

CHINA

Hong Kong defends new security law

Wall Street Journal, foreign politicians slammed over false, biased claims

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The Commissioner's Office of the Chinese Foreign Ministry in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region published a strongly-worded letter on Thursday criticizing the US newspaper Wall Street Journal for claiming in an editorial that the new national security ordinance is "a giant leap backward" and will "lock Hong Kong people up," as the new ordinance comes into effect.

The article also claimed that Hong Kong is "not enough" for having the "controversial" National Security Law for Hong Kong, and therefore comes a "sweeping" and "vague" new legislation.

A spokesperson for the office said the sensational accusation is just a "silver bullet" for the newspaper to catch readers' eyes, saying such kinds of constant smears have deterred some businesspeople in the United States from visiting Hong Kong for the fear of being "locked up," the spokesperson heard.

"I believe many Western media outlets, including The Wall Street Journal, should take credit for their distorted Hong Kong impression," the spokesperson said.

The spokesperson said the National Security Law implemented in 2020 covers only two of the seven categories of crimes under Article 23 of the Basic Law, namely secession and subversion, and the other five crimes, such as treason and theft of State secrets, are not included.

Furthermore, some provisions in Hong Kong's laws still retain terms such as "the Crown," referring to British monarchs in colonial days, the spokesperson pointed out, emphasizing that it is fully justified for Hong

Kong to close the legislative gap with the new ordinance.

As for labeling the new national security ordinance as "sweeping" and its terms "conveniently vague," the spokesperson called the remarks a downright double standard. The law is consistent with the definitions of terms in different places' national security legislation and has taken Hong Kong's reality into full consideration, the spokesperson said.

No text in the law says it regards foreign influences as a threat — unlike the editorial wrote, the spokesperson said.

The letter also said that although the newspaper has been doomsaying China for decades, it has been pathetically inaccurate.

The national security ordinance, cleared by the city's legislature on Tuesday, was made to prevent, deter and punish five types of acts endangering national security, including treason, theft of State secrets and espionage.

On Friday, more Hong Kong people stood out and protested against the smears by some Western politicians on the city's national security ordinance.

A flock of people rallied outside the British consulate general in Hong Kong, condemning the biased remarks made by British politicians, including former UK prime minister and current Foreign Secretary David Cameron and former British governor of Hong Kong Chris Patten, regarding the legislation.

Several groups also organized a protest at the US consulate general in Hong Kong, saying the ordinance won't bring broad support during its monthlong public consultation, and it will better protect Hong Kong society and enterprises.

Jiangxi county tries to lower 'bride price'

By **ZHAO RUINAN** in Nanchang
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A county in Jiangxi province recently announced new rules to incentivize "zero and low bride prices", sparking heated debate on social media.

While experts said the initiative holds significance in combating exorbitant marriage practices, concerns about feasibility and overlooking family differences persist.

The practice of "bride prices", where the groom provides money or other gifts, such as gold or jewelry, to the bride and her family as a prerequisite for marriage, is widespread in China.

According to the new initiative, children of couples opting for zero or low bride prices in Chongyi county, Ganzhou, will be given priority in school enrollment in the county during preschool and compulsory education.

A low bride price is one that does not exceed 39,000 yuan (\$5,400) in betrothal gifts or cash.

The new regulations have been given a one-year trial period.

Those taking advantage of them can also enjoy free entry to county-owned scenic spots, a complimentary health checkup within the first year, and free public bus rides within the county.

Chen Wenchao, assistant judge at Beijing's Chaoyang District People's Court, praised the move, seeing it as a refinement of the latest judicial interpretations and reflecting efforts to curb exorbitant bride prices and guide marriage customs.

A month ago, China's top court, the Supreme People's Court, clarified the scope of betrothal gifts, determined the circumstances in which they should be returned, and prohibited asking for money or other possessions in the name of gifts.

