

## CHINA

# China, US military talks reopening

Authorities are 'coordinating' on restart of high-level communication: Spokesman

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China and United States defense authorities are "communicating and coordinating" on resuming high-level military communications, the Chinese Defense Ministry said on Thursday.

Senior Colonel Wu Qian, spokesman for the Ministry of National Defense, made the remarks at a news conference in response to the latest updates on China-US military ties after the two countries' leaders met in San Francisco last month.

"According to the consensus reached by the two heads of state, China and the US have agreed to resume high-level military communication on the basis of equality and respect," he said. That includes the China-US Defense Policy Coordination Talks and the China-US Military Maritime Consultative Agreement meetings, as well as telephone conversations between theater commanders.

"The defense departments of the two countries are maintaining communication and coordination on this issue, and we will release relevant information in due course," said Wu.

The spokesman highlighted the basis of equality and respect, stressing that should be the "integral component" of the way in which China and the US properly get along, and it is also the basic premise for developing bilateral military ties.

Wu said that China attaches great importance to the relations between the two militaries.

He added that the Chinese military is willing to work with the US side to earnestly implement the consensus of the two heads of state, carry out exchanges and cooperation in accordance with the principles of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation, and promote the healthy and stable development of the relations between the two militaries.

The defense official also expressed firm opposition to the US inciting the Philippines to infringe upon China's rights and make trouble in Ren'ai Reef in the South China Sea, in response to the joint

statement released by the US and Philippine defense secretaries after their meeting in Jakarta, Indonesia, in mid-November.

Their statement claimed that the two countries denounced the maritime rights protection and law enforcement activities by China toward Philippine Coast Guard and resupply vessels conducting resupply operations around China's Ren'ai Reef.

Japan's Nikkei Asia news outlet last week quoted people familiar with the matter as saying that the US has begun advising the Philippines on the repair of the warship that has been illegally grounded in shallow waters near Ren'ai Reef in the South China Sea for the past 24 years.

Wu said that China has indisputable sovereignty over the South China Sea, including Ren'ai Reef and its adjacent waters.

"The Philippine side has illegally grounded a warship in Ren'ai Reef and continuously sent ships to intrude into the waters there, attempting to repair and reinforce the grounded warship, which seriously infringes China's sovereignty, international law and the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea," he said.

Wu emphasized that the Ren'ai Reef issue is a bilateral matter between China and the Philippines and has nothing to do with the US.

"China firmly opposes the US, which has been interfering and stirring up trouble in the South China Sea for its own selfish interests, inciting the Philippines to infringe China's rights and make trouble in Ren'ai Reef, and intensifying regional tensions," said the spokesman, adding that history has proven time and again that US intervention only makes situations worse.

"We strongly condemn the wrong actions of relevant countries in provoking confrontation and undermining peace and stability in the South China Sea, and urge them to exercise caution in their words and actions," said Wu.

He warned that the Chinese military will take resolute and powerful measures to defend national territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests.

## Blaze drill



Firefighting teams battle a forest fire during an emergency exercise in Yidu, Hubei province, on Thursday. A total of 18 forest firefighting teams in the province participated in the drill, which employed helicopters, drones and robots. ZHOU XINGLIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Experts seek to reassure public on spike in respiratory illnesses

By **LI LILEI**  
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The recent surge in respiratory illnesses in China has not been caused by novel coronavirus mutations nor immune deficiency induced by the virus, said top Chinese health experts.

The remarks were part of the country's public health community's efforts to assuage growing public concerns over a jump in respiratory infections as temperatures drop and cold fronts sweep through northern China, which first affected mainly children but has in recent weeks spread to sickened adults alike.

Zhang Wenhong, director of the National Medical Center for Infectious Diseases in Shanghai and a respected epidemiologist whose advice helped the Chinese public through COVID-19 outbreaks, said that mycoplasma pneumoniae — a pathogen that is behind many infections lately — is totally different from the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19.

"The difference is even bigger than that between a human being and a fly," he said on China Central Television on Sunday.

His pushback comes against unsubstantiated theories that are

making waves on social media, with claims that mycoplasma pneumoniae is an updated version of COVID-19 given that the two diseases share symptoms such as a sore throat, coughing, high fever and body aches.

There are also theories speculating that the damage done by COVID-19 to people's immune system is behind the latest outbreak.

Speaking on the same program, Tong Zhaohui, director of the Beijing Institute of Respiratory Diseases, said mycoplasma was discovered in the early 1900s, much earlier than the novel coronavirus.

"The two infections are totally unrelated," he said.

Tong noted that the latest mycoplasma outbreak affected mainly children because they have weaker immunity than adults.

The pair also attempted to allay worries that compromised immunity had led to an uptick in the number of patients with fever who are testing positive simultaneously for multiple pathogens, including influenza, novel coronavirus and mycoplasma pneumoniae.

Zhang, the epidemiologist in Shanghai, said testing positive for more than one pathogen need not be a cause for alarm, as it could simply be a result of more powerful testing kits.

Tong Zhaohui agreed. He said the phenomenon doesn't mean each pathogen has equally contributed to the symptoms. "Doctors will have to analyze case by case to determine which pathogen is the culprit causing people to feel sick."

The surge comes in the first full winter since China lifted the stringent coronavirus restrictions it imposed in 2020.

Last week, Chinese authorities shared data about the surge with the World Health Organization at the agency's request.

WHO experts concluded that, rather than the emergence of an unknown pathogen as people had feared, the immunity gap created by the pandemic was fueling the clusters. A dramatic reduction in the circulation of other viruses and bacteria reduced children's immunological defenses against bugs like influenza, respiratory syncytial virus and other cold-causing viruses.

