

CHINA

Row, row, row your bucket



A man paddles in a bucket through knee-deep floodwater in Lujiang county, Anhui province, on Wednesday. Water from a small river nearby spilled into the town center after a small dike was breached. HUANG YANGYANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Premier pledges oversight of government assistance funds

Authorities to ensure transfer payments make their way to the grassroots level

By XU WEI
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Premier Li Keqiang pledged on Thursday to bolster oversight over the use of government funds and make government aid policies more targeted and timely as part of broader measures to promote clean governance.

In a speech delivered at a State Council teleconference on clean governance, Li said the government will tighten discipline and improve the conduct of officials in the face of unprecedented risks and challenges.

Officials must govern for the people and ensure six priorities and sta-

bility in six areas, which is also a test for the government's power of implementation and its work style, he said. The six priorities are safeguarding employment, people's livelihoods, the development of market entities, food and energy security, the stable operation of industrial and supply chains, and the smooth functioning of society.

He urged local authorities and different departments to strictly enforce the special transfer payment mechanism and ensure that the newly added fiscal funds can be channeled directly to the grassroots level.

Governments at various levels must tighten their belts, cut their

expenditures and ensure that their funds can be used where they are needed most, he said, adding that utmost efforts must be made to protect jobs, ensure public livelihoods and help market players.

He warned against the practice of formalities for formalities' sake and bureaucratic acts, saying that misconduct in all forms will be resolutely corrected.

Anyone who dares to use funds earmarked for public well-being for corrupt purposes will be held accountable, he said.

The premier urged governments at various levels to act in line with the practice, adopt measures in a timely manner and excel in using reform to solve difficult issues and diffuse risks.

It is also important to continuously reduce the burden on the grass-

roots level governments and consolidate outcomes on cutting red tape so that primary-level officials can stay focused on their work, he added.

Li underscored that problems such as corruption and infringing on public interest must be rectified, and government workers at various levels should get used to performing their duties under oversight.

They must also serve the public interest with clean conduct and work diligently for the people, the premier said.

Li reiterated the importance of coordinating epidemic containment and socioeconomic development, adopting concrete measures in flood prevention, disaster relief and work safety and striving to attain the targets and tasks for social and economic development this year.

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'Pearl' lake shining again after protection projects

By WANG QINGYUN
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In the heart of Weining Yi, Hui and Miao autonomous county in Guizhou province lies Caohai, the largest natural freshwater lake in Guizhou province.

At an elevation of more than 2 kilometers, the 25-square-kilometer lake has been dubbed "a pearl in the plateau".

The "pearl", home to more than 200 kinds of birds, including the endangered black-necked crane, hasn't always shone. It once shrank to only 5 sq km due to reclamation. After gaining its current size, it was threatened by unrestrained tourism and untreated domestic sewage.

Things have improved since 2015, when the county started a campaign to repair Caohai's environment.

According to local officials, the county has paid local farmers for 4,000 hectares of water, wetland and farmland to carry out protection projects, including wetland restoration and building foraging habitats for birds.

Further, the county banned tourism at the lake in 2019.

Xia Chaowen, an official of the management committee of the Caohai national nature reserve, which covers 120 sq km, said visitors used to take the farmers' boats to tour the lake, resulting in litter, alarmed birds and damaged aquatics. Chemical fertilizers and pesticides used by the farmers posed another hazard to the water, Xia said.

The county has also moved more than 2,300 households from the lakeside.

Located next to the county's traditional communities, Caohai can be easily affected by human activities. Before the overhaul campaign started in 2015, residents living around the lake used to discharge sewage directly into the water.

As a result, the county built a sewage treatment plant on the upper stream of Caohai, processing 8,000 metric tons of sewage every day on average, as well as 19 smaller ones around the lake.

During an interview in June, Hong Huining, deputy head of the major treatment plant, showed the media how sewage is treated in her factory.

The wastewater becomes clear and odorless after a number of

steps to remove impurities. In the end, the water runs through an artificial wetland filled with different plants used to further absorb harmful substances before being discharged into Caohai.

Positive results have surfaced after five years of restoration efforts.

Li Zhenji, an official of the environmental monitoring department under the Caohai reserve management committee, said 246 kinds of birds were recorded in the region this year, 18 more than in 2010.

The overhaul campaign has improved biological diversity in Caohai, leading to a more stable and stronger biological system, according to Li.

Plants such as water fern, which used to "grow wildly" over Caohai due to deteriorated water quality and disrupted growth of aquatic life, can hardly be seen in the lake now, while some other plants rarely seen in the past have become more common in recent years, according to Li.

Located next to Yunnan province and near Sichuan province, Caohai is part of the Yangtze River system. It is located at the upstream of the Hengjiang River, which is a branch of the Jinsha River.

As a result, protecting Caohai is not only important for Guizhou, but also for the environments of neighboring Yunnan and Sichuan, according to Li.

Hong, who works in the sewage treatment factory, recalled that the water in Caohai worsened in the 1990s, and she was "very disappointed" to see the lake turn "black and smelly".

With the water quality improved significantly since 2015, Hong said now she and her husband often take walks by the lake to enjoy its "pleasant view", especially the "good air and clear water" in the summer.

Hong said she is confident that Caohai will continue to get better and added that the lake should be protected by all local people.

Yang Jun contributed to this story.

Shanghai Book Fair space to grow in response to virus

By ZHANG KUN in Shanghai
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The 17th Shanghai Book Fair will expand its exhibition space and give a boost to its online presence to help ensure public health and safety.

The city's annual reading celebration and showcase for new publications from China and abroad will take place at the Shanghai Exhibition Center from Aug 12 to 18, the municipality announced on Thursday.

