

COMMENT

Editorials

Some Western critics never tire of their efforts to smear China

When China introduced strict COVID-19 pandemic prevention and control policies three years ago, Western critics called the lockdowns imposed on Wuhan and elsewhere an inhuman medieval practice.

Yet when Western countries were forced to implement their own lockdowns to prevent their own health systems from being overwhelmed, they praised as the moves as resolute measures to protect people from the virus.

Now that the virus is displaying weakened pathogenicity and most of China's population is vaccinated, the country has taken the initiative to lift its strict virus control measures. But to these Western critics this is not of its own volition. Rather, it is because the country has had to surrender to the virus. They claim it proves that the country's dynamic clearing policy has been a failure. Of course, when their own countries reopened, it was portrayed as a calculated decision to acquire herd immunity.

Having found it impossible to explain the discrepancy between large number of deaths attributable to the virus in their own countries and the relatively low number in China, they are predicting a tsunami of COVID deaths in China now that, according to them, the country has been "forced" to "abruptly" end its former pandemic control policies.

While the Chinese economy has maintained sizable growth, and demonstrated its resilience and potential even at the most difficult time,

these critics clamor that the world's second-largest economy is collapsing.

When China selflessly provides vaccines, essential medical care supplies and life necessities to the rest of the world, they claim the vaccines and medical items do not work, and China is making a fortune out of other's misfortune.

Even though China remains a reliable trade partner and a driver of the global economy as a manufacturing center, logistics hub and key link in the global industry and supply chains, these critics spread alarmist fear that China's COVID policies are threatening the stability of world trade and foreign companies are losing confidence in it.

Calling black white, they turn a blind eye to which countries are trying to collude with each other to weaponize trade, investment and technology to hijack the world economy for their own narrow ends.

They also choose to ignore the gap in medical care resources between China and their own countries, as well as China's development stage and the size of its population, taking every opportunity to hype up any medical supply shortage after the adjustment of the COVID-19 policies as fault or failure of the Chinese government. Something none of their own countries proved to be able to do even with their more developed medical care conditions and much smaller populations.

The question is for how long will these critics persist with their dog-and-pony shows of bias and prejudice.

New stage for control of COVID-19

Starting from Jan 8 next year, COVID-19 will be managed as a Category B infectious disease rather than as Category A, the National Health Commission said in a statement issued on late Monday. This is indeed an important adjustment following the loosening of the tight prevention and control measures.

It was responsible of the Chinese government to classify COVID-19 as a Category B infectious disease like HIV, viral hepatitis and H7N9 bird flu, in January 2020, after it was confirmed it could spread between humans. And it was also responsible of the government to manage it under Category A disease protocols, like bubonic plague and cholera, as there was still a lot to learn about the virus and its pathogenicity was strong and so was the fatality rate for those infected.

Category A protocols gave local governments the power to place the infected and their contacts under quarantine and lock-down areas where there was a cluster of infections. There is no denying that the tight control and prevention measures such as the checking of nucleic acid test results for those entering public venues and the closed management of neighborhoods effectively protected the majority of residents from being infected, and therefore lowered the fatality rate of the disease by a considerable margin.

However, it is impossible for such management measures to last given the toll they were taking on the economy and social activities, and there was no rea-

son to continue these measures when the Omicron variant of the virus has strong transmissibility but weak pathogenicity and a much lower fatality rate.

But what local authorities should be reminded of is the fact that this shift of policy does not mean reduced responsibility on their part for the management of the epidemic, but rather a change of focus.

They will have to do an even better job in ensuring there is an adequate supply of medical services and materials and enough care for vulnerable groups such as the elderly. Relevant departments still need to monitor the mutation of the virus and keep the public informed about the developments of the epidemic.

The shift of policy means a long-anticipated green light has been given to normalize cross-border exchanges of people and production factors. That will greatly expand the space for the recovery of the economy by presenting foreign businesses with the opportunities of one of the largest consumer markets that has effectively remained untapped for three years, as well as domestic export enterprises with a wider access to the foreign market. Tourism, education and cultural exchanges will also receive a shot in the arm, reviving related sectors.

