

[China to announce annual water-quality rankings](#)

Starting from this year, China will publish the annual rankings of cities with the best and poorest water quality, as the government moves to further increase transparency.

In addition, results of investigations into major or sensitive environmental emergencies, their impacts on the environment, and assessments of losses will also be made known to the public in line with the law, according to the central government's agendas for 2017 unveiled by the State Council.

Water quality has not drawn as much attention from the public as air quality, and the rankings will serve as a form of supervision over local governments, as well as motivate them to step up efforts to treat polluted water and improve water quality, said Peng Yingdeng, a Beijing-based researcher in urban environmental pollution control.

China still has a long way to go in the treatment of polluted and odorous water, Peng said, adding that the rankings will prompt cities that have done poorly in this regard to strive harder for improvements.

[Speech: UK government supports training of Zambia peacekeeping defence forces](#)

It is a great honour to be here today. I lived and worked for two years with the British, US and Afghan military in the war-zone of Helmand, southern Afghanistan, during which time our coalition forces were losing lives on an almost daily basis. And my eldest son is a British army officer who could be deployed on operations at any time. Therefore I know from personal experience about the good that our armed forces can achieve in trying to stabilise places in the world that are shattered by conflict. And I know about the sacrifices that brave military personnel are often called upon to make.

I repeat that it is an honour to be here today.

I echo the US Ambassador's congratulations to President Lungu, to the Government, to the Zambian Defence forces, and to the Zambian people, for supporting peace and security mission in Africa, with boots on the ground.

I am glad that British Army trainers could assist again with the Zambian

Defence Force's pre-deployment training, in 2017 as we did in 2016. The training of ZAMBATT 3 over the last 2 months has been a joint effort between Zambian, US and UK trainers: the Zambian Army under Colonel Changala, US African Contingency Operations Training & Assistance under the direction of Curtis Crum, and British Army under W01 Regimental Sergeant Major Ash Curson.

The training package involved individual specialist courses ranging from advance medical training to creating and training the female engagement teams rightly highlighted by the US Ambassador. This training then progressed from training individuals to Companies of around 120 personnel, and to the whole Battle Group 750-strong.

I wish to thank the Zambian and US teams for their patience in trying to understand the wide variety of British accents within the UK team. While Britain can't compare with Zambia for the number of local languages spoken, we display our diversity through regional accents and dialects which can be difficult to comprehend when first heard, even for fellow countrymen like myself.

The British team have described to me the training as "testing". I gather that Mr Crum and Colonel Changala, who designed, coordinated and, ran this package, are not the kind of trainers who would allow anyone to have an easy or comfortable time.

Credit must go to Colonel Changala, and his Zambian trainers, who worked tirelessly to ensure their fellow country men and women are now well placed to achieve a positive effect in the Central African Republic.

Mention should be made of the Zambian Air Force contingent, under the command of Col Alipher Phiri, who have been put through their paces – from base protection to helicopter casualty evacuation exercise. I wish you well with your probable mission to South Sudan.

I wish to pay tribute, as well, to Lt Col John Banda, CO of ZAMBATT 3, for the sterling effort he and his headquarters team have put into shaping ZAMBATT 3 into an effective force of which Zambia can proud.

ZAMBATT 3 can expect a challenging tour, with your subunits spread over great distances in a confusing and contested environment, where the belligerent forces are neither easily defined nor contained.

ZAMBATT 3, you represent a glimmer of hope to the people of the Central African Republic. Treat them with respect. Since you are guests in their land, the onus will be on you to understand their story, their pain and anger, after the trauma they have experienced. When you finish your work in their country, let them remember the people of Zambia with affection and pride.

Lt Col John Banda, I wish you and the men and women of ZAMBATT 3 the best of luck. From what my British Army colleagues have told me, I don't believe that ZAMBATT 3 will be found wanting.

Corrupt Chinese fugitive repatriated from Zimbabwe

A retired Chinese tax official has been returned from Zimbabwe to China less than four months after he fled a corruption probe and hid in the southern African country.

It is Jiangsu Province's fastest repatriation of a corrupt fugitive, provincial anti-graft officials said.

