

China collects over 400 bln yuan in taxes from major FTZs

China collected 409 billion yuan (59.3 billion U.S. dollars) in taxes in four major free trade zones (FTZs) last year, data from the State Administration of Taxation (SAT) showed.

The tax revenue growth was driven by fast development, reasonable industrial structure and strong innovation in the Shanghai, Tianjin, Fujian and Guangdong FTZs.

Nearly 90 percent of the tax revenue came from the modern services sector, while high-end manufacturing witnessed strong growth in tax revenue, SAT data showed.

SAT data showed tax receipts from car manufacturing had annual growth of 44 percent last year, 34 percentage points higher than the national average.

Internet, software and information technology services posted stellar growth in tax revenues. The Guangdong FTZ, supported by tech-hub Shenzhen, saw tax revenues from the two sectors increase 470 percent and 390 percent respectively year on year.

FTZs are part of government efforts to test reform policies, including interest rate liberalization and fewer investment restrictions to better integrate the economy with international practice.

China launched its first FTZ in Shanghai in 2013. In late 2014, Tianjin, Fujian and Guangdong were allowed to set up a second group of FTZs. Another seven were approved in August 2016 in a bid to replicate the success of previous trials.

Let's have a budget for prosperity

We need to move on from austerity. The Treasury needs to write back some of the tax revenue it will collect over the next couple of years, that it took out of the forecasts in the Autumn Statement. It was too gloomy then. It needs to spend enough on social care, schools and the NHS to provide a good service. It can make spending reductions elsewhere, starting with the EU contributions and other items I have highlighted on this website.

It also needs to unleash more infrastructure investment. Much of this in energy, broadband and some in transport can be privately financed. The government may need to assist with loan guarantees, permissions, licences and

co investment. It needs to do more to promote enterprise through tax cuts. It has a programme to raise the 20% and 40% tax thresholds for Income Tax. It would also be wise to cut Stamp Duty rates to help homebuyers. It could offer entrepreneurs and small businesses additional tax relief.

Mr Trump's plans to increase infrastructure spending, cut personal and company income tax rates, and relax banking controls to allow bit more lending all make sense. The UK is already well ahead of the US in lowering corporation tax rates for large companies, but needs to sharpen its competitiveness for start ups and smaller companies. We should tax work, effort and enterprise less, as we want more of it.

In Niger, Security Council links aid and development in fight against Boko Haram

5 March 2017 – The Security Council which is in the Lake Chad Basin to draw attention to the humanitarian and development needs of a region grappling with Boko Haram's terror visited for the first time Niger, one of the poorest countries in the world.

Addressing media in Niamey, Ambassador Matthew Rycroft of the United Kingdom, who is leading the Council visit as president of the Security Council for the month of March, pledged solidarity with the people who the Council had met.

"We have demonstrated our commitment to further support Niger in its remarkable efforts to restore the security stability of the localities in the Lake Chad basin but also to provide the necessary protection and assistance to the populations affected by the crisis," Mr. Rycroft told journalists.

Earlier, the Council members had met with President Mahamadou Issoufou.

They also heard from UN agencies and partners about the dire situation in the region of Diffa along Niger's border with Nigeria. Last summer, tens of thousands of people fled Diffa as Boko Haram flooded the desert town from Nigeria.

In addition to insecurity, Niger is plagued by drought, desertification and a lack of jobs and schools for its young people, who make up two-thirds of the population. The country ranks 188th out of 188 countries on the 2015 UN Development Programme's Human Development Index.

Speaking to the Council during its visit, the UNDP Resident Representative and Resident Coordinator, Fodé Ndiaye, said survivors of Boko Haram violence

are being hosted by other poor and vulnerable communities.

“But they are showing humanity,” Mr. Ndiaye stressed.

One of the main observations from the visit, according to Mr. Rycroft, was the importance of Sustainable Development Goal 16. That Goal aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

“You can’t come to a place like the Lake Chad Basin without seeing the value of Goal 16,” Mr. Rycroft said.

The Security Council next heads to Maiduguri, Borno, in north-eastern Nigeria, known since 2009 as the epicentre of the Boko Haram insurgency. The Council members are meeting with local officials and civil society organisations before they are scheduled to visit a camp for internally displaced persons.

The Council members will also visit Abuja, where they will meet with acting President Yemi Osinbajo.

[UN in Central African Republic condemns threats by armed group against civilians, peacekeepers](#)

5 March 2017 – The United Nations peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic (CAR) is warning a rebel movement against impeding humanitarian access, saying any threats to peacekeepers, aid workers or civilians are “unacceptable” and could be tried as war crimes.

In a press release issued on Saturday, the UN Integrated Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in CAR, known by its French acronym MINUSCA, warned leaders of the Popular Front for the Rebirth of the Central African Republic (FPRC) that they will be held individually responsible if such acts are carried out.

“Any attack targeting the civilian population, UN and humanitarian personnel is a war crime that can be prosecuted in accordance with Central African law and international law,” MINUSCA underscored.

The Mission called on the FPRC and all armed groups “to refrain from any interference with the work of humanitarian workers, as well as threats against international humanitarian organizations and civilian populations.”

“No armed group has the right to prohibit or impede the free access of humanitarian actors to vulnerable populations, even in areas where these groups continue to have a negative influence,” MINUSCA continued.

In the same statement, the UN Mission rejected attempts to justify the travel to Bambari of 40 or so heavily armed members of the coalition as peaceful.

“These men and the rest of the elements of the coalition violated the demarcation line established by MINUSCA, approaching Bambari with Kalashnikovs and rocket launchers, posing a risk of the city burning to disastrous consequences for the civilian populations,” the Mission said.

According to MINUSCA, “the threats contained in the communiqué of the FPRC prove once again its warlike character and the rejection by its leaders of any peaceful solution to the current crisis, as advocated by the Central African Government and by the international community.”

MINUSCA said it would pursue its mission impartially and “reserves the right to use all means at its disposal by the Security Council to achieve this, in support of the Central African Government.”

‘Hong Kong independence’ leads nowhere

The notion of “Hong Kong independence” will lead nowhere, a government work report to be delivered by Chinese Premier Li Keqiang on Sunday said.

The report, available just before the opening of the annual session of China’s top legislature, the National People’s Congress (NPC), also pledged to fully implement the “one country, two systems” principle in the special administrative region.

It said the central government will continue to implement, both to the letter and in spirit, the principle of “one country, two systems,” under which the people of Hong Kong govern Hong Kong, the people of Macao govern Macao, and both regions enjoy a high degree of autonomy.

“We will continue to act in strict compliance with China’s Constitution and the basic laws of the Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions, and we will ensure that the principle of ‘one country, two systems’ is steadfastly applied in Hong Kong and Macao without being bent or distorted,” the report said.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of Hong Kong’s return to China.

The report pledged full support for chief executives and governments of the two regions in exercising law-based governance, growing their economies, improving people’s well-being, advancing democracy, and promoting social

harmony.

It added that efforts will be made to push forward cooperation between the mainland and Hong Kong and Macao.

In particular, the report said the central government will draw up a plan for the development of a city cluster in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, give full play to the distinctive strengths of Hong Kong and Macao, and elevate their positions and roles in China's economic development and opening up.

"We have always had full confidence about ensuring lasting prosperity and stability in Hong Kong and Macao," it said.