

TOP NEWS



Students of Rongshui Miao Autonomous County Middle School in Liuzhou, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, cheer one another during a stress-relieving exercise on Sunday, in the run-up to the national college entrance examinations, or *gaokao*, which kick off on Friday. More than 1,000 senior-year students of the school have registered for the prestigious exams this year. LONG TAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

Preparations underway to ensure smooth, fair *gaokao*

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Multiple ministries in China are ramping up efforts to ensure the safety and fairness of the national college entrance examinations, or *gaokao*, which will kick off on Friday. Data from the Ministry of Education shows that 13.42 million students have registered for this year's *gaokao*, an increase of 510,000 compared with last year. Local education authorities have been urged to strictly regulate management to ensure that the exams are conducted safely. The *gaokao* is one of the most important exams for Chinese students and is widely viewed as a key factor in determining a student's future prospects. Supervision should be strengthened over the entire exam process including question setting, printing and transportation of the exam papers and grading, the ministry said, adding

that higher education institutions should ensure fairness and transparency during admission as well. Meteorological, earthquake and other relevant departments have been asked to release timely information about any natural disasters before and after the exams, guiding local authorities to enhance their response in the event of exam-related emergencies. The Education Ministry emphasized the importance of combating exam fraud to ensure justice. Special measures will be launched, in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Security, to crack down on the sale of cheating devices and to eliminate proxy test-takers, it said. Security check protocols for candidates entering exam venues should be strictly enforced, while testing centers should be fully equipped with intelligent security gates, and wireless signals should be effectively blocked in exam halls, the Education Ministry said.

Smart monitoring and inspection of exam venues will be tightened to prevent high-tech cheating, it added. Many higher education institutions also issued notices recently to strengthen student management and prevent proxies or other forms of exam assistance. Yantai University in Shandong province said in a circular late last month that it will resolutely prevent its students from acting as proxies in *gaokao*. It is essential for students to understand the severe consequences of getting involved in cheating, and they should be educated to refuse any form of fraud, whether online or offline, the university said. As this year's *gaokao* overlaps with the three-day Dragon Boat Festival holiday, which starts on Saturday, some university students will not be present on campus, posing threats to student management and increasing the possibilities of cheating.

Local authorities have been urged to regulate exam-related training institutions and strictly combat illegal activities such as false advertising and charging expensive consultation fees. Meanwhile, candidates will be provided with personalized services in terms of transportation, accommodations and medical care, the Education Ministry said. Customized Braille exam papers will be prepared for 15 visually challenged candidates nationwide, and over 11,000 candidates with disabilities will be provided with convenient accommodations, it added. Ren Yanhong, a mental health teacher at Beijing Academy, said that *gaokao* takers should turn their anxiety into motivation to do well on the exams. "When anxiety occurs, students should be aware of what happened instead of being trapped in the feelings. The biggest enemy of anxiety is action," Ren said.

Travel boom expected as Dragon Boat Festival draws near

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Short-distance destinations with the vibe of traditional Chinese culture have seen a surge in bookings with the approach of the Dragon Boat Festival holiday, which in 2009 became the first Chinese holiday to make UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage list. Dragon Boat Festival, which usually falls on the fifth day of the fifth month on the Chinese lunar calendar, will see a three-day break this year, starting on Saturday. Various folk activities will be held during the holiday, including dragon boat races, eating sticky rice dumplings, or *zongzi*, and hanging bunches of mugwort for blessings. Travel agencies and industry insiders expect a travel boom, saying that tour products are more affordable and scenic spots will be less crowded this holiday, as the holiday overlaps

with China's annual national college entrance examination — known as *gaokao* — starting on Friday. Figures from the travel portal Trip.com Group show that short-distance tours are hot sellers on the platform, with bookings to short-distance destinations increasing 20 percent year-on-year so far. It said that tour products to Nanjing in Jiangsu province, Hangzhou in Zhejiang province and Shanghai have been the platform's top-selling products for short-distance trips. The online travel agency Tuniu said that most of its users make two- or three-day travel plans for the short holiday, and they are eager to explore destinations with folk culture and tasty food. It added that destinations with farm views or exotic culture — for example, Altay in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region — have also been popular, as hit television dramas made them trendy destinations.

Bookings for hotels and homestays that offer folk activities have surged. The homestay booking and operating platform Tujia said that, as of Wednesday, searches for homestays involving dragon boat and *zongzi* folk activities rose 50 percent month-on-month, and bookings to such homestays doubled year-on-year. Xu Di, owner of the Beima Villa, a homestay in Dalian, Liaoning province, said that 90 percent of the rooms were booked for the holiday, and the homestay is fully booked for Saturday, the first day of the holiday. She said that many folk activities will be organized for customers, such as making *zongzi* and palm-leaf fans. "It's of great importance to pass down traditional customs. We hope that these handicraft activities can let families living at our homestay feel the charm of the traditions of Dragon Boat Festival and keep these memories," she said.

Longguili, a riverside homestay in Foshan, Guangdong province, has also seen an increase in bookings, as dragon boat races will be held on the river during the holiday. "Customers can see the intense races from the windows of our rooms," said Lin Datao, the manager of Longguili. "Guangdong has a long-standing tradition of the spirit of racing dragon boats, and the holiday atmosphere is attracting more travelers." Zheng Nan, from Tuniu's public relations department, said that more travelers, especially younger ones, focus on experiencing folk customs during traditional Chinese festivals, and they explore different destinations by attending local celebrations and tasting local food specialties. "The dragon boat races, for example, are not only a good way to promote traditional Chinese culture, but also to attract travelers from home and abroad to feel 'The Fast and the Furious' on the water," she said.

