

Xi urges continued efforts to build strong military

President Xi Jinping has called for building a strong military by further enhancing the military's political awareness, pushing forward reform, and governing it according to law.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, underscored the importance of improving combat readiness through troop training.

The president made the comments while visiting the 65th Army Group stationed in northern China's Hebei Province on Monday.

£3.7 million to regenerate communities

Communities and Children secretary Carl Sargeant has today announced funding for the projects which include the creation of a new 3G facility adjacent to the existing stadium at Parc Eirias in Colwyn Bay which will create or safeguard 17 jobs; the development of commercial property in Swansea which will enable the creation of 40 jobs; demolishing a derelict pub in Tredegar to allow the building of 28 new affordable homes; and providing supported accommodation for up to 8 homeless people each year in Caernarfon.

The money from the Vibrant and Viable Places programme is a mixture of newly allocated funding and the reallocation of underspent funds from other projects.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

“This additional £3.7 million is a big boost to these twenty five regeneration projects across Wales which will make a very real difference to their local communities.

“As well as improving important local services and facilities, the funding will create jobs and traineeships, boost the housing supply and create environments in which small businesses can flourish.

“These projects are an excellent example of how regeneration funding is supporting important improvements that will benefit whole communities.”

Press release: Burns Night boom for Scottish drinks

Scots have another cause for celebration this Burns Night as new figures reveal gin and beer are following in the footsteps of exporting phenomenon Scotch whisky, announced Environment Secretary Andrea Leadsom today.

The celebration of poet Robert Burns is now marked around the world, with Burns suppers enjoyed as far afield as South Korea and the USA. While a wee dram is the traditional drink of choice for Burns Night – with 34 bottles shipped overseas every second – the UK's gin and ale industries are following suit, with nearly a billion pints of beer and 150 million bottles of gin exported around the world last year.

With two thirds of the UK's gin produced in Scotland – accounting for more than half the world's total exports – and a record 22 breweries opening last year – bringing the total number of breweries to over 100 for the first time in more than a century – the demand for traditional Scottish drinks shows no sign of slowing.

Environment Secretary Andrea Leadsom said:

Scotch whisky is a driving force of the UK food and drink industry, accounting for nearly one-quarter of all our food and drink exports each year. It's fantastic other businesses are following suit and exporting around the world.

I want to build on the significant global opportunities for our food and drink businesses by giving companies the skills and confidence to start tapping into new international markets.

This Burns Night I would encourage people around the world to celebrate with the very best the Scotland has to offer.

Demand for Scotch whisky, the UK's biggest food and drink export, continues to rise, with almost 900 million bottles exported between January and September last year – an increase of three per cent on 2015. This success is set to continue, with the Scotch Whisky Association expecting seven new whisky distilleries to open in Scotland this year.

Fuelled by a growing thirst for Scotland's craft ales, exports of beer were worth £479 million from January to October last year, a 16 per cent rise from the same period in 2015. Exports of gin were worth nearly £400 million between January and October, an 11 per cent increase on 2015, and total gin sales broke the £1 billion mark in 2016.

Julie Hesketh-Laird, acting chief executive of the Scotch Whisky Association, said:

Burns and Scotch whisky are synonymous. The Scottish poet penned his love for our national drink in his verse 'O thou, my muse! guid auld Scotch' and around the globe a dram will be raised in his memory.

Scotch exports are worth around £4 billion a year to almost 200 markets. Such demand is driving an unprecedented number of Scotch distilleries being opened. We're committed to working with Defra to maintain export growth, leading the way for other food and drink products overseas.

Beer, whisky and gin all form a key part of the Government's plans to boost food and drink exports over the next five years. The recently launched [UK Food and Drink International Action Plan](#) aims to forge stronger economic links with key countries around the world, opening up new markets and helping first-time and existing exporters to bring a £2.9 billion boost to the UK economy.

There is a growing thirst for whisky in both the USA and Canada, where Defra is targeting an extra £579 million in exports over the next five years. The Government is also aiming for a £215 million export boost in Mexico and Latin America through growing demand for a wide range of British products including gin.

Secretary of State for Scotland, David Mundell said:

Whisky is one of Scotland's greatest success stories and tonight, like many Scots across the world on Burns Night, I'll be enjoying a wee dram.

Whisky is a vital part of any Burns night celebration – and these statistics show the industry is going from strength to strength. They also show the growing thirst for other fantastic Scottish drinks such as gin and craft beer, which have seen business booming.

Through the Government's Food is GREAT campaign Defra is working to drive exports and increase global demand for the UK's top quality food and drink.

The Government recently launched a new [online exporting hub](#), which provides a one-stop site for free advice as well as financial and regulatory support and over 1,300 live exporting opportunities. This includes over 200 current opportunities for food and drink companies in the UK.

[Hard-working people don't want an NHS where they are charged for treatments – Jonathan Ashworth](#)

Jonathan

Ashworth MP, Labour's Shadow Secretary of State for Health, commenting on reports that GPs are drawing up plans to charge patients for evening and weekend appointments, said:

"The fairest, most efficient and most equitable way of delivering healthcare is to ensure it is publicly funded and free at the point of use.

"Reports that GPs are now considering introducing charging would allow wealthier patients to jump the queue. It is an intolerable consequence of Government under-funding of General Practice and the Tories' wasteful re-organisation of the NHS.

"This is yet another stark revelation about the reality of Tory mismanagement of the NHS. The Prime Minister simply cannot keep blaming everyone other than her own Government for the scale of this crisis. Hard-working people don't want an NHS where they are charged for treatments. Theresa May needs to get a grip and fast."

[Chinese leaders extend festival wishes to predecessors](#)

President Xi Jinping and other Chinese leaders have visited their predecessors with seasons greetings ahead of the Spring Festival.

Former leaders including Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao got personal visits either from the current leaders or from their representatives, according to a statement from the General Office of the Communist Party of China (CPC)

Central Committee on Wednesday.

The visitors wished their hosts a happy Spring Festival, good health and long lives, the statement said.

The leaders of the older generation fully endorsed the outstanding achievements the country has made since the 18th CPC National Congress under the leadership of the CPC Central Committee with comrade Xi Jinping as the core, and expressed hope that Chinese people would unite to achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

Spring Festival, or the Chinese Lunar New Year, falls on Jan. 28 this year.