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California still coping with severe storms as death toll rises to 14

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Martial arts enthusiast from the US finds his place in Wudang Mountains

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CHINA DAILY

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习近平主席同捷克总统泽曼视频会晤

Video setkání prezidenta Xi Jinping a prezidenta Miloše Zemana



President Xi Jinping meets via video link from Beijing on Monday with Czech President Miloš Zeman. ZHAI JIANLAN / XINHUA

President vows to advance ties with Czech Republic

By MO JINGXI
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President Xi Jinping pledged on Monday to push forward the steady development of relations between China and the Czech Republic, saying that more measures will be unveiled to promote cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European countries.

Speaking during a virtual meeting with Czech President Miloš Zeman, Xi said the two have held in-depth exchanges on bilateral ties and governance experience during

their many meetings and phone conversations over the past decade.

Xi said that the two heads of state also jointly promoted bilateral trade and personnel exchanges, with Czech exports to China nearly doubling and the number of Chinese tourists visiting the Czech Republic increasing by 250 percent between 2013 and 2019.

Xi said China highly values developing Sino-Czech relations and is ready to work with the Czech Republic in advancing bilateral ties to better benefit their peoples.

He called on the two nations to respect each other's core interests and major concerns, strengthen high-quality communication at various levels, expand mutually beneficial cooperation and facilitate people-to-people exchanges.

Noting that China's policy toward the European Union remains stable, Xi expressed his hope that the Czech Republic will continue to actively advance China-CEEC cooperation and promote the sustainable and sound development of China-EU relations.

As China is promoting national

rejuvenation through a Chinese path to modernization and continues with high-level opening-up, Xi said it is certain that China will bring new opportunities to all countries, including the Czech Republic.

Zeman said he is ready to work with China in strengthening cooperation in areas such as trade and investment, overcoming the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and resuming personnel exchanges.

The Czech Republic is willing to play a positive role in promoting the healthy development of EU-China relations, he added.

Xi emphasizes zero tolerance for corruption

Anti-graft fight remains serious and complex, he says at plenary session of top watchdog

By CAO DESHENG
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Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, stressed on Monday the need to further exercise full and rigorous governance over the Party and vowed zero tolerance for corruption.

Xi, who is also China's president and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks while addressing the second plenary session of the 20th CPC Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, which opened in Beijing on Monday.

Stressing that the situation in the battle against corruption remains serious and complex, Xi said that resolute efforts must be made to investigate and deal with corruption that involves both political and economic elements, and to resolutely prevent leading officials from acting on behalf of any interest groups or powerful groups.

He called for preventing collusion between officials and businesspeople and guarding against infiltration by capital into the political field in order to prevent such wrongdoings from undermining the political ecosystem or economic development. Laws and regulations to punish bribery should be further improved, he added.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012, the CPC Central Committee has made continuous efforts to improve Party conduct, uphold integrity and combat corruption with unprecedented courage and resolve.

As a result of high-profile anti-corruption campaigns, some 81,000 people have voluntarily surrendered to disciplinary inspection and supervision agencies over the past five years, Xinhua News Agency reported.

Addressing the 20th CPC National Congress in October, Xi said, "As the largest Marxist governing party in the world, we must always stay alert and determined to tackle the special challenges that a large party like ours faces, so as to maintain the people's

support and consolidate our position as the long-term governing party."

Within just over a month after the closing of the 20th CPC National Congress, more than 10 officials who were suspected of severe violations of discipline and laws had turned themselves in.

At Monday's meeting, Xi emphasized that exercising full and rigorous self-governance over the Party is a long-term, strategic issue that matters to the Party's long-term ruling of the country, the nation's long-lasting stability and the people's well-being.

He urged continuous efforts to achieve the strategic goal that officials do not dare, are not able and have no desire to become corrupt.

Strong political supervision must be conducted to ensure that the decisions and policies unveiled at the 20th CPC National Congress are faithfully implemented, he added.

Xi also called for continuous efforts to implement the "eight-point decision on improving conduct", which was first made public in December 2012 and targets formalism, bureaucratism, hedonism and extravagance and seeks to rein in privilege-seeking attitudes and behavior.

In order to improve Party conduct, Xi said consistent and sustained efforts should be made to identify problems specific to certain areas, sectors and periods of time, and to go to great lengths to tackle prevalent and recurrent problems.

Tackling formalism and bureaucratism should be given greater prominence as a significant task in improving Party conduct, he added.

Xi underscored the importance of tightening Party discipline and urged Party officials to stick to the Party Constitution.

While stressing the Party's unified leadership over anti-corruption work, Xi also urged disciplinary inspection and supervision departments to assume their responsibilities and effectively fulfill their duties in the tough battle against corruption.

Thailand greets Chinese tourists after policy update

By YANG WANLI in Bangkok
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As Thailand welcomed the first group of Chinese tourists on Monday after updating its arrival policy over the weekend, local authorities fully opened their arms to inbound travelers by removing the requirement of vaccination before entry.

Anutin Charnvirakul, Thailand's deputy prime minister and minister of public health, said, "Visitors who are not vaccinated at all will also be granted entry without restriction. Showing proof of vaccination would be cumbersome and

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inconvenient, so our decision is that it is unnecessary," Anutin said.

Thailand is also offering visitors a longer period of stay. Effective through March 31, the period of stay is extended from 30 days to 45 for tourists from countries and regions that qualify for visa exemption, and to 30 days instead of 15 for those eligible for a visa on arrival.

The announcement was made after a welcoming ceremony on Monday for the first group of Chinese tourists to arrive at Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport since Thailand updated its travel policy.

China optimized its own travel protocol for inbound arrivals on Sunday. Xiamen Airlines flight MF833, carrying 269 Chinese tourists, landed in the Thai capital after flying from East China's Fujian province.

A large group of greeters led by Anutin, the public health minister, Transport Minister Saksayam Chidchob and Tourism and Sports Minister Phiphat Ratchakitprakarn

welcomed the tourists after their arrival.

Officials presented the tourists with orchid garlands, souvenirs and leaflets in Chinese. They also held up a banner that read: "Chinese and Thais come from the same family. Amazing Thailand will always warmly welcome Chinese people."

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Online
See the video by scanning the code.

US still haunted by vast racial inequities today

Nearly 60 years have elapsed since the late Martin Luther King Jr made his touching "I have a dream" speech to protest racial discrimination, yet his grandchildren are still judged by the color of their skin rather than the content of their character.

Aggravating the problem of racial discrimination, racial injustice has permeated the bedrock of the United States' criminal justice system, tarnishing the nation's human rights record.

According to the Center for American Progress, the vast racial inequities that exist today are the result of inequitable policies that were long in the making.

The administration of US President Joe Biden, a self-proclaimed

WORLD WATCH
By Junius Ho Kwan-yiu and Kacey Ting Wong

champion of human rights, seems committed to the eradication of racism in the criminal justice system. However, human rights groups, civil rights organizations, academics and other critics have argued that the US justice system exhibits systemic racial biases that harm minority groups, particularly African Americans.

Hypocrisy has cast a pall over the "city on the hill".

According to Article 5 of the International Convention on the

Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, "State parties undertake to guarantee the right of everyone ... to equal treatment before the tribunals and all other organs administering justice." Contrary to the above principle, the US judiciary has failed to guarantee the right of black people to equal treatment before the law. Some critics have highlighted the overrepresentation of black people on death row as evidence of the unequal racial application of capital punishment.

Two capital offense cases have drawn criticism and caused a barrage of public anger in the black community. In *McCleskey v Kemp*, the petitioner, a black man convicted of murdering a white police officer, alleged that the death sentence

process was administered in a racially discriminatory manner in violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution.

Another highly controversial case is the November execution of Kevin Johnson, a black man convicted of killing a white police officer. The execution of Johnson is regarded by critics as an example of racial injustice because of allegations that race had been a decisive and unconstitutional factor throughout the prosecution. Special prosecutor Edward Keenan had contended that racist prosecution techniques tainted Johnson's conviction and death sentence.

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Riots quelled in Brasilia



Security forces arrest supporters of former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro on Sunday after retaking control of the Planalto Presidential Palace in Brasilia. More than 400 people who had stormed and vandalized the presidential palace, the Congress and the Supreme Court were arrested, a local official said on Monday. TON MOLINA / AFP

YOUNG GROUP PUTS PAST AND FUTURE INTO WORDS

Students and others describe their lives in China, hopes for year ahead

By CHEN XUE
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Young people from China and several other countries have been looking back at the past year and ahead to what awaits them in 2023.

To describe their lives in China

over the past 12 months and their visions for the future, they each chose three words.

The group, members of Genera-

tion Z, appeared in the latest episode of the China Daily series Youth Power, titled "Your Year, Your Word", which was broadcast online on Dec 30.

Generation Z refers to those born in the late 1990s or early 2000s, who are perceived as being familiar with the use of digital technology,

the internet and social media from an extremely young age.

Matthew Kelly, who is studying Chinese language and Chinese culture at the Confucius Institute in Dublin, Ireland, chose the word "rewarding" to sum up his life last year.

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From left: Alexandre Guery, Enoch Wong, Han Shuyuan, Jennifer Holstein, Jood Sharaf and Joshua Brown choose words to describe their lives over the past 12 months and their visions for the future. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Matthew Kelly PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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Three months ago, Kelly had the opportunity to travel to China for the first time through a scholarship program for study at Peking University, one of the country's top universities.

"It's been such an amazing experience. I think the biggest reward for me has been the connections I've made in China, and the friends that I've made through learning Mandarin," he said.

For Han Shuyuan, a Tsinghua University student attending a visiting undergraduate program at Harvard University in Boston, United States, "adventure" was the best word to describe her experiences over the past year.

She said visiting Harvard is adventurous because it is the first time she has studied overseas with other students from a wide range of cultural backgrounds, each of them holding different views of the world.

"This is not only an adventure to learn more from the professors during lectures and seminars, but also an adventure to learn more about the outside world," Han said.

Gap year

Gabriella Madombwe from South Africa chose "explore," "choice" and "self-trust" to describe the past 12 months, as she had just graduated from high school and taken a gap year to decide what she wanted to do with her life.

She took new courses, including one on cybersecurity, and was given choices such as whether to pursue a nursing degree or learn practical skills like those used by a locksmith or a welder. In the process of studying Chinese, Madombwe also regained trust in herself.

"I'm now more confident, as I know myself better and what I like and dislike. I feel my future has many possibilities, and that I'm in a much better place than when I started the gap year," she said.

For a keyword to describe China,

Words: Optimism voiced for next 12 months



The group appears in the latest episode of the China Daily series Youth Power, titled "Your Year, Your Word". PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

“It's been such an amazing experience. I think the biggest reward for me has been the connections I've made here in China, and the friends that I've made through learning Mandarin.”

Matthew Kelly, from Ireland, who is studying Chinese language and Chinese culture at the Confucius Institute in Dublin, chose the word "rewarding" to sum up his life last year

Joshua Brown, who comes from the US and works for a funding company, chose "dynamic," in a reference to China's pandemic control policies.

Last year was the third year since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a huge impact on life around the world, and during which China has responded to the ever-changing situation regarding the disease by updating its policies accordingly.

