

## CHINA

## Leap of hope



A candidate for Shandong University of Arts' dance major performs for judges in Jinan, Shandong province, on Monday, as she takes second-round tests in the competition for admission. Nearly 110,000 students registered for the online preliminary, but a mere 306 entered the second round. They will compete for 66 spots. HUANG ZHONGMING / FOR CHINA DAILY

# Teachers asked not to have parents grade homework

## Schools criticized for handing out too many assignments to children

By ZOU SHUO  
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Teachers should not let parents grade or check students' homework, the Ministry of Education said on Tuesday after several local education authorities banned the practice following fierce criticism from parents.

Lyu Yugang, director of the ministry's department of basic education, said teachers should not assign any homework to parents or assign homework that is so demanding that only parents can finish it on their children's behalf.

"They should also not ask parents to grade or check students' homework and I should stress

that this requirement should be delivered to all teachers," he said at a news conference.

Teachers should grade students' homework themselves, give timely feedback and answer their questions, he said, adding that they should not assign punitive or repetitive homework.

Schools should limit the amount of homework and make sure its difficulty does not exceed the standard for the curriculum, he said.

Students in the same grade should have the same homework and there should be coordination between teachers not to assign too much homework, he added.

Ye Yuting, mother of a first grade student in Beijing, said she

strongly supports not letting parents grade homework.

"Currently, the school asks me to supervise my daughter's homework, grade it and sign my name afterward," she said. "There is no punishment from the teachers if I refuse to do so, but there is peer pressure from other parents."

"It is a daily task that requires lots of time and effort, especially for parents like us who both need to work."

Ye said she hopes her daughter's school can quickly follow the ministry's new requirement and liberate her from the burden.

Yu Fengyi, father of a second grade student in Yueyang, Hunan province, said he also has to grade his daughter's homework.

"I do not understand why a 7-year-old needs to do so much homework," he said. "Sometimes she could not finish it until after

10 pm. I even want to do it for her."

Teachers believe parents should participate in children's education and grading homework is a good way to make teachers' jobs easier, he said.

Grading homework is clearly the teachers' responsibility and parents are just afraid that the teachers might not treat their children fairly if they refuse to do it, he said.

Yan Yun, a teacher at a primary school in Wuhan, Hubei province, said her school does not allow parents to grade homework but some parents have voluntarily done so.

Primary school homework is not difficult and students are supposed to be able to finish it themselves, she said, adding that too much homework help from parents will make students dependent on them.

# Over 400,000 students spent holiday on campus

By ZOU SHUO

A total of 416,300 university students in China stayed on campus during the Spring Festival holiday as the country encouraged people to stay put during the year's most important traditional Chinese holiday to contain COVID-19 risks, the Ministry of Education said on Tuesday.

None of the students and faculty staying put had contracted the disease and they had an enjoyable and safe holiday, said Wang Dengfeng,

head of the ministry's department of physical, health and arts education.

Local education authorities and universities took antivirus measures and met students' study and leisure needs during the holiday, he said.

They disinfected important venues frequently and checked all people and items entering the universities, he said. Teachers and students were also asked to report their health conditions every day.

University canteens, libraries, study rooms and sports facilities

stayed open during the holiday and the universities organized various activities to celebrate the Lunar New Year, he added.

Hu Baijing, vice-president of Renmin University of China, said a record 1,208 students chose to spend the holiday at the university — more than 50 percent of them graduating students.

"The school started to make plans in early January and we wanted them to feel at home and spend a memorable holiday on campus," he said.

The university kept a record of all remaining students and made sure their needs could be met in a timely fashion, he said.

It also sent them gift packages and free mobile phone data, as well as complementary meals on Lunar New Year's Eve and Lunar New Year's Day, he said.

"We are deeply touched that many students chose to spend the nights of Lunar New Year's Eve and the next day, usually the time for family gatherings and relaxing, studying in classrooms," Hu said.

# New law to protect Yellow River Basin ecosystems

By CAO YIN  
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A law to improve the conservation of Yellow River Basin ecosystems and promote regional economic development is being drafted to strengthen protection of the watercourse and prevent environmental hazards, China's top legislature said on Tuesday.

The legislative work has been put on the work agenda of the Standing Committee of National People's Congress this year and government departments are preparing to draft the law, Wang Fengchun, an official from the NPC's Environmental Protection and Resources Conservation Committee, said.

Similar legislation aimed at

protecting some other river basins across the country is also being prepared, he said.

Wang said that while environmental protection and green development are the top priorities in making such laws, "we will also take ecological and economic benefits into consideration to improve the green transformation of economic and social development in all respects in the river basins."

To ensure the laws can better respond to public concerns and solve environmental problems more effectively, he said lessons will be drawn from the drafting of the Yangtze River Protection Law — which was passed late last year — with a cross-department legislative team established and opin-

ions solicited from more walks of life, both online and offline.

The Yangtze River Protection Law was the country's first law made for a specific river basin.

Aimed at promoting well-coordinated environmental conservation and avoiding excessive development, the law will come into force on March 1.

As well as strengthening protection of the ecology of Asia's longest river, the law will also restrict exploitation of shorelines and impose tougher punishments for a number of violations that cause environmental hazards in the river basin.

