

CHINA

Xinjiang condemns US for awarding fugitive

By **AYBEK ASKHAR** and **MAO WEIHUA** in Urumqi

Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region officials said the US State Department's conferment of the 2020 International Women of Courage Award to Sayragul Sauytbay, a person wanted by the Xinjiang Public Security Department, is a travesty of human rights and an interference in China's domestic affairs.

On March 4, the United States' Secretary of State Mike Pompeo honored Sayragul with the award and said she "bravely provided accounts of Xinjiang's internment camps."

Ilijan Anayt, a spokesman for the Xinjiang government, said during a news conference on Thursday that "several times we have publicized the suspected crimes Sayragul has committed in China and exposed the lies she has fabricated. The Xinjiang government and its people of all ethnic groups strongly condemn and reject the conferment of the award to her."

On June 2015 and December 2016, Sayragul applied for a loan of 470,000 yuan (\$68,000) from a rural credit cooperative with a false guarantee of materials and fabricated a purchase contract, and she still owes 398,000 yuan on the loan, Ilijan said.

According to Ilijan, on April 5, 2018, Sayragul illegally crossed the border into Kazakhstan from the China-Kazakhstan Horgos International Border Cooperation Center.

Sayragul told foreign media that she was forced to work at a "detention camp" before running away from China.

Before she went abroad, she was head of a kindergarten in Zhaosu county, Ili Kazak autonomous prefecture. According to Bishala Sauytbay, Sayragul's sister, she had never been or worked at any vocational education and training center.

"Such a shameless person as Sayragul Sauytbay is, yet she was portrayed as a "human rights fighter" by some US politicians who just turned blind eyes to the facts, and repeatedly smeared Xinjiang with her lies and misled the international media," Ilijan said.

Meanwhile, in response to the prevention and control efforts related to the novel coronavirus outbreak in Xinjiang, Ilijan said the region has done a good job fighting the spread of the epidemic, and the economic and social order as well as production has been fully restored.

Most of the companies have resumed operations, he said.

By March 11, Xinjiang had 76 confirmed cases of the virus. Of those, three patients died and the other 73 recovered.

No new cases have been reported for 23 consecutive days, according to the regional government.

Contact the writers at aibek@chinadaily.com.cn



Forestry workers admire their drawing of a tree with the number 22.96%, signifying China's forestry coverage rate last year, in Luanchuan, Henan province, on Thursday. WANG ZHONGJU / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Green coverage grows, boosting poverty relief, wildlife protection

By **YANG WANLI**

yangwanli@chinadaily.com.cn

China has witnessed remarkable growth of green coverage due to the implementation of afforestation projects, with more than 7 million hectares of trees planted last year, according to a report.

Last year, 7.06 million hectares of trees were planted and 3.14 million hectares of degraded grassland were treated, according to a report released by the National Afforestation Committee on Thursday, the 42nd National Tree Planting Day.

The forest coverage rate in China increased to nearly 23 percent by the end of last year. Now, the country contains 220 million hectares of forests.

Thanks to the country's afforestation efforts, the report showed that 803,000 hectares of farmland were turned into forest or grassland last year and a total of 2.26 million hectares of sandy land was placed under protection.

As part of the plan to build a "Beautiful China", the country has vowed to increase its forest coverage to 26 percent by 2035.

According to the report, China now has 194 forest cities, with an average green coverage of 41 percent. In addition, 7,586 villages have been designated as "national forest villages".

It also showed that the country's forest tourism received 1.8 billion visits last year, an increase of 12.5 percent year-on-year, creating a comprehensive economic value of about 1.75 trillion yuan (\$250 billion).

The afforestation has benefited many people across the country, especially in remote areas.

According to the report, nearly 1 million people under the poverty line were working as forest rangers last year.

Moreover, the greening efforts have helped at least 3 million people escape poverty, the report said. In the Tibet autonomous region, for example, many of its rural residents have been benefiting from income growth by providing labor to afforestation projects.

In 2019, the regional government continued to promote its green landscaping work and accelerated the planting of more trees in the region's six river basins, with more than 87,000 hectares of land planted. In addition, the region has successfully finished the task of adding trees to 1,079 villages that had none.

This year, the local government is encouraging 90 percent of rural residents to participate in various afforestation projects. Also, it set a target to plant 62,820 hectares of trees in 2020.

In Libo county, Guizhou province, afforestation and the development of

eco-friendly industries, such as tourism and the planting of herbs with high economic value, have also contributed to poverty elimination in the county, where more than half the population used to live in poverty.

The report said that all residents of Libo shook off poverty by the end of last year.

Along with the massive greening project, China continued to promote the idea of building an eco-friendly country via the establishment of a mechanism last year, emphasizing the protection of both the country's all-nature reserves and the wildlife living in them.