Jennifer Holstein, a journalist from the US working in Beijing, agreed. "In 2022, China learned that the Omicron variant is less deadly and is relatively mild compared with earlier variants of COVID-19. It makes sense now to ease the restrictions," she said.

Enoch Wong, who comes from Hong Kong and works for CGTN, said the word "believe" best depicted China during the past year.

Wong cited several examples, including China's successful space missions, the launch of a number of national parks, and the nation's contribution to the UN Climate Change Conference in Sharm-el-Sheikh, Egypt, in November. She also referred to Beijing becoming the world's first "dual Olympic City" when it hosted the Winter Olympics in February, in addition to staging the 2008 Summer Olympics.

Wong attributed all these factors to the firm belief among China's 1.4 billion population to stay together for a shared future.

"I think it's a belief from the past that has made us who we are today, and a belief that will shape what we become in the future," Wong said.

Nation prospers

Alexandre Guery, who comes from

France and has just graduated from Nankai University in Tianjin, chose "transition" and "prosperity" to best describe China. He said that even though the nation is experiencing a period of change, it made significant achievements in the past year and will continue to flourish in the next 12 months.

"Everyone knows that China was the first civilization. Last year, the nation remained prosperous, and life went on. People are working hard and the country is doing well," he said.

Jood Sharaf, a student from Bulgaria studying at Tsinghua University, recently arrived in China for the first time. She chose the word "shocking" — not to describe China, but to refer to the way in which it is shockingly different from the impression that she and her friends back home

used to have of the country.

She also said it was shocking for her to realize how deeply they had been influenced by the Western way of understanding China.

"Everything that we've done so far in terms of politics and theories has been based on a Western perspective and a Western way of seeing and viewing the world and interacting with each other. I think that what we have right now here (in China) can offer a different perspective, a different way of developing and moving forward," Sharaf said.

Asked to choose a word to describe their hopes for 2023, the group came up with a variety of choices.

Raz Galor from Israel, who launched *Why China*, a video show depicting foreigners' lives in China, said "embrace" best summed up his experiences last year and his hopes



Sarah Khattab PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

for 2023. In the past year, he has seen many changes in his life and those of people close to him. However, instead of feeling upset and resentful, he chose to embrace these changes, and plans to continue doing so in the coming year.

"I hope to help shape the changes that I see in the world. I see myself as an active participant, but I also try to change things for the better. No matter where we're from, no matter what we do, if we are sympathetic and empathetic to others, we're going to live in a better world," Galor said.

Sarah Khattab from Egypt, who is studying at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, opted for "peaceful" as her word for 2023, because last year there was too much chaos, including wars, in different parts of the world. Holstein also opted for the same word.

"You can't fight hate with hate. You have to fight hate with love. I really hope that in this chaotic world, everybody can find a modicum of peace and happiness," Holstein said.

Tang Kaiming, a student from China at Shanghai International Studies University, said "connection" best summed up last year and her hopes for 2023.

In the past year, Tang decided she wanted to help connect China and the rest of the world. She started to improve her language skills by taking part in as many English speech competitions as possible. Tang also learned more about China's diplomatic approaches, including the Belt and Road Initiative, so that she can introduce them to people from other countries.

"As a student majoring in Spanish, I want to be the bridge that connects China and Spain, their peoples and their cultures," she said.



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Generation Z's open attitude, broad horizons point way to brighter future

By WU DI
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Words chosen by a group of young people in China and elsewhere in the world to best describe the past year are not as strange or depressing as those picked by the publishers of leading dictionaries.

As in previous years, publishers such as Oxford University Press, Merriam-Webster and Collins selected words to sum up the past 12 months. For last year, their choices included "Goblin mode," "gaslighting" and "permacrisis".

"Goblin mode" is a slang term for behavior that intentionally and shamelessly indulges in habits and activities without regard to social norms or expectations, "gaslighting" refers to manipulating someone psychologically into doubting their sanity, while "permacrisis" is an extended period of instability and insecurity.

To discover how a group of young people best summed up the past year, China Daily's Generation Z Research Center surveyed 132 respondents from 24 countries and regions, including China, Afghanistan, Egypt, France, India, Russia, South Africa, the United

Kingdom and the United States.

The respondents were asked to share their keywords for last year, regarding themselves, their home countries and the world. They were also asked for their expectations for 2023.

Words chosen by the group to encapsulate the past year covered a wide range, with some noticeable surprises.

More than half these words were positive. "Endeavors" was the most popular, being mentioned nine times, followed by "good" and "perplexity". Other popular choices included

"challenges", "vigor", "growth" and "enrichment".

Among Chinese members of Generation Z, the top three keywords used to sum up their personal lives were "endeavors", "perplexity" and "vigor", while for overseas members the choices were "good", "challenges" and "endeavors".

Some 60 percent of the words used by respondents to describe their home country last year were positive, with examples including "development", "great" and "hope". However, the survey found that members of the group also chose negative terms such

as "stagnant" and "chaotic", while 26 interviewees opted for neutral words such as "epidemic" and "challenges".

The most popular choice was "prosperity", which was listed seven times.

The survey also found that fewer than 30 percent of the keywords used to describe the world last year were positive.

The most popular word used in this category was "chaos", which was mentioned 14 times, followed by two words the opposite of one another — "happiness" and "awful". Other choices included "volatile", "tough", "split"

and "rejuvenation".

Most members of the group were positive about the future, the survey found. A total of 70.5 percent of the interviewees believed that compared with last year, the next 12 months would be better, while 29.5 percent were uncertain or thought that this year might be worse than last.

The keywords used by the group demonstrated its diversity, inclusiveness, critical thinking and care for the world, giving reason to believe that with such an open attitude and broad horizons, Generation Z is ready to usher in a bright future.

TOP NEWS

Travel document issuance restarts following hiatus

Centers processing passports, permits resume full operation after suspension due to COVID

By CUI JIA
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Exit and Entry Administration centers nationwide were busy on Monday, the first working day after the country resumed issuing passports and travel permits for Chinese residents on the mainland.

The centers resumed full operations after the issuing of travel documents for tourism and nonemergency purposes was stopped on July 30, 2021, due to concerns over the COVID-19 pandemic.

On Monday, there was strong demand for passport and other services from mainland residents as well as foreigners seeking residence permits and visas, immigration officials said, adding that demand for the services is expected to continue to rise.

Even though all service counters at the Beijing Exit and Entry Administration Service Center were open on Monday, applicants for travel documents still had to wait for short periods.

Liu Jing, an officer of the Exit and Entry Administration Bureau of Beijing Municipal Public Security, said the number of people visiting the center in the morning was similar to pre-COVID levels.

"As Exit and Entry Administration service centers around the country are dealing with a surge in applications, I strongly recommend people to make an appointment online first to avoid long waiting times," Liu said.

Management of COVID-19 was downgraded from Class A to Class B on Sunday. The next day, authorities resumed issuing passports for Chinese mainland residents for tourism purposes abroad as well as processing endorsements for Chinese mainland residents to visit the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

A Beijing resident surnamed Gong said her passport expired in 2022 and she urgently needed to renew it.

"I loved traveling around the world before the pandemic, and now I can continue doing that," said the 66-year-old while flipping through the pages of her old passport, which contains immigration stamps from many countries.

It took Gong and her husband,

who also renewed his passport, about an hour to complete the renewal process. The couple decided to have their passports renewed as quickly as possible, after hearing a week ago that passport renewal and other services would resume on Monday.

"I want to visit Europe and Africa this year. I will first consider countries that don't impose travel restrictions for people who travel from China," Gong said.

Chen Shubin made an online appointment to apply for a travel document to visit Hong Kong after the service was made available at the Beijing center.

"I planned to travel to Hong Kong before, but I didn't make it because of the travel restrictions imposed to contain the spread of COVID-19. Now I can finally make the trip," Chen said.

Ji Xiaowen, an officer of the Exit and Entry Administration Bureau of Beijing, said services for foreign nationals at the center have returned to normal. The services deal with foreign nationals' applications for the extension, renewal and re-issuance of ordinary visas, short-term stay permits and residence permits.

"After the number of inbound flights starts to increase and more foreigners come to China, we expect to see a gradual increase in applications from foreign nationals," Ji said.

Derek Holste, 24, from the United States successfully submitted an application for a residence permit on Monday.

"Now it's more convenient for students from all over the world to study in China, which is a great opportunity," said the PhD student at the Central University of Finance and Economics in Beijing.

In response to the large number of visa applications in Shanghai, operations have been optimized, said Shen Qiang, a director with the Exit-Entry Administration Bureau of Shanghai Municipal Public Security Bureau.

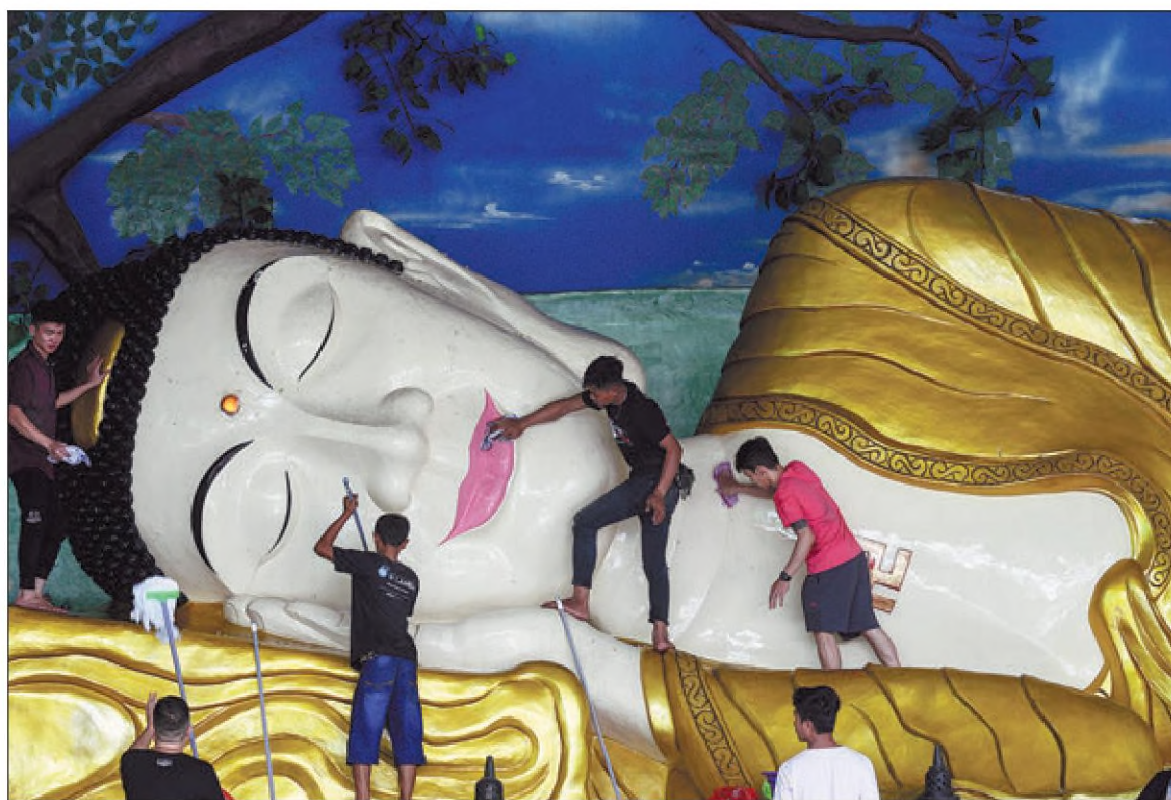
All 150 reception counters across the city have been opened to offer services, Shen said.

