

VIEWS

Qu Sixi

World should address hunger crisis

Globally, 2022 began with severe uncertainty as a COVID-19 relapse threatened to prolong the pandemic. Conflict and climate events and the Ukraine crisis continued to exacerbate uncertainties and put the most vulnerable further at risk.

I am trying to sound the alarm about this as loudly as I can. The global food crisis just continues to intensify, and things are going to get worse in 2023.

Somalia is on the frontline of this crisis, facing the impact of climate change — seeing its worst drought in 40 years. Crops are failing, livestock are dying and millions of people are facing starvation. This is in just one corner of our planet; people in other places are also on the edge of famine.

The World Food Programme's latest analysis has found that, currently, 349 million people across 79 countries are facing acute, or crisis-level, food insecurity — up from 282 million at the start of the calendar year. This is a record high and more than 2.5 times the number of people experiencing crisis levels of hunger before the pandemic began. It's hard to believe that this number was only 80 million people just a few years ago.

Among the 349 million facing food insecurity, some 49 million people living in 49 countries are just one step away from famine. Most worrying of all, now almost one million people are living in famine-like conditions — over 300,000 in Somalia alone, the rest in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Yemen.

The compounding factors like conflicts, COVID-19's economic ripple effects, extreme weather, inflation and economic shocks, fuel and fertilizer shortages, and the crisis in Ukraine have created a global food crisis unlike any other.

Put simply, the world is facing a food crisis of unprecedented proportions, with the threat of mass starvation and famine growing all the time. Rising food prices and falling living standards have combined to push millions toward starvation unable to afford a basic meal.

We must race against time to save lives. The WFP is mobilising all available resources to get life-saving help wherever it is needed most, scaling up food and nutrition assistance to prevent famine. And we aim to reach 160 million people in 2022 — the highest number in our history.

Looking ahead, it is hard to be optimistic. By 2050, there will be 10 billion people in the world to feed and this will be an unprecedented challenge if significant attempts are not made to reverse current trends.

And yet, we must confront these challenges and redouble our efforts in order to get SDG 2 — zero hunger — back on track and realize the promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Building resilient food systems is an important part of these efforts. The UN Food Systems Summit convened in September 2021 made an ambitious commitment to take concrete measures to build resilience and ensure sustainable food systems, particularly for those most vulnera-



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In the longer term, it means investing in resilience building so vulnerable communities are more self-reliant and able to enhance protection to shocks that occur year after year whilst improving food security and livelihoods. This includes helping farmers adapt to the challenges of climate change, and providing capacity building for livelihoods and skills, while facilitating sustainable climate-smart agricultural practices.

ble to food insecurity and malnutrition.

In the short term, an urgent and coordinated multilateral effort across governments, institutions, the private sector and civil society is needed to avoid an even more severe global hunger crisis in 2023, including supporting social protection systems and strengthening national food systems. For example, we can reach more people and create more resilient, equitable and efficient food systems by delivering home-grown school meal programs.

China is a valued partner of the WFP in tackling hunger and strengthening livelihoods, resilience and nutrition. We will continue to explore the newest ideas, latest technologies, and build lasting partnerships with our Chinese partners to reach people who have been left furthest behind. Meanwhile, we are acting as a bridge to leverage relevant expertise, experiences and resources from our partners, in response to emergencies and development needs, helping developing countries progress toward zero hunger, through South-South and Triangular Cooperation. Platforms like the WFP-China South-

South Cooperation Knowledge Sharing Platform (www.wfpchinacoe.net) can work to enhance food security, improve nutrition and alleviate poverty, by providing an enabling environment for partners to post demands, share solutions and connect with each other.

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We all know that ending hunger is the greatest challenge of our time, but together, we can make an impact and turn hunger into hope.

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Wu Di and Su Yiming

International aviation to take off again, due to new rules

On Monday the National Health Commission announced that the novel coronavirus pneumonia is to be renamed as novel coronavirus infection, and that China will downgrade management of the disease from Category A to Category B in accordance with the Law on Prevention and Treatment of Infectious Diseases, starting from Jan 8.

On Tuesday, the State Council joint prevention and control mechanism against COVID-19 announced that passengers traveling to China need to take a nucleic acid test within 48 hours before boarding their flights to China, but nucleic acid screenings and centralized isolation after arrival will be canceled.

The new rules suggest the international aviation industry can expect to be on the road to recovery soon.

The circuit breaker mechanism has been in place for almost two and a half years, as the government initiated the move on June 8, 2020, to restrict the number of inbound flights. Based on data from DAST, an online travel agency, due to the circuit breaker policy, international passenger traffic to China dropped to a gloomily low level with less than 1,100 inbound flights a month at the most (equivalent to less than 37 inbound flights per day). Also, 1,963 inbound flights were suspended temporarily from June 2020 to July 2022.

Worse, up to 1,247 inbound flights were suspended or restricted in 2022 (by the end of July), accounting for about 63.5 percent of the total inbound flights sus-

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pend ed or restricted during the pandemic. As the above data show, China's civil aviation market has been down for several years due to flight suspensions and/or restrictions.

But since the new rules to optimize the prevention and control measures since early November, many airlines, both domestic and foreign, are working out new flight schedules in order to cash in on the “opening-up” of China's aviation market again. As for the Civil Aviation Administration of China, it will implement its 2022-23 winter-spring season flight schedule from late October 2022 to March 2023.

