

Xi bids New Year greetings to non-Communist parties

Chinese President Xi Jinping Sunday attended a gathering in Beijing and extended Lunar New Year greetings to people from non-Communist parties, the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce, and those without party affiliation.

Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, called on non-Communist parties and personnel to uphold the leadership of the CPC and give suggestions for CPC governance.

Senior leaders Yu Zhengsheng and Zhang Gaoli also attended the event.

After listening to a speech by a representative of non-Communist parties, Xi expressed appreciation for the CPC's united front work and contributions made by non-Communist parties last year.

He also stressed the importance of consensus and joint efforts among the CPC and the non-Communist parties, the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce, and those without party affiliation.

Xi expressed hope that non-Communist parties and personnel would support creating a good environment for the 19th National Congress of the CPC, which is scheduled for this year, and pool wisdom and strength for the implementation of the CPC Central Committee's decisions.

He called on relevant people to give suggestions for the country's reform and development and ensure stability, as well as those that related to public concerns.

He further noted the importance of the proper selection of personnel and officials in non-Communist parties.

He said that CPC committees at all levels should support non-Communist parties and people without party affiliation in carrying out their duties.

Moreover, he said the ruling party should be open-minded in following others' good suggestions, and it was an important duty for non-Communist parties to let voices from across spectrum, including criticism, be heard by the ruling party and to give their advice truthfully.

Relocation to support 'ecological migrants'

A mass resettlement project for "ecological migrants" in China does not force ethnic groups to abandon their traditional culture and way of living, a senior official said on Sunday.

Zhang Yongli, deputy head of the State Forestry Administration, made the remarks during a news conference held by the State Council Information Office. He was asked by a reporter whether ecological migrants are struggling under a government-led project, thought to be the world's largest environmental migration project.

"The areas where the migrants come from do not have even the most basic facilities required for human survival and development," he said. "This would make it impossible for them to maintain their traditional culture and way of living.

"The project aims to help migrants improve their living standards, so their cultural heritage can be protected and passed down better than before," he added.

According to the State Forestry Administration, areas affected by desertification and sandification account for nearly 20 percent of China's territory. In some areas, land sandification is expanding, with another 310,000 square kilometers likely to suffer from sandification in the near future.

Against this backdrop, many people in the Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Tibet, and Ningxia Hui autonomous regions, as well as Gansu and Qinghai provinces, had to leave their homes, which had become distressed by desertification, climate change, industrialization and human activities.

Jia Yaofeng, a professor at Beifang University of Nationalities and an expert on climate change, said China started ecological migration exploration as early as 1983 when the central government targeted three regions in Gansu and Ningxia Hui autonomous region. The project was then expanded to include more regions that were struggling with poverty and desertification.

"Based on the results in central and western areas of China, moving people out of their homes has helped to mitigate local environmental pressure and helped migrants to improve their lives," Jia said. "However, we must admit that there are problems brought by mass resettlement."

Wang Yuming, vice-chairman of the government of the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, said all resettlement is proceeding based on the will of local residents. "We have relocated more than 200,000 people and we will relocate another 200,000."

He added that places that embrace ecological migrants have mature industries.

“Resettlement encourages local urbanization. Urbanization means more job opportunities, and people want to move to cities where jobs are available,” he said.

Summit brings bus industry together

Wales’ first ever Bus Summit, part of Economy Secretary, Ken Skates’ 5 point plan for the industry, will bring all interested parties together to look at how they can work more effectively together to deliver the best, most robust service possible.

Speaking ahead of the summit, the Economy and Infrastructure Secretary Ken Skates said:

“There is no question that 2016 was a mixed year for the bus industry in Wales. Whilst our bus network accounted for some 101 million passenger journeys – with many routes gaining in popularity – the demise of some service providers left certain communities, services and bus users vulnerable.

“The five point plan I announced last September sought to stabilise and support the industry in the short term but we must look for longer term solutions if we are to deliver a quality service that our thousands of passengers across Wales can have confidence in. I’m particularly keen to hear the views of the industry on how we can encourage young people to increase their bus travel. The MyTravel Pass pilot was a useful starting point and given us some valuable insight, we must now build on that and work with partners to develop an all Wales solution.