Li Peixuan in Beijing and Wang Ying in Shanghai contributed to this story.



Applicants are helped on Monday at the Exit and Entry Administration Bureau of Beijing Municipal Public Security. ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

Preparing for the holiday



Devotees clean a statue of Buddha at a temple in Bogor, West Java, Indonesia, on Sunday, ahead of the Chinese Lunar New Year, which falls on Jan 22 this year. LENNY KEN MARHAENIS / SIPA USA

Thailand: 5 million tourists from China expected to visit this year

From page 1

"That was a big surprise to us. Thailand's people are very amicable," said Ma Zixiao, a traveler from Beijing. "It's exciting that we can come back to Thailand, as we last paid a visit to the country in 2016."

Her trip with family members will cover Bangkok and the coastal city of Pattaya.

"Many of my friends love Thailand very much, and they envy me for the quick decision that made the trip possible," she said.

According to statistics from the Tourism Authority of Thailand, Chinese travelers accounted for one-fourth of the total international inbound tourists to Thailand before the COVID-19 pandemic. There were more than 11 million Chinese visitors in 2019 alone, generating over 500 billion baht (\$14.95 billion) in tourism revenue.

The number dropped sharply in 2020 and 2021. Last year saw the number of inbound Chinese travelers surge to nearly 290,000.

25 million

The number of international tourists expected to visit Thailand this year

Following China's optimization of its COVID control policy, the Tourism Authority of Thailand estimated that the number of international inbound tourists this year is likely to reach 25 million. It believes that starting on Monday, about 300,000 Chinese tourists will arrive in the first quarter — 60,000 in January, 90,000 in February and 150,000 in March. A total of 5 million Chinese tourists are expected to visit Thailand in 2023.

Tanes Petsuwan, the Tourism Authority's deputy governor for international marketing for Asia and the South Pacific, said he was very glad to see an increase in the number of Chinese visiting Thailand. "Most Thai people are very

happy. The situation of COVID-19 is under control. Both the number of deaths and new cases are very low," he said.

Tanes said representatives of Thailand's private sector will be visiting China for business cooperation later. "It will be very good collaboration between Thailand and China," he added.

Phuket, one of the most popular island destinations among Chinese tourists, now has about 60 percent of its private sector back in business. Bhumikitti Ruktaengam, advisory chairman of the Phuket Tourist Association, told local media that about 20 percent of the island's suspended businesses could reopen if Chinese tourists return.

In addition to Chinese tourists' favorite activities of visiting beaches and enjoying the food, "we would like to promote exclusive tour packages in the northeast region, the less-trampled corner of Thailand, which is filled with natural beauty," said Yuthasak Supasorn, governor of the Tourism Authority.

Briefly

Former spokesman takes up new post

Former Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian has taken up the post of deputy director of the ministry's Department of Boundary and Ocean Affairs, according to the ministry's website.

Zhao had been a deputy director-general of the ministry's Information Department since 2019, and he became the ministry's 31st spokesperson in 2020. Before that, Zhao, born in 1972, had served as the minister counselor and charge d'affaires at the Chinese embassy in Pakistan.

The Department of Boundary and Ocean Affairs develops policies concerning land and maritime boundaries, guides and coordinates external work concerning oceans and seas, and manages land boundary delimitation and demarcation and joint inspections with neighboring countries.

It also handles external boundary matters and cases concerning territories, maps and place names, and engages in diplomatic negotiations on maritime delimitation and joint development.

CHINA DAILY

Tibet University programs benefit poor students

By PALDEN NYIMA in Lhasa
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Tibet University has implemented a range of financial support measures in recent years to ensure that underprivileged students are able to pursue their dreams of higher education.

In 2021, the university spent more than 24 million yuan (\$3.54 million) on scholarships, loans, grants, medical aid and subsidies, allowing more than 9,900 students from poor families to fulfill their dreams, according to a report in Tibet Daily.

"Tibet University has been working hard to offer its students at least eight sponsorship programs. These include study loans, scholarships and grants, tuition fee and accom-

modation cost exemptions, employment opportunities after graduation and student loan waivers for graduates who find jobs in rural areas," Phuntsok Wangdu, an official in the university's student work department, was quoted as saying.

The official said the university annually provides financial support for around 10,000 students. Twenty-four scholarship projects have been rolled out and other forms of financial support are provided to poor students every year, he added.

Allowing the students to take up part-time jobs while studying at the university is also part of the institution's efforts to help them cope with financial difficulties. This has been an effective means of developing

their all-around capabilities, according to the official.

In recent years, the university has provided students with more than 300 on-campus jobs annually, including at the supermarket, printing house, canteen, libraries and department offices.

The university has opened a "green channel" for those from poor families, so that their admissions can be smoothly processed every year. This is among the many efforts to encourage underprivileged students to go to college, Phuntsok Wangdu said.

Ma Caihua, who completed a master's degree at Tibet University, said he studied at the university's Literature College between 2018 and 2021. "The annual tuition fee was around 5,000 yuan, so I first

applied for a student loan," he said.

Ma also benefited from the annual stipend for students who come from outside the Tibet autonomous region. "The university offers a scholarship of 5,000 yuan to 8,000 yuan. I received 5,000 yuan every year during my three-year course. With the scholarship and stipend, I received more than 10,000 yuan annually for my higher studies," he said.

The former student thanked the university for helping him complete his education. "My parents and I did not have to worry about funding my studies, thanks to the scholarship and stipend the university provided."

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Discrimination: Racial injustice, inequality in US two sides of the same coin

From page 1

Equally of concern is that the US has been sitting on the problem of the disproportionately high incarceration rate for black people. Despite some reductions in incarceration rates for blacks in recent years, black offenders remain vastly overrepresented in prisons. There are significant racial disparities within the US prison population, with black individuals making up 38.2 percent of the federal prison popula-

tion in 2020 despite accounting for only 13.4 percent of the total population.

Racial injustice and racial inequalities are two sides of the same coin. Economic inequality, in particular, has adversely affected blacks and other minorities, and the wealth gap between black people and white people in the US has remained unchanged. Black, Latin American, Asian and Native American communities have been disproportionately burdened by the impacts of the

COVID-19 pandemic, a situation that critics say has deepened racial injustice in healthcare, housing, employment, education and income.

All eyes are now on how the Biden administration implements Executive Order 13985, which aims to advance racial equity and support underserved communities. Although Biden has tried to cultivate an image of being an advocate for racial equity, the deep-rooted problems of racial injustice and racial inequalities

In spite of its illusionary goodwill in promoting human rights diplomacy, the US has a notorious record of entrenched racial injustice in its criminal justice system.

have gone from an illness of the limbs to organic degeneration.

In a speech to the Democratic National Convention in 2004, Barack Obama, then a candidate for the US Senate, said, "There's not a black America and white America and Latino America and Asian America, there's the United States of America. We are one people." Sadly, the opposite proves true and Americans are not one people.

In spite of its illusionary goodwill in promoting human rights

diplomacy, the US has a notorious record of entrenched racial injustice in its criminal justice system.

Junius Ho Kwan-yiu is a Legislative Council member of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and a solicitor. Kacey Ting Wong is a barrister and part-time researcher at Shenzhen University's Hong Kong and Macao Basic Law Research Center. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA

Govt to cover treatment costs until at least March

By LI LEI
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Patients needing treatment for COVID-19 will not have to foot pricey bills for hospitalization out of their own pockets until at least the end of March, according to authorities.

Additionally, outpatient costs will be more generously refunded if incurred at smaller hospitals serving vast rural areas, they added.

The policies were outlined in a circular released on Saturday by the National Healthcare Security Administration, the Ministry of Finance, the National Health Commission and the National Administration for Disease Prevention and Control.

For the last few years, the State has settled all expenses for the diagnosis and treatment of COVID-19 at centralized isolation facilities.

Payment liability issues were only brought to the fore early last month, when health authorities allowed patients to be treated at any hospital of their choice.

The circular said the State will continue to pay for hospitalization costs until at least March 31, as long as patients conform to the diagnosis and treatment plan for novel coronavirus infections, as COVID-19 has been officially known in China since Dec 26. The disease was previously called novel coronavirus pneumonia.

Hospitalization costs, usually incurred by older patients in critical condition, will be collectively paid by the national medical aid program for families in financial difficulty, local finance authorities, and two State-run healthcare plans with almost universal coverage on the mainland — basic medical insurance and insurance for severe illnesses. Central finance pledged it will give compensation of up to 60 percent of local finance payment liabilities.

However, the liabilities for outpatient spending vary.

The circular said that COVID-19 patients seeking medical advice at Grade I hospitals, or grassroots medical institutions such as township hospitals, will have at least 70 percent of their spending covered by the State, as part of an incentive for patients to avoid busier hospitals in major cities.

The exact ratio will be determined by local medical insurance and finance departments depending on the state of their insurance funds.

"In principle, local authorities do not set thresholds for reimbursable costs or cap the refunds at grassroots medical institutions."

In comparison, spending at higher-level hospitals — including for outpatient services and emergency treatment — will be reimbursed at the same rate as other Class B infectious diseases, which are constrained by a reimbursement threshold and a refund cap, it said.

Places facing shortages of medications are allowed to add more drugs to the catalog of reimbursable medicines, the circular added.

According to a 2020 report released by the State Council Information Office, the cost of treatment per COVID-19 patient averaged 23,000 yuan (\$3,300). The cost of treating critically ill patients was usually in excess of 150,000 yuan, with some cases costing as much as several million yuan.

Before the nationwide reimbursement policy was unveiled, local authorities were racing to devise their own rules to ease the financial burden on those suffering from COVID-19.

For example, Anhui province published a circular on Dec 29 stipulating that 70 percent of outpatient costs and bills for emergency treatment will be reimbursed. The rules do not set thresholds for reimbursable costs or cap refunds and apply to both rural and urban hospitals in the province.

In Jinjiang, Fujian province, authorities said that 70 percent of outpatient costs will be reimbursed at rural hospitals, compared with just 50 percent in urban ones. The city set a 420 yuan refund cap for spending at rural hospitals, compared with 50 yuan in urban hospitals.

Places including Beijing, and Henan, Hubei and Yunnan provinces in December temporarily added a mix of traditional Chinese medicines, antiviral drugs and over-the-counter medications such as fever reducers and cold capsules to their catalog of medicines covered by State-run healthcare plans.

Healthy beverage



People drink a free traditional Chinese medicine concoction provided by Sanya TCM Hospital in Sanya, Hainan province, on Monday. The city requested grassroots medical facilities make the concoction to boost people's immunity. SHA XIAOFENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Happy 100th



Medical workers and relatives sing a birthday song for a patient surnamed Wei to celebrate his 100th birthday in an intensive care ward in Changsha, Hunan province, on Sunday. Wei was sent to the ward a week ago with a severe COVID-19 infection but has been improving since. GU PENGBO / FOR CHINA DAILY

Focus shifts to saving lives as infections peak in cities

Latest diagnosis, care protocol aimed at ensuring improved warning standards

By ZOU SHUO
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With the management of COVID-19 downgraded from Class A to B, the focus of epidemic control has changed from curbing infections to preventing severe cases and saving people's lives, health officials and experts said.