Since 2015, China has approved the construction of 10 pilot national parks covering more than 20 square kilometers. The pilot will end this year.

Four of the country's 10 pilot parks — Northeast China Tiger and Leopard National Park, Giant Panda National Park, Qilian Mountain National Park and Hainan Rainforest National Park — have already established overall development plans, according to the report.

Further, it said the country's second territorial wildlife resources inspection, which kicked off in 2011, has been successful so far. Last year, 49 animal species and more than 300 plants were inspected.

Daqiong contributed to this story.

29 dead as all hotel collapse victims found

Man pulled from debris after 69 hours on Tuesday last to be recovered alive

By **HOU LIQIANG** in Beijing and **HU MEIDONG** in Fuzhou

A family of five, with three children aged 2, 5 and 7, was enduring their final day of a 14-day quarantine in Xijia Hotel when the building collapsed on Saturday in Fujian province's Quanzhou city.

In a video the mother uploaded earlier this month to Douyin, a popular video-sharing platform, the children are seen climbing over a couch near the window, occasionally looking out of it to see the streets.

They didn't manage to get out of the room alive. Neither did their parents.

When rescuers reached them on Wednesday, the family was all in one room. The father had a protective posture over his wife, while their daughter was seen under her mother's arms. Their two boys were nearby.

They were among 29 people killed in the sudden collapse at 7:15 pm on Saturday amid a renovation occurring on the building's ground floor. Mere minutes after a worker told the building's owner over the phone that a pillar had deformed, it crumbled, according to authorities. The accident also injured 42.

After three hours of painstaking digging by firefighters, a man was miraculously pulled out alive on Tuesday afternoon after being buried for over 69 hours.

Thereafter, however, no more miracles occurred in efforts that involved over 1,100 rescuers. The last of the 71 trapped were pulled out of the debris dead at around 11 am on Thursday.

Of those trapped, 58 were under quarantine. The others included hotel staff and employees of businesses located on the ground floor of the building, according to local authorities.

Also on Thursday, the State Council, China's Cabinet, announced that it has set up a special investigation

team to look into the accident. Fu Jianhua, vice-minister of Emergency Management, will head the team.

Work to clear the site is under way, the ministry said in a media release.

"Preliminary investigation shows that this is a workplace accident caused by human factors," Pei Wentian, an official with the ministry, told a news conference on Thursday.

Aside from violating the law during its construction, the hotel also breached renovation regulations multiple times, he said.

With 66 rooms, the hotel went into operation in 2018. It was designated as a quarantine facility after the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, according to local authorities.

Pei noted that relevant local authorities are also to blame for the accident as they failed to fulfill their supervisory responsibilities, which left safety hazards in place for an extended period of time.

Those found responsible for the accident will be held accountable according to the law, he said.

Hong Ziqiang, executive vice-mayor of Quanzhou, said people found responsible for the accident in a preliminary investigation have been brought under control and their assets have been frozen.

The local government will make all-out efforts to cooperate with investigations from higher authorities and not a single procedure in the hotel's construction and renovation and its designation as a quarantine facility will be missed in the investigation, he told a news conference on Wednesday.

"There will be zero tolerance for any violations and dereliction of duties. No lenience will be given to institutes and individuals related to these problems, including public servants," he said.

Contact the writers at houliliqiang@chinadaily.com.cn

Markets: Economies urged to cooperate

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Xue Yi, a professor of finance at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, said if US stocks are caught in a protracted and deep decline, the risk of recession in the US economy will become real, as the slashed value of stocks will hurt consumer spending and later corporate investment.

The risks faced by the US economy could lead to disruption to the global supply chain, weaker demand, financial market fluctuations to other economies, and resonate with risks faced by those economies domestically, Xue said.

A Goldman Sachs report said that as the epidemic grows, higher-income economies may slow sharply in the coming months, with stagnation in the US and contraction in the euro area in the second quarter.

"The ultimate loss for the global economy is yet to be known, but the key move to shield the world economy with any crisis will be bringing the global virus outbreak under control as soon as possible," Xue said.

Positive developments in combating the virus will help stabilize US stocks in the near term, said Jameel Ahmad, global head of currency strategy and market research at global foreign exchange broker FXTM.

"Investors want to see a hero, and this hero isn't the central bank in the US cutting interest rates. The hero they want to see is the good news that this virus has now been controlled," Ahmad said.

Li Qilin, chief economist at Guangdong province-based Yuekai Securities, said it is important for governments in major economies to cooperate in combating the epidemic and its economic impact.