Ties: BRI promoting enrollment of foreign students

From page 1

Under the framework of Belt and Road cooperation, Tianjin University has expanded enrollment of students from Malaysia and other member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, with nearly 600 Malaysian students studying at the university in 2023. Cheok said she is impressed by the country's technological innovations and development, especially the shared bicycles, which are convenient, efficient and environmentally friendly. Cheok's stay in China has also

allowed her to deepen exchanges with her Chinese peers. "We take class and do experiments together, and I never feel isolated." She said that all the students on the campus, whether they are from China or abroad, treat each other as equals, regardless of background. Furthermore, events such as the international cultural festival have provided Cheok with opportunities to introduce Malaysian culture to Chinese and international students. "The strength of an individual might be limited, but working together we can better promote exchanges and friendship between

our two countries," she said. She added that she hopes Malaysian students will act as goodwill ambassadors and help to promote even closer relations between the two countries. Cheok's views were echoed by Tan Pei Wei, who also studies at Tianjin University. "Educational cooperation provides us international students with a more global perspective, allowing us to experience the customs and cultures of another country," Tan said. "At the same time, it enables us to introduce Malaysia to more Chinese

students who may not be familiar with my country. "I also hope to introduce China to the youths of Malaysia," she added, stressing the importance of people-to-people exchanges in deepening mutual understanding and promoting bilateral cooperation in various fields such as trade. Bilateral trade volume has surged from less than \$200 million half a century ago to \$190.24 billion last year, a 950-fold increase, according to Chinese Ambassador to Malaysia Ouyang Yujing. China has been Malaysia's largest trading partner for 15 consecutive years

Beijing rejects Manila's claims over islands

Ministry says China's sovereignty over Nanhai Zhudao indisputable

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China reiterated on Monday its indisputable sovereignty over Nanhai Zhudao (South China Sea islands), dismissing Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr's speech at the recent Shangri-La Dialogue concerning the South China Sea issue. The Philippine president said in a keynote address at the dialogue on Friday in Singapore that the Philippines' territorial claims are backed by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the South China Sea "arbitral award" made in 2016, according to a transcript published by the Philippine Presidential Communications Office. In response, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson said in an online statement that China, which was the first to have discovered, named, explored and utilized the South China Sea islands and relevant waters, has indisputable sovereignty over the islands and sovereign rights and jurisdiction over relevant waters.

The Philippine president's remarks disregard history and facts and are designed to amplify Manila's wrongful position on the South China Sea, the statement said. Philippine territory is defined by a series of international treaties that do not include China's Nansha Islands and Huangyan Island, the statement said. China opposes the Philippines' occupying by force some islands and reefs of China's Nansha Islands, which seriously violates its sovereignty, sovereign rights and international law, the statement quoted the spokesperson as saying. The spokesperson reiterated that the "arbitral award" on the South China Sea is "illegal, null and void", saying that China's

territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests in the South China Sea will not be affected by the so-called award. It is the Philippines that bears responsibility for the escalation of the situation, the spokesperson noted. The Philippines has breached its commitments and common understandings with China, frequently made provocations at sea and solicited external support to flex its muscles, and spread disinformation to vilify China and mislead the international community, the spokesperson said. The spokesperson also blasted the United States for its support and assistance to the Philippines in infringing on China's sovereignty and exploiting the South China Sea issue to drive a wedge between China and other countries in the region. It is clear to see exactly whom Philippine foreign policy serves and whose bidding the Philippines is doing with all these maritime actions, the spokesperson added. The spokesperson noted that the situation in the South China Sea is generally stable, and there has been no issue at all regarding the freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea that countries enjoy in accordance with law. China will continue to firmly defend its territorial sovereignty and maritime interests and rights, and it remains committed to properly handling maritime disputes and differences through negotiation and consultation with countries directly concerned, the spokesperson said. The spokesperson also urged Manila to return to the right track of handling maritime disputes and differences properly, through dialogue and consultation, as soon as possible.

Eyeing a career



Graduates attend a job fair on a campus of Nanchang University in Nanchang, Jiangxi province, on Sunday. Nearly 500 employers based in Jiangxi, including State-owned enterprises, government-funded institutions and private enterprises, offered 9,888 vacancies at the fair. SHI GANGZE / FOR CHINA DAILY

and a major source of investment. Meanwhile, the mutual visa exemption between China and Malaysia, which took effect in December, has facilitated travel between the two countries. Tan highlighted her family's recent visit to Chengdu, Sichuan province, as evidence that the visa-free policy will attract more Malaysians to explore China. Malaysian statistics showed that the number of Chinese tourists visiting Malaysia in 2023 exceeded 1.47 million, making China the largest source of tourists for Malaysia outside of ASEAN. Since the start of the year, more than 275,000 Chinese tourists have visited Malaysia each month, according to the Chinese ambassador.

This fully demonstrates that the mutual visa-free policy has met the needs of the two peoples for frequent exchanges, enabling Chinese and Malaysian tourists to embark on a journey anytime without planning, Ouyang said in a recent interview with China Central Television. The mutual visa exemption has also promoted the recovery and growth of the airline business and tourism between China and Malaysia, he said, adding that it will undoubtedly further promote people-to-people exchanges, enhance the economic benefits of related industries, and facilitate all-around practical cooperation.

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