

# Researchers Given More Say in Fund Use: State Council

By LI Linxu

At the State Council executive meeting at the end of July, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang said a greater resolution should be made to respond to the common concerns of researchers and more efforts should be made to overhaul funding management rules that are not suitable for scientific research.

The meeting decided on a series of measures to further reform and improve management of central fiscal re-

search funding, so as to give researchers more rights in fund use.

The measures include streamlining budget-making, increasing incentives for researchers, and speeding up fund payments. It also includes innovating fiscal funding support for research and employing professional financial assistants for research projects to ease the administrative burden on researchers.

"Currently, in the allocation of some research funding, the larger part is spent on equipment while the smaller part is spent on human cost," said

Li, adding that some purely theoretical researches are mainly dependent on human effort, not on how many pieces of equipment are bought.

Li stressed that the proportion of indirect funding in research projects and the expenditure spent on human cost should be increased, and more discretion will be given to researchers in terms of the funding management.

More than 50 percent of research funding can be spent on human cost, the meeting decided. For some purely theoretical basic research projects such as mathematics, the proportion of indirect funding can be raised to 60 percent. Research institutes may spend all indirect funding on performance-based expenditures.

In addition, the scope of labor cost will be expanded, which will include social insurance subsidies and housing provident funds paid by research institutes.

"The income of researchers, particularly those doing basic research, should match the importance of their research fields," said Li.

The meeting decided that cash rewards for the commercialization of scientific and research findings will not be limited by the total amount of mer-

it pay at the institute, and it will also not be used as a base for merit pay in the following year, so as to give more incentives to researchers.

The payments of research funding will be speeded up, the meeting stressed. The funding will be disbursed to the institutes concerned within 30 days of signing the project undertaking forms.

Moreover, international cooperation and exchange expenses listed in research funding will not be counted as spending on official overseas trips, official vehicles and official hospitality.

In order to streamline budget-making, the nine-plus budget items will be cut to three. The power to transfer budgetary funds under different items will also be delegated to the institutes undertaking research projects. Furthermore, the creation of ceilings in funding that enable the retention of unused funds will be promoted in basic research projects and talent-related programs.

"It is indeed difficult for scientists to do an accountant's work and figure out every item of financial expenses," said Li, "Policy should serve scientists instead of making things difficult for them."

To reduce the administrative burdens on researchers, financial assistants should be equipped by the institute, the meeting suggested. Related labor costs can be covered by the funding or through other channels.

The meeting also called for innovative supporting methods in fiscal research funding. For example, in accordance with the priorities and scope of the country's agenda, lead scientists can determine research topics, build research teams and decide fund use at their own discretion.

"Time and tide wait for no man," said Li, "We should resolve to break barriers that constrain the creativity of researchers, and give more incentives for researchers to do their work without distractions and do well in basic research, so as to provide a solid support to build a strong sci-tech country."



PHOTO:VCG

## China to Boost Global Cooperation in Digital Economy

By ZHONG Jianli

The digital economy is booming in China. According to data from the 2021 Global Digital Economy Conference held in Beijing this August, China's digital economy reached 5.4 trillion USD in 2020, ranking second in the world, with a year-on-year growth rate of 9.6 percent, the highest in the world. From a global perspective, the value added of the digital economy of 47 countries reached 32.6 trillion USD in 2020, up by 3 percent year-on-year in nominal terms and accounted for 43.7 percent of GDP.

The digital economy has become the new engine driving economic growth. To further promote its development, the Ministry of Commerce, the Office of the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission and the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology have jointly issued a Guide for Outbound Investment and Cooperation in Digital Economy, in which the follow-

ing aspects are stressed:

Firstly, to promote international investment and cooperation in the digital economy, it is necessary to actively integrate into the digital economy global industrial chain. Relevant enterprises are encouraged to accelerate the deployment of overseas R&D and product design centers, pool global innovation resources, strengthen cooperation with overseas technological companies in such fields as big data, 5G, artificial intelligence, and blockchain to jointly develop cutting-edge digital technologies.