China has met the right conditions for downgrading the management of COVID-19 and putting an end to measures such as large-scale lockdowns and movement restrictions. The virus hasn't been eradicated but its control is now under the aegis of the medical system. It is time to move forward.

Danger of another powder keg in Europe igniting

In a further sign of the worsening relations between Serbia and Kosovo, Serbian Defence Minister Milos Vucevic said on Monday that Serbian armed forces had been put on the highest level of combat readiness.

The escalating standoff between Serbia and Kosovo does not bode well for Europe, which is already reeling from the conflict between Russia and Ukraine and its consequences, ranging from a severe energy crisis to skyrocketing inflation.

Any mishandling of the current situation could ignite a new powder keg. Northern Kosovo has been on edge since November when hundreds of ethnic Serb workers in the Kosovo police as well as the judicial branch, such as judges and prosecutors, walked off the job protesting a controversial decision to ban Serbs living in Kosovo from using Belgrade-issued license plates, which created a security vacuum in Kosovo.

The situation worsened earlier this month when Serbs, who make up the majority of the population in Northern Kosovo, put up barriers to protest against the arrest of a Serbian former police officer suspected of involvement in attacks against ethnic Albanian police officers. Kosovo sent military and police officers to try to enter Serb areas, while Serbs blocked all thoroughfares, and the situation began to escalate.

On Dec 15, Kosovo applied for European Union membership. At the same time, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic Vucic asked NATO for permis-

sion to deploy up to 1,000 Serbian troops and police officers in Kosovo, as he said it is entitled to do under UN Security Council Resolution 1244 if the "peace and normal life" of local residents is threatened. But NATO subsequently turned down Vucic's request, and several NATO members even issued an ultimatum to Serbia on Sunday demanding that it end the standoff.

Those Western countries, namely the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Italy, have been motivated to do so because of Belgrade's close ties with Moscow, rather than the merits of the situation. It seems they have not learned the lessons of history.

In the time of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Kosovo was an autonomous province of Serbia, but Albania had a majority population. In 1999, because of ethnic issues, fierce conflicts broke out.

NATO intervened forcefully, and Serbia was forced to surrender after more than 70 days of bombing. In 2008, with the support of the West, Kosovo unilaterally declared independence, which was recognized by major Western countries, but Serbia, Russia and other countries, as well as Spain, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Cyprus in the European Union, refused to recognize it.

With the Ukraine war continuing to spell trouble for Europe, the ghost of the Kosovo war might be revived and haunt the continent soon. All parties should show greater political wisdom to avoid such a gloomy prospect.

Luo Jie



Opinion Line

Greater Bay Area's vitality attractive to investment

The Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area recently held a global investment conference in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong province. It attracted hundreds of enterprises from more than 10 countries and regions.

At the conference, Siemens Energy announced that its Shenzhen branch was now officially registered, following its establishment as an innovation center in January last year. The innovation center focuses on smart energy, advanced gas turbines and green hydrogen energy, three core technologies related to the energy transition, and works to build a joint open platform to accelerate the commercialization and industrialization of innovation results.

The company said that the newly registered Shenzhen company will further strengthen collaboration with the Greater Bay Area, fully tap local

innovation resources, talent and policy advantages, and help optimize the area's energy structure and layout.

Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, and the world's top 500 companies such as ZF Friedrichshafen AG and Carlsberg Group, also signed major projects at the investment conference.

A total of 853 cooperation projects were signed, with a total investment of 2.5 trillion yuan (\$359.33 billion), and 48 major projects were inked on site, with a total investment of 180.1 billion yuan. The enterprises that signed these major projects include both foreign-funded enterprises and Sino-foreign joint ventures, involving advanced manufacturing, biotechnology, new generation information technology, and food and health industries.

Covering Hong Kong, Macao and nine cities in the Pearl River Delta, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area is one of China's

most open and dynamic regions, and also the fastest growing and most dynamic bay area in the world. The "Chinese vitality" the area has demonstrated is the main reason why it has won recognition from investors at home and abroad. Its "Chinese speed" is another attraction.

