

POLICY REVIEW

Ministries smooth path for trade

Freight train services between China and Europe gather steam in first quarter, but shipments by sea suffer due to impact of pandemic

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China has unveiled a host of measures to free up foreign trade channels, with steps to facilitate the normal operation of international sea, air and rail routes and express delivery services as the novel coronavirus pneumonia pandemic disrupts world trade.

The country will support international cargo ship operators in restoring routes cut due to the pandemic and ensure major trade routes are not suspended, the ministries of transport, commerce, the General Administration of Customs and four other government departments said in a joint notice issued on April 20.

Airlines will receive support to boost the number of cargo flights, including measures to use passenger planes to transport cargoes, so that the country can quickly improve its international cargo transport capacity, the notice said.

China-Europe freight train services will be given a more prominent role, with operators encouraged to increase the frequency of trains and expand the coverage of services, it added.

International package orders and products from cross-border e-commerce operators will be shipped via the freight railway routes as part of a slew of measures to solve delayed deliveries.

Cargo throughput at Chinese ports dropped 4.6 percent year-on-year to 3.01 billion metric tons in the first quarter of the year, with container throughput down by 8.5 percent, data from the Ministry of Transport showed.

Customs data showed China's foreign trade contracted by 6.4 percent in the first quarter to 6.57 trillion yuan (\$927.7 billion), with exports dropping by 11.4 percent and imports by 0.7 percent.

To speed up international express delivery services, the notice said delivery service providers will be encouraged to boost international cargo transport capacity via channels such as their own cargo flights, or chartering or renting planes.

The authorities also pledged to ease the passage of vehicles used to import or export key epidemic containment materials, and other materials needed for construction and production.

More work will be done to promote one-stop services in international trade, streamline the oversight of exports and imports and refine maritime supervision and customs clearance procedures, the notice said.

Li Tianbi, head of the Ministry of Transport's department of water transport, told a news briefing on



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Geng Shuang, foreign ministry spokesman

April 18 that over 90 percent of China's exports and imports were shipped by sea but the \$320 billion reduction in global trade due to the pandemic had seen demand for international shipping decline.

The ministry has introduced tax and fee cuts that have saved businesses 7.4 billion yuan and stepped up coordination with China's major trading partners to prevent excessive quarantine measures and ensure normal shipping operations, he said.

Freight train services between China and Europe have become a new pillar in bilateral trade during the pandemic.

Wu Qian, deputy head of Chong-

qing Customs' port supervision division, said 144 containers had been shipped via the Chongqing-Xinjiang-Europe railway between January and April 20, enabling the shipment of over 2.76 million parcels — eight times the number in the same period last year.

The rail freight route, part of the China-Europe freight network, now accounted for over 70 percent of parcels shipped from China to Europe, she said.

To fast-track the customs clearance process, Chongqing Customs refined cooperation mechanisms with peers in Beijing, Shenzhen and Urumqi to optimize work procedures and offer one-stop services

to exporters, she said.

China-Europe freight trains made a total of 1,941 trips in the first quarter, up 15 percent year-on-year, and transported the equivalent of 174,000 standard 20-foot containers of goods, up 18 percent, Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said at a news briefing on Thursday.

“The regular operation of the China-Europe freight train service helps facilitate the cross-border flow of goods and services as well as the resumption of work and production, and mitigate the pandemic's impact on China-Europe cooperation in supply chains and industrial chains,” he said.

POLICY RESPONSE

Crackdown on illegal fundraising to be intensified

By MO JINGXI  
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A number of ministry-level departments, including those responsible for human resources and social security, agriculture and rural affairs, and industry and information technology, have responded recently to issues of public concern.

Regulation to target illegal fundraising

China will speed up efforts to launch a regulation on preventing illegal fundraising this year, a joint ministerial meeting said on April 20.

There were 5,888 criminal fundraising cases filed in China last year, up 3.4 percent year-on-year, with the amount of money involved up 53.4 percent to 543.42 billion yuan (\$76.7 billion), according to the meeting.

It called for efforts to improve the emergency response mechanism for dealing with illegal fundraising activities and a steady and orderly crackdown on such practices in key areas such as online lending and private equity.

The number of illegal fundraising cases should be greatly reduced this year, it said.

The meeting also urged efforts to compile a three-year plan for the establishment of a national illegal fundraising monitoring and early warning system, improve interconnectivity between national and local platforms and enable financial institutions to play a bigger role.

Graduates can start work before gaining licenses

College graduates qualified to apply for licenses required for certain jobs can start work before obtaining them due to the disruptions caused by the novel coronavirus pneumonia pandemic, a notice published on Thursday said.