Secondly, it is vital to accelerate the construction of digital infrastructure. Enterprises are encouraged to seize opportunities in the international digital infrastructure market to invest in the construction of land-sea optical cables, broadband networks, satellite communications, big data centers, artificial intelligence, and provide digital services on a global scale. Enterprises can also develop the potential market of upgrading and transforming traditional in-

frastructures in the host country, through making them digitalized, networked and intelligent.

Thirdly, it is important to optimize the layout of the digital economy to go global. Enterprises are encouraged to strengthen cooperation with developed countries in artificial intelligence, virtual reality, blockchain and other fields, and to actively integrate into the global advanced digital technology development system. Enterprises are also encouraged to carry out technological innovation and cooperation with partners in countries along the Belt and Road Initiative to promote the applications of e-government and remote healthcare.

Fourthly, enterprises should be aware of risks when carrying out outbound cooperation in the digital economy. They are encouraged to improve their internal compliance systems, strictly implement China's laws and regulations on data outbound security management, abide by the laws and regula-

tions of the host country and other internationally accepted rules, and properly respond to reviews and regulatory measures related to the digital economy. It is also necessary to enhance the awareness of intellectual property rights protection, improve the data security management system, take necessary technical measures to protect data security and personal information. Enterprises should also closely follow and be prepared to respond to the latest policies on the global digital economy including the anti-monopoly policy and the levy of digital taxes.

As the new round of technological revolution and industrial transformation are advancing by leaps and bounds, the digital economy is being promoted to a new level of development. Against the background of a weak economic recovery globally, the digital economy has become the key to achieving economic recovery and promoting sustainable, high-quality development.

## Sci-Tech Innovation Centers with International Influence Bolstered

By CHEN Chunyou

On July 27, at the press conference on providing strong scientific and technological support for building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, Wang Zhigang, Minister of Science and Technology, said that the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) will be continuing to support the building of sci-tech innovation centers with an international influence in Beijing, Shanghai and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. These centers will be a driving force for high-quality development. At the same time, the government plans to actively promote the role of the 21 national independent innovation demonstration zones and 169 national hi-tech zones.

"In the historical process of completing the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects, the role of scientific and technological innovation has become increasingly prominent. The scientific and technological strength and innovation capability have greatly improved, which is both an important indicator of and a key support for completing the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects," said Wang.

In terms of guiding the innovative development of regions with advantages, the government will actively promote the construction of regional innovation highlands, and encourage the regions that can afford to take the lead in achieving innovation-driven development. According to Wang, the research and development investment of enterprises in the hi-tech zones account for 50 percent of the total investment of enterprises in China, and the GDP created in the zones account for more than 12 percent of the total GDP. The per capita labor productivity is three times higher than that of the whole society, and the comprehensive energy consumption of 10,000 RMB added value is two thirds of the country's average level.

In addition, the MOST launched an initiative to drive high quality employment through technological entrepreneurship last year, providing 167,000 scientific research assistant positions, and providing up to 150,000 new job opportunities in incubator institutions and enterprises. More than 2.3 million college students benefited from this action.

Wang said that the MOST will continue to support the building of international sci-tech innovation centers in

Beijing, Shanghai, and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area in the next phase, in accordance with the deployment of the central government, through which to promote coordinated regional development and high-quality development.

In February 2021, Xu Jing, the director of the Department of Strategy and Planning of the MOST, said that during the 14th Five-Year Plan period, the layout of major national innovation bases and platforms should be strengthened and efforts should be made to deepen science and technology system reforms and policy innovation.



Pudong seen from the Bund. (PHOTO:VCG)

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It is hoped that the three regions play a leading role in policy innovation, carry out more research, and promote sound interaction and integration among science and technology, industries and finance, taking the lead in becoming a cradle of scientific and technological innovation and a driving force for high quality development in China.

