

China vows to address stifling smog, terror threat

By Gillian Wong
The Associated Press

BEIJING — China's government has vowed to address long-festering complaints about choking smog while promising to crack down harder on the new threat of terrorism and promote unity among the country's sometimes-restive ethnic minorities.

In his first annual policy speech, Premier Li Keqiang also pledged to move more people into the middle class, cut government waste, and push further with President Xi Jinping's signature campaign to fight the rampant official corruption that has undermined public faith in the Communist Party.

Li's speech at the opening of China's annual ceremonial legislature comes as the government confronts ethnic unrest in the far western region of Xinjiang that has intensified over the past year. Earlier this month, China saw the first big terror attack outside Xinjiang blamed on militants from that region — a slashing attack at a train station in Kunming that killed 29 people and wounded 143.

In Beijing, the meeting's nearly 3,000 delegates from across the country observed a moment of silence for the victims of the attack as the session opened.

Li briefly mentioned the attack in his speech, saying authorities would toughen its controls on public order and "crack down hard on violent crimes of terrorism."

Chen Fengxiang, a delegate from Hubei, said during the session that the government would adopt stronger security steps following the attack by assailants wielding large knives.

"They lost their senses, and we must crack down harshly and take strict measures in preventing the violence," Chen said.

Much of Li's report served to further define priorities that had been outlined after a party policy meeting in November, which included plans to make the world's second-largest economy more open and competitive.



Li announced an official growth target of 7.5 percent for this year and pledged that Beijing will encourage competition, ease exchange rate controls, and improve access to credit for productive businesses. Last year, the economy grew 7.7 percent.

Li said the government will work harder to reduce pollution by shutting more coal-fired furnaces and controlling the tainting of rivers. He referred to the stifling smog that creeps over increasing areas of China and the fouling of the country's air, water, and soil as "nature's red-light warning against the model of inefficient and blind development."

Li promised to cut government waste, reiterating earlier decisions to ban the building of new government offices and reduce the number of government employees. He said the administration would try to be more responsive to the people's concerns and penalize corrupt officials "without mercy."

Outside the Great Hall of the People, where security was tight, two middle-aged would-be protesters broke through a police cordon and ran onto Tiananmen Square. One of them threw leaflets into the air before paramilitary police dragged them off the square.

Li emphasized that China's many ethnic

groups were all "equal members of the Chinese nation," an indirect response to frequent complaints by minority Uighurs and Tibetans that they are discriminated against for jobs, passports, and bank loans and unfairly subject to intense surveillance.

The work report did not indicate any intention on the government's part to review its ethnic policies in Xinjiang and Tibet. Critics say Beijing's policies of encouraging the migration of majority Han and imposing restrictions on religion and language have fuelled unrest in recent years.

The government also released details on its budget, announcing a 12.2 percent increase in military spending to \$132 billion. That followed last year's 10.7 percent increase to \$114 billion, giving

POLICY PROMISES. Delegates in ethnic minority costumes arrive for a session of the National People's Congress held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China. China has vowed to tighten environmental legislation and force polluters to pay compensation following renewed blasts of toxic air, according to the country's top legislator. (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)

China the second-highest defense budget for any nation behind the U.S., which spent \$600.4 billion on its military last year.

Increases in China's military budget have regularly exceeded both total increases in government spending and the nation's rate of economic growth. That has allowed lavish spending on new hardware and better conditions for soldiers, raising concerns about how China intends to use its new-found power amid a rise in tensions with its neighbors over the country's territorial claims.

In particular, there's been a sharp increase in friction between China and Japan in the past 18 months over control of a string of tiny uninhabited islands in the East China Sea.

While becoming increasingly assertive in its own territorial claims, Beijing has at the same time accused Japan of renewed militarism while dwelling on Tokyo's history as an aggressor during World War II.

"We will safeguard the victory of World War II and the postwar international order, and will not allow anyone to reverse the course of history," Li said, in an obvious dig at Tokyo.

Associated Press writers Didi Tang, Joe McDonald, Christopher Bodeen, and Ian Mader contributed to this report.

