

TOP NEWS

Premier vows steps on taxes, expenditure

Li: Economy could face more complex domestic, international environment

By XU WEI
xuwe@chinadaily.com.cn

Premier Li Keqiang pledged greater strides on Wednesday in cutting taxes and reducing government expenditure as a key part of proactive fiscal policies this year to lift market expectations and keep major economic indicators within an appropriate range.

Li's remarks came as he presided over a State Council meeting that solicited suggestions from economists and business leaders on the annual Government Work Report to be delivered in March.

The premier said China could be faced with an even more complicated and challenging domestic and international environment this year, and more targeted policies and measures must be adopted to cope with the challenges.

The government must further tighten its belt and cut its normal expenditure, especially administrative expenses, by a large margin, to ensure that systematic tax cuts can be fully implemented and the basic public livelihood can be ensured.

He underlined the importance of maintaining reasonably sufficient liquidity during the implementation of a prudent monetary policy, with stronger measures to improve its transmission mechanism, so that the financing difficulties faced by small and medium-sized enterprises can be effectively alleviated.

The government will continue with an employment-focused policy and prioritize efforts to expand channels for job creation and support flexible employment, he said.

The government must minimize its direct intervention in the market to provide a more enabling environment for business operations and to create more businesses, he said, adding that market players have a key role to play in withstanding the downward pressure on the economy.

The premier also highlighted the significance of further tapping the potential of domestic consumption and giving play to the strength of China's vast domestic market.

He urged proactive efforts to develop community services such as elder care and day care for infants, and to strengthen weak areas in infrastructure and urban facilities.

It is also important to move forward with the renovation of old residential communities to expand effective investment and harness the momentum of growth, he said.

Among the attendees were Gao Peiyong, vice-president of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and Lei Jun, founder and CEO of Xiaomi Corp.

Gao urged the government to make its cuts in expenditure part of its institutional arrangement, while Lei called upon the authorities to scale up measures to attract foreign professionals to work in China.

Winter stopover



Whooper swans gather in the water at a park in Rongcheng, Shandong province, on Tuesday. From November to April each year, tens of thousands of whooper swans travel thousands of kilometers from Siberia and Mongolia to the coastal city of Rongcheng to spend the winter, presenting their grace and beauty. LIN HAIZHEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Anti-graft: Discipline at all levels gets new push

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More inspections will scrutinize performance in poverty alleviation work, the continuity and stability of poverty relief policies and the work to come after anti-poverty goals have been achieved, the communiqué said.

Officials who fake poverty alleviation data, embezzle public property or make use of their position to gain benefits for their relatives and friends, should be held accountable and punished severely, the communiqué added.

Attendees agreed. Feng Zhili, the top disciplinary inspection official in Yunnan province, said scrutiny of the performance of Party committees and governments at all levels in poverty alleviation should be enhanced, with a focus on the problem of ignoring the Party's political disciplinary rules.

Disciplinary departments should carry out their supervision responsibility, and those who fail to fulfill it should be held accountable when violations occur, he said.

Wang Lishan, the top disciplinary inspection official in Hubei province,

said, "To effectively address the practice of bureaucratism and formalism in the fight against poverty, we must mobilize the public to supervise the work because they see clearly and have deep feelings about such issues."

Xia Hongmin, the top disciplinary inspection official in Guizhou province, said discipline inspection efforts will be made in areas that are directly related to people's well-being, including education, medical care and employment to increase residents' sense of happiness.

The session also concluded that accurate investigations should be carried out to discover and punish officials who provide protection for criminal gangs and otherwise solve problems in ways that harm people's interests, the communiqué said.

Deepening reforms in the disciplinary inspection and supervisory systems through building a qualified team of discipline inspectors who are loyal, upright and have a high sense of responsibility was also listed as a goal in the communiqué.

Xinhua contributed to this story.



Luo Huining (2nd from left), the new director of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, toasts with Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor (center) and other dignitaries during the Spring Festival reception hosted by the Liaison Office at Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Center on Wednesday. CALVIN NG / CHINA DAILY

Liaison office chief outlines key tasks for HK

The new director of the central government's Liaison Office in Hong Kong said on Wednesday that ending violence and chaos remains the most pressing task for Hong Kong, appealing to the whole community to cherish Hong Kong and uphold the "one country, two systems" principle.

"Given the current situation in Hong Kong, I want to say that ending violence and chaos and restoring social order still remain the most pressing task for Hong Kong," said Luo Huining, the new director of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

"I also want to say that treasuring Hong Kong, our home, is a shared view, expectation and responsibility of all who truly care for and cherish Hong Kong," he added.

Luo made the remarks at the annual Spring Festival reception held by the liaison office in Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Center and attended by around 4,000 guests including representatives of the central government and the HKSAR government, foreign diplomatic missions and various sectors of Hong Kong society.

Pointing out that Hong Kong has not completely emerged from its

predicament of prolonged social unrest, which has brought Hong Kong's economy into a recession and severely affected residents' lives, Luo called on the whole community to cherish their home by making the best use of "one country, two systems", upholding the core values of the rule of law and civilized society, and realizing the aspiration of prosperity and development.

"Despite our differences in political views, all should agree that recognizing the 'one country' and cherishing the 'two systems' will be key to securing Hong Kong people's livelihood as well as the

region's future," he said.

"Overstepping the bottom line of the rule of law as well as the civilized society will only lead to disastrous damage to society," he said, urging people who love the country and Hong Kong to work in unity. He also called on Hong Kong's 180,000 civil servants to fulfill their responsibilities, and all sectors of society to make joint efforts to firmly uphold the core values of the rule of law and resolutely support the HKSAR government in its effective administration in accordance with the law.