Li outlined the risk that as the epidemic hits global growth, different economies may resort to competitive monetary easing and exchange rate depreciation, and scramble for more positions in the global industrial chain, leading to uncoordinated and ineffective policy reactions.

"Where the global economy is heading for, to some extent, will rely on how the Chinese economy performs in the coming months," said Dong at Wuhan University of Science and Technology.

As the world's second-largest economy has an unsynchronized economic cycle with developed economies and is gradually recovering from the epidemic, it may help the global economy gain footing, Dong said.

Contact the writers at zhoulanxv@chinadaily.com.cn

Pandemic: US imposes travel restrictions on Europe

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Geng also said that the origin of the virus is a scientific issue that requires professional and scientific evidence. He said the international community should work together instead of blaming each other, which is thoroughly unconstructive.

After downplaying the threat of the virus for days, US President Donald Trump announced Wednesday night in an Oval Office address that he is sharply restricting European passenger travel to the US and moving to ease the pandemic's economic costs.

In the address, Trump seemed to

be blaming Europe for the increased novel coronavirus case-load in the US.

"To keep new cases from entering our shores, we will be suspending all travel from Europe to the United States for the next 30 days," Trump said, adding the new rules will take effect on Friday at midnight.

The US president also said there will be exemptions for US citizens who have undergone screenings and that the travel restrictions do not apply to the United Kingdom.

Because of their quickly climbing COVID-19 case numbers, the US and Europe are coming to be seen as the new epicenter of the pan-

demic. According to the WHO, Italy had 10,149 confirmed cases as of Wednesday. By Wednesday, there had been more than 1,100 confirmed infections in the US and 32 deaths, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University.

China reported a record low of just 15 new cases on Thursday and three-fourths of its infected patients have recovered.

The NBA became the first major US sports league to suspend play until further notice after a Utah Jazz player tested positive for coronavirus. In Italy, soccer club Juventus said defender Daniele Rugani tested positive. Actor Tom Hanks

and his wife Rita Wilson said they had the virus. He had been working in Australia when they felt ill with slight fevers, his statement said.

Officials in Seattle announced that public schools would close for about 53,000 students and large gatherings were banned in San Francisco and in Washington state, the hardest-hit US state, with 29 deaths.

Ai Heping in New York contributed to this story.

Contact the writers at chenweihua@chinadaily.com.cn

Visit: Community workers praised for contributions

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They also urged officials to take into account the emotional pressure that residents are experiencing due to the monthlong community lockdown for the purpose of epidemic prevention and control, shoulder their responsibility to safeguard people's livelihoods and maintain social stability.

While visiting Huoshenshan Hospital, the first leg of his inspection tour, Xi lauded the front-line medical workers and called them "the most admirable people in the new era" who deserve the highest commendation. He said they have taken on the most arduous missions.

Zhang Sibing, the hospital's president, said that he was impressed by Xi's requirement to improve the recovery rate and reduce the mortality rate. Zhang said he will lead the medical team to fight to the end in the battle against the virus and he is confident they will win it.

Xi fully recognized medical workers' efforts in and dedication to epidemic control, said Hu Ke, a respiratory doctor from the People's Hospital of Wuhan University. Hu said he was inspired by Xi's heartwarming words.

While visiting the Donghu Xincheng Community in Hongshan district, home to 3,325 households and more than 12,700 residents, Xi praised community workers' outstanding contributions in the fight against the epidemic and thanked them for their hard work.

Yang Mingxin, a community worker who joined the meeting with Xi during his inspection tour in the community, said that Xi cares greatly about the development of the epidemic in Wuhan

and people's livelihoods there. "This demonstrates that his heart is always with all our Wuhan residents," she said.

Chen Feng, a resident of Songtaoyuan Community in Wuchang district, said he was impressed by Xi's warning against complacency in epidemic control. "It is critically important to ensure all of the officials and residents remain vigilant about the epidemic even though there are positive signs on the containment of the virus," Chen said.

Presiding over a teleconference attended by local government officials, Xi said the epidemic will not affect the fundamentals of Hubei's steady and long-term sound economic development. He urged the implementation of policies and measures to support businesses, stabilize employment and create more jobs.

Jiang Tao, general manager of Sinopharm Zhonglian Pharmaceutical Co in Wuhan, said Xi's visit took place at a critical time, and has boosted his confidence in overcoming the challenges arising from the epidemic.

Due to the epidemic control, most of the businesses in Wuhan were ordered by city authorities to be temporarily suspended. Jiang's company is among a few businesses in the city that are allowed to operate on a small scale as part of the fight against the epidemic.

"We are making every effort to resume normal business operations so that we can continue to contribute to the city's economic development," Jiang said. "In the meanwhile, we will take rigorous measures in epidemic prevention to protect the safety and health of our employees."