"We will build more tents to expand the exhibition space from the usual 23,000 square meters to an unprecedented 26,000," according to Xu Jiong, head of the municipal administration of press and

publication. "This will help to prevent crowds from gathering and provide a safer and more comfortable environment for visitors."

This year, the COVID-19 pandemic has created great challenges for the fair, the organizer said, but "we will learn from the operations and feedback from other large public events in the city, such as the upcoming Shanghai International Film Festival (July 25-Aug 2) and China Joy (July 31-Aug 3), an exhibition of digital entertainment industry, to implement effective measures to ensure a safe book fair now that the containment of COVID-19 has become a regular part of daily life."

Visitors will have to make reservations with their valid ID, present

their health QR code and have their temperatures taken upon entering the fair. Moreover, the fair will monitor the number of visitors in the exhibition space and prevent more people from entering if the number reaches a peak level.

The fair will open from 9 am to 9 pm every day, with a certain period allocated for sterilization and cleanup, Xu said.

"I hope people will understand that the inconvenience is all for the cause of public safety," he said. "We ask publishing houses to showcase at the fair as many new titles as possible, but with not so many copies for each title. This will leave maximum space for visitors, enable them to find new books at the fair, and buy online promptly and conveniently."

Aside from the main exhibition venue at Shanghai Exhibition Center, the fair will also host a showcase of new books and reading events at 150 other locations around the city. In addition, the fair will make more efforts than ever to enrich online service and broadcast more events through online livestreaming on popular web platforms such as Bilibili and Little Red Book.

"We hope to introduce the fun of books to as many new readers as possible, and make the fair a festival for the wide public, instead of a secret shared by small groups of dedicated book lovers," Xu said.

For the convenience of epidemiological tracking, all tickets must be booked online or purchased on site with a valid ID, he added.



Endangered black-necked cranes increasingly flock to Caohai, the largest natural freshwater lake in Guizhou province, as the water quality of the lake has improved since the local government launched many projects to protect it. HE HUAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Consulate: Allegations described as effort to 'look tough' on China before US election

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Wang said the US has twice opened Chinese diplomatic pouches — in July 2018 and January 2020. Washington has not denied that fact, he said, but repeatedly cited technical reasons to justify the actions and shift responsibility.

The US actions violated China's diplomatic dignity and security and should be condemned, he said.

Wang also denied reports that the US closure of the consulate was done in retaliation for China not helping the country reopen its consulate in Wuhan. The US announced in January the temporary closure of its consulate in Wuhan and the withdrawal of its personnel.

Some US diplomats returned to the consulate to resume operations in June, and China has been providing conveniences for the US

consulate to perform its duties in accordance with the law.

Cai Wei, consul general of China in Houston, told ABC13 television news on Wednesday: "I am surprised and angry because we have done nothing wrong."

"I think the US and China are such important countries; we need to be friends. It's unimaginable for me to see such a cold war between two such big countries. It's a disaster to two peoples. It's also a disaster for the whole world."

"Some US politicians lied for so-called political correctness, while ignoring people's lives and well-being. In the end, they will harm others as well as themselves. We advise those US politicians to stop playing their tricks as soon as possible."

Jessica Chen Weiss, a political scientist and associate professor of government at Cornell University, said that unless more evidence is

forthcoming, the move "looks like a stepped-up effort to use China as the boogymen and distract US voters from the Trump administration's disastrous response to" the novel coronavirus pandemic.

'Last thing' US needs

"If the consulate has been engaged in 'massive illegal spying and influence operations', why was the announcement so thin on detail?" Weiss asked in a series of tweets posted on Wednesday.

"The last thing we need as our country struggles with a once-in-a-century pandemic is an all-out confrontation with China," she added.

Jon Taylor, a professor and chair of the department of political science and geography at the University of Texas at San Antonio, said the timing of the US move "immediately raises some questions".

"Unless there is some substantial evidence, this appears to be another effort to 'look tough' on China during a US presidential election year," he said.

Charles Foster, the former chairman of the Asia Society Texas Center and the current chairman of US-China Partnerships in Houston, said that the US decision will "cause a counter reaction in China — and any further reaction in the US — all leading to steady deterioration of bilateral relations at a time we should be strengthening it".

Foster said that China, as the other major economic power in the world, shouldn't be ignored by the US.

"It represents close to one-fifth of humanity and more when you include the China diaspora. We cannot ignore China. We must work with China," said Foster.

"Under the current administration, all the actions that have been taken in the last several months are driving a

wedge between the US and China, and it is making everything more difficult to resolve than before," he said.

"Just a few months ago, when the phase one trade deal was announced, China would be buying billions of US products, a lot of which would be very beneficial to Houston and Texas as a result of purchasing billions in oil and gas, all of which last night's decision puts into jeopardy," he said.

Bob Harvey, president and CEO of the Greater Houston Partnership, said, "The consulate has been important to building bilateral trade and investment between the Houston region and China and for furthering cultural ties."

Wang, the spokesman, was asked about allegations that the Chinese consulate engages in espionage activities, based on reports of the Houston consul general and two other Chinese diplomats recently using fake identi-

fication to escort Chinese travelers to the gate area of a charter flight at George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston. He clarified that Chinese consular officials entered a restricted area of the airport with a consular certificate approved by the US State Department to take care of Chinese citizens on the flight.

Wang said that such a practice complies with relevant laws and regulations, and there are precedents.

"The US accusation against China is completely fabricated and not true," he said, adding that the information about the staff of the Chinese diplomatic missions in the US is open and transparent.

May Zhou in Houston contributed to this story.

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