As the largest area of the Guangdong pilot free trade zone, the local authorities are making greater efforts to develop the Nansha Area into the first special zone for international talents in China, accelerate the building of a modern industrial system driven by advanced manufacturing and modern service industries, and build a major strategic platform based on the Greater Bay Area, coordinating Hong Kong and Macao, and facing the world. These pragmatic opening-up measures have also provided a broad space for foreign investment.

— ECONOMIC DAILY

Penalizing barriers to knowledge flow

The State Administration for Market Regulation has imposed a penalty of 87.6 million yuan (\$12.58 million) on Chinese Knowledge Information Gateway, a domestic online resource of published academic essays. The penalty amounts to 5 percent of CNKI's 1.75 billion yuan sales in 2021.

The SAMR announced the decision on Monday, following a seven-month investigation. In May, the SAMR launched a probe against CNKI for suspected abuse of its monopoly in the market. Even before the probe in May, several scholars had filed cases against CNKI for making use of their academic papers for profit without their

consent or without paying them.

Although CNKI promotes itself as a "knowledge information gateway", it was hindering free flow of knowledge and profiting from other people's hard labor.

Of late, CNKI had raised its service charges so much that some academic research institutions had to stop buying academic papers from it. Reportedly, it was even forcing publishing houses not to authorize any third party to use their papers.

The big fine imposed by the SAMR not only penalizes CNKI for its monopoly, but is also a strong signal to other agencies.

Knowledge is a precious resource, and it is only right that

those creating knowledge content get economic support for their efforts. However, the cost should not be so high as to hinder the free flow of knowledge among academics. Also, those working in the field of knowledge should be the ones receiving the subsidies.

By repeatedly raising its prices, CNKI was hindering free flow of knowledge to those who needed it the most. Neither was it sharing the profits it was making with those working in the field of knowledge to create the content.

It is time for CNKI to learn a lesson, and for the academic sector in China to become more healthy.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Stay-on-the-job frontline workers deserve extra

Shanghai is offering subsidies, ranging from 60 yuan (\$8.62) to 150 yuan per person per day, for workers of e-commerce companies and couriers who stick to their posts from Dec 25 to Jan 27. The New Year holiday will last from Dec 31 to Jan 2, and the Spring Festival holiday from Jan 21 to 27.

This represents the latest efforts of Shanghai to stabilize its e-commerce and logistics sectors, which are suffering from a shortage of manpower.

That is a common challenge for almost all localities of the country, particularly during the year-end festival season when most migrant workers go back home to celebrate the Lunar New Year.

Due to the once strict COVID-19 pandemic prevention and control policies, most migrant workers have not had a family reunion at the most important Chinese festival for three years in a row. So the labor shortage in cities this year might be acuter than before. And the e-com-

merce and logistics sectors, which play an important role in meeting the residents' demands for life necessities during the COVID-19 pandemic, will be particularly affected.

Although the subsidies Shanghai provides to the workers are not that high, they are the best the city can give under arguably the most difficult conditions over recent years, and represent the great significance the city attaches to ensuring smooth operation of these key industries.

This is undoubtedly a heart-warming move that is expected to make the workers and couriers feel their contributions to the city are valued and appreciated. And it also sets a good example for other cities to follow suit.

At the same time, their employers are expected to increase the earnings of the workers during the holiday periods so as to make sure their income objectively reflects their value in the labor market.

Most couriers have been infected with the virus in the first wave of contagion over the past three weeks after the strict virus control policies were lifted, and they are likely to be among those infected in the anticipated second wave as well if they choose to stand fast and remain at their posts. Not to mention that they used to be among those who had to queue up to take nucleic acid tests on a daily basis over the past three years whatever the weather.

Like grassroots civil servants and medical workers, they should be counted as those fighting directly with the virus on the front lines. And when many others can heave a sigh of relief during the respite created by the adjustment of the virus control policies, they and the medical workers continue to carry out their work.

For that, they well deserve the government subsidies and extra pay from their employers during this special period.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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