The notice, jointly issued by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security and six other ministries, said the measure was aimed at further stabilizing employment and promoting job opportunities for college graduates.

It said graduates who haven't obtained teaching qualifications or those required to become nurses, fishery crew, veterinarians, or show business or patent agents, can engage in related work and attend exams to obtain the qualifications later.

Law graduates who haven't obtained professional qualification certificates can apply for internships at law firms.

Once the internship is complete, they will be evaluated by the lawyers association. Those who obtain professional qualification certificates within a year of passing their evaluation can apply for lawyers' practicing certificates, the notice said.

Former Yangtze River fishermen better off

China has supported around 128,000 fishermen to lead better lives after they gave up their nets and boats on the Yangtze River to observe a fishing ban aimed at protecting biodiversity.

The government has provided them with living subsidies, employment services and medical and social insurance to help them cope



with the changes, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs said on Thursday.

A 10-year fishing moratorium began this year in 332 conservation areas in the Yangtze River basin. It will be expanded to all the natural waterways of the country's longest river and its major tributaries by the beginning of next year.

The full-scale ban is likely to affect more than 113,000 fishing boats and nearly 280,000 fishermen in 10 provincial regions along the river, according to earlier estimates.

Local governments should work to ensure that the affected fishermen are able to settle down and make a better living, the ministry said.

Meanwhile, it said, efforts should also be made to enhance monitoring and legal enforcement to secure the full implementation of the fishing ban, which could be a difficult task due to its large scale.

More support for digital innovation drive

China will speed up technological research on the construction and application of digital infrastructure, a senior Ministry of Industry and Information Technology official said on April 17.



Speaking at a seminar in Beijing, Chen Zhaoxiang, vice-minister of the MIIT, said more support will be provided to the research and development of fifth-generation enhancement technology and sixth-generation technology, while promoting the accurate matching of innovation, industrial, capital and policy chains.

Chen said the ministry will take a string of measures to optimize industrial development, such as expediting construction of 5G networks and the industrial internet connecting people, machine and things, developing new types of intelligent computing facilities, advancing the orderly construction and application of large data centers and building a network security system.

Xinhua contributed to the story.

Policy digest

Cabinet calls for more measures to help poor

China will beef up assistance to impoverished people, those on minimum subsistence allowances and the unemployed, a State Council executive meeting chaired by Premier Li Keqiang decided on April 21.

In the face of unprecedented challenges to economic development, more targeted measures must be adopted to better ensure basic livelihoods and help those most in need, the meeting said.

It decided that the construction of major national projects will prioritize the employment of those living in poverty, and the policy of using employment as a form of relief will be implemented in more areas, with salaries accounting for a higher percentage of project funding.

Given that the impact of the novel coronavirus pneumonia pandemic could lead to people falling back into poverty, supportive policies, such as providing skills training and microloans with discounted interest rates, should be adopted to support vulnerable people, it said.

The meeting said unemployed people without unemployment insurance and those whose incomes are below the standard of subsistence allowances should be covered by such allowances in a timely manner.

The meeting also decided to expand access to minimum subsistence allowances and unemployment insurance.

Party to focus on eliminating formalities

The General Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee has issued a circular stressing the need for consistent efforts to eliminate “formalities for formalities' sake” and avoid placing unnecessary burdens on primary-level authorities.

Promoting social and economic development is more difficult this year, the circular said, noting that the country faces mounting risks and challenges in addition to the impact brought by the novel coronavirus pneumonia pandemic.

It highlighted the need to improve the Party's conduct and boost the enthusiasm, initiative and creativity of Party members and officials.

Primary-level officials should be freed from formalities for formalities' sake and be able to engage in concrete work, the circular said, noting that this will contribute to securing a decisive victory in building a moderately prosperous society in all respects as well as eradicating poverty.

Calling for efforts to learn from the experience and lessons derived from combating the pandemic, the circular demanded that the people's interests should always be treated as the highest priority.

It urged Party members and officials to avoid acts that flattered the leadership but disappointed the people. It warned against problems, including ignoring the people's safety and health, stressing that bureaucracy in the poverty alleviation campaign should be addressed.

The circular said the number of meetings held by authorities across the country should be monitored and limited, as should the number of documents issued by governments. The number of documents issued to those at the primary level and the reports demanded from them should be strictly limited.

Supervision and inspection campaigns carried out by higher-level authorities should be more efficient, and the campaigns should not only identify problems but also help solve them.

The research trips of the authorities should not place extra burdens on primary-level governments.

Incentive mechanisms for promoting officials should be improved, and officials who were punished but subsequently performed well should be eligible for promotion.

The circular also urged the delegation of more powers and the allocation of more resources to lower levels.