

《中国领导人面临艰巨挑战》

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It's been a year of political transition. For President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang, their first year in office has been one of sweeping reforms and daunting challenges.

They have already left their mark through their policies aimed at changing the country. But change won't come easily.

A once-in-a-decade change of guard at the top. Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang took over a country full of promise, but ridden with problems. The biggest challenge is from within the party, and that is where they began - with a trip to the past. The central leadership paid tributes to the nation's founders at the National Museum. It is here that Xi Jinping announced his vision.

"One's fate is determined by his choice of path. Our choice is to revitalize the Chinese nation, that is our Chinese Dream," Xi said.

The dream asks for a change of style, which is simplicity. Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang launched a campaign against extravagance and waste. They reduced red tape, limited the use of government cars and allowed no banquets, no mooncakes and not even a gift card on the government's bill. The move was swift and important.

"It is important as it prepares the groundwork for deeping reforms," said Fu Jun from the Public Management School at Peking University.

The top leaders led by example to make change happen. They travelled the country to whip up support for their campaign, showed up at the grassroots to keep in touch with the base and asked their ministers and governors to do soul searching.

Corrupt officials were brought down on an unprecedented scale. In a space of 400 days, 21 ministerial-level officials have already been sacked. The message from Xi Jinping and Li Keqing is clear: when they said they would deal with corrupt tigers, they meant it.

Then, there is the substantive change. The top priority is to steer the country's economy away from its reliance on exports and investment. And the key is the redefinition of government.

"The government must be slimmer. It feels like cutting yourself. It hurts. But it is what the people want and the country needs," Premier Li Keqiang said.

In order to do that, the government needs to step back and let the market step up. But that means they will have to challenge entrenched interest groups head on. They need a game changer moment. November 2013, the CPC held a plenum to map out the reforms for the next decade.

"China is at a critical moment, they either make it or they don't," Fu Jun said.

The slope will be steep and tough to negotiate: SOE reforms, government slim-down, cleaner air and growing economy are all tricky challenges. To deliver change and maintain stability is a great balancing act.

They have put up a plan of reform, but that is the easy part. They will have to reset the target, regroup the bureaucracy and realign the interests, and that will be a real test of the leadership. It is now the second year into the administration, they still have time but they need to make the best of it.