Yang Xingfu, who retired as the deputy head of Local Taxation Bureau of Nantong City in 2015, fled to Zimbabwe last December, fearing a graft investigation.

Initial probes revealed evidence of Yang's abuse of power and acceptance of bribes in construction projects, corporate financing, and handling tax transfers since 2010 during his term of office.

The local procuratorate issued detention orders for Yang in January 2017. Learning he was in Zimbabwe, a law enforcement team was promptly assembled and dispatched, the officials said. Police in Zimbabwe held Yang and transferred him to the team in accordance with the law.

The case is still being investigated.

"The operation shows that there is no haven for corrupt officials abroad," said Yao Aishan, deputy head of the Jiangsu provincial procuratorate's anti-corruption bureau. "They won't escape punishment by the law, no matter where they flee."

Yao urged other fugitives on the run to turn themselves in to be considered for leniency.

China has stepped up efforts in international cooperation to hunt criminal fugitives. Operation "Sky Net," for example, repatriated 908 fugitives, including 122 officials, from over 70 countries or regions in 11 months last year.

Most fugitives have fled to developed countries, including Canada, the United States, and Australia, but a few have also taken refuge in Africa.

What should be the age to receive your State pension?

We have received a couple of reports this week discussing the age at which people should be entitled to a State pension based on their NI contributions.

Current policy is to raise the age from 65 to 66 in 2020, and to 67 in 2028. As people live longer, so the cost of their pensions rises without a proportionate increase in their contributions over their working lives. Whilst the state retirement scheme is a pay as you go one, where each generation pays for its parents generation out of current NI payments, individual pension entitlement is still based on your past contribution record.

The Cridland report suggests raising the age to 69 between 2037 and 2039 and going higher thereafter. The Government Actuary suggests 69 by 2053-5, with another variant bringing in 69 as early as 2040.

The Report also raises the issue of whether after the end of this Parliament there should be some change to the triple lock. Currently the government is pledged to increase pensions each year by the highest of earnings, prices (CPI) or 2.5%. Dropping one or two of these requirements could make progressive savings to the total cost. In recent years the 2.5% minimum has meant pensioner incomes rising faster than incomes in work.

I would be interested in your thoughts on all this. There does seem to be a good case to say that as longevity rises there should be a proportionate rise in the pension age to keep some balance between an individual's contributions when working and their pension receipts. Allowing the triple lock has helped narrow the gap between pensioner incomes and working incomes. There is an issue in how much further people think that should go.

Hundreds of thousands trapped in Mosul with 'worst yet to come' – UN agency

24 March 2017 – An estimated 400,000 Iraqi civilians are trapped in Mosul's Old City as fighting intensifies and people continue to flee, the United Nations refugee agency representative today warned.

“The worst is yet to come,” said Bruno Geddo, the Representative of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in Iraq.

Speaking by phone, Mr. Geddo said the fighting in the west has been more

intense than in the less densely populated east of the city, where the battle ended in January.

“People are stuck between a rock and a hard place,” he added. “There’s fighting shelling, bombing.”

When people try to flee, extremists shoot them. Some have tried to leave during prayers or under cover of fog at first light but were killed, Mr. Geddo said.

Meanwhile, life in the Old City is becoming impossible with a lack of food, clean water or fuel, Mr. Geddo said.

Meeting with civilians at the UNHCR transit and reception centre at Hammam al-Alil, outside of the city centre, Mr. Geddo said the number of people moving through has “surged” in recent days with up to 12,000 people arriving daily.

Some 340,000 people have been displaced since the fighting in Mosul started last October. Of those, about 72,000 have returned home.

VIDEO: Desperate to flee fighting, thousands of displaced Iraqis from west Mosul are arriving in Hammam al-Alil camp, a few kilometres south of the city. Many spend their first night in a reception centre awaiting their tents. Others are transferred to nearby camps to reunite with other family members. *Credit: UNHCR*

The UN representative called on all those fighting to allow civilians to leave areas of conflict for safer zones, and no one should be forced to come back home.

“Liberating Mosul is necessary but not sufficient,” Mr. Geddo said. “We equally have to get it right with the protection of civilians and in the humanitarian response.”