

## Business

# Survey: China's image slips further in developed world

## Concerns grow over Beijing's rising military, economic power

WASHINGTON: Increasingly large majorities in the developed world see China unfavorably, with record levels of criticism in the United States, Germany and South Korea, a survey said Wednesday. A 19-nation survey by the Pew Research Center showed a further deterioration of China's reputation over the past several years, as concerns grow about Beijing's rising military and economic power, its human rights record and the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Eighty-two percent of Americans, 80 percent of South Koreans and 74 percent of both Germans and Canadians viewed China unfavorably, the survey said - record levels in each country. China's unfavorability also hovered around near-record highs of 87 percent in Japan, 86 percent in Australia and 83 percent in Sweden.

China's reputation eroded especially sharply in South Korea, against which Beijing in 2017 launched a campaign of economic retaliation after Seoul and the United States set up an anti-missile system that the two allies say is in response to North Korea, not China. Beijing has also imposed economic punishment over actions by Australia, where concerns have been heightened in recent months after the country spotted Chinese spy ships near its waters.

China's image fell even in some nations with which it has comparatively warm relationships. A record 50 percent saw China unfavorably in Greece, which has welcomed major Chinese investment since its economic crisis. One outlier was

Zionist entity, where opinions on China were almost evenly divided and, in contrast to Western nations, most people called for prioritizing economic relations even without addressing human rights. The survey took answers from 24,525 adults from February 14 to June 3.

### Sowing division

Meanwhile, China has accused Group of Seven countries of irresponsibly sowing division after the forum condemned Beijing's trade practices in an end-of-summit statement. G7 leaders had slammed China's "non-transparent and market-distorting" international trade tactics on Tuesday, in a statement that also vowed to reduce "strategic dependencies" on the Asian giant.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian on Wednesday hit back at the criticism, saying the statement showed the allies were "keen to create divisions and confrontations without any sense of responsibility or morality". The G7 should "advance globalization" rather than encourage division "at a critical time for the international community fighting the pandemic and striving for economic recovery," Zhao said at a regular press conference.

The G7 statement, in which leaders pledged to "foster diversification and resilience to economic coercion, and to reduce strategic dependencies," came hours before the leaders joined a larger group of their counterparts at a NATO summit in Madrid. There, the 30-member alliance was also poised to toughen its stance against Beijing. —AFP



BEIJING: A man rests on a bench while sheltering under an umbrella, along a road in Beijing on June 30, 2022. —AFP

## Services, manufacturing rebound in China after COVID-19 curbs eased

BEIJING: China's factory and services activity picked up in June, official data showed Thursday, fuelled by the easing of COVID-19 restrictions in major cities such as Shanghai and Beijing. The non-manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), a key gauge of activity in the world's second-biggest economy, defied expectations and surged to 54.7 points in June after three months of sluggish performance. It was the first time since February that the reading was above the 50-point mark separating growth from contraction. It sat at 47.8 in May.

"As the situation of domestic epidemic prevention and control continued to improve and a package of policies... to stabilize the economy was implemented at a quicker pace, the overall recovery of our country's economy has accelerated," National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) senior statistician Zhao Qinghe said in a statement. In particular, business activity in industries severely hit by the pandemic such as rail and air transport picked up in June, the statement said.

