

Cabinet tackles virus' impact on trade

State Council also emphasizes need to expand domestic demand and stabilize employment

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The central government has pledged stronger measures to safeguard China's industrial and supply chains from the impact of the novel coronavirus pneumonia pandemic, with steps to ensure the production and export of globally important services and products.

At its executive meeting on March 24, the State Council said the global spread of the disease has dealt a severe blow to the global economy and brought about major challenges to the Chinese economy.

The Cabinet highlighted the importance of expanding domestic demand, aiding businesses and stabilizing employment, with proactive efforts to help the manufacturing and distribution sectors get back to business.

As the pandemic has seen export orders dwindle, the meeting decided on measures to support businesses to conduct trade talks and exhibit their products online and to take more initiatives to secure foreign orders.

The Cabinet said it is weighing up plans to delay this year's China Import and Export Fair or hold the fair online instead.

The government will prioritize efforts to expand the growth of new business models in the retail sector, with plans to boost the growth of online retailing, catering, diagnostic and education services, in addition to measures to develop e-commerce in rural areas to facilitate the sale of farm products, the Cabinet said.

Financial institutions will be guided to offer more unsecured loans, refinancing and medium- to long-term loans while bolstering the availability of new loans to small and medium-sized enterprises obtaining credit for the first time.

The World Trade Organization has warned that the pandemic, which had hit 202 countries or territories by Sunday, could result in a very sharp decline in trade.

Zheng Pengfei, general manager of Shunmei Group, an exporter of ceramics in Fujian province, said his company has seen half its export orders either delayed or canceled by buyers due to the pandemic.

"We are barely taking any new purchasing orders," he said. "And many customers are asking to suspend the ones they have already placed."

"That is largely because the pandemic has resulted in widespread store closures in our destination markets. Our customers are facing difficulties selling their products as well."

The company, which exports 80 percent of its products to the European and United States markets, now relies on online channels for business consultations and exhibiting products as the pandemic also crippled international passenger flows.

Despite all the measures the company is taking, Zheng said hopes for a rebound in export orders ultimately rely on effective containment of the virus overseas.



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

Liu Changyu, an official with the Ministry of Commerce's Department of Foreign Trade, told a news briefing on Thursday that emergency epidemic containment efforts in China's major trading partners had dealt a blow to the country's export sector.

The postponement or cancellation of exhibitions and trade fairs due to the curtailment of international travel had also made it difficult for businesses to obtain new orders, he said.

However, Liu said China's foreign trade sector remained well-structured and highly competitive in its industrial chains and its businesses were highly innovative and capable of turning the crisis into opportunities.

Some economists have warned of severe blows to the country's economy and labor market from worsening external demand and have urged the authorities to step up aid.

Lu Ting, chief China economist at Nomura Securities, wrote in a research note on Thursday that the recession among developed economies and emerging Asian economies could hit China's exports hard.

The worsening of external demand could be more clearly felt in the later stage of the second quarter, and the longer the pandemic lingered in developed economies, the more time it could take to restart the global value chain, he wrote.

In an ideal scenario, in which the curve of the pandemic is flattened by mid-April, China's exports could slide by 20 percent year-on-year in the first quarter and by 30 percent in the second quarter, he predicted.

To counter the impact of the pandemic and stabilize foreign trade, the government could scale up exports of epidemic containment materials and improve their international certification, he said.

Lu said the government must ensure that monetary policy plays a key role, with targeted quantitative easing by the central bank to increase the supply of money, while using fiscal policies to help businesses and families affected by the epidemic.

POLICY RESPONSE

Central SOEs to boost recruitment of migrant workers

By MO JINGXI
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Some ministry-level departments, including those responsible for State-owned assets, education, and public security, have responded recently to issues of public concern.

More SOE jobs planned for migrant workers

China's centrally administrated State-owned enterprises must boost recruitment of migrant workers, the State Council's State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission said on Wednesday.

Online and offline methods should be used in a flexible way to recruit impoverished migrant workers, it said in a news release posted on its website.

The commission said it had surveyed poor counties designated for support by central SOEs to learn the detailed employment demands of impoverished laborers, including the industries and workplaces they prefer.

It said central SOEs must actively consider migrant workers' employment demands and make recruitment plans.

Labor-intensive companies in the construction, trade, manufacturing and service industries will be encouraged to provide more jobs for impoverished migrant workers, it said.

The commission said it will strengthen communication and coordination with government departments to guarantee the employment of newly hired migrant workers as work resumes around the country in accordance with local epidemic control requirements.

