in the country's rivers and lakes, so that 75 percent of water in major drainage basins is of good quality by 2030.

[China's Tianjin issues air pollution alert](#)

North China's Tianjin Municipality issued a yellow alert for air pollution and activated emergency response measures on Saturday.

According to the city's environmental protection bureau, the Air Quality Index (AQI) reading passed 200 around noon, with the PM2.5 reading exceeding 150 micrograms per cubic meter.

Emergency measures included banning heavy trucks in the downtown area and suspending dusty construction site work.

The bureau said that increased coal consumption, unfavorable weather conditions and fireworks were to blame for the smog.

The smog will disperse Sunday, the bureau said.

Beijing, which is adjacent to Tianjin, issued a blue alert for air pollution on Friday.

Hangzhou, a city in east China's Zhejiang Province, which banned fireworks displays in its six main districts, reported improved air quality over the Spring Festival week.

On midnight Jan. 28, the Lunar New Year's Eve, the traditional time to set off fireworks, the PM2.5 density was 42 micrograms per cubic meter, the lowest in five years.