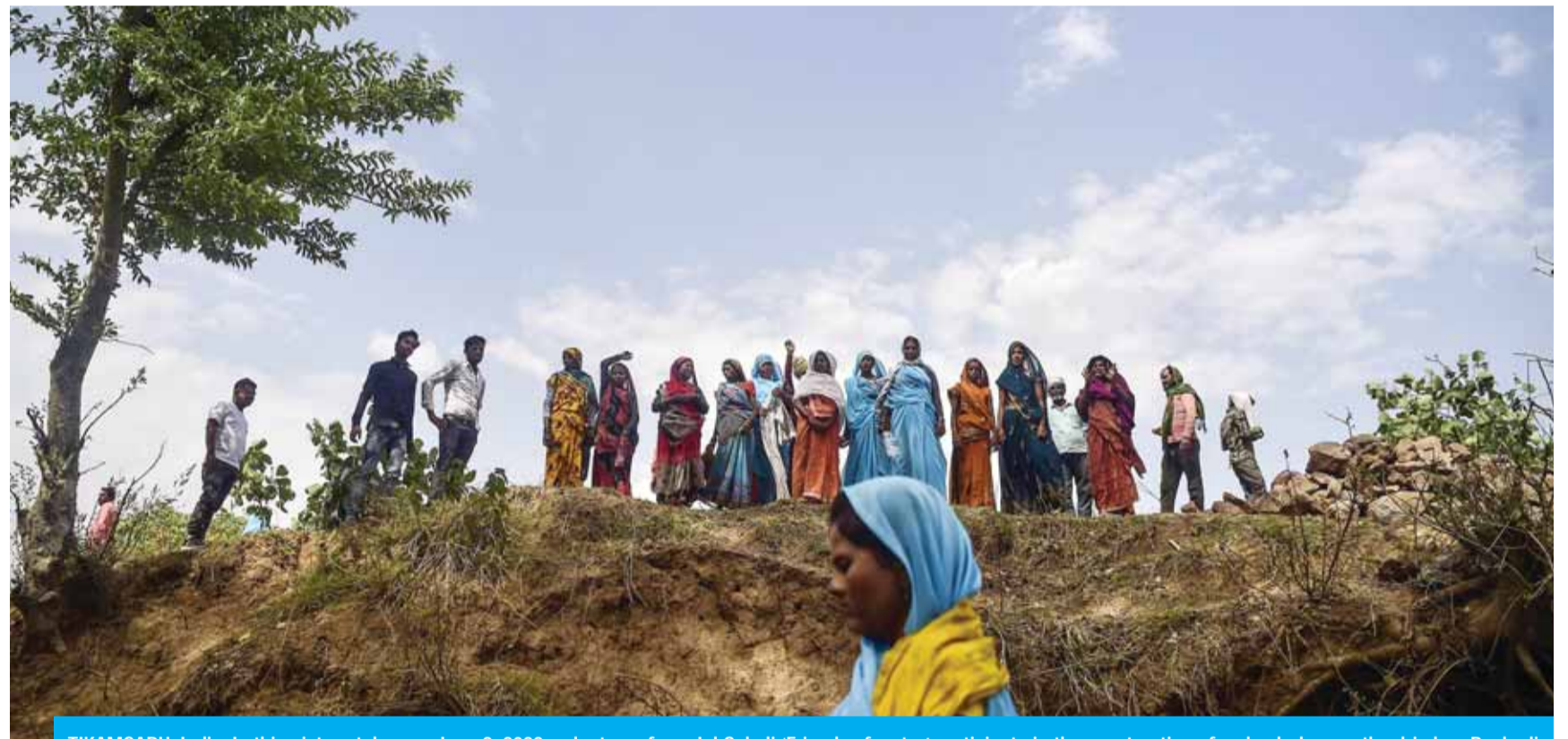
Construction activity also helped fuel the PMI boost. But the "surprisingly rapid recovery in services" likely reflects a one-off boost from reopening, said Julian Evans-Pritchard, senior China economist at Capital Economics. Manufacturing PMI rose to 50.2 points in June - similar to analyst expectations - up from 49.6 in May. As work resumed after COVID lockdowns, production and demand in the sector picked up and delivery times improved, according to the NBS.

China is the only major economy still pursuing a zero-COVID approach of eliminating outbreaks as they emerge, using snap lockdowns and mass testing. While the country is shortening quarantine times for new international arrivals, President Xi Jinping warned this week that China "would have faced unimaginable consequences" had it adopted a herd immunity or hands-off approach, signaling the government would persist with its current policy.

