

# COMMENT

## Editorials

### Washington’s political hysteria behind its continued hunting down of TikTok

Caught in the crossfire of escalating geopolitical rivalry between China and the United States, Beijing-based internet technology company ByteDance is facing increasing pressure to divest itself of its thriving TikTok operations in the US.

In the latest developments, the popular Chinese video app has been banned from all US House of Representatives-managed devices, and a law will soon come into effect banning the app from being used on all US government devices.

In a message sent to all lawmakers and staff on Tuesday, the House's Chief Administrative Officer said that the app is considered “high risk” due to “security issues”.

Although alleged US Commerce Department concern about a potential loss in a subsequent litigation may mitigate the urge to press ahead with a total ban, there seems to be no way for TikTok to escape increasingly politicized scrutiny.

Considering the current tensions surrounding the overall China-US relationship, there is little chance the China hawks in the US government and Congress will give up until they hunt down every viable link between the two economies and peoples and sever it, which appears to be the only way for them to stop worrying about “national security”.

One thing that has become increasingly clear over the past few years is that the constantly growing distrust has cultivated a vicious circle in one of the world's most substantial state-to-state relations, and the bilateral relationship is more and more vulnerable to political hysteria.

TikTok's troubles began under the Donald

Trump administration, which first attempted to bring it under US control, and then tried to ban it. The Joe Biden administration once invalidated the Trump ban by revoking the latter's executive order. The renewed appeals for TikTok's forced sale show how strongly some China hawks in the US feel about the company's Chinese ownership, which has been the sole argument they have raised to justify their calls.

Like the Chinese telecom company Huawei, which has lost almost all access to the US market because of unsupported “national security concerns”, the case against TikTok has been built on suspicion. For all the hoopla about Huawei's “threat” to US national security, and that of the US' allies and partners, no credible evidence has ever been presented to justify the claims. Yet Huawei was banned anyway. And more US allies and partners are on their way to excluding it.

Given TikTok's success in the US market — it has an estimated 100 million individual users and an increasing number of US businesses are using it — a blanket ban may be difficult. But that doesn't mean its troubles will not continue. As some in Washington have said, the only way for it to operate in the US that would be acceptable to them would be TikTok's divesture from its Chinese owner.

ByteDance has worked hard to satisfy US demands and allay security concerns. But that has not been enough so far. Given TikTok's success and the inability of some in the US to tolerate any foreign company being successful, let alone a Chinese one, things are unlikely to get easier for the company any time soon.

### Futile slandering of nation’s fight with virus

The claims of some Western media that China's adjustment of its COVID-19 pandemic prevention and control policy equals “inaction” do not hold water at all.

There is no doubt that China has tried its best to cushion the shocks coming from the wave of mass infections — which no country has escaped or can avoid — and has minimized their influence on the recovery of socioeconomic activities.

Indeed, the government's to-do list is even longer than before. Since it is prioritizing the most vulnerable who become infected — that is mainly the elderly with underlying health conditions — it has to ensure care is delivered in a more targeted and prompt way.

China has more than 240 million people aged 60 and above, larger than that of all developed economies combined. Although the vaccination rate of this group has reached about 90 percent, one of the highest in the world, that means there are still about 25 million people in this vulnerable group who remain unvaccinated against the virus.

That medical care and supplies, especially intensive medical care, have been unable to keep pace with the demand, within a short time, has been inevitable given the contagiousness of the dominant virus variants and the fact that the medical staff have unavoidably borne the brunt of the virus in the first wave of infections thanks to the nature of their jobs.

Yet despite this, public health institutions have sustained their operation during the most difficult time

over the past three weeks, and the capacity of the intensive medical care in many cities has expanded rapidly thanks to the governments' huge input.

As of last weekend, the shortage of medical care resources began being eased with the remarkable increase of sickbeds, more medical staff resuming their duties after recovery and the gradual decline of infections.