With the situation improving, albeit slowly, the international aviation sector is looking to tap the dormant potential of the Chinese aviation market by operating about 420 scheduled inbound passenger flights a week (about 60 inbound flights a day). Leading airlines including Air China, China Southern and China Eastern plan to operate 52, 42 and 42 international routes respectively.

Taking Air China and China Southern as examples, the number of international

routes scheduled for the 2022-23 winter-spring season has increased significantly compared with the 2022 summer-autumn season. In addition, China Southern resumed international passenger flights including one from Guangzhou to New York from Dec 1, resuming return flights from Dec 3, although for long, China Southern operated flights only between Guangzhou and Los Angeles in the American civil aviation market since 2020.

These facts portend a prosperous aviation market is on its way. But the facts also mean that airports will need to make adequate preparations to face the existent and emerging challenges. Along with the brighter prospects, the aviation industry also faces many challenges. To begin with, easing the pandemic prevention and control measures doesn't necessarily mean the flights and airports become safe automatically. On the contrary, the increase in international passenger flow has put greater pressure on anti-pandemic work at airports.

Besides, the mentality, demand and attitude of passengers toward air travel in the post-pandemic era, as well as the market structure and the airlines' operational demand have changed. Whether airports can effectively adapt to these changes and respond to the new challenges are also important issues for airport operators and managers.

However, the easing of anti-pandemic restrictions will play a positive role in increasing international aviation traffic and the number of air passengers, which in turn will accelerate the recovery of air-

lines around the world and benefit global aviation hubs in China including Beijing, boost the airport economy and promote regional development.

It has been more than two and a half years since Daxing airport suspended international flights. Daxing is a global leader in terminal design, and has central radial finger gallery structure and automation facilities that make transit, both domestic and international, much easier. In fact, in terms of minimum connecting time, Daxing is one of the world leaders.

Before the pandemic broke out, Daxing airport planned to have in place a relatively complete international airline network. It had made serious efforts to turn the airport into a global transit hub, which could share codes and engage in international airline alliance cooperation. And now that the government has cancelled the circuit breaker mechanism, we can expect the aviation industry as a whole to benefit from the decision — for example, Daxing airport can be expected to resume international flights.

The new rules bring hopes to China's aviation sector, which will contribute to the faster recovery of the world aviation market.

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Xu Wenhong

Can US interest rate hikes curb high inflation in new year?

Although the United States administration is satisfied with the state of the US economy, experts are worried about the continued strengthening of the US dollar because it has been affecting global development.

Faced with decades-high inflation, the US Federal Reserve has been aggressively raising the interest rate, which in turn is strengthening the dollar. Many central banks have been forced to follow in the Fed's footsteps to guard against rising inflation and maintain economic development.

The decades-high inflation in the US can be attributed to the imbalance in demand and supply. Due to the pandemic, general demand neither rose nor declined sharply. It remained almost at the pre-pandemic level, but general supply sharply declined.

To deal with the pandemic in the initial days, the Fed lowered interest rates for federal funds to 0-0.25 percent, and comprehensively expanded the balance sheet, while the US administration increased the issuing of currency in the name of rescue plans, such as the \$2.2 trillion American Cares Act, the \$900 billion Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, and the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act.

This helped raise general demand. But since the supply couldn't meet the demand, prices kept rising. At its highest, the US' Consumer Price Index reached 9.1 percent year-on-year in June. To deal with the high inflation, the Biden administration went from one extreme to another, from resorting to tightening fiscal policy to a series of interest rate hikes.

Apart from the impacts of the pandemic, there are other reasons behind the decades-high inflation in the European Union.

In 2022, the Federal Reserve has raised interest rates for seven times. And on Dec 14, the Fed's rate-setting committee hiked its benchmark rate by 0.5 percentage points, lifting its target rate into a range between 4.25 percent and 4.5 percent — the highest level in 15 years.

For the Fed, the final interest rate level is more important than the pace of its increase. And the Fed is on the way to realizing its 2 percent inflation target.

The prices of crude oil and other commodities have declined of late, and data show that the problems with supply chains have slightly eased. Yet the easing of inflation has not been to the Fed's satisfaction, mainly because the Fed's interest rate hikes and contractions have been suppressing part of the inflation caused by demand while having limited effect on inflation caused by rising costs and supply constraints.

By continuously raising the interest rate, the Fed has made the dollar stronger. On the one hand, the raising of interest rate has prompted investors to pour more and more money into the US and thus strengthen the dollar. On the other hand, the US economy's foundation is more stable than others, so investors worried about global recession are increasing their investments in the US, again making the dollar stronger.

Apart from the impacts of the pandemic, there are other reasons behind the decades-high inflation in the European Union. After the Russia-Ukraine conflict broke out, energy prices in European countries, which heavily depend on Russian oil and gas, soared, which pushed inflation up to decades-high levels. The high inflation in the US and the EU has extended to most other countries over time due to international trade.

Because of continuous interest rate hikes, concerns that the US economy is falling into recession are rising, and many market experts assume US inflation has peaked. In November, the dollar had not only weakened, but also had depreciated by 4 percent, which means the current round of dollar appreciation has almost reached its peak, and the room for subsequent surges is very limited.

The US Fed may raise the interest rate again in February 2023, after which the pace of increase will slow down. As for 2023, the benchmark interest rate may hover around 5 percent.

Finally, the interest rate will depend on the economy's performance and inflation in the US. And the long expected interest rate cuts by the Fed may not occur until 2024.

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