“This Bus Summit is an opportunity for us to share ideas to solve the difficulties facing the industry, define what we want our bus services to deliver and understand how we can better work together in order to deliver the quality services communities across Wales expect and deserve.

“In my eyes, that means a top quality and sustainable service, one that can drive forward our economy and our communities to greater prosperity. It means a service which works for both rural and urban areas, young and old and promotes and enables independent living, all whilst ensuring value for money for the tax payer.

“It’s a tough task but I’m positive we have the expertise and the will in Wales to deliver it.

“In the meantime, of course, we will continue to support local

authorities and communities wherever possible, whether it be through taking on new services like the TIC between Aberystwyth and Cardiff or providing further financial support to areas affected by loss of service providers.

“But longer term I want to ensure we establish a better informed, better designed, long term approach to the planning of our transport system. I’m keen, amongst other things, to explore with others whether new legislation can play a role in this.

“This Summit will be a catalyst for that and I look forward to working with the industry to inform and deliver the best possible system, together.”

[New £36m fund to reduce infant class sizes and raise standards announced by Kirsty Williams](#)

Directed at the frontline and starting with the largest class sizes, it will target classes where teaching and learning needs to improve and where there are high levels of deprivation.

The money, consisting of both revenue and capital funding, will be invested over the next four years up until 2021.

The latest figures show that 7.6% (8,196) of infant pupils in Wales were in classes of over 30.

Kirsty Williams said:

“Our national mission is to raise standards and extend opportunities for all our young people.

“Time and time again parents and teachers tell me that they are concerned about class sizes. We have listened to these concerns, looked at the international evidence, and are today announcing a new £36m fund to address infant class sizes.

“There is a positive connection between smaller classes and attainment, particularly for pupils from poorer backgrounds. This is most significant for younger children, which is why we are targeting this investment at infant class sizes.

“This announcement, linked to our other reforms, will create the

space for teachers to teach and for pupils to learn.”

Second-child policy increases births by 7.9%

The universal second-child policy implemented early last year was a major factor in raising the number of births in China to 17.86 million last year, an increase of 7.9 percent and the highest annual number since since 2000, according to the top health authority.

The number of newborns has increased by 1.31 million compared with 2015.

The portion of the births to couples who already had at least one child rose quickly to at least 45 percent last year, Yang Wenzhuang, a division director of the National Health and Family Planning Commission, said at a news conference on Sunday. The proportion was around 30 percent before 2013.

“It demonstrates that the universal second-child policy came in time and worked effectively,” Yang said.

“Some regions, mostly large cities in eastern areas, began recording second children as comprising more than half of local newborns,” he added.

Yang expected that by 2020, the number of new births each year would stand between 17 to 20 million in China, citing expert estimations.

Last week, Ma Xiaowei, deputy director of the commission, said a baby boom triggered largely by the new policy probably would come within the next two years.

For that, the commission plans to add 140,000 more maternity health workers in the coming years, he said.

The top decision-makers intensified efforts in late 2013 to adjust birth policies in place for three decades that limited most couples to just one child, aiming at addressing major demographic challenges such as an aging population and a looming labor shortage.

Starting in early 2014, couples in which one was an only child could have a second child. The universal second-child policy was implemented at the start of 2016.

“The long-term effect of the universal second-child policy is very helpful to China’s sustainable development,” said Yuan Xin, a professor of population studies at Nankai University in Tianjin.

By 2050, the policy is expected to bring about an extra 30 million working-age people and reduce the nation's aging rate by 2 percent, commission projections show.

But matching policies have not yet been refined to provide good support for couples willing to have more than one child, particularly in terms of maternity education and health services, Yang conceded.

A 2015 survey by the commission found nearly 75 percent of respondents were reluctant to have a second baby, largely due to economic burdens.

Other major concerns are age, parents' career development, and a lack of caregivers, it showed. Yuan suggested the government introduce support measures like favorable tax policies, prolonged maternity leave and education for families with two children.

As a byproduct of socioeconomic development, people tend to have smaller families, even with no birth limits, he said. "Now we might need to consider incentives for people to have more children."

In the mid-1950s, the average number of annual births was around 18 million, almost the same as in 2016. But the fertility rate (the average number of children a woman will have during her life) has dropped from more than six then to less than two.