As major cities in China pass the infection peak, authorities have taken active measures to increase intensive care resources to cope with the peak of severe cases.

Guo Yanhong, director of the National Health Commission's health emergency response department, said the newly released 10th edition of its diagnosis and treatment protocol for COVID-19 has improved the warning standards for severe patients to make sure they receive early treatment.

The protocol stresses the need to treat COVID-19 and underlying diseases simultaneously, as many elderly patients also have underlying conditions, which can be worsened by the COVID-19 infection, she said at a news conference on Monday.

Wang Guiqiang, head of Peking University First Hospital's infectious disease department, said the treatment of severe patients should focus on breathing support, such as receiving oxygen therapy or antiviral medications at an early stage.

The treatment of critical patients should focus on multi-department cooperation to prevent organ failure, worsening underlying diseases

and pneumonia, and to maximally reduce the risks of death, he said.

The new protocol has raised the age limit for people deemed at high risk of severity from 60 to 65, and stressed that unvaccinated groups should be given special attention, he said.

Kan Quancheng, director of the Henan Provincial Health Commission, said 89 percent of the province's population had been infected with COVID-19 as of Jan 6.

The number of patients at fever clinics peaked on Dec 19 and has since declined, he said. The province has passed the infection peak but is still at the peak for severe patients, he said at a news conference on Monday.

From Dec 10 to Jan 7, the province increased its ICU beds from more than 13,600 to 21,700, he said.

The Henan government has allocated 600 million yuan (\$88.4 million) in expanding ICU beds and procuring necessary medical equipment such as respirators, monitors and oxygen inhalators, Kan said.

Henan has also organized intensive care training sessions for medical workers and the number of ICU medical workers has increased from more than 26,000 to 33,000, he said.

Li Pan, deputy director of the Chongqing Health Commission, said the number of patients at fever clinics in the municipality's hospitals has dropped to around 7,000 a day from 49,000 on Dec 20, showing that the peak of infections has passed in the city.

Since December, the city has added 2,131 new ICU beds at designated hospitals, he said at a recent news conference, adding that all designated hospitals are equipped with dialysis machines, delivery rooms and pediatric departments.

The city has conducted health surveys on more than 5.7 million elderly people aged 65 and above and offered special medical monitoring to those with high risks, he said.

Xu Hejian, spokesman for the Beijing municipal government, said the epidemic situation has become less intense and the shortage of drugs has been alleviated.

However, there are still challenges in outpatient and emergency treatment and in caring for critical patients, he said, adding that the most pressing task currently is saving severe and critical patients.

At the emergency department of Peking University First Hospital Taiyuan Hospital in Taiyuan, Shanxi province, the number of patients is almost four times the average in normal times.

More than 30 ambulances arrive at the hospital every day, and the emergency room has to treat more than 150 people daily, according to Xinhua News Agency.

Over 70 percent of the patients needing emergency treatment are aged 65 and above and many of them are in severe and critical conditions, Xinhua said.

Jiang Rui, a head nurse at the hospital said, "Just to prove how busy we are, health tracking devices show that nurses at the emergency department walk more than 30,000 steps every day."

Higher active immunity in elderly reason for downgrade

By CHENG SI
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Ensuring the health of the elderly is a major priority of the government after it downgraded COVID-19 management from Class A to Class B from Sunday, according to a senior health expert from the National Health Commission.

Liang Wannian, head of the NHC's COVID-19 response expert panel, said in a recent interview with the China Central Television that the optimization of COVID-19 policy is a proactive measure with appropriate timing in view of the virus' lower pathogenicity, the higher active immunity among the public and the higher vaccination rate among elderly people.

"We have great sorrow that some elderly patients are infected or are even in severe condition or die from the epidemic. But we can't deny that the epidemic has spread fast and wide, which has posed tremendous threats to our people's life and health," he said.

"I was sent to Hong Kong in the middle of February 2022 with an expert team and found that 94 percent of deaths were old-age patients. Back then, the vaccination rate in Hong Kong was around 86 percent while the rate was only 15 percent for the elderly. That's the crux, because the vaccination rate on the mainland was also around 80 percent while less than 40 percent for seniors."

He said the vaccination rate among the elderly has risen to 80 percent on the mainland.

People were asking whether it would be a better choice to downgrade the management in June or July this year as there would be a lower incidence rate of respiratory diseases during that period, Liang said. He responded that among those recently vaccinated, their active immunity would have decreased by that time.

"It was also not a good choice to optimize the management in the summer of 2022. At that time, our entire elderly population and our entire booster vaccination levels had not achieved the expected protection effect. The overall rate of vaccination for the elderly was relatively low at that time, so we took advantage of these window periods to further strengthen the vaccination of the elderly," he told China Central Television.

According to Liang, the infection wave came too fast and caused a surge of infections, especially among the elderly who often need to be treated in hospitals. "That's why medical resources are in short supply. However, we've made great efforts to shore things up."

Free hotel for medical workers to recuperate

By XU XIAOMIN in Shanghai
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A downtown Shanghai hotel catering exclusively to medical staff infected with COVID-19 has opened in Huangpu, the first of its kind in the district.

Backed by the district government, the facility, located in the Ji Hotel in People's Square, offers free services to medical staff infected during the course of their work and who do not have space available at home to isolate.

Li Wei, deputy director of the district's health commission, told China Daily that the 220-room hotel has already received over 70 guests from local fever clinics, emergency departments and wards since it opened on Dec 20.

"We hope to offer doctors and nurses who have been working

hard on the front line a comfortable place to have a good rest and recover as soon as possible," Li said.

The district has 20 hospitals of various levels with over 4,000 medical staff.

Xiao Youdi, who works at the Shanghai Ruijin Rehabilitation Hospital in Huangpu, stayed at the hotel after developing a fever in December. She reported her situation to the hospital and arranged to stay at the hotel as she was afraid of infecting her roommate.

Xiao told local news portal The Paper.cn that she's pleased with the daily services and amenities, which include three healthy meals, plenty of snacks and antigen testing kits.

To improve guest experience, the hotel has opened a cafe area where they can read books and magazines

while enjoying a cup of tea or coffee.

Huangpu district authorities have also launched a mental health hotline to offer medical staff professional consultation from Shanghai Mental Health Center.

The move comes just days before the release of a document titled "Work Opinions on Ensuring the Strength of Medical Personnel on the Front Line by the Shanghai Health Committee". In the document, Shanghai's health authorities call for greater efforts to protect front-line medical staff who have been working under increased pressure in recent weeks.

It also calls for medical institutions to continue the pilot project of setting up standard rest areas and offices for staff, as well as ensuring they are given sufficient rest days.



A hotel worker checks in a medical worker who came to recover at the Ji Hotel in Shanghai's Huangpu district last month. WANG XIANG / XINHUA

CHINA



From left: Wang Chunjing makes sugar figurines at one of her stores in Harbin, Heilongjiang province. Wang prepares sugar syrup in a bowl. Wang makes a sugar rooster at one of her shops. A sugar dinosaur made by Wang. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The sweet magic of Harbin's sugar figurines

Inheritor is one of few women in the country recognized for art

By ZHOU HUIYING in Harbin
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Children gaped as they watched Wang Chunjing create a lifelike rabbit out of molten maltose in minutes at her stall in Harbin, Heilongjiang province.

Their reactions did not surprise the 32-year-old, who has been blowing sugar figures, a traditional Chinese folk art, for more than a decade.

The process begins with heating sugar syrup, drawing out a small portion, kneading it into a ball with a hollow center, pinching the edges together and stretching it into a tube.

The maker then blows air into the tube and molds the sugar ball into different shapes. "To make a successful piece, I have to do it all in three minutes," Wang said.

Born in Heilongjiang's Qinggang county, she understands the children's reactions because she too once watched in amazement as her father did the same thing when she was a child. "He learned from my grandfather and mastered sugar figurine making to support the family," she said. "But from my perspective as a child, he was more like a magician."

Showing both interest and talent, Wang was able to make easy shapes,



Wang works at one of her sugar figurine stores.

like a gourd, with sugar syrup by the time she was 6.

After graduating from senior high school in 2008, her family moved to Harbin, the provincial capital, in search of a better life. "My father hoped I'd find get a stable job, and I tried several in Harbin, including as an assistant at a clothing shop and a mobile phone shop," she said. "How-

ever, I still dreamed of becoming a figurine maker to create magic like my father."

Upon her insistence, he finally agreed to take her on as his student. She spent three years mastering the skills and then traveled to different provinces, including Guangdong, Yunnan, Sichuan and Fujian, and the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous

region to earn a living by making sugar figures.

In 2015, Wang decided to return to Harbin, where her parents live. "I like the city, and my boyfriend at that time, one of my father's students, also hoped to begin a stable life here," she said. "Then we started our sugar figurine business, which brought us lots of followers who wanted to learn."

Over the past years, they have taught 12 students from across the country.

The couple married in 2018 and have opened three stalls in famous tourist spots around the city. Now, their figurines are appreciated by residents and tourists alike.

"Most of them are a light brown color, but I can make them into differ-

ent colors," she said. "I also pay a lot of attention to refining details, such as the nose, eyes and mouth."

Wang has also tried out ideas for new shapes and figures.

To celebrate the successful return of one of the country's rocket crews, Wang spent three days creating the sugar figure of an astronaut. "I can't remember how many times I failed," she said. "But I wasn't discouraged, and after working out what I was doing wrong, I finally created a satisfactory figurine — finally succeeding, just as the country had succeeded in sending a rocket into space."

In 2006, sugar figurine making was listed as a national-level intangible cultural heritage, and in 2019, Wang was granted the title of provincial-level inheritor.

"As far as I know, there are fewer than 100 people in China who can make sugar figures, and even fewer are young female inheritors," she said. "It is not easy to make innovations to an intangible cultural heritage, but I will persevere."

Every month since 2017, Wang and a group of folk artists visit rural schools in Harbin, teaching students about traditional art forms such as paper cutting and clay sculptures.

The students also get to make figures of their own under their guidance. "We were all very happy to discover that the students were really interested in these traditional arts," she said. "Making sugar figurines is not just a precious childhood memory, it also brings me great happiness and joy. I hope to teach more people about the art and traditional culture."



From left: A canteen with a view of mountains in a guesthouse in Nanyu village in Laishui, Hebei province. LI SHUANGNAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE
Nanyu is known for a variety of boutique homestays. XINHUA



Boutique B&Bs lead mountain village's revival

SHIJIAZHUANG — Duan Jinghe is renovating his courtyard home in Nanyu village, located in Laishui county in Hebei province.

The 32-year-old runs two guesthouses with a total of nine rooms in the village in the Taihang Mountains, which lie on the border between Hebei and Beijing.

"Although it is low season here now, we can take advantage of the time to improve the guesthouses," Duan said.

Duan worked elsewhere after graduating from university, but as he saw tourism develop in the village, he decided to return home to start a business. In 2019, he turned his unused house into a B&B. The rooms, which are fashionably designed, and his enthusiastic service brought in a steady stream of customers.

"For the past two years, although we were affected by the epidemic, profits in peak season were really good. In the summer of last year, we earned 300,000 yuan (\$43,075)," he said.

