

Return to nature



Twenty-eight Przewalski's horses are released into the wild at the Gansu Dunhuang West Lake National Nature Reserve in Gansu province, on Tuesday morning, after a nearly 20-hour journey covering 1,030 kilometers. The batch of endangered horses was transported from the endangered animal protection center in Wuwei city, Gansu. With this release, the reserve's population of Przewalski's horses now totals 184. TIAN XI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Top court interpretation curbs misuse of non-compete clause

Updated regulations stress balance between trade secrets and job mobility

By CAO YIN caoyin@chinadaily.com.cn

A few months ago, a man surnamed Shi, who is skilled in traditional Chinese medicine and worked as a livestreamer at a technology company, found himself embroiled in a lawsuit.

The plaintiff was his former employer, a company which claimed Shi had breached a non-compete agreement after resigning, and sought 1.75 million yuan (\$245,285) in damages.

The Beijing Chaoyang District People's Court recently dismissed the case, ruling that the non-compete clause, or NCC, was not legally enforceable. Shi did not hold a managerial or technical position that gave him access to the company's trade secrets, the court said, adding that his livestreams on TCM did not involve confidentiality obligations.

An NCC is a legal agreement that restricts an employee from competing with their employer after leaving the job. It typically prevents the disclosure of trade secrets or proprietary information.

Such agreements are designed to protect a company's market position by barring employees from starting or joining a competing

business for a defined period. They are common in sectors including technology, new energy, autonomous vehicles and pharmaceuticals.

"But many employers were found to have misused the clause, indiscriminately requiring employees to sign agreements with exorbitant penalties," said Chen Yifang, chief judge of the First Civil Division with the Supreme People's Court.

"The misuse or abuse of the NCC severely restricts workers' right to choose their employment and also hinders the flow of talent," she said.

In response, the top court updated a judicial interpretation on labor disputes and issued it in August. The revision clarifies that an NCC is not valid if an employee does not have access to or knowledge of confidential matters.

"This means workers outside the scope of non-compete restrictions are not legally bound by such a clause, even if they have signed it," Chen said. The updated interpretation took effect on Sept 1.

Chen said the clarification stemmed from a sharp increase in NCC-related labor disputes in recent years.

Data released by the Beijing No 1 Intermediate People's Court in July showed that from 2020 to June

2025, it concluded 432 lawsuits involving NCCs, accounting for 3.72 percent of all labor-related cases. That marked an increase of 104.73 percent compared with the period from 2014 to 2019.

In 2024, a case filed by a restaurant against its former cold dish chef, surnamed Liu, drew widespread public attention.

Liu signed an NCC with the restaurant that barred him from working in the catering business for two years after leaving. If he violated the agreement, he would face penalties ranging from 5,000 to 10,000 yuan.

In May 2022, Liu left the restaurant and later worked as a chef preparing cold and side dishes at two hotels.

In April 2023, the restaurant sued Liu in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, demanding 100,000 yuan in compensation.

The restaurant argued that Liu violated the agreement, saying he specialized in seafood dishes — a niche area in the culinary industry — and had gained specific skills through training and long-term work.

But Liu countered that he had only prepared basic cold dishes such as cucumbers and salads at the restaurant and never worked on seafood.

The Nanjing court ruled in favor of Liu, saying that although he signed an NCC, he was a regular cold dish chef without access to trade secrets. The restaurant also

failed to prove he had learned confidential cooking techniques during his employment.

The court declared the NCC invalid and said the restaurant's actions harmed Liu's labor rights.

In a 2023 paper, Yu Shuhong, a law professor at Wuhan University, analyzed 454 court rulings involving NCCs and found that more than 70 percent of the employees held lower-level positions, including salespersons, teachers at training institutions, security guards, cleaners and receptionists, according to Legal Daily.

Shen Jianfeng, a professor at the Central University of Finance and Economics, told the paper that an NCC should serve as a "firewall" for trade secrets, not a "stumbling block" for talent mobility.

