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CHINA'S LARGEST INDEPENDENT FILM FESTIVAL SHUTS DOWN

The China Independent Film Festival (CIFF), China's largest such gathering, has suspended operations, claiming that it is now "impossible" to maintain an "independent spirit." A CIFF statement read: "We believe it is impossible to locally organize a film festival with a purely independent spirit, and even film festivals as a mechanism need to be reflected on. For those local film festivals that try to encourage the spirit of independence under the cloak of safety, we express our respect." The CIFF released the statement on its WeChat account, which has now been suspended indefinitely. The CIFF festival was held a total of 14 times, and screened around 1,000 films – many on sensitive issues rarely seen at mainstream events. "The closure is normal. We are just back to the usual rule under the party. We just went back to 20 years ago, when there was no room and opportunity for independent films," said Zhang Xianmin of the Beijing Film Academy, who organized the CIFF for 16 years. (*South China Morning Post*, January 10, 2020)

BEIJING RELEASES HUNDREDS OF BILLIONS TO STEM ECONOMIC DOWNTURN

Beijing has launched a variety of stimulus measures intended to boost the country's economy. The People's Bank of China reduced the amount of cash banks have to keep in reserve, freeing up \$115 billion for lending. The Ministry of Transportation plans to spend \$400 billion on rail, road, and waterway infrastructure. Authorities have also lowered tariffs on hundreds of imported products, and promised to open several sectors to foreign investment. Last month, the State Council called on local governments to "go to all lengths" to prevent job losses and warned that China could face "massive unexpected incidents" if unemployment continues to rise. At a recent policy meeting, Commerce Minister Zhong Shan told dozens of his top officials to prepare for a tough year ahead. Debt has soared in the past decade, due to massive borrowing by government and state-owned companies to fund housing and infrastructure after the 2008 global financial crisis. (CNN, January 13, 2020)

DESPITE PUSH FOR MORE BABIES, CHINA'S BIRTHRATE CONTINUES TO FALL

China's birthrate in 2019 fell to 10.48 live births per 1000 people, the lowest level since the PRC's founding in 1949, according to the National Bureau of Statistics. Last year, there were 14.6 million births in China, a drop of about 500,000 from 2018 and the third year in a row that the number of births fallen. By comparison, last year England's birthrate was 11.1 per 1000 people, the lowest since records started in 1938; Singapore's birthrate was 8.9 per 1,000 people; while Niger, with one of the highest birthrates in the world, had 46.5 births per 1000 people. In 2015, China reversed its "one child policy" and began to allow all couples to have two children. These statistics, however, reveal that most families have still chosen not to do so, often citing the high costs of school, housing and medical care. The low birthrate will have a significant societal impact, because many only children must now care for their elderly parents, the fastest-growing segment of Chinese society. (*Guardian*, January 17, 2020)

PLA REFORMS MILITARY ENLISTMENT POLICIES

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has altered its military recruitment plan for 2020 in an effort to improve the quality of recruits and increase respect for military personnel in the country. The Ministry of National Defense previously held military recruitment once every year, but this year, there will be two recruitment sessions – one every six months – and, due to increased selectiveness, fewer soldiers will be recruited in each session. The PLA will continue enlisting recruits out of high school, but it will also shift its focus to university graduates that support the global reorientation of China's national defense strategy. (*Taiwan News*, January 17, 2020)

CHINA'S SPACE PLAN FOR 2020

This year, China plans to launch more than 60 spacecraft into orbit in 40 launches – a significant increase from the 34 space launches that took place in 2019. Shang Zhi, director of the Space Department of the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC), identified three major missions on which the country will be focused: the completion of the BeiDou-3 Navigation Satellite System; lunar exploration, and; the Gaofen observation satellites network. Three new types of carrier rockets – the Long March-5B, Long March-7A and Long March-8 – will take flight in 2020. The Long March-5B, a next generation carrier rocket with the largest carrying capacity in low-Earth orbit, will carry the core capsule and experiment capsules for China's space station. It will be launched three times in 2020, carrying a new generation of manned spacecraft, a Mars probe, and a Chang'e-5 probe into space. The Long March-7A is China's next generation of medium-sized high-orbit rocket. The Long March-8 will increase China's lift capacity to meet its growing commercial launch needs. (Xinhua, January 17, 2020)