Fishing, for example, will be banned in all of the Yangtze's natural waterways, including its main tributaries and lakes.

Several officials from environment-related authorities pledged at a news conference on Tuesday to try their best to make sure the law can be implemented effectively.

Ma Yi, head of the office for dealing with Yangtze River work at the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, said it will guide local government departments in the implementation of the fishing ban, helping to save endangered species in the river.

Before the top legislature began making laws to improve the ecological conservation of China's river basins, it made great strides in fighting air, water and soil pollution through legislation, with inspections by law enforcement agencies stepped up.

# More people receive care at home with 'senior beds'

By ZHAO XINYING  
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The creation of "household senior care beds" has helped reduce the burden of taking care of the elderly in many Chinese families, a senior civil affairs official said at a news conference on Tuesday.

Gao Xiaobing, vice-minister of civil affairs, said people usually spend their retirement at one of three locations: at home, in a community or at a senior care organization.

Most seniors in China prefer to spend their retirement at home with their children and relatives.

However, as the elderly population grows and the number of elderly people who have lost the ability to take care of themselves increases, burdens on Chinese families are mounting, she said.

To solve the problem, the ministry, together with the Ministry of Finance, has piloted the innovative "household senior care bed" project across the country, Gao said.

In the project, senior care organizations help families to transform the home environment and facilities into ones suitable for elderly people.

Instead of spending their lives at senior care centers, elderly people stay at home and staff members from the centers visit them regularly to offer care and other services.

"For elderly people, they can not only receive services and care with-

out leaving the environment they are familiar with, but also save the cost of going to expensive senior care centers," Gao said.

Organizations can save the cost of land and buildings. Research has showed that the cost of transforming a senior care bed at home is only one-fifth that of establishing a bed at a senior care center, she added.

In Nanjing, capital of Jiangsu province, more than 6,000 senior care beds were developed last year, with that capacity equaling 50 medium-sized senior care centers, Gao said.

She added the ministry takes the project very seriously, and will set standards for and strengthen supervision and management of household senior care beds.

More policies will also be put into place to support the development of the new-style senior care service.

In recent years, the senior care industry in China has developed quickly. Li Jiheng, minister of civil affairs, said at the news conference that during the 13th Five-Year Plan period (2016-20), the ministry spent 5 billion yuan (\$770 million) on piloting new senior care services in 203 areas.

By the end of last year, there were 38,000 senior care organizations nationwide, marking growth of 37.2 percent from late 2015. The number of senior care beds in communities and all kinds of senior care centers reached 8.24 million — up 22.5 percent in the same period.

# Elderly to get assistance in smart exit, entry services

By YANG ZEKUN  
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Multiple measures will be adopted to assist elderly people applying for exit and entry documents and help them address difficulties they face in using information technology, the National Immigration Administration said on Tuesday.

The new measures, to take effect on April 1, will see immigration service centers establish a "green channel" for the elderly to apply for travel documents and set up service windows for them and other groups in need of assistance to reduce waiting times.

Seniors will be able to apply for entry and exit permits at the service centers without online reservations, and staff members will help them print application forms and fill them out.

The authorities will enhance face-to-face guidance and consultation at service centers and help the elderly use self-service equipment.

People aged 60 or above who apply for passports or travel permits to Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan will be able to reuse the photographs in their entry and exit documents or resident ID cards if they were taken within the past five years.

The administration will also upgrade the government's entry and exit service platform to improve elderly people's online service experience.

The platform will allow seniors' relatives or friends to help them handle affairs. It will also feature an optimized interface with aids such as large fonts and big buttons to simplify the operation process.

Applicants will be able to have documents delivered, pay postage and search for information through the website of the administration's government affairs service platform, its mobile phone application

and third-party platforms.

The problem of the "digital divide" is becoming increasingly prominent with the rapid growth of the elderly population. The Ministry of Civil Affairs said in October that China's elderly population will exceed 300 million during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-25).

Many seniors are not accustomed to internet-based services or smartphones, so they often encounter difficulties in shopping, travel, medical treatment and other daily activities.

The State Council issued a notice in November requiring all localities and departments to focus on high-frequency matters and service scenarios involving the elderly and effectively solve the difficulties the elderly face in using information technology.

It required the level and convenience of IT services for the elderly to be significantly improved, with a long-term mechanism to be established by the end of 2022 to address the digital divide.

In December, 22 key government agencies held a meeting focusing on seven types of high-frequency matters and service scenarios in the daily lives of seniors, such as travel, medical services, consumption and entertainment.

Service modes that caused inconvenience to the elderly should be promptly rectified, the departments said in a statement.

One example is the health codes on smartphones that allow people to move about more freely during COVID-19 precautions. The health commission has constantly pushed forward with information integration and mutual recognition and the elderly can now register with valid identity documents or paper certificates. Areas and places where conditions permit should set up channels for elderly people who do not use smartphones.

## Giving a lift



A crane hoists a car stranded in the snow in Qinghe, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, on Tuesday. The car, en route to a ski resort, slipped off the road and became stranded. Local police officers came to the rescue. WANG YOUBO / FOR CHINA DAILY