"The core of the NCC is to prevent the leakage of business secrets, not to hinder job-hopping," Shen said, adding that the updated judicial interpretation was a timely correction and warning against misuse in practice.

Chen, the top court judge, urged courts nationwide to strengthen efforts to resolve NCC disputes by balancing workers' employment freedom with fair market competition.

"The free movement of workers optimizes the allocation of social resources, and it also promotes technological innovation and facilitates industrial upgrading," she said.

Shandong university launches major in infant health

By ZOU SHUO in Beijing and ZHAO RUIXUE in Jinan

Shandong Women's University has launched one of the nation's first undergraduate degree programs in infant development and health management, aiming to help young parents take better care of their toddlers.

The university is one of two in China to gain approval from the Ministry of Education in April to open undergraduate programs in the field. The other is Shaanxi Xueqian Normal University.

Government data shows that the country has about 30 million children under age 3, and more than 30 percent of families with children in that demographic are in need of child care.

In 2021, the vocational education major catalog included child care service for the first time, and many vocational universities have since offered degrees in infant care service and management.

Ji Yanhong, director of the infant development and health management program at Shandong Wom-

en's University's School of Education, said there is a structural shortage of professional child caregivers, with only 500,000 people nationwide holding certificates in child care service and fewer than 10 percent of them having bachelor's degrees or higher.

"With the rapid development of the industry, there is increasing demand for high-end child caregivers," Ji said.

The program enrolled 40 students in its inaugural class this year. The admission score within Shandong was 505, surpassing the entry scores for first-tier universities by more than 60 points. Of the 40 students, 38 are women, she said.

Highlighting the importance of early childhood, Ji said the first three years of life are a period of exceptional brain development. A supportive environment can greatly enhance development, while negative influences may have long-term effects.

"Our mission is to equip students with the knowledge of child growth patterns and the skills to promote healthy development," she said.

The program integrates four core fields: medicine, psychology, education and management. Unlike conventional preschool education programs, it includes specialized courses such as infant disease prevention and nursing, emergency response and injury prevention, and responsive caregiving — content specifically tailored for infants through 3 years of age, Ji said.

She outlined major advantages of the program, such as its interdisciplinary curriculum and strong industry-academia collaboration, ensuring students acquire both theoretical knowledge and practical experience. The university is equipped with simulated training on campus, hands-on practice at its affiliated nursery, and off-campus internships at partner organizations, she said.

Employment prospects for graduates appear to be broad. With the government promoting the construction of public child care facilities, particularly in populous counties and urban districts, there is a growing demand for profession-

als to work in child care service centers, community nurseries, early education institutions, and maternal and child health hospitals, Ji said.

When asked why the program was established amid declining birthrates, Ji responded: "It is precisely because of the demographic challenge that the country introduced policies in 2019 to strengthen infant and toddler care services. There is a shortage of well-trained, multidisciplinary talent in this field."

Dong Yuqi, 18, a freshman in the major, said: "I see the infant-to-age-3 period as the most critical window in human development. I want to use my knowledge to contribute to society and help build a stronger foundation for future generations."

"This profession is not just about caring for children — it's about applying expertise in management, community service and even entrepreneurship," said Bu Lingyu, another student in the major.

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Provinces propose more leave to boost marriages

By WANG XIAOYU wangxiaoyu@chinadaily.com.cn

A growing number of provinces in China have extended marriage leave to up to 30 days or are considering doing so as part of efforts to build a fertility-friendly society amid declining birth rates.

In May, health authorities in Sichuan province proposed increasing the duration of marriage leave from five to 20 days for all newlyweds, with an additional five days granted to couples who voluntarily undergo premarital medical examinations.

The proposal was included in a draft amendment to a local population and family planning regulation, which closed for public feedback on June 30. Authorities said in July that the final version would be published by the end of the year.