XINHUA

SOEs: Companies bring opportunity

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The government also supports central SOEs being listed on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange, Peng added.

China First Heavy Industries Co, which supplies technical equipment, high-tech products and services for a number of industries, including steel, nonferrous metals, electrical power, energy and automobiles, suffered financial losses in 2016 but has seen a notable jump in net profits since 2018, after it steadily deepened its supply-side

structural reform and adjusted its operating model.

Liu Mingzhong, the group's chairman, said it has upgraded its products and introduced wider mixed-ownership reform in some of its subsidiaries to tap new industries and provide more diverse products.

The improved efficiency of the SOEs will benefit the whole corporate sector as they provide broad opportunities for the investment and growth of businesses with varied ownership, as well as promote deep integration of industrial,

supply and value chains for enterprises of differing sizes in home and global markets, said Liu Xiangdong, deputy director of the economic research department of the China Center for International Economic Exchanges in Beijing.

Operating revenues of central SOEs totaled 30.8 trillion yuan in 2019, a year-on-year growth of 5.6 percent, the State assets regulator said. Among them, 10 central SOEs achieved revenue growth of more than 20 percent last year, and 29 registered over 10 percent growth.

Wuhan enhances virus monitoring

By WANG XIAODONG
wangxiaodong@chinadaily.com.cn

The possibility of human-to-human transmission of a new virus that has caused 41 pneumonia cases in Wuhan, Hubei province, cannot be ruled out, although the risk of widespread transmission between humans is low, local authorities said on Wednesday.

Authorities in the capital of the province have intensified monitoring and search efforts in hospitals and clinics across the city to identify suspected cases, Wuhan Health Commission said in a statement released early on Wednesday.

Investigations have uncovered no clear evidence that the new coronavirus could be transmitted between human beings, and experts are conducting further research into the virus, the statement said.

Most of the 41 confirmed cases occurred in males and middle-aged or elderly people. Symptoms mostly seen in the early stage of the disease are fever and coughing, and those patients in serious condition are mostly elderly or those with other diseases, the commission said.

One of the cases involved a man employed at a seafood market in the city. His wife, who got sick following him, denied having been to the market, the commission said. Local authorities closed the market, a suspected source of the outbreak after reports of the outbreak last month.

A Wuhan resident was diagnosed with the virus in Thailand

and is in a stable condition, and authorities in the city have put all people who have had close contact with the patient under observation, and no abnormalities have been found, the commission said.

As of Tuesday night, seven people confirmed to have been ill from the virus had been cured and released from the hospital, six in critical condition, one had died and the remainder were in stable condition. All the patients under treatment were in designated medical institutions in the city and quarantine measures had been taken, the commission said on Tuesday night.

Close contact

Also as of Tuesday night, the city had tracked 763 people who had close contact with patients, such as cohabitants and medical workers who did not take effective precautions when giving them diagnosis and treatment. The medical observation had been terminated with 450 of them, and the remaining 313 were still under observation. None had been found to be infected, the commission said.

The outbreak was first reported last month in Wuhan. Researchers said last week that the outbreak was caused by a new coronavirus and ruled out that it was a new SARS — severe acute respiratory syndrome — outbreak.

Measures recommended by the World Health Organization to prevent spread of the infection include regular hand washing, covering the mouth and nose

when coughing and sneezing, thoroughly cooking meat and eggs, and avoiding close contact with anyone showing respiratory illness symptoms such as coughing and sneezing.

Investigations continue

The WHO said in a statement on Monday that after the recent case in Thailand, "the possibility of cases being identified in other countries was not unexpected", adding that active monitoring and preparedness in other countries are needed.

"The genetic sequencing shared by China enables more countries to rapidly diagnose patients," it said. The WHO said it was essential that investigations continue in China to identify the source of the outbreak and any animal reservoirs or intermediate hosts.

Wang Yuedan, an immunology professor at Peking University's Health Science Center, said despite the possibility of limited human-to-human transmission of the new virus, large-scale spreading of the disease is unlikely.

"The existing control and prevention measures adopted by health authorities are very strict," he said. "Local authorities quarantined people who had close contact with the patients from the start, which guards against the risks of human-to-human transmission."

"I think the risk of the disease spreading is controllable and chances of massive, worldwide spread are not high."

Island: DPP blamed for downturn in relations

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Ma said the DPP authorities have refused to recognize the 1992 Consensus since they took office in 2016. They have undermined the common political basis for the development of cross-Straits relations, supported Taiwan separatists, relied on foreign forces to build themselves up and opposed the mainland by blatantly provoking cross-Straits hostility.

He added that these are the fundamental causes of the deterioration of relations and the suspension of dialogue, and they have made the situation more complicated.

"The election does not change the fact that Taiwan is part of China," Ma said, adding that policies toward Taiwan will not change. Only by adhering to the consensus will the interests and welfare of Taiwan compatriots be enhanced, he said.

"National reunification is a trend that cannot be stopped by anyone or any force. We have the will, confidence and ability to thwart any form of independence and will never allow anyone, any group or any political party to separate Taiwan from China — not at any time or in any form," he said.

Ni Yongjie, deputy director of the Shanghai Institute of Taiwan Studies, said Tsai's election victory means she will continue to confront the mainland or even create conditions for decoupling, which is definitely not good for cross-Straits relations.

"We should not underestimate our Taiwan compatriots," he said, because a large number of people support parties that favor peace and stability.

Cross-Straits relations will not make positive progress politically with Tsai at the helm, he said, but exchanges between people and cities will not be hindered and are likely to increase.

"We should not underestimate Taiwan people's need for better cross-Straits relations, nor the impact of the mainland's preferential policies toward Taiwan or the efforts made by mainland people," he said.