## Chinese Think Tanks Unveil Truth about U.S. COVID-19 Fight

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The report noted that from the first COVID-19 outbreak, there are many disagreements among the two parties of the U.S. that hold the country back: from nucleic acid testing, masks wearing, social distancing, home quarantine, vaccinations, to the distribution of strategic medical reserves and emergency relief bills, between federal, state, and local levels, between executive, legislative and judicial branches, and between conservative and liberal media.

The federal system under the competition between the two major parties failed to take on responsibilities, giving prevarications at different levels. It constituted a "Disunited America" image in the fight against the pandemic, the report stressed.

### Save the stock market, not to save lives

The U.S. stock market has soared since hitting a low on March 23, 2020, after the Federal Reserve took "extraordinary" measures to create more money.

From March 2020 to January 2021, the combined wealth of more than 600 American billionaires increased from an estimated \$2.947 trillion to \$4.085 trillion, an increase of 38.6 percent. The Federal Reserve printed excessive money. In fact, the U.S. in a year and a half printed nearly half of all the dollars for more than 200 years.

However, countries around the world have to bear the burden of inflation, instability, and "bubble" pressures that they should not have to suffer from.

Such a beggar-thy-neighbor approach has brought additional economic and social pressures to countries suffering from the COVID-19 outbreak; this can even lead to political conflict and regional chaos, warned the report.

### Violation of common scientific knowledge and "origin tracing terrorism"

The COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S. had been excessively politicized due to political disputes. This was reflected in the control methods of the pandemic. It went against common sense in prevention and control, policy measures, virus origin tracing investigation, and so on.

To exploit the pandemic for political purposes, the U.S. government has suppressed scientists and professional opinion. Scientists who denied the "lab leaks" were subject to cyber violence and harassment. This affected their normal work and even physically threatened their safety.

Understanding the origins of the virus is a serious scientific and medical issue that aims to prevent the next pandemic and protect the lives and health of people in all countries. The U.S. government, however, is making a presumption of guilt on this issue. Wash-

ington is presupposing the conclusion of "Wuhan laboratory origin" and obstructing the scientific tracing work, said the report.

Worse still, the U.S. has been manipulating the vaccine map and manipulating global public opinion by practicing "origin tracing terrorism."

### Intensified racial conflicts and social unrest

Under the pandemic, the American people's right to live in health has not been equally guaranteed.

The social ethical crisis and humanitarian disaster have caused a serious imbalance in the sense of security and gain for different groups of people, and the bonds that maintain social cohesion in the U.S. are being torn apart by the disparity between rich and poor, social division, class solidification, racial conflicts, regional conflicts, and intergenerational conflicts, according to the report.

The conspiracy about the origins of COVID-19 has fueled bullying against Asians, as pointed out in the report, Asian-American discrimination cases surged. Social unrest is a chronic illness in the U.S., and the COVID-19 pandemic acted as an amplifier for existing divisions. In 2021, the U.S. not only had the highest level of social unrest among developed countries, far higher than the U.K., Canada, Spain, but higher than many other developing countries.

The two political parties and the elites in the U.S., however, are still hyping and amplifying the aforementioned division. They are doing this either to gain voter support or to solidify the vested interest structure of the political and economic oligarchy. The American public is increasingly seeing the U.S. government as only representing the interests of a few vested interest groups.

The pandemic is a global public health crisis that requires countries around the world, including the U.S., to pool their resources to fight the pandemic.

However, as the world's top superpower, said the report, the U.S. has allowed the virus to spread, resulting in the serious deterioration of pandemics in other countries; it has shirked its responsibilities and tried to use the World Health Organization as a tool to defend its own interests, and pursued "anti-pandemic egoism" and "vaccine nationalism".

Objective facts have shown that the U.S. is well deserved to be the world's No. 1 anti-pandemic failure, the world's No. 1 political blaming country, the world's No. 1 pandemic spreader country, the world's No. 1 political division country, the world's No. 1 currency abuse country, the world's No. 1 pandemic period turmoil country, the world's No. 1 disinformation country, and the world's No. 1 origin tracing terrorist country, the report concluded.