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"CHINA'S SCHOOLKIDS BUCKLE UNDER PRESSURE" – CAIXIN

Chinese parents feel intense pressure to provide extra educational resources for their children, who, in turn, work extra hard to keep up in an educational rat race. The market for China's K-12 after-school training was worth 800 billion yuan in 2019. A survey of 4,000 parents found that 92 percent enroll their children in extracurricular classes and that half spent more than 10,000 yuan per year on them. Chinese use the term "neijuan," or involution, which means "inside rolling," to describe this process of incessant competition from which no one benefits. Behind the massive pressure is are shortages of school spaces and teachers, and mismatches between resources and demand. From 2016 to 2019, the number of K-12 teachers in Beijing rose by just 2000, despite a shortage of 28,000 teachers. About 180,000 students will graduate from middle school in Beijing's Haidian district, but public high schools there only have 120,000 spaces. To get into one of the top six schools, a student needs to rank in the top 2000 in the city. (Caixin, March 29, 2021)

BBC CHINA CORRESPONDENT MOVES TO TAIWAN AFTER THREATS

In response to pressure and threats from China's authorities, the BBC's Beijing correspondent, John Sudworth, abruptly left China for Taiwan. He and his family were followed to the airport by plainclothes police officers. "John's reporting has exposed truths the Chinese authorities did not want the world to know," read the BBC statement regarding the decision. Wherever they tried to film, Sudworth and his crew faced surveillance, threats of legal action, obstruction and intimidation. Last year, China expelled correspondents from the New York Times, the Washington Post and the Wall Street Journal, and in September the last two Australian reporters in the country flew home after a five-day diplomatic standoff. "Abuse of Sudworth and his colleagues at the BBC forms part of a larger pattern of harassment and intimidation that obstructs the work of foreign correspondents in China," said the Foreign Correspondents' Club (FCC) of China. (BBC, March 31 2021)

UK URGES G7: "IT'S TIME TO GET TOUGH WITH CHINA"

In March, London released a strategic review of British foreign policy that identified China as the biggest state-based threat to the country's economic security. Soon afterward, Britain's Trade Minister, Liz Truss, hosted a G7 meeting at which she pushed the grouping to get tough on China over "pernicious practices" that undermine the international trading system. "This is the time to get tough on China and their behavior in the global trading system, but also modernize the WTO. In many ways it's stuck in the 1990s. People cannot believe in free trade if it is not fair. Public trust has been corroded by pernicious practices, from the use of forced labor to environmental degradation and the stealing of intellectual property. The WTO was established when China was 10% the size of the U.S. economy. It is ludicrous that it is still self-designating as a developing country — and those rules need to change." (Reuters, March 31, 2021)

HONG KONG DOES NOT WARRANT SPECIAL STATUS, SAYS BLINKEN

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has reaffirmed to Congress that Hong Kong is no longer autonomous from Mainland China and thus should not receive preferential treatment under U.S. law. Over the last year, Blinken said, China has continued to "dismantle Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy" that it was promised for 50 years under the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1997. The State Department report to Congress says China "dramatically undermined rights and freedoms in Hong Kong" when it imposed a new national security law (NSL) last summer. Since then at least 99 politicians, activists and protesters have been arrested under NSL charges. "The NSL grants the [Hong Kong Police] broad authorities to conduct wiretaps or electronic surveillance without warrants in national security-related cases. The NSL also empowers police to conduct searches without a warrant, including of electronic devices." Washington has sanctioned 35 Hong Kong and PRC officials in connection with the adoption and implementation of the NSL. (UPI, March 31, 2021)

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Under the 2019 Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act, the State Department must conduct an annual assessment of whether Hong Kong warrants special trade status.]

A SITTING U.S. AMBASSADOR VISITS TAIWAN FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE 1979

U.S. Ambassador to Palau John Hennessey-Niland has become the first sitting U.S. ambassador to travel to Taiwan in an official capacity since Washington cut formal ties with Taipei in 1979. Hennessey joined a delegation from the Pacific Island nation of Palau led by President Surangel Whipps Jr. While in Taipei Hennessey-Niland touted the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act, which calls for the U.S. to strengthen trade and economic ties with Taiwan and help maintain its official diplomatic ties and international space. The visit “reaffirms our commitment to strengthening U.S.-Taiwan-Palau cooperation by promoting democracy and good governance,” read the American Institute of Taiwan’s press release. Palau is one of Taiwan’s 15 official diplomatic partners, including three others in the Pacific Island region – the Marshall Islands, Nauru, and Tuvalu. The Solomon Islands and Kiribati both recognized the PRC in 2019. (*The Diplomat*, April 1, 2021)