"In recent years, the issue of exorbitant bride prices has become prev-

alent in several areas, with some bride prices reaching exceptionally high amounts," Chen said.

"This trend needs to be curbed, and marriage customs require proper guidance."

Previously, cities like Yingtan in Jiangxi had issued guidelines stating that rural bride prices should not exceed 60,000 yuan. Fenyi county, in Xinyu, set the upper limit for rural bride prices at 69,000 yuan.

Local governments elsewhere have also made efforts to regulate high-priced bride prices. Ningling county in Henan province, one of the first national experimental zones for marriage custom reforms, has advocated they not exceed 30,000 yuan.

Four years ago, in Shandong province, Yangzhuang town in Yishui county set the standard at a maximum of 10,000 yuan. In May 2022, Liangshan prefecture in Sichuan province introduced regulations that capped them at 100,000 yuan.

Lan Wen, a political adviser from Jiangxi province, said bride prices are often tied to prestige issues, especially in low-income rural regions.

Rural families equate the amount with sincerity, personal prestige, or even the perceived value of their children, disregarding the financial capacity of the groom's family, she said.

Lan said that addressing the issue of exorbitant bride prices requires joint efforts, including tailored regulations, economic and societal development, protection of vulnerable groups and community interventions.

Chen, the judge from Beijing, said that the vast income disparities among regions and diverse forms of bride prices, ranging from cash to traditional gold jewelry, make it challenging to have a "one-size-fits-all" approach, and a simple fixed amount might not be effective.

Mantis mania



Wang Yong, a martial arts inheritor, teaches foreigners a style of Chinese kung fu imitating a mantis in Qingdao, Shandong province, on Friday. Foreign friends from Morocco, Mongolia, Russia and other countries and regions visited Laoshan Academy in the city to learn China's traditional martial arts. WANG YUXUAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

School bullies will lose chances for better education

By **ZHAO YIMENG**
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Junior middle school students who have a record of school bullying will be deprived of recommendation opportunities for excellent senior middle schools, a local education authority said recently.

Candidates who have engaged in negative behaviors such as cheating during exams or school bullying should not be recommended as students with admission advantages during the enrollment process of senior middle schools, according to a regulation released by the Chengdu Education Bureau in Sichuan province.

The regulation aims to ensure that comprehensive quality evaluation plays a significant role in high school enrollment, breaking away from a score-oriented approach, it

said. The regulation will help foster students' moral integrity, and promote their comprehensive development and healthy growth.

The regulation was issued amid heated discussions about several recent school bullying incidents involving teenagers.

A video went viral on social media showing three male students in Linyi, Shandong province, stuffing garbage into another boy's mouth and physically assaulting him by punching and kicking, while hitting him with tree branches.

During the 7-minute video, the boy was crying in pain as the other students insulted him.

Local police said on Monday that the assailants had been apprehended and the boy was not badly hurt.

Another video showed that in

Jieyang, Guangdong province, a girl was surrounded and attacked by a group of male students of the same age, who used ropes to whip and kick her in a corner.

Local police announced on Monday that the case has been resolved.

In a recent case of three boys who allegedly killed a middle school student in Handan, Hebei province, the victim's father said his son had suffered from school bullying for a long time.

There have been increasingly dangerous trends emerging in school bullying, including younger perpetrators engaging in bullying behavior, China Central Television commented on Wednesday.

Moreover, the severity of such behavior has challenged social norms, given that acts such as forcing classmates to eat feces or coercing others to lick genitals are being

perpetrated by elementary and middle school students, some of whom are under 10 years old, the commentary said.

Cases of juvenile delinquency closely associated with school bullying are also rising.

"We must prioritize the perspective of the victims and impose strong punishments on bullies. It is especially necessary to analyze and deal with emblematic cases properly to set examples and deter future occurrences, gradually reversing the negative trends," it said.