In an interview with health-focused news outlet Stat, Maria van Kerkhove, acting director of the WHO's department of epidemic and pandemic preparedness and prevention, endorsed the immunity gap explanation.

"This is expected. This is what most countries dealt with a year or two ago," she said.

## Open house



People scramble for rice cakes to celebrate the establishment of a new activity center in Qifeng village in Duchang, Jiangxi province, on Wednesday. There is a custom of throwing rice cakes in Jiangxi's rural areas when a new building is completed. FU JIANBIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Unmanned helicopters to speed up sea rescue

By **ZHAO RUIXUE** in Jinan  
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After a year of trial operations, two unmanned maritime helicopters were officially deployed in Weihai, a coastal city in Shandong province, on Wednesday.

They are expected to greatly improve the management of maritime traffic and make it easier to respond quickly to accidents at sea, the Weihai Maritime Bureau said.

During a search and rescue mission in early September last year, the first undertaken by one of the helicopters, it arrived at an accident scene 30 kilometers from shore in just 20 minutes, reducing the overall rescue time by 30 percent compared with conventional patrol boats, said Wang Chengjun, an officer with the bureau.

At 7.33 meters long, 1.58 meters wide and 2.43 meters tall, each heli-

copter has a load capacity of 75 kilograms and can be remotely controlled from up to 150 km away.

They have a maximum range of 400 km and a top speed of 150 km per hour. Each is equipped with advanced capabilities for thermal imaging, long-range video transmission, and emergency supply delivery.

They can also operate in weather conditions with wind speeds of less than 74 km/h, making them the most advanced unmanned helicopters used in China's maritime system, the bureau said.

The waters off Chengshantou in Weihai, which will be monitored by the unmanned helicopters, are a key route for ships traveling to and from ports along the Bohai Sea and the northern part of the Yellow Sea. Each year, approximately 110,000 voyages are made by ships through those waters, while tens of thou-



An unmanned maritime helicopter deployed in Weihai, Shandong province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

sands of fishing boats are active in the area.

"The unmanned helicopters will be used for law enforcement activities, such as tracking and investigating illegal vessels," said Wang Gang, director of the bureau's command center.

"They will also play a significant

## Price drop coming for 30 medical devices

The fourth round of China's centralized bulk medical procurement has resulted in a 70-percent drop in the average price of 30 types of medical devices, according to the National Healthcare Security Administration on Thursday.

The products cover intraocular lens and sports medicine consumables for the treatment of cataract patients and patients who need sports medicine surgery due to labor or sports muscle or ligament damage.

"The aging population has led to an increasing demand for intraocular lenses," said Jiang Changsong, an assistant to the dean of the National Healthcare Institute of the Capital Medical University in Beijing.

"Cases of damaged joints, pulled muscle and strained ligament are surging in the national fitness boom."

Gao Xue, deputy director at a national office that administers the bulk-buying program for high-value medical products, said that it has also achieved full coverage of intraocular lens products and can now better regulate prices.

"While some people doubt whether reducing prices will prevent companies from investing more in research and development, the reality is that price competition only drives down the prices of products that everyone can manufacture," Gao said.

"The competitiveness of high-tech or innovative products is a strong impetus to motivate enterprises to set up research and development, improve the quality of their products and enhance the irreplaceability of their core technology."

Noticing that there was only small difference in the bidding prices of similar products in general, Gu Hai, director of the Center for Public Health Management and Medical Security Policy at Nanjing University, attributed it to the smooth running of the bulk-buying program.

"Upholding its principle of stabilizing prices, centralized procurement makes only a slight difference to the market while maintaining the existing distribution pattern," Gu said.

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## Tibetan villagers resettled to improve living standard

By **PALDEN NYIMA**  
and **DAQIONG** in Lhasa

In a culmination of years of planning, the final group of residents from one of the highest villages in Xizang was recently relocated.

A total of 143 villagers from 37 households from Jigkyob village, located at 4,900 meters above sea level, in Lhaze county in the Xizang autonomous region were relocated

to a lower altitude settlement this week, providing them with better public services and a more promising future.

In 2016, the first of the resettlements began in the village with the 65 most impoverished households being relocated.

The new settlement is 4,012 meters above sea level, and the move was celebrated on Tuesday with a relocation ceremony as the keys to

their new houses were handed over.

The settlement features utilities including water and electricity, and is connected to the telecom network. The transportation system is convenient, and the surrounding infrastructure is comprehensive, according to local officials.

Jigkyob is the highest village in Lhaze county, whose residents live off animal husbandry and migrant work.

Kelsang Gyatso, Party secretary of Jigkyob village, said due to its location and financial limitations, the village faced many challenges such as a fragile environment, inadequate infrastructure and extreme weather. "Water and electricity are scarce resources for our villagers, and the high altitude, cold climate, and lack of oxygen are the most realistic challenges faced by our residents," said Kelsang Gyatso.

Herdsmen in the village are populated scarcely, and heavy snowfall occurs frequently from October every year, rendering all vehicles inoperable and forcing the residents to travel on foot, he said.

"This relocation project aims to provide more convenience to the community, enabling them to access essential public services such as education and healthcare facilities in close proximity," he added.

The relocation project was supported and funded by Aid-Xizang cadres from Shanghai.

Gong Airu, head of the Shanghai's

working group on the pairing campaign in Lhaze, and deputy executive secretary of the county, said after over a year of hard work, the initial stage of the residential project has been concluded. The new residential site emphasizes the use of clean energy and prioritizes the construction of environmentally-friendly projects.

"As a result, the quality of life and growth opportunities for the villagers is expected to undergo a fundamental improvement."

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