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DAILY CONVERSATIONS IN CHINESE MEDIA



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NEWS IN CHINA

- Chinese State Councillor and Minister of National Defense Li Shangfu met with Bangladeshi Chief of Naval Staff Admiral M Shaheen Iqbal in Beijing on Saturday. Li appreciated Bangladesh's firm support on issues concerning China's core interests and expressed China's willingness to expand new exchange areas and create new cooperation areas with Bangladesh to safeguard the common interests of the two countries as well as global and regional security. Shaheen said Bangladesh is willing to deepen practical cooperation with China in various fields and push bilateral military relations to a new height.
- China launched Tianlong-2 (Sky dragon) liquid carrier rocket on Sunday from Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in Inner Mongolia, which sent a remote sensing satellite into a sun-synchronous orbit at 500 km above the surface. Space Pioneer (天兵科技), a private company set up in 2015 has developed this rocket and it became the first privately-built rocket in the world to reach its orbit in its maiden attempt. Previously, two other Chinese private companies i-Space and Galactic Energy have achieved this feat using solid-propellant rockets which had a limited capacity in terms of launching large satellites. Tianlong-2 is 32.8 m tall, 3.35 m wide with a weight of 153 metric tonnes. It has also become the world's first launch vehicle to use coal-based aerospace kerosene. Tianlong-2 also enabled the reuse of rocket body structure after flight.
- Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen and Guatemalan President Alejandro Giammattei visited a Mayan civilization citadel in Guatemala, where they observed an ancient ritual and vowed to maintain strong ties amidst China's diplomatic offensive. This comes after neighbouring Honduras broke diplomatic ties with Taipei to link up with Beijing. Guatemala is one of 13 diplomatic allies of Taiwan in the world, and some Guatemalans believe their nation is losing economic

opportunities by choosing Taiwan over mainland China. President Tsai also visited a hospital in Chimaltenango which was built with \$ 22 million assistance from Taiwan. On her way home, Tsai will also meet the US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy in California.

- Ezhou Huahu airport in Hubei, China's first professional cargo hub airport, opened an international cargo route to Belgium's Liege airport on Saturday. It is the first cargo route opened by Hubei airport and it will operate twice a week carrying cargo and express mails. Ezhou Huahu airport is the first professional cargo hub airport in Asia and is expected to offer over 400 tonnes of cargo transport capacity between China and Europe every week. China has planned 40 domestic cargo routes and 4 international routes to be opened by the end of this year. Ezhou base of SF airlines, an airline branch of SF Express, was also opened the same day and it will provide cargo facilities to other companies as well. A cargo transit center by SF Express is also being built and will start operations by the end of this year. This airport was started in July 2022 with a primary objective to transport cargo and put little emphasis on passenger traffic.
- China and Singapore have established an "All-Round High-Quality Future-Oriented Partnership", an upgradation in their bilateral relations. They reaffirmed their commitment to strengthen their comprehensive and innovative cooperation in areas including trade and investment, green and digital economies, food security, financial sector, aviation, and people-to-people exchanges. Both countries

welcomed the substantive conclusion of the China-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (CSFTA) Work Programme for Subsequent Negotiations, which will improve the market access for their businesses to trade and invest in each other's markets. They also reaffirmed their shared commitment to multilateralism, support for the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, adherence to international law, and upholding the rules-based multilateral trading system. These developments took place during Prime Minister of Singapore Lee Hsien Loong's recent visit to China.

SOCIAL MEDIA CHATTER IN CHINA

- **Netizens discuss government's efforts to boost birth rates:** A recent news about a spring break to encourage students to "experience the beauty of love" has sparked interesting discussions on Weibo about China's birth policies. Although the concerned school in Sichuan clarified that the holidays are in line with government's policy to boost tourism during Qingming festival, many netizens have connected this decision to government policy on boosting birth rates. Some people expressed their displeasure for involving school students in birth policies. Similarly, a school textbook cover showing a couple with one child was also modified recently to show two children to imbibe among students larger families. Moreover, an old headline from 2003 newspaper which declared China's aim to "achieve zero population growth in 2022" also became a subject of people's criticism. Many netizens mocked this headline and went on to appreciate
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authorities for overachieving the target by reaching negative population growth in 2022. Many netizens also highlighted the fallacy of these measures as they are not effective in convincing citizens to bear more children with rising living costs. Some also raised concerns about the potential impact of these policies on working women as it can affect their career trajectory.

INDIA WATCH

- The recent talks between General Li Shangfu, Chinese State Councilor and Defense Minister, and Admiral M Shaheen Iqbal, Chief of Naval Staff of Bangladesh, reflect the close ties between China and Bangladesh and the importance of their military cooperation. The meeting held on April 1, 2023, highlighted the mutual respect and appreciation between the two countries, with General Li emphasising the time-honoured friendship between China and Bangladesh. Admiral Iqbal's expression of gratitude for China's support and assistance to Bangladesh's national development and military building highlights the importance of China's investments in the country. He also conveyed his willingness to deepen cooperation in the navies of the two countries. Access to Bangladesh's maritime infrastructure can provide significant advantage to China in the Bay of Bengal. This can create a security concern for India in the future. Further, China also has increasing arms trade with Bangladesh worth \$ 2.37 billion between 2013 to 2021, which accounted for nearly 70 per cent of Bangladesh's total arms imports. On the other hand, India also shares good relations with Bangladesh as the current

Prime Minister of Bangladesh is said to have a very positive view of India, and leaders of both share fond relations with each other. However, India lacks high level of defence cooperation with Bangladesh. Thus, in the light of China's growing footprint in Bangladesh's defence, India has also expressed its interest recently to contribute in Bangladesh's defence modernization. Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka offered a \$ 500 million of defence credit line for enhancing military capabilities. China's rising influence on Bangladesh over the years is a cause of concern, However, Bangladesh has been vigilant in ensuring that its own priorities and interests are pursued, unlike some other countries in South Asia. That being said, India needs to up the ante with Bangladesh, invest in the relationship, in trade and especially in military cooperation to maintain strong relations with its eastern neighbour.

Prepared by: Team ORCA