For decades, the standard duration for marriage leave across China was three days. Some regions previously offered extended leave to those marrying at what was then considered a relatively older age, defined as men over 25 and women over 23.

Amid a growing trend of completely avoiding or delaying marriages among younger generations, along with decreasing birth rates, many regions have eliminated incentives for late marriage and instead extended marriage leave for all couples to encourage marriage and childbirth.

The longest marriage leave, lasting 30 days, is currently implemented in Shanxi province in North China and in Gansu prov-

ince in the northwest.

Authorities in Shandong province announced in January that they would provide up to 18 days of marriage leave. Since June, residents in Hubei province have been entitled to 15 days of marriage leave, which can be taken all at once or split up over time.

A few provinces, including Guangdong, Hunan and the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region have maintained the three-day marriage leave policy.

Jiang Quanbao, a professor at the School of Labor Economics at the Capital University of Economics and Business, said the three-day leave is insufficient given China's high population mobility.

He said extending marriage leave can make it more convenient for young people to travel, stimulate consumption, improve well-being and even boost willingness to have children.

Wei Shaoling, a marriage and family lawyer at Beijing Jingsh Law Firm, told Xinhua News Agency that marriage leave policies are designed based on factors such as regional demographic structure, marriage and fertility trends, and the capacity of employers.

She suggested that companies adopt flexible working arrangements, allowing employees to adjust their schedules around marriage leave to reduce the impact of their absence.

Official data shows that more than 6.1 million couples registered for marriage in 2024, a decrease of 20.5 percent compared with 2023.



Horticultural workers erect the giant floral basket named Blessing the Motherland at Tian'anmen Square in Beijing on Wednesday. CHEN XIAOGEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Floral displays blossom ahead of National Day

By WANG SONGSONG and YANG CHENG

Workers in Beijing have begun installing a giant flower basket and extensive floral decorations in Tian'anmen Square and along Chang'an Avenue as the capital prepares to celebrate the 76th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China on Oct 1.

The giant centerpiece, themed Blessing the Motherland, will be placed in the middle of Tian'anmen Square. It features a 16-meter-high basket topped with flowers symbolizing peace and prosperity.

For the first time, the city flower — the Chinese rose — will serve as the main flower of the floral arrangement, while a dynamic animal sculpture — a "glowing" pigeon — has been introduced as a new highlight, said Song Xuemin, a junior official at the Beijing Municipal Forestry and Parks Bureau.

The surrounding green spaces cover 9,600 square meters, with 18 large flower balls on either side, according to the bureau. Along Chang'an Avenue, more than 7,000 square meters of ground-planted flowers are being laid out, continuing the commemorative style used for the 80th anniversary of the victory in the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War.

In addition, 10 groups of three-dimensional flower beds representing "national prosperity, national rejuvenation and people's happiness" will be set up along Chang'an Avenue. The installa-

tions aim to showcase achievements obtained during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-25) and to look forward to a bright future.

Meanwhile, 67 new types of plants — 17 domestic and 50 newly imported — are being used for the first time, including chrysanthemums and lilies, Song said. The fresh mix of plants reflects both breeding innovation and a push to use more native flora.

The capital is also encouraging public participation. High-quality flowers cultivated by residents will be selected and displayed along Chang'an Avenue, echoing the slogan "Everyone is taking action in the Garden City."

"I feel proud to see the country so strong," said Li Meng, a 31-year-old visitor from the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region. "The basket reminds me to cherish our happy life."

Li said she had come across the floral displays a day before she had to leave Beijing to head back home.

"It's my first time seeing how these floral arrangements are put together," she said. "Seeing it with my own eyes is far better than simply hearing about it."

Since 1984, Tian'anmen Square has hosted large-scale flower displays to mark National Day, with their size and symbolism evolving over the years. This year's installations extend beyond the square and avenue and include other areas in the city, such as Jianguomen, to create a festive atmosphere.

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