To effectively curb incidents of school bullying, schools must play a pivotal role and act as the first line of defense. Judicial authorities should employ decisive measures on minors suspected of committing crimes, imposing necessary penalties and charging appropriate compensation, it added.



To catch a sheep

Herdsmen of the Tajik ethnic group ride yaks to catch sheep during a contest in Tashikurgan Tajik autonomous county, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, on Friday. Catching sheep while riding on yaks is a traditional Tajik folk sport. It has been recognized as an intangible cultural heritage in Xinjiang.

SUN TINGWEN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Briefly

Death penalty for poisoning founder

Xu Yao, the former CEO of Three-Body Universe (Shanghai) Cultural Development, was sentenced to death by the Shanghai First Intermediate People's Court on Friday for the murder of the company's founder, Lin Qi. The court's review of evidence revealed that between Dec 14 and 15, 2020, Xu deliberately poisoned Lin by lacing edible items consumed by Lin with toxins, leading to Lin's death on Dec 25. The court also found that between September and December 2020, Xu premeditated poisoning two other colleagues amid workplace disputes by contaminating their office beverages. Two more colleagues were also poisoned from drinking the office beverages.

Cause of forest fire in Sichuan determined

Authorities have determined that a forest fire that started in the Garze Tibetan autonomous prefecture in Sichuan province last Friday was caused by the use of a fire at a construction site. The prefecture's emergency management bureau did not specify which construction site. The forest fire broke out in Yajiang at around 5 pm near Baizi village and spread to a larger area, driven by a sudden increase in wind that began on Saturday. The fire consisted of three main sections, with the first being extinguished on Monday. As of 6 am on Friday, the third section had no open flames and only sporadic smoke. The second section had intermittent fires and two large fires, according to the Garze prefecture forest and grassland prevention and control command. The fire has so far claimed no lives.

New ALS treatment brings hope to patients

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A patient suffering from a type of ALS — a progressively deteriorating, fatal neurodegenerative disease characterized by muscle weakness and atrophy — became on Thursday the first in China to receive a therapy that targets a gene that causes the disease.

Liu Jun, a professor with the neurology department of Shanghai Ruijin Hospital, who is in charge of the case of the 49-year-old woman at Ruijin-Hainan Hospital in Hainan province, said that the medical team will conduct comprehensive assessment of the patient — including rating her activities, electromyography, imaging and tests for specific genes — in around half a year to evaluate how the injection has worked.

The woman, a native of Shandong province, was diagnosed in Beijing in 2022.

"Another 12 patients have already made reservations to get

the injections at our hospital," said Liu on Friday.

"Every tiny step of the medical progress requires colossal efforts behind the scenes. We anticipate that the new therapy will provide new hope to treat such patients," he said.

The first and only special medical zone in China, the Boao Lecheng International Medical Tourism Pilot Zone in Hainan was established in 2013 and has been granted preferential policies, including using medical devices and drugs licensed abroad but not in China.

ALS is the most common type of motor neuron disease, and patients will eventually die due to difficulty in swallowing and respiratory muscle weakness. They usually survive only three to five years after the onset of the illness.

There are currently more than 40,000 ALS patients in China. Liu said most patients are in their 40s and some are younger. The ratio of women patients is slightly higher.

Currently, two medicines are

used to treat ALS in the country, but they often show limited efficacy. Doctors said that therapies with different drug targets are in urgent need.

The injection Tofersen, by US-based biotechnology company Biogen, was approved in the United States in April 2023. It treats adults with ALS who have a mutation in the SOD1 gene, which results in the production of abnormal proteins.

Tofersen can interfere in the production process, and thus reduce the synthesis of problematic SOD1 proteins.

Liu said that patients need an injection once every three to six months. Each injection costs \$14,000. There are roughly 1,000 ALS patients with SOD1 gene mutations in the country.

"We'll continue to observe the actual efficacy of the novel treatment, including how it can help slow disease progression and how long its effects can be sustained after a shot," he said.