Nanyu was once poverty-stricken. In 2012, per capita income there was less than 2,000 yuan, and 52 out of the village's 220 households were classified as poverty-stricken.

For the past two years, although we were affected by the epidemic, profits in peak season were really good. In the summer of last year, we earned 300,000 yuan (\$43,075)."

Duan Jinghe, guesthouse owner in Nanyu village, Hebei province

"We are located in deep mountains," said Duan Chunting, village Party chief. "In the past, transportation was inconvenient, there was little farmland, and people were not rich. Most young people chose to leave the village for work."

In 2014, thanks to the opening of a major highway that has an exit nearby, Nanyu's fortunes were turned around. With the transportation problem solved, the village's geographical advan-

tages began to drive the development of tourism.

"Our village borders Beijing's Fangshan district, and there are some beautiful and famous scenic spots nearby. The mountains, the water and the air here are good and suited to developing tourism," Duan Chunting said.

In recent years, Nanyu has also begun to develop rural tourism by building roads and bridges and turning old farmhouses into boutique homestays, so now villagers can earn money at home and lead better lives, Duan Chunting added.

In April 2016, the village set up a cooperative that was responsible for the transformation of old houses and the creation of a boutique B&B brand. Traditional rural food and farming culture are integrated into tours so that people from the city can experience village customs.

"Our cooperative brings in professional companies to operate the B&Bs, and the revenues are shared between the cooperative and the operators," Duan Chunting said.

"Fifty percent of the cooperative's share is distributed as dividends, and the other 50 percent is used as follow-up development funds. Each villager invests 1 yuan, and

they all share the profits."

With its natural scenery and exquisite B&Bs, Nanyu village has become popular online, attracting many tourists from the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region.

At the end of 2018, the village was officially declared to have been lifted out of poverty. Its boutique B&Bs have also generated good economic benefits. By 2021, they had brought in cumulative revenue of more than 11.6 million yuan, 1.8 million yuan of which has been distributed as dividends.

In recent years, Nanyu has been declared a "national rural governance model village" and a "provincial beautiful village", among other honors. It now has 70 medium and high-end B&Bs with more than 400 rooms, and attracts around 30,000 tourists a year.

At present, the county has 500 B&Bs, mostly family-run, said Li Weimin, director of Laishui county's culture, radio, television and tourism bureau. In 2021, the county's B&B revenues rose to more than 41 million yuan, creating jobs for some 1,300 people, and resulting in social benefits of more than 100 million yuan.

XINHUA

China-Laos railway to bring bounty for all

KUNMING — After arriving at the Wild Elephant Valley station on the China-Laos Railway and enjoying playful interaction with the giant creatures, tourists usually walk to Manzhong village about a kilometer away for a cultural experience.

The village in the Xishuangbanna Dai autonomous prefecture in Yunnan province is attracting visitors by offering a number of experiences that involve intangible cultural heritage.

"Visitors can experience traditional Dai culture such as slow-wheel pottery making, palm-leaf scriptures and brocade making," said Yu Fahan, a villager whose father is an inheritor of Dai slow-wheel pottery making.

"In summer 2021, about 20 people came to my home every day to experience pottery making. Last summer, the number of tourists doubled thanks to the opening of the China-Laos Railway," she added.

The village has 13 restaurants and 24 inns to cater to the growing number of tourists.

Much like Manzhong, a number of once-obscure villages along the line have gradually become popular tourist destinations. "The villagers sensed the opportunity brought by the railway and turned their courtyard homes into hostels," said Ai Hanpeng, a resident of the Dai village of Chengzi.

Located in Mengla county, Chengzi is rich in culture. Leveraging its prox-

imity to the line, it is developing rural tourism so that villagers can enjoy the dividends of the China-Laos railway.

"We plan to hold folk festivals to encourage more tourists to spend the night," Ai said, noting that the rail line is the foundation of the village's development.

Nakeli village, part of Hani and Yi autonomous county in Pu'er city, was once an important stop on the Ancient Tea Horse Trail. Today, it has become a popular tourist town along the China-Laos Railway.

Zhang Honglei, the village head, said more and more people have come to Nakeli to start businesses, live or just visit since the China-Laos Railway opened, adding that it has finally brought rail service to Xishuangbanna and Pu'er.

The China-Laos Railway, which began operation in December 2021, stretches for over 1,000 km and links Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province, with Vientiane, the Laotian capital.

"Special trains between the snow-capped mountains of Lijiang and the rainforests of Xishuangbanna have been launched to promote the integration and development of the railway and tourism," said Chen Pei, deputy general manager of China Railway Kunming Bureau Group.

XINHUA



Tourists enjoy a boat ride on the Longde Lake in Jinghong, Xishuangbanna prefecture, Yunnan province, in July. LI YUNSHENG / XINHUA

WORLD

Russia claims attack; Kyiv denies deaths

By REN QI in Moscow
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Moscow claimed on Sunday that its army conducted a "retaliatory strike" in a city in Donetsk that killed more than 600 Ukrainian servicemen. However, Ukrainian officials denied there were any casualties.

The Russian Defense Ministry said its missiles hit two temporary bases housing 1,300 Ukrainian troops in the city of Kramatorsk, killing more than 600 of them. Lieutenant-General Igor Konashenkov said the strikes were in retaliation for Ukraine's attack on Jan 1 in Makiivka, in which at least 89 Russian soldiers died.

But Ukraine's armed forces quickly rejected the Russian claim about the Kramatorsk strikes.

"This information is as true as the data that they have destroyed all of our HIMARS," Sergiy Cherevaty, spokesman for the eastern group of the Ukrainian armed forces, told Ukraine's Suspilne news. In the attack on Makiivka, Ukraine used United States-supplied HIMARS artillery.

Cherevaty said Russia could not deliver high-precision strikes and the Russian statement did not say when exactly the strike had taken place.

Kramatorsk Mayor Oleksandr Honcharenko told Reuters that there had been no casualties.

Also on Sunday, the Ukrainian military claimed to have hit a residential hall of a medical university in Rubizhne, a town in the Lugansk region, killing 14 Russian soldiers housed there. The number of wounded was unknown, it said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin

ordered a 36-hour cease-fire last week to allow Orthodox Christians to mark Christmas, which was celebrated on Saturday in Russia and Ukraine.

Ukrainian officials, who dismissed the cease-fire as a "cynical propaganda move", said Russia had in any case not respected it.

Also on Sunday, Russia and Ukraine swapped 50 captured soldiers each in a deal that both sides welcomed even as fighting continued between the troops.

Russia's Defense Ministry said the 50 returned Russian soldiers, "who were in mortal danger while in captivity", would be flown to Moscow for medical and psychological rehabilitation.

Prisoner swap

Andriy Yermak, head of the Ukrainian presidential office, confirmed the information and said Russia had freed 50 Ukrainian servicemen as part of the same deal.

"To be continued. We must bring all our people home, and we are on it," Yermak said on Twitter, posting images of the freed Ukrainian soldiers holding bags of food near a bus they were about to board and a video of them singing the Ukrainian national anthem once underway.

Separately, Russia and Belarus will hold joint air force exercises in Belarus from Jan 16 to Feb 1, the Belarusian Defense Ministry announced.

A Russian air division team arrived in Belarus on Sunday, while personnel, weapons, military and special equipment of the Russian armed forces will continue to arrive before the exercises.

Agencies via Xinhua contributed to this story.



Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva surveys the damage at the Planalto Palace in Brasilia after it was stormed on Sunday by supporters of former president Jair Bolsonaro. ERALDO PERES / ASSOCIATED PRESS

World denounces riots in Brazil capital

Leaders' reaction comes amid evidence pro-Bolsonaro actions planned in US

BRASILIA — After supporters of former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro stormed the presidential palace, the Congress and the Supreme Court in the capital city on Sunday, leaders of countries and international organizations condemned their actions and expressed support for President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

The attackers in Brasilia were protesting in response to Bolsonaro's loss of power after his defeat by Lula da Silva, popularly known as Lula, in the presidential election in October.

Lula, who was sworn in on Jan 1, has condemned the invasions of the buildings, saying the attackers would be punished "with the full force of law".

More than 400 were arrested in connection with the attacks, Federal District Governor Ibaneis Rocha said on Monday.

Rodrigo Pacheco, president of the Federal Senate, said the protesters were "undemocratic" and must be punished "rigorously".

Rioters donning the green and yellow of the national flag on Sunday broke windows, toppled furniture, and hurled computers and printers to the ground. They punctured a massive Emiliano Di Cavalcanti painting in five places, overturned the U-shaped table at which Supreme Court justices convene, ripped a door off one justice's office and vandalized an iconic statue outside the court. The monumental buildings' interiors were left in states of ruin.

In a news conference late on Sunday, Brazil's Justice Minister Flavio Dino said the acts amounted to terrorism and coup-mongering and that authorities have begun

tracking those who paid for the buses that transported the protesters to the capital.

"They will not succeed in destroying Brazilian democracy. We need to say that fully, with all firmness and conviction," Dino said. "We will not accept the path of criminality to carry out political fights in Brazil. A criminal is treated like a criminal."

David Adler, a political economist and coordinator of the left-wing international organization Progressive International, said on Sunday that the invasion may have been planned from the United States.

Evidence suggests that the invasions "may have been planned in Florida," tweeted Adler, adding that "Secretary of Security for the Federal District is in the USA and recently traveled to Orlando — exactly where Jair Bolsonaro is currently staying".

Support from ex-leader?

Bolsonaro, who was absent from the inauguration ceremony of Lula, voiced earlier on Twitter his support for peaceful demonstrations and rejected vandalism and invasion of public buildings.

Local media reported that the president was not in the presidential palace at the time of the riot and security forces had retaken control of the three buildings.

World leaders repudiated the protesters' acts and expressed their support for the Brazilian government.

While expressing his support for Lula, Colombian President Gustavo Petro called for an urgent meeting of the Organization of American States, or OAS, to "apply the democratic charter".

Chilean President Gabriel Boric said: "An unconscionable attack on

the three powers of the Brazilian state by Bolsonaroists. The Brazilian government has our full support in the face of this cowardly and vile attack on democracy."

The Ecuadorian Foreign Ministry issued a statement giving its "unrestricted support for democracy and the legitimately elected government".

Argentine Foreign Minister Santiago Cafiero wrote on Twitter that "we express our solidarity with Lula da Silva and raise our voices in defense of Brazilian democracy".

Mexican Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard expressed his country's "full support for the government of President Lula elected by popular will" and rejected "any attempt against democratic institutions".

OAS Secretary-General Luis Almagro condemned the actions on Sunday, saying they were of a "fascist nature".

US President Joe Biden described the scenes in Brasilia as an "assault on democracy".

In Europe, the European Union's high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, Josep Borrell, said in a statement that the bloc condemns in the strongest terms the antidemocratic acts of violence that took place on Sunday in the heart of Brasilia's government quarter, and reiterates its full support for the president.

French President Emmanuel Macron, in a tweet stating his support for Lula, said: "The will of the Brazilian people and the democratic institutions must be respected!"

Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa condemned the acts of Bolsonaro's supporters and stressed Portugal's solidarity with Lula as a new "legitimately invested power" in Brazil after the 2022 election.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

Briefly

CHINA Foreign minister holds first call with Lavrov

Foreign Minister Qin Gang held a phone conversation with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov on Monday, the first such interaction since Qin assumed the post in late December. During the phone call, Qin said China is willing to work with Russia to well implement the important consensus reached by the two heads of state to constantly advance the progress of bilateral relations. Lavrov congratulated Qin on his taking the post as China's foreign minister, saying he looked forward to building sound working relations with Qin. He also hoped they would lead diplomatic services to continue to work closely and promote the bilateral partnership to yield new results. The two ministers also exchanged views on the Ukraine crisis.

NIGERIA 32 people abducted as gunmen storm station

Gunmen armed with AK-47 rifles have abducted 32 people from a train station in Nigeria's southern Edo state, the governor's office said on Sunday. The attack is the latest example of the growing insecurity that has spread to nearly every corner of Africa's most populous country, posing a challenge to the government in advance of a February presidential election. Police said in a statement that armed herdsmen had attacked Tom Ikimi station as passengers awaited a train to Warri, an oil hub in nearby Delta state. The station is 110 kilometers northeast of state capital Benin.

JAPAN Kishida leaves on tour to Western allies

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on Monday left on a tour of Europe and North America with security-focused talks on the agenda after his nation's biggest military policy overhaul in decades. Japan holds the 2023 presidency of the G7, and Kishida will visit bloc members France, Italy, the United Kingdom and Canada starting on Monday. Kishida's final stop is the United States — his first visit to Washington as prime minister — where he will meet President Joe Biden on Friday.

INDIA Dense fog hampers traffic in New Delhi

Air, rail and road traffic was affected in New Delhi and surrounding areas on Monday morning as a dense blanket of fog engulfed the Indian capital amid an intense cold wave. According to official sources, more than 30 flights originating from or landing in New Delhi were delayed at the Indira Gandhi International Airport. Around 30 trains approaching the city were also running late as the dense fog hampered the rail traffic. As a result of low visibility, which was reduced to 5 meters in the wee hours, cars were seen playing on roads with their blinkers and headlights on.

CHINA DAILY—AGENCIES—XINHUA



Ukrainian troops sit in a bus after being released in a prisoner swap with Russia. Ukraine released this image on Sunday. The location was not given. ANDRIY YERMAK / TELEGRAM VIA REUTERS

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Ozone layer's repair could slow climate change

By BELINDA ROBINSON

in New York

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An influential panel of UN-backed scientists say that airborne chemicals that had been destroying the ozone layer are now in decline for the first time, which could help repair the crucial layer that protects humans from the sun's most harmful rays.

The report, released by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) on Monday, showed that there has been a thickening of the ozone layer — a part of the atmosphere up to 18 miles high that absorbs harmful ultraviolet rays and blocks them from the earth's surface.

Scientists believe that by 2040 worldwide, the ozone layer could now be on track to switch back to levels not seen since the 1980s, and by 2066 over Antarctica, where it had declined so much it had left a hole above the South Pole.

For decades, climate change activists have warned that the ozone layer was being depleted due to the increased use of harmful chemicals.

The chemicals damaged the crucial part of the atmosphere that protects humans from excess ultraviolet rays that can cause skin cancer and eye damage in humans. Ozone also protects plants from damage, enabling them to grow and store carbon dioxide in their leaves.

In the past few decades, several steps have been taken to aid in the restoration of the ozone layer. One, the Montreal Protocol, which came into force in 1989, was approved by every country worldwide.

It outlaws the manufacturing of chemicals that destroy the ozone when they mingle in the atmosphere.

The chemicals include chlorofluorocarbons or CFCs, which have ozone-depleting chlorine and were generally used in refrigerators, aerosols and air conditioners.

Scientists said in the report that

China had largely eliminated emissions of one of those chemicals.

Less use of 99 percent of the banned ozone-depleting substances has helped heal the ozone layer, the report said.

In September, the US ratified the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol, which urges countries to phase out the use of hydrofluorocarbons, a greenhouse gas that warms the planet more than carbon dioxide.

Meg Seki, executive secretary of the UNEP's Ozone Secretariat hailed the move and other initiatives for slowing climate change.

Seki said in a statement: "That ozone recovery is on track according to the latest quadrennial report is fantastic news. The impact the Montreal Protocol has had on climate change mitigation cannot be overstressed."

"Over the last 35 years, the Protocol has become a true champion for the environment."

The report's findings were presented at the American Meteorological Society's 103rd annual

meeting in Denver.

The research used data from the WMO, UNEP, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NASA and the European Commission.

Key findings suggest that chlorine, which is ozone-damaging, declined 11.5 percent in the stratosphere between 1993 and 2020. Bromine declined 14.5 percent in the stratosphere from a high in 1999 and 2020.

WMO Secretary-General Professor Petteri Taalas said in a statement: "Ozone action sets a precedent for climate action. Our success in phasing out ozone-eating chemicals shows us what can and must be done — as a matter of urgency — to transition away from fossil fuels, reduce greenhouse gases and so limit temperature increase."

The scientists also examined what the potential effects on ozone would be if aerosols were intentionally injected into the stratosphere. Known as stratospheric aerosol injection (SAI), it is thought that this method could



A traffic sign warns of an ozone alert on Interstate 25 in the western US during evening rush hour on July 23, 2021. DAVID ZALUBOWSKI / AP

reduce climate warming by increasing sunlight reflection.

However, the panel warned that the unintended consequences of SAI "could affect stratospheric temperatures, circulation and ozone production and destruction rates and transport."

Thanu Yakupitiyage, communication director of 350 Action, an organization that mobilizes progressive

voters and looks to get climate champions elected, wants to see the US government do even more to combat climate change.

Yakupitiyage told China Daily: "Achieving social and economic transformation means we need to see elected officials at all levels, committed to doing everything it takes to protect people and the planet, and it has to be a high priority for all elected officials."

WORLDUS

Immigration politics on summit agenda

By HENG WEILI in New York and MAY ZHOU in Houston

Immigration politics are on the agenda as US President Joe Biden arrived in Mexico for the North American Leaders Summit a day after his first official visit to the southwest border, where he received a letter critical of White House policy from the governor of Texas.

Mexican President Andre Manuel López Obrador said Monday in the leadup to the summit that starts on Tuesday that he would consider accepting more migrants than previously announced under Biden's plan to turn away people from four nations who cross illegally into the United States.

"We don't want to anticipate things, but this is part of what we are going to talk about at the summit," López Obrador said. "We support (these) type of measures, to give people options, alternatives," he said, adding that "the numbers may be increased."

Lopez Obrador is hosting Biden and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau between Monday and Wednesday for the first summit between the three since late 2021.

Jake Sullivan, White House national security adviser, cautioned that nothing was decided yet.

"I'll just say that, today, with President López Obrador, President Biden is looking to dive deep on a set of issues that are priorities for his administration, including continued close coordination on migration questions," Sullivan said at a news conference Monday morning in Mexico City.

Biden last week announced a major shift in US migration policy,

which had been negotiated with Mexico. Under the plan, the US will send 30,000 migrants per month from Cuba, Nicaragua, Haiti and Venezuela back across the border from among those who entered the US illegally, under Title 42, a World War II era health measure.

But the administration announced that it would allow up to 30,000 migrants from the four countries to enter legally per month.

Democratic US senators Robert Menéndez and Cory Booker of New Jersey, and Ben Ray Lujan of New Mexico and Alex Padilla of California put out a joint statement hours after Biden announced his plan Thursday at the White House.

"While we understand the challenges the nation is facing at the Southern border exacerbated by Republican obstruction to modernizing our immigration system, we are deeply disappointed by the Biden Administration's decision to expand the use of Title 42," wrote the four senators.

There were more than 2.38 million encounters at the border by migrants seeking entry in the fiscal year that ended Sept 30, the first time the number topped 2 million.

"We also will spend a considerable amount of time today, both in the bilateral and inside meetings that members of our Cabinet will be holding on how we can enhance and elevate our cooperation on fentanyl," Sullivan said.

Sullivan said Biden believed he would emerge from the summit with "commitments for stronger cooperation" to address fentanyl, a synthetic opioid blamed for



US President Joe Biden and Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, accompanied by first lady Jill Biden and Obrador's wife Beatriz Gutiérrez Müller, shake hands during an arrival ceremony at the National Palace in Mexico City on Monday. ANDREW HARNIK / AP

thousands of deaths in the United States.

The leaders also are expected to discuss deepening economic ties, even as disagreements persist over Lopez Obrador's energy policies, which led to Washington and Ottawa launching a formal trade complaint in July.

Christopher Landau, US ambassador to Mexico under former president Donald Trump, said domestic politics meant finding compromises on energy and migration would be difficult.

"There's no obvious deal that

satisfies all of their domestic interests," he said, "but I think it's in all their domestic interest to say they get along."

On Sunday, Biden was greeted at El Paso International Airport by Texas Governor Greg Abbott, who handed him a letter listing complaints about the record surge of migration on Texas' border with Mexico.

"Your open-border policies have emboldened the cartels, who grow wealthy by trafficking deadly fentanyl and even human beings," read part of the letter. "Texans are

paying an especially high price for your failure, sometimes with their very lives, as local leaders from your own party will tell you if given the chance."

The letter also described Biden's visit as "two years and about \$20 billion too late."

Earlier Sunday, the Republican governor accused Biden and his team of failing to communicate with local officials about the visit to El Paso.

"He did not call me, nor [did] his staff call, and let us know, either about his visit or to invite us, until

last night. We got a random email to one of my staff members asking if I would be there to meet him on the tarmac," Abbott said on *Fox News' Sunday Morning Futures*.

But White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters on the plane to El Paso that Abbott had been invited and she understood that he would be at the airport when Biden landed.

In an interview on Monday on Fox News, Abbott described the president as "cordial" during their meeting. He said he also asked Biden to see for himself where people are crossing the border illegally.

"Obviously, he didn't do that," Abbott added.

Abbott said that he showed Biden five proposals to address the border crisis during border visit. He said that they don't "require any new passage of law; they only require the president to enforce issues that have already been enacted into law by the United States Congress that would stop the flow of illegal immigration between the points of entry."

Abbott said that his deploying of the Texas National Guard has reduced border crossings and that he would contest Biden's wanting Texas to remove barriers where people cross the border.

"We want to litigate this issue and prove that Texas does have the authority to undertake the actions I'm undertaking, which are unprecedented for a state to secure not only our state but the entire country," he said.

Agencies contributed to this story.

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Severe storms still battering California

By LIU YINMENG in Los Angeles teresaliu@chinadailyusa.com

About 90 percent of California's population — more than 34 million people and 10 percent of the US population — were under flood-watches Monday as another severe thunderstorm slammed the West Coast after a short reprieve from heavy rains last week.

The number of deaths related to the storms climbed from 12 to 14 on Monday, state officials said.

Forecasters warned that a new wave of thunderstorm is going to be more severe.

More than 37 million people were under wind alerts Monday in California, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Arizona and Wyoming as hurricane-force wind gusts topping 74 mph hit

some of the states.

"This will be a fairly substantial second wave," Daniel Swain, a climate scientist at the University of California at Los Angeles, said on a live YouTube video Monday morning. "What falls is going to fall quickly."

On Sunday evening, President Joe Biden declared a state of emergency for California. The declaration cleared the way for assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to coordinate disaster relief efforts in the state.