That is something hard to come by were it not for the close coordination among the government, public health agencies and society, the dedication of medical workers and couriers to doing their jobs, and the stepped-up operation of all pharmaceutical companies and enterprises producing essential medical supplies and life necessities.

All these efforts have been necessary for the nation to cope with this wave and will ensure it is better able to ride out future waves of the virus.

Given all this, the adjustment of the virus control measures came at the right time, as it not only sets the stage for the take-off of the economy after a short period of shocks, but also enables the country to concentrate its limited medical care resources on caring for the most vulnerable among its huge population.

Shame on those trying to belittle and slander the nation's efforts. Whatever they may claim to the contrary, the most populous country in the world has never stopped doing all it can to save lives. Because of that, it has one of the lowest COVID death rates in the world.

### Reopening will help revitalize global economy

With COVID-19 formally downgraded from a Category A to Category B infectious disease, China will no longer require passengers arriving from abroad to quarantine starting Jan 8, although they will still need a negative nucleic acid test result 48 hours before departure, the National Health Commission announced on Monday.

The move marks a major step forward in China reopening its borders nearly three years after the country imposed strict entry restrictions to prevent imported novel coronavirus infections. Inbound international travelers currently have to quarantine for five days at a centralized facility, followed by three days at home, a requirement that is already down from up to four weeks in the past.

The policy shift is a timely response to the fast-changing epidemic situation, which has entered a new stage with the more transmissible yet less virulent Omicron variant of the novel coronavirus.

This is also in answer to the increasing calls of Chinese residents to travel abroad and foreigners to come to China for work and business after three years of pandemic-induced disruptions. Outbound flight bookings reportedly surged by more than 250 percent early on Tuesday in the wake of the lifted restrictions, according to online travel booking platform Trip.com, with the most popular destina-

tions including Hong Kong, Japan and Thailand.

China has always been a major driving force behind economic globalization and is itself a beneficiary of the increasingly integrated global economy. According to a report released by the National Bureau of Statistics last month, China contributed up to 38.6 percent to world economic growth from 2013 to 2021, more than the G7 industrialized nations combined.

That China is reopening its borders will instill confidence that the country is resolved to continue to work with other countries to uphold free and fair trade, and ensure the stability of global industry and supply chains. Despite the rising trend of protectionism and anti-globalization in some quarters, China remains committed to its fundamental national policy of opening up to the outside world.

Yet the latest step China has taken to facilitate cross-border personnel flow has prompted some countries such as Japan and India to tighten their border controls targeting Chinese passengers, who will have to test upon arrival.

Hopefully countries will take a coordinated approach with China and base their response on science to ensure safe and smooth cross-border travel, and help contribute to the world's economic recovery.



## Opinion Line

# Garbage removal legislation milestone conservation move

The 38th session of the Standing Committee of the 13th National People's Congress reviewed the draft law on ecological conservation of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau for the second time. The draft stipulates that people organizing tourism activities on the plateau should also take care of the garbage generated, while stipulating legal action against those dumping garbage at will.

The making of a special law for its ecological conservation marks a milestone in the country's ecological and environmental protection.

The Qinghai-Tibet Plateau has a cold climate and fragile ecology, and even a minor human disturbance or damage can leave a deep stamp there.

With the leap-frog development of Tibet's economy, the construction of transportation infrastructure in Tibet has been progressing rapidly. Even remote areas that once took a week to reach from Lhasa can now be reached in a day by car. Before the pandemic, tourists loved driving into Tibet, believing it was a place for cleansing their soul.

While tourism has improved the living conditions of local people, it has also brought pressures on the local ecology.

Since the 1980s, great achievements have been made in the ecological protection of the plateau. Several internationally renowned nature reserves have been estab-

lished and fauna such as Tibetan antelopes and wild yaks effectively protected. With the establishment of the national park system, the management system of nature reserves on the plateau has been upgraded. Thanks to this system, nature is expected to have a harmonious relationship with humankind.

Checking pollution on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau through legislation marks a very practical move. Human beings should exercise restraint to show their kindness to nature. We hope the draft law brings more positive changes to the ecological protection of the plateau.