North Koreans cast votes, but government decides for whom

PYONGYANG, North Korea (AP) — North Koreans went to polling stations this month to approve a new national legislature.

The vote for the Supreme People's Assembly is the first in five years and the first under leader Kim Jong Un. The last elections were held in March 2009, when 687 deputies were elected to the assembly. It is the most powerful body under North Korea's constitution, but which in reality has little political power.

Instead of choosing who they support, voters are given the choice of a yes or no for the single candidate on their ballot. Virtually all choose yes.

Despite the lack of drama, the voting was held in a holiday atmosphere, with national flags hoisted along the streets, women decked out in colorful traditional clothing, and dancing events held in parks, schools, and riversides.

Voting in authoritarian North Korea is considered to be obligatory. Outside observers say that this makes elections in North Korea an opportunity for the authorities to check up on the population and tighten control.

Hyon Byong Chol, the chairman of a preparatory committee for one of the sub-districts in the election, called the vote



"ELECTION" DAY. People gather to watch performers near an election site in the Central District near Taedong Gate, in Pyongyang, North Korea. North Korean voters went to polling stations to elect a new national legislature, although they don't get to choose who to vote for since there is only one candidate per district. (AP Photo/Kim Kwang Hyon)

"meaningful" because it is the first under Kim.

"Through this election we will fully display the might of the single-hearted unity of our army and people who are firmly united behind our respected marshal," he said.

The Supreme People's Assembly usually runs five-year sessions. It meets only rarely, often only once a year. When it is not in session, its work is done by a smaller and more powerful body called the Presidium.

Kim is also a candidate. State media announced that his constituency is a remote mountain area on the border with China. Mount Paekdu is venerated in North Korea's official history as the birthplace of Kim Jong Il, although his-

torians outside the country agree that he was born in the former Soviet Union.

The new parliament is expected to meet next month. No date has been officially announced.

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K-pop group managed by Jackie Chan to debut album

Continued from page 2

martial arts at the China Drama Academy before working in films.

One of the best-known action stars in the world, he released Mandarin pop albums in the 1990s with moderate success.

JJCC will be his first attempt to cross over to Korean pop, which has been dominating music charts in Asia.

2013 Most Honored Elder Award Recipient

Flordeliza B. Irlandez

Flordeliza B. Irlandez was born August 24, 1932 in Taysan, Batangas province, the Philippines. She is the eldest of seven children born to Ciriaco Bautista and Nieves Ramirez Bautista, and as such was nicknamed "The Commander." She attended Batangas High School and studied chemistry at the University of the



Philippines, where she was at the top of her class and earned a Bachelor of Science degree. Flor came to the U.S. in 1956 to study food technology at Oregon State University, where she obtained a bachelor's degree in food technology and a master's degree in food technology and biochemistry. After graduation, Flor found a job as a researcher at the Heinz Company in Pittsburg in the baby food division, where she worked for four years. She married her husband, Frank Irlandez, in 1961. The couple has two daughters, Marissa and Liza, and two grandchildren, Ryan and

Alex. Flordeliza has been a member of the Fil-Am Friendship Club for more than 35 years and a volunteer at the Portland Center for the Performing Arts for more than 20 years, in addition to volunteering for various church organizations. She is an avid runner, with 18 marathons and many half-marathons and Hood To Coast runs under her belt. Among her many running accomplishments, Flor is the reigning champion in the 80-years-and-over category for the Marine Corps Marathon and has a first-place age-group award for the 2012 Rock 'n' Roll Portland Half Marathon. When not strapping on her running shoes, Flor keeps busy with aerobics, yoga, zumba, kickboxing, pilates, and dancing with husband Frank.

The Asian Reporter Foundation is accepting nominations for its 2014 "Most Honored Elder" awards.

The recognition banquet will be held Thursday, April 17, 2014 at northeast Portland's TAO Event Center. Nomination forms and guidelines for eligibility are available for download at <www.ARFoundation.net>.

The nomination deadline is Wednesday, March 26, 2014 at 5:00pm.