The storms hitting California are caused by a barrage of atmospheric rivers, which are long, flowing regions of the atmosphere that transport water vapor through the sky.

When atmospheric rivers make landfall, they often release water vapor in the form of rain or snow.

“This storm was as bad as a couple of the hurricanes I’ve been through. Never in my life [as] a Californian have I felt this kind of windstorm.”

Carley Gomez, a meteorologist at ABC10 in Sacramento

While the atmospheric rivers will continue to pummel California through early this week, its most potent system was expected to arrive Monday, the National Weather Service said.

"This storm was as bad as a couple of the hurricanes I've been through. Never in my life [as] a Californian have I felt this kind of windstorm," Carley Gomez, a meteorologist at ABC10 in Sacramento tweeted on Sunday.

Rescuers ended the search for a 5-year-old boy who was swept

away by floodwaters in central coastal California while the entire community of Montecito was ordered evacuated Monday as residents grappled with flooding and mudslides as the latest of powerful storms hit the state.

The evacuation order came on the fifth anniversary of a mudslide that killed 23 people and destroyed more than 100 homes in the coastal enclave of about 8,600 people.

Since Dec 26, San Francisco has received more than 10 inches (25 centimeters) of rain, while Mammoth Mountain, a popular ski area in the Eastern Sierra Nevada, got nearly 10 feet (3 meters) of snow, the National Weather Service said.

The storms won't be enough to officially end California's drought, but they have helped.

Swain expects a break in the rain after Jan 18.

"That is my best guess right now, which is good because it will give the rivers in Northern California, and now in Central California, a chance to come down," he said.

Agencies contributed to this story.

US school district's suit: Tech giants harm teens' mental health

By LIA ZHU in San Francisco liazhu@chinadailyusa.com

Seattle's public school district has filed a lawsuit against some big tech companies, claiming their social media platforms are responsible for the mental health crisis among youth.

The complaint filed Friday says social media companies like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok have violated Washington state's public nuisance law and created a public nuisance by targeting their products to children.

The district asks the court to order remedies, including monetary damages and funding for prevention education and treatment for excessive use of social media.

The school district includes more than 100 schools and serves about 50,000 children. The complaint says that from 2009 to 2019, there was on average a 30 percent increase in the number of students who reported feeling "so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row" that they stopped doing some typical activities.

"Defendants have successfully exploited the vulnerable brains of youth, hooking tens of millions of students across the country into positive feedback loops of excessive use and abuse of Defendants' social media platforms," the complaint says.

The suit blames those companies for worsening the students' mental health and behavioral disorders, including anxiety, depression, disordered eating and cyberbullying.

They said it has made it more difficult to educate students and forced them to take steps such as hiring additional mental health professionals, developing lesson plans about the effects of social media, and providing additional training to teachers.

"Youth in plaintiff's community are experiencing the same mental health crisis observed nationally," says the complaint.

Nearly 1 in 10 Americans and almost 1 in 5 adolescents and young adults reported having depression in 2020, but most of the victims were not seeking help, resulting in an "escalating public health crisis," according to a recent study published

by the American Journal of Preventive Medicine.

The idea that social media companies should be held accountable for the potential damage their products cause to young people surfaced after Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen in 2021 testified that the tech giant is aware that some of its platforms are harmful to certain populations, including teenagers, but targets them anyway.

“Defendants have successfully exploited the vulnerable brains of youth.”

Seattle public school district lawsuit against social media companies

Many families have filed similar lawsuits against the tech companies, including more than a dozen blaming them for suicides.

The New York City public school system, the largest in the US, also has pushed back against the impact of social media on students' lives. The schools have banned their students from accessing the ChatGPT artificial intelligence program to generate text.

Google, which owns YouTube, responded to the allegations by saying they have invested heavily in creating safe experiences for children across their platforms and have introduced "strong protections" and "dedicated features" to prioritize their wellbeing.

For example, through Family Link, parents can set reminders, limit screen time and block specific types of content on supervised devices, said Google.

Meta, the company behind Facebook and Instagram, said it has "more than 30 tools to support teens and families, including supervision tools that let parents limit the amount of time their teens spend on Instagram, and age verification technology that helps teens have age-appropriate experiences."

Agencies contributed to this story.

Dolby hones in-car audio, sees potential in China

By LIA ZHU in Las Vegas

Catching the subtle sound of plucked guitar strings, connecting with different instruments from different positions and feeling the movement of sounds around you — the sensation of sitting in a concert can now be mimicked in a car cabin with the audio technology Dolby Atmos.

Launched in 2012 by Dolby Laboratories, Atmos creates an immersive, three-dimensional listening experience with sounds emanating overhead, below or behind a listener. It was first created for movies and now has been extended to music streaming, cars and live music venues.

The San Francisco-based company showcased its latest innovation — Dolby Atmos for cars — at the just-concluded CES in Las Vegas. Though it's new to consumers, the company has been exploring its application to music for a few years.

"What we realized is this same technology might be interesting to musicians. So we started to talk to musicians and record producers, and they had many ideas of where they wanted to take sound," John

Couling, senior vice-president of entertainment at Dolby, told China Daily.

The company has partnered with music creators, including those in China, to develop the Dolby Atmos technology. The result was "perfect" for music, said Couling.

"We've been able to have consumers enjoy that over the last two years since we launched services from Amazon, Apple Music, and QQ Music and NetEase music in China," he said.

The company has recently focused on the in-car listening experience, because automobiles are one of the main, ideal places to listen to music, said Couling.

"From a sound perspective, you can design those sounds for the speakers and the car at the same time, so you know exactly how it's going to sound," he explained during a demo at the CES.

Dolby Atmos is not limited to two-channel stereo playback, so it allows for each sound, whether an instrument or vocal track, to be placed anywhere in a space to make audio more realistic.

"We know that people enjoy listening to music in their cars. It might be the one time of the day when it's

just you, no one else distracting you, and you get to enjoy your time," said Couling. "Or it might be when you're taking your children to school, and you will sing songs together in the car. It's a very special occasion, and music in the car is something that we see as very important."

The trend is growing, especially as more cars become electric, and people will spend more time in their cars for entertainment while the cars are being charged, he added.

Dolby has partnered with automakers, including Mercedes and LUCID Motors, and Chinese auto brands Nio and Li Auto to integrate Dolby Atmos into some of their models.

China is the largest automobile market and an electric-vehicle leader and accounted for more than half of all EVs sold globally in 2022.

"I think there is a lot of opportunity in automotive. There's a lot more we could do to bring the experience to a wider range of people in China. That's going to be a focus for us," said Couling.

He said the Chinese market already is embracing the technology. Dolby Atmos-enabled content is available on the streaming platforms of Tencent, iQIYI, and Bilibili.

BUSINESS

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Role in supply chains grows

By MA SI and JIANG XUEQING

As China moves up the value chain, the country is becoming more of an exporter than importer of intermediate goods used by manufacturers elsewhere, helping strengthen the connectivity and hence competitiveness of regional supply chains, according to a report by HSBC.

In Asia, intermediate goods imports from the Chinese mainland now account for close to 20 percent of all component imports on average, said HSBC's Asian Economics Quarterly: Retooling Factory Asia report.

As supplier networks are changing, exporters in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations — ASEAN — increasingly rely on components from the Chinese mainland rather than other sources, the report said.

It further stated that global trade may be heading for a rough patch — cyclically, certainly, and possibly structurally — but factories in Asia continue to be retooled and adjusted, helping preserve their competitiveness. That is lifting investment and providing an extra layer of resilience in an ever more turbulent world.

Liu Wenqiang, deputy head of the China Center for Information Industry Development, which is based in Beijing, said the HSBC report underlines China's major role in global supply chains.

As Chinese companies step up their efforts to hone their research and development capabilities, the country's appeal for high-end manufacturing will grow, which can better help safeguard the stability of global industrial and supply chains, Liu said.

From January to November last year, the actual use of foreign capital in China's high-tech manufacturing sector increased nearly 59 percent year-on-year, latest data from the Ministry of Commerce showed.

Deuk-kyu Hwang, president of Samsung Greater China, had said earlier, "With a complete supply chain supporting system, China is well positioned to cope with global uncertainties ... and China boasts a strong logistics system that secures stable supply chains."

As the world's largest manufacturing country, China ranks first globally in terms of output, accounting for more than 40 percent of the world's 500 major industrial products, data from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology showed.

More than 570 Chinese industrial companies have made it to the global top 2,500 companies in terms of R&D investment, boosting their ability to support supply chains, MIT said.

Jean-Pascal Tricoire, chairman and CEO of Schneider Electric, said China is one of the company's most important centers, which integrates R&D, supply chains, sales and service. The company also has a complete ecosystem of local suppliers and integrators in China.

China, he said, accelerates industrial digitalization and pays increasing attention to sustainable development, and is one of the company's most important R&D bases in the world.

Craig Allen, president of the US-China Business Council, said, "China is an attractive location for supply chain integration."

Most US companies investing in China are "in China, for China," and they hope to serve Chinese markets through highly global supply chains that involve imports and localized production, Allen said.

China's scale motivates US companies, while the nation's ecosystem is strengthened greatly by investments in infrastructure and talent, he said.

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RIGHT TRACK



A bulk vessel carrying Brazilian corn to China arrives at a port in Dongguan, Guangdong province, over the weekend. HUANG GUOBAO / XINHUA

Brazilian corn to help meet demand

By ZHONG NAN

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China's move to add Brazilian corn to its shopping list will help the former further expand corn import channels and lower economic risks so as to better secure its grain security, said market watchers on Monday.

The first bulk vessel carrying 68,000 metric tons of Brazilian corn to China arrived at a port in Dongguan, Guangdong province, on Saturday, marking the establishment of a new corridor for the South American country to export corn to the Chinese market, according to a statement released by COFCO Corp, the country's largest grain trader and foodstuff producer by sales revenue.

The shipments, imported by COFCO, will be transported to domestic feed processors via both land and water routes after quarantine and clearing inspection, said the Beijing-based State-owned enterprise.

To avoid risks caused by external factors such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict and falling US corn shipments to China, it is practical for China to diversify corn import sources, said Ding Lixin, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences in Beijing.

The volume of China's corn imports dropped 26.89 percent on a yearly basis to 19.75 million tons between January and November last year, while its bulk corn imports from the United States

and Ukraine dropped 26.3 percent and 31.95 percent on a yearly basis, respectively, said China's General Administration of Customs.

Ma Tongchao, head of corn business at COFCO Trading, a COFCO subsidiary, said the group looks forward to strengthening China-Brazil agricultural cooperation and is willing to import high-quality Brazilian agricultural products to China.

These efforts will not only offer a huge market for Brazilian farmers to sell their corn and other agricultural products to China, but also meet domestic demand. Therefore, it is able to achieve win-win results, said Ma.

China and Brazil — the latter being a major corn producer and exporter — reached an agreement on corn imports in May 2022. Over 130 Brazilian traders and cooperatives were given the green light to export corn to China in November last year, said the GAC.

Wang Yunchao, vice-president of COFCO International, COFCO's international arm, said more vessels loaded with Brazilian corn, purchased by COFCO, are currently en route to China.

"In addition to actively participating in global agricultural cooperation and agri-food resource allocation, we will continue to enhance the layout of global resources and industrial systems, as well as reinforce our international competitiveness," said Wang.