Food safety a priority as schools resume

The authorities must ensure food safety in schools and kindergartens amid the novel coronavirus pneumonia pandemic, according to a notice published on March 23.

The notice, jointly issued by the State Administration for Market Regulation, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Public Security, said local authorities are responsible for making plans and taking measures to coordinate epidemic control work with food safety-related work in schools and kindergartens in regions that have started the spring semester.



The health status of personnel involved in school catering should be monitored closely, it said, and tableware, food processing equipment and dining places should be kept clean and sanitary.

Local market regulation authorities must strengthen food safety supervision and inspection, it said, adding that illegal activities will be severely punished.

Nationwide campaign to help the homeless

A nationwide campaign has been launched to improve relief services for homeless people and beggars who have no means of support.

The campaign, launched by the Ministry of Civil Affairs and 10 other

departments, urges local authorities to use methods including DNA matching and face recognition to help such people find their families.

Local authorities should also help people who have been homeless for a long time to settle down, the ministry said.

Police and city management organs should promote security management to reduce "professional begging", and avoid injuries and death due to frost and starvation, it said.

Civil affairs authorities at all levels should guide relief management institutions to establish databases on vagrants.

The ministry also called for improving the quality of relief management workers and care services, and the exploration of third-party supervision to oversee the operation of local relief management institutions and care services.

The campaign will end in June next year.

Timely land use approval for investment projects

Land use approval for major investment projects will not be

delayed during the resumption of work and production, Liu Guohong, a spokesman for the Ministry of Natural Resources, said on March 21.

Since the start of the novel coronavirus pneumonia pandemic, the ministry has implemented special procedures to speed up administrative approval in order to provide timely and accurate services to guarantee land use so that investment projects can begin as soon as possible, Liu said.

Speaking at a news conference in Beijing held by the State Council's joint epidemic prevention and control mechanism, he said one problem with the existing land approval system was that it took too long to get administrative permission.

Liu said China's revised Land Administration Law, which took effect on Jan 1, authorized provincial governments to approve two items that previously required State Council approval.

Reforms such as integrating business certification and licenses into one consolidated business license had also helped to reduce the procedures needed for land approval, he said.

Policy digest

Hardworking spirit education boosted

The Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council have unveiled a guideline on strengthening education on the hardworking spirit among students in universities, secondary and primary schools in the new era.

Education on the hardworking spirit is an important part of the socialist education system with Chinese characteristics. While progress has been made in terms of such education, the unique value of the hardworking spirit has still been overlooked in recent years. As a result, some teenagers don't cherish the fruits of hard work and are incapable of or not interested in working hard.

The whole Party and society must pay close attention to education on the hardworking spirit and take effective measures to strengthen such education, the guideline said.

Stressing the importance of full understanding of the new requirements for strengthening such education and cultivating the younger generation to join the socialist cause, the guideline called for students to be taught to respect work and be trained in the scientific spirit.

Students should acquire basic working skills for livelihood and individual development, and form good working habits through such education, the guideline said.

Specifically, young children in primary school should learn to take care of themselves in daily life and understand that everyone needs to work. Older children in primary school should help parents do household work and learn to cooperate with others while working.

Students in middle school should develop qualities such as being responsible and enduring hardship, while high school students should acquire several hardworking skills and want to actively help others and society, according to the guideline.

A priority of such education in vocational schools is cultivating the craftsmanship spirit and dedication of students, and university students should be aware of public services and be dedicated when faced with crises such as major epidemics or disasters, it said.

The guideline also called for ensuring investment in hardworking spirit education to train more teachers, establish more practice bases, and improve security protection for teachers and students in such work.

Government at all levels should strengthen supervision of education on the hardworking spirit, the guideline said.

Efforts required to meet afforestation targets

China has urged greater afforestation efforts amid the novel coronavirus pneumonia pandemic to ensure afforestation targets are met this year, according to a circular released by the General Office of the State Council.

Promoting afforestation in an active and orderly manner is an important part of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects and realizing the economic and social development goals of the 13th Five-Year Plan. It is also an important measure to boost employment and incomes of the poor and win the battle against poverty, the circular said.

Regions with a low risk of novel coronavirus transmission should speed up afforestation while medium-risk regions should stagger working hours to promote afforestation in a safe and orderly manner.

The circular called for efforts to organize poor farmers to shoulder more local afforestation work in a bid to boost their incomes and help eradicate poverty.

Innovative methods such as posters, video clips, the internet and social messaging should be adopted to encourage public participation in voluntary tree planting and spread afforestation knowledge, it said.

Xinhua contributed to the story.