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Strategic competition grows increasingly fierce in Arctic



A Russian ship explores the Arctic Ocean.

FILE

By HUO WENQI

Now that sea ice in the Arctic Ocean has begun to melt at an alarming rate, global powers are recognizing the increasing geopolitical significance of the polar region.

On July 16, the United States, Russia, Canada, Denmark and Norway signed a joint declaration pledging to monitor and manage fishing activities in the polar region.

On July 26, Russian President Vladimir Putin approved the country's new maritime policy. In the future, the Atlantic and Arctic oceans will be prioritized in the military agenda of the Russian Navy.

In the past few years, the United States and other countries have launched several military drills in the region. Apparently, many countries are already engaged in the contests for regional governance and national interests.

The abundance of petroleum, natural gas, mineral and fishing resources underscores the region's strategic importance to many countries. "Sustainable development is usually held back by an environmental threshold and a natural resource limit," said Ding

Huang, dean of the School of Political Science and Public Administration at Wuhan University. "In this regard, the Arctic has become increasingly important, and a series of scientific studies have already revealed its environmental value and the estimated worth of its natural resources.

The strategic competition in the Arctic is closely related to the long-term development and national interest of China and other countries. "Arctic issues matter not only to the region but to the international community as a whole," said Li Zhenfu, director of the Research Center of Maritime Issues of the Polar Region at Dalian Maritime University. Li contends that stakeholders should think about the big picture in order to resolve the Arctic conundrum.

In 2013, China became an observer state of the Arctic Council. Observer states can participate in regional environmental protection, public welfare, and economic and social development but have no say in exploitation of natural resources and security issues.

For China, the Arctic matters because four national interests are involved: security, economy, politics and scientific research. The energy

and environmental security of the region affects all countries of the world. Under international law, China has the right to be part of the commercial exploitation of the region's natural resources.

China's political interest involves participation in multilateral regional governance, discursive power, national image and reputation. Scientific research centered on the polar region is not only crucial for the survival and future of mankind but also demonstrates comprehensive national strength. It is China's vital interest to conduct research in the region.

In tandem with its growing strength, China is expected to play a more influential role in international affairs. Ding Huang said China should participate in the regional agenda of the Arctic as a "responsible stakeholder" and cooperate with the Arctic Council, countries of the region and other organizations. Moreover, China should make the best of its role in the Arctic Council and its legitimate rights and interests granted by international law. In terms of scientific research, China needs to clearly prioritize certain projects and align scientific pursuits with national interest.

UN official: African colleges should serve public good

By WANG YOURAN

In order to realize its full potential, Africa should prioritize the public good in its higher education agenda, a UN official said at the recent Times Higher Education African Universities Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa.

The expansion of African higher education has been driven by profitability. As "Africa Rising" becomes a catchphrase, the world might be too optimistic about middle class growth and consumption power of the continent. In reality, the wealth gap has been widening, and the

public's voice has been effectively silenced in Africa, said Adebayo Olukoshi, director of the UN African Institute for Economic Development and Planning.

"Bringing back the public purpose in African higher education and making it central to the definition of mission and goal of the university will enable the university to claim its rightful role and place in...the mobilization of the citizenship, which we require for the renaissance of the continent," Olukoshi said.

African higher education is in an alarming state. Governments have no specific requirements for university

curriculum and graduate qualifications, said Lindela Rowland Ndlovu, vice-chancellor of the National University of Science and Technology in Zimbabwe.

Olukoshi said he envisioned a pan-African higher education system with a standardized curriculum, adding that this goal would take some time to realize and requires "breaking down barriers to collaboration" that are a legacy of colonialism.

"Re-establishing linkages between African universities must be an important element of the renaissance we seek to create," he said.

News in Brief

ARCHAEOLOGY

Qijia culture: early evidence of East-West exchange

At the International Symposium on Qijia Culture and Chinese Civilization, held on July 1 and 2 in Guanghe County, Gansu Province, scholars explored the significance of relics from the ancient Qijia culture. "Similar to Banpo Village and the Yin Ruins, the Qijia Ruins are sacred to archeologists and historians," said Wang Wei, director of the Institute of Archeology at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Prior to the establishment of the Xia Dynasty (c.2070-1600BC), Chinese civilization was characterized by remarkable regional diversity. Qijia culture played an important role in the formation of such a civilizational pattern, scholars said. In addition, Guanghe County, the heartland of Qijia culture, is strategically located in the corridor of East-West exchange. Judging from the pottery, jade artifacts and bronze vessels unearthed in the location, East-West exchange predated the emergence of the Silk Road.

LINGUISTICS

Khotanese Manuscripts unearthed, published

Recently, Zhongxi Book Company published *Khotanese Manuscripts Preserved in the National Library of China* edited by Duan Qing, a professor at the Center of Eastern Literature at Peking University. In the past few years, a wealth of Khotanese manuscripts had been unearthed in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and preserved in the National Library of China. Through studying these manuscripts, scholars will gain a deeper insight into the eastward spread of Buddhism, its influence on Chinese culture and the place of the Hetian region in the history of exchanges between China and the West.

HISTORY

Conference explores Japanese occupation of NE China

Recently, the Northeast China's Society for Historical Studies of Sino-Japanese Relations in Northeast China convened its 18th annual conference in Harbin. At the conference, the subject of Japanese settlements emerged as a focus of intellectual exchange. Judging from piles of evidence, many Chinese were dispossessed of their land by Japanese settlers. To make ends meet, they had to work as serfs and coolies, scholars said. Sexual slavery was another issue that provoked heated discussion. The oral account of Wen Mingjin, a former sex slave from Northeast China, was presented at the conference. It will shed new light on relevant research. The conference was co-organized by the research society and the Heilongjiang Provincial Academy of Social Sciences.

LITERATURE

International festival draws poets together

The fifth Qinghai Lake International Poetry Festival started on Aug. 7. The festival's theme is the ongoing evolution of poetic language and structure of modern poems. American poet and Sinologist Denis Mair said that, although poetry is relegated to the periphery of contemporary culture, it still has a purpose in an era of all-prevailing consumerism. Sublime, diverse and powerful, poetry is a cultural phenomenon that transcends linguistic, ethnical and national boundaries, Mair said. It binds people together. Chinese poet Xi Murong said: "Poetic inspirations spring from daily experience and reflections. Poetry resonates with the tempo of life."

PUBLIC POLICY

Forum looks at roles of gov't, corporations

Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government and the Cheung Kong Graduate School of Business co-hosted a conference titled "Responsible Business Leadership in China and the US: Private Sector and Public Value" on Aug. 7 in Boston. Last year, the two institutions signed a strategic cooperation agreement to foster sustainable development and social innovation worldwide. At the forum, attendees agreed that neither governments nor corporations can fully fulfill their social obligations alone. Public services provided by governments have long been criticized as being costly and inefficient. For this reason, corporations need to intervene and facilitate public services using their business networks, scholars said.