Brazil in the southern hemisphere and China in the northern

hemisphere complement each other in corn harvesting seasons, and importing corn from Brazil has diversified the supply channels of corn in China, thereby easing seasonal and regional fluctuations in supply, COFCO said.

To meet demand from both domestic consumers and foodstuff manufacturers, COFCO signed over \$10 billion worth of purchase contracts with foreign partners from countries including Thailand, Cambodia, the US, Canada, Australia, France, Kazakhstan, Russia and Brazil in November last year.

"Apart from importing edible oil, sugar, meat, alcohol and dairy products from overseas markets, we have purchased grain and bulk commodities such as wheat, corn and sorghum to meet the demand of domestic food processing companies," said Luan Richeng, COFCO's president.

COFCO has established a stable food corridor between major grain producers across the world and the emerging markets in Asia, including the network connecting Southeast Asia, North and South Americas, Australia, the Black Sea region and other regions. After years of growth in the South American market, its investments in Brazil have reached more than \$2.3 billion, according to the company's statement.

China's import value of grains and related products declined 0.5 percent on a yearly basis to \$19.67 billion during the January-November period of 2022, Customs data showed.

Renminbi on rebound as recovery sets

Experts highlight growth, fundamentals as onshore USD/CNY breaches 6.8

By SHI JING in Shanghai
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Supported by China's economic recovery amid downward pressure on other economies, the renminbi's bullish momentum has become more noticeable, currency market experts said on Monday after the Chinese currency's exchange rate against the US dollar breached the 6.8 psychological level.

The onshore USD/CNY jumped 876 basis points on Monday to close at 6.7712, up 2.5 percent from the beginning of this year.

The renminbi's offshore exchange rate against the greenback, which reflects international investors' outlook on the Chinese currency, once touched 6.7669 during afternoon trading, with an intraday surge of more than 600 basis points.

The Chinese yuan has thus reported gains for five consecutive trading days since this year began. It is also the first time for USD/CNY to drop below 6.8 since August 2022. The renminbi has gained 6 percent in all since November 2022.

Li Liuyang, a foreign exchange researcher from China International Capital Corp Ltd, said China's faster-than-expected economic recovery is among the factors that have been propping up the renminbi's recent rebound.

While the world's major economies, including the United States and Europe, are approaching a possible recession, China's quick economic recovery is conducive to the inflow of northbound capital, or the amount that overseas investors pump into A shares via the stock connect program linking Shanghai, Shenzhen and Hong Kong bourses. Such capital inflows will also help the renminbi to improve its performance in the currency market, he said.

The northbound capital reported a net inflow of 7.7 billion yuan (\$1.1 billion) on Monday, when the benchmark Shanghai Composite Index rose for the sixth consecutive trading day to 3176.08 points, up 0.58 percent from Friday's close.

Northbound capital inflow has exceeded 27 billion yuan so far this year.

The seasonal factor has also helped lift the renminbi's value, said Li. Exporters usually make cyclical exchange settlement before Chinese Lunar New Year, which starts on Jan 22 this year. Such collective settlement usually drives up the renminbi's exchange rate in the short term, he said.

Goldman Sachs analysts led by Kamakshya Trivedi wrote in a report on Jan 6 that USD/CNY is likely to touch 6.5 by the end of this year, driven by market optimism that China may further optimize its COVID-19 control policies. The previous estimate was 6.9.

In an interview with the Xinhua News Agency on Saturday, Guo Shuqing, Party secretary of the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, said the renminbi has rebounded strongly since the end of last year amid continued foreign capital inflows. This reflects the global investors' positive outlook on China's economic growth and their confidence in the country's economic fundamentals such as prices.

In the mid to long run, the renminbi exchange rate will see two-way fluctuations. But the overall trend is upward, he said.

Data released by the State Administration of Foreign Exchange on Saturday showed that China's foreign exchange reserves exceeded \$3.12 trillion by the end of December, up \$10.2 billion from a month earlier. This was a rise for the third month in a row.

Wen Bin, chief economist with China Minsheng Bank, said China's foreign exchange reserves stood above \$3 trillion throughout 2022. China's current account will continue to report a surplus in 2023 given the country's strong resilience in exports.

As China's economic growth further stabilizes, RMB assets will gather greater appeal and the country's balance of payments will remain stable. All these will translate into a stable scale of foreign exchange this year, he said.

Briefly

CNNC power output up 11% in 2022

China National Nuclear Corp, one of the country's largest nuclear power operators, said it had generated nearly 218.74 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity from commercial operations in 2022, up 11 percent year-on-year. CNNC said all its nuclear power units combined to generate 185.2 billion kWh of electricity last year — up 7 percent from 2021. The company also reported a large expansion in new energy installed capacity like wind and solar power. Its new energy power generation from such sources surged by 51 percent year-on-year to about 22.48 billion kWh in 2022.

Xi'an-Europe freight trains make 4,639 trips

Xi'an, the capital of Northwest China's Shaanxi province, saw a surge in China-Europe freight-train trips in 2022, local authorities said. The Chang'an China-Europe freight train service operated 4,639 train trips last year, up nearly 21 percent year-on-year, and transported nearly 4.12 million metric tons of goods, up more than 43 percent. The city ranked first among Chinese cities operating the China-Europe freight service for the number of train trips, cargo volume and rate of heavy containers in 2022.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY



Tourists seen at a departure gate at Beijing Capital International Airport on Sunday. ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

Wanderlust unleashed after restrictions eased

By ZHU WENQIAN

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Chinese tourists have shown their enthusiasm to once again venture overseas after the government eased COVID-19 restrictions on international travel on Sunday. Singapore and Thailand have become hot overseas tourist destinations, and the return of Chinese tourists will bring new vitality to the global tourism market, experts said.

Beginning Sunday, quarantine-free cross-border travel resumed in China after nearly three years of restrictions.

The volume of international flight tickets booked for travel on Sunday surged 628 percent year-on-year, hitting a level not seen since March 2020, and the booking volumes of outbound and inbound flights each accounted for half of the total, according to Tongcheng Travel, a Suzhou-based online travel agency.

For the period from Sunday to Spring Festival, which falls on Jan 22 this year, many Chinese residing overseas have shown demand to reunite with family members, and the trend has boosted sales of inbound flight tickets.

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and the Chinese

mainland started to allow quarantine-free cross-border trips, and Hong Kong became the top departure city for inbound travelers on Sunday. Main destinations include Shanghai; Guangzhou, Guangdong province; and Chengdu, Sichuan province, said Tongcheng Travel.

This year, China's outbound tourism market is expected to rebound significantly, the China Tourism Academy said. For overseas hotel bookings, cities such as Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Thailand's Chiang Mai and Koh Samui, as well as Milan, Italy have already seen an apparent increase of hotel bookings by Chinese travelers, said Trip.com Group.

Since China relaxed COVID-19 curbs on international travel, multiple tourism bureaus from different countries have expressed their welcome to Chinese tourists. The Tourism Authority of Thailand expects that this year, some 5 million Chinese tourists are likely to visit Thailand, while the number stood at 274,000 in 2022.

Since Dec 27, among Chinese tourists booking overseas hotel stays longer than 20 days, hotel bookings in Thailand made up 44 percent of the total, and taking a long vacation has become the choice for many travelers to Thailand, according to Trip.com.

Abu Dhabi's tourism bureau said it has been actively preparing for the China market's reopening over the past two years, and is looking forward to welcoming Chinese visitors to the Mideast country.

"China has always been a key market for Abu Dhabi. In 2023, we will be focusing on key segments including couples and families interested in culture, luxury, new experiences and family entertainment. We will also continue to grow awareness among Chinese audiences," said Abdulla Yousuf Mohamad, director of Travel Trade and Market Development at the Department of Culture and Tourism Abu Dhabi.

South African Tourism said the country keenly looks forward to the

return of Chinese tourists. China has been a key source market for inbound tourists to South Africa, and it boasts a huge growth potential.

In December, Air China launched flights connecting Beijing, Johannesburg and Chengdu, Sichuan province, and it is the carrier's first direct flight launched between South Africa and South-west China.

"The return of Chinese tourists is to be expected for destinations globally. It is expected to give a boost to the Asian travel market in particular. Chinese travelers are likely to rebuild their travel and spending confidence," said Shen Jian, a senior researcher at Trip.com's research institute.

BUSINESS



Consumers check out perfumes at a duty-free shopping mall in Sanya, Hainan province, on Jan 1. LUO YUNFEI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Duty-free shopping heats up in tropical province

By ZHU WENQIAN
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The offshore duty-free shopping market in Hainan province has continued to embrace a rosy sales performance following the approaching winter tourist season and the optimization of COVID-19 prevention and control measures. During the three-day New Year's holiday from Dec 31 to Jan 2, the daily average sales of duty-free products in Hainan reached 140 million yuan (\$20.6 million). Since mid-December, average daily sales have exceeded 100 million yuan, according to Haikou Customs. Over the holiday, some 43,000 people went duty-free shopping on the tropical island and purchased a total of 476,000 units of duty-free products. Their average transaction amount reached 9,816 yuan

per person, which rebounded to a similar level compared to the same period last year, Haikou Customs said. "After China's optimization of the COVID-19 measures, business operators expect that the tourism sector will grow vigorously," said Pan Heli, co-director of the Digital Economy and Financial Innovation Research Center at Zhejiang University's International Business School. "Duty-free shopping has been one of the most popular segments in recent years, and many enterprises would like to grab the opportunities to satisfy growing consumer shopping demand as reduced disruptions from COVID-19 are expected to release pent-up demand," Pan said. Major duty-free operators have increased their investments in Hainan. Domestic retailer Wangfujing Group plans to launch a new duty-free mall in Wanning, Hainan, in January, and the mall has entered the final preparation stages. After the opening of the new mall, the total number of offshore duty-free malls in the province is expected to reach 12, giving full play to the role of consumption in driving economic growth in the region. Next, Wangfujing Group plans to further expand its layout in three aspects, which are offshore duty-free shopping, and operating duty-free stores in cities and at ports. In late October, China Duty Free Group opened its new shopping complex in Haikou, the provincial capital of Hainan. The mall is expected to further strengthen the position of CDFG in the offshore duty-free market in Hainan and contribute to its revenue growth, said Southwest Securities.

Meanwhile, Chinese companies such as BBK Electronics Corp, Guangzhou Lingnan Group Holdings Co Ltd and Zhongbai Group have intentions to operate duty-free businesses. However, they haven't been approved for duty-free licenses yet. "With the upgrading of the industrial structure of the Hainan Free Trade Port, the spillover effect of various factors such as manpower and technology has been obvious," said Zhang Tianbing, leader of consumer products and retail at Deloitte Asia-Pacific. "As an important tourism destination and duty-free market, Hainan is expected to further drive China's overall consumption growth by helping to raise the high-quality consumption scale and supporting the backflow of international spending," Zhang said.

While the government's efforts to build a new type of power system with a gradual increase in the proportion of clean energy will further consolidate renewable energy's role in the country's energy mix while facilitating the country's carbon neutrality goals, said industry experts. The National Energy Administration started soliciting public opinions on the development of the country's new type of power system on Friday. In the blue book released by the administration, it emphasized the importance of making new energy resources a reliