

9-10 FEBRUARY 2023

DAILY CONVERSATIONS IN CHINESE MEDIA

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NEWS IN CHINA

- China launched the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Project to combat [space debris](#). The State Key Laboratory of Astronautic Dynamics (ADL), which is linked with the Xi'an Satellite Control Center in northwest China, has initiated a new effort to combat the rising problem of space debris using AI. The Ministry of Science and Technology approved the project, called "Intelligent Modeling of the Complex Evolving Principle of Complex Environments for Space Debris and Autonomous Monitoring," as part of the country's "New Generation of Artificial Intelligence 2022 Major Program."
- The recent visit of the [Cambodian PM](#) to China, is being seen as a sign of improved relations between the two countries. Xi Jinping, during his meeting with Cambodian PM Hun Sen, reiterated that Beijing refused to accept any attempts to weaponize trade or suppress the development of other countries. Xi also extended his firm support to Cambodian people in independently choosing a development path that suits their national conditions and in safeguarding Cambodian national sovereignty and security, while also stating that it opposes interference by external forces in Cambodia's internal affairs. President Xi also articulated the need for a cooperation framework between the two countries in areas of production capacity, agriculture, energy, security, and people-to-people and cultural exchanges as well as political cooperation through deepened strategic communication and experience-sharing.
- On Thursday, the Chinese [defense ministry](#) rejected the US invitation for a phone conference between the defense ministers of the two nations, calling the US' recent attack on a

Chinese civilian balloon "irresponsible and gravely wrong." The US strike was considered a breach of international rules and a "poor precedent," according to Senior Colonel Tan Kefei, spokesman for the Ministry of National Defense. According to the official, the "environment for communication and exchanges between the two militaries" has not been developed as a result of the US' actions, prompting China to reject the phone call suggestion. The Chinese defense ministry has reserved the right to use necessary means in response to similar situations.

- The Ministry of Education's director, Liu Jin, confirmed on Thursday that the World Digital Education Conference would be held in Beijing on February 13th and 14th, which is co-hosted by the Ministry of Education and the Chinese National Commission for UNESCO. The meeting, which will be attended by state leaders, education ministers, UN agencies, international organisations, universities, schools, and technology businesses, will focus on digital transformation and the future of education. The conference will have a plenary session as well as concurrent sessions on basic education, vocational education, higher education, and smart education assessment. The event will also see the publishing of the China Smart Education Bluebook, the Development Index, and the Standards and Norms for Construction, as well as the formation of the World Digital Education Alliance. Approximately 800 representatives from 130 countries are expected to attend, with 300 attending the offline event in Beijing.

- On Thursday, Taiwan Affairs Office and the Development and Reform Commission in Guangzhou have released a revised version of the "60 Measures to Benefit Taiwan Compatriots in Guangzhou" The measures aim to improve the standard of living for Taiwan compatriots by offering more opportunities for business development, supporting public offerings, promoting integration in Nansha New Area, providing accurate services, and protecting the rights of Taiwan businesses. This revision incorporates the latest policies of Guangzhou, offering broader and more comprehensive support. Young people from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macao will receive the same support policies when starting businesses or seeking employment in Guangzhou. Over 20,000 Taiwan investors and their families live in Guangzhou, and the city's Taiwan-funded companies employ 200,000 people.

SOCIAL MEDIA CHATTER IN CHINA

- **Retirees protest against the government:** In Wuhan, thousands of seniors flocked to the streets to demonstrate against significant reductions to their medical benefits. Social media video showed the retirees, many of whom are former Wuhan Iron and Steel Factory workers, congregating outside the local government building in the pouring rain while police attempted to manage the mob. The central government issued a warning that it would not assist struggling local governments, which prompted the protest. The retirees are appealing to the government to reinstate their medical
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benefits, which were cut from 260 yuan to less than 100 yuan. Nearly 2 million pensioners in Wuhan are impacted by the reduction, and many are struggling to pay for their medical care due to the city's soaring healthcare prices. Additionally, some retirees have also demonstrated against significant reductions in funeral expense claims.

- **Impact of commute time:** On Weibo, "commute time" has become a topic of debate, with one study suggesting that long commuting time reduces people's happiness and leads to increased stress and a lower quality of life for many people, whereas the other group, mostly financial experts, talks about how an increase in commute time helps boost household consumption and residents' income, and also citing a paper that wrote, "Internet consumption has become an important consumption channel for office workers and a way to use commute time, which is conducive to alleviating the negative impact of long commuting and improving residents' commute happiness." The statistics show that in China, more than 14 million people are enduring extreme commuting of more than 60 minutes one way.

INDIA WATCH

- A more detailed parameter was added to the China-Cambodia relationship with the recent meeting between Chinese president Xi Jinping and Cambodian PM Hun Sen. Cambodia is a major diplomatic partner to China and helps dampen the criticisms raised against Beijing within ASEAN. Meanwhile India has engaged with

Cambodia through MoUs in the field of health, medicine, biodiversity conservation and education to name a few. India is also providing assistance through Quick Impact programs as well as projects like the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) and Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC) for development in the country. However, trade remains inadequate between India and Cambodia. According to data in the 2021 report, total trade between the two countries amounted to just US \$311 million. With India's Act East vision and interest to seek increased ties and cooperation with ASEAN countries in mind, establishing a better relationship with Cambodia is essential. The proposed bilateral FTA between the two nations can be pushed forward and existing cultural ties between them can be revitalized. A deepened relationship with Cambodia would also aid India to place itself at a better position to navigate its path vis-à-vis China as well as place India as a vital strategic partner in the Indo-Pacific region.