The approach has taken a harsh toll on the economy, with shops and factories forced to stop operations and supply chains strained. The non-manufacturing rebound in June was "mainly due to more construction activity", said Iris Pang, chief economist for Greater China at ING. "We think that it will be challenging for the government to achieve the 5.5 percent GDP target set in March. There will need to be a lot more infrastructure activity if the government is to achieve this target." —AFP



SHANGHAI: Vehicles make their way amid heavy traffic conditions on a highway during the evening in the City of Shanghai. —AFP



TIKAMGARH, India: In this picture taken on June 9, 2022, volunteers from Jal Saheli 'Friends of water' participate in the construction of a check dam on the dried up Bachedi stream in Agrotha village. — AFP photos

## India women water warriors transform parched lands

CHHATARPUR: As the monsoon storms bear down on India, a dedicated group of women hope that after years of backbreaking labor, water shortages will no longer leave their village high and dry. The world's second-most populous country is struggling to meet the water needs of its 1.4 billion people - a problem worsening as climate change makes weather patterns more unpredictable.

Few places have it tougher than Bundelkhand, a region south of the Taj Mahal, where scarce water supplies have pushed despairing farmers on the plains to give up their lands and take up precarious work in the cities. "Our elders say that this stream used to run full throughout the year, but now there is not a single drop," said Babita Rajput while guiding AFP past a bone-dry fissure in the earth near her village.

"There is a water crisis in our area," she added. "All our wells have dried up." Three years ago, Rajput joined Jal Saheli ("Friends of Water"), a volunteer network of around 1,000 women working across Bundelkhand to rehabilitate and revive disappeared water sources. Together they carry rocks and mix concrete to build dams, ponds and embankments to catch the fruits of the June monsoon, a season which accounts for about 75 percent of India's annual rainfall.

Agrotha, where Rajput lives, is one of more than 300 villages where women are chalking out plans for new catchment sites, reservoirs and waterway revitalizations. Rajput said their work had helped them retain monsoon rainwater for longer and revive half a dozen water bodies around their village. Though not yet self-sufficient, Agrotha's residents are no longer among the roughly 600 million Indians that a government think-tank says face acute water shortages daily.

The women's efforts provide a rare glimmer of hope as national shortages worsen. Water utilities in the capital New Delhi fail to meet demand in summer, with trucks regularly travelling into slums to supply residents unable to draw water from their taps. India's NITI Aayog public policy centre forecasts that around 40 percent of the country's population could be without access to drinking



Women collect water from a well in Agrotha village.

water by the end of the decade.

### 'Government has failed'

Erratic rainfall patterns and extreme heat have been linked to climate change in Bundelkhand, which has suffered several long dry spells since a drought was declared at the turn of the century. Civil society activist Sanjay Singh helped train women in Agrotha to harvest and store rainwater after the surrounding land was desiccated by drought.

By doing so he helped the village rediscover knowledge that was lost decades earlier, when water went from being a community-managed resource to one administered by India's government. "But government has failed to ensure water to every citizen, particularly in rural areas, pushing villagers to go back to the old practice," he told AFP. Before Agrotha's irrigation project began, women had to walk miles every day in a desperate and often fruitless search for a well that was not dry.

In India's villages, fetching water is traditionally the responsibility of women, several of whom have faced violence from their husbands after being unable to find enough for their households, Singh said. He added that drought had brought big social changes to the region, pushing men to move to cities and leave their families behind. But since it was founded in 2005, the Jal Saheli initiative has helped more than 110 villages become self-reliant

for their water needs and aided in reversing the outward flow of people.

### Dust bowl to oasis

In the nearby Lalitpur district, the elderly Srikumar has seen the initiative transform her community from a dust bowl into an oasis. She heard about the volunteer group a decade ago after suffering through years of water shortages, by the end of which every well and hand pump in her village of 500 people had run dry. Most of the farms in the area had turned barren because of a lack of irrigation, and dehydrated cattle herds were dying in summer temperatures close to 50 degrees Celsius. "Villagers suffered a lot during those days," Srikumar said. "Farming was impossible and men were fleeing their homes to cities to earn a living."

With the help of Singh's charity, Srikumar and a dozen other volunteers dug a football field-sized reservoir near the village that holds up to 10 feet of water after the monsoon rains arrive. The village now has enough water reserves to meet its needs year-round and replenish the earth that had dried out before their intervention. "Things have changed for good. We have enough water now, not just for our homes but also for our cattle," she told AFP. "Our lives would have been miserable without this pond," she added. "It would have been very difficult to survive." — AFP