— BEIJING NEWS

### ‘Strawberry soldiers’ fail to convince

Tsai Ing-wen, leader of China's Taiwan island, has announced extension of military service for local young people from the current four months to a year, effective from Jan 1, 2024.

While announcing it on Tuesday, Tsai said this was “a difficult decision”, and for once she seems to be right. There was a time when every young man on the island had to spend two years in a military camp. However, to please young voters, the Kuomintang and Tsai's Democratic Progressive Party jointly reduced it to one year in 2008, and then to four months in 2018.

Reports now say that pressure from the United States has prompted the ruling DPP to extend the

period of military service. Washington has always been pushing to turn the island into a fortress and an “unsinkable aircraft carrier” against China in its quest to prevent China's national reunification. Now Tsai has chosen to favor her boss across the Pacific rather than voters on the island.

She did so despite a popular sentiment on the island that goes “Vote DPP and get warfare”. Her announcement comes after the DPP's humiliating defeat in local elections in November.

The decision indicates who is Tsai's biggest supporter and who is the biggest threat to peace in the Taiwan Straits. Yes, it is the US and the gentlemen and gentlewomen on

Capitol Hill who are always pointing fingers at everyone in the world.

However, their plan to prevent China's reunification will not succeed. People on both sides of the Straits believe Taiwan's military consists of “strawberry soldiers”, implying they are as fragile as strawberries, which need warmth and tender care. And some people believe that should the motherland attempt national reunification by force, the strawberry soldiers will surrender in no time. A local opinion poll in Taiwan showed that as many as 71 percent of those surveyed are not confident that these soldiers will be able to “defend Taiwan”.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

## What They Say

# Europe needs clear-eyed view of US moves

The natural gas price in Europe once hit nearly €350 (\$372.58) per megawatt-hour since the Russia-Ukraine conflict broke out. However, from Dec 19 to 23, the benchmark price of natural gas futures in Europe fell sharply, down by 26.40 percent in a week. That means it has fallen back to the pre-conflict level.

An immediate consequence of the energy shortage in Europe as a result of the Russia-Ukraine conflict was a sharp rise in manufacturing costs, leading to a contraction in industrial output. The eurozone manufacturing purchasing managers' index has been below the expansion/contraction line for six months in a row since July. New orders have fallen for eight consecutive months in the eurozone's manufacturing sector as of this month, and for six months in its service sector. Germany, the Netherlands and Spain have all shown obvious signs of output contraction.

This creates a cycle: the energy crisis depresses economic output, which in turn depresses demand

for natural gas.

European energy ministers agreed on Dec 19 to impose a price cap if prices in the European Union's main trading centers remained above €180 per megawatt-hour for three consecutive days, which has been another factor pushing down gas prices.

The agreement is stricter than the European Commission's original ceiling of €275 per megawatt-hour. The new ceiling of €180 gives the market no room to stir up gas futures prices.

Besides, the previous shortage of natural gas has prompted major European countries to expand their stock to prepare for an even worse situation. As a result, they once had nearly 94 percent of their gas stocks at full capacity, a historical high, and now about 83 percent of their natural gas stocks remain full.

Moreover, despite the cold winter in North America — nearly 250 million United States and Canadian people have felt the icy grip of a massive winter storm over the past

holiday weekend — the temperature in Europe this winter is higher than average, and that has weakened many speculators' expectations for a sharp rise in nature gas prices in the future.

Contrary to their claims, European countries have still imported large amounts of natural gas through various means from Russia this year. In the January-November period, European LNG imports from Russia rose 40 percent from the same period in 2021, hitting 19.4 billion cubic meters, according to Russian data. That means Russia remains Europe's second-largest source of liquefied natural gas, with a market share of 16 percent, second only to the US.

Europe has fully realized that the US' Inflation Reduction Act threatens to hollow out European industry. Perhaps in the future, Europe may take advantage of its imports of more Russian gas and oil as a tool to answer the US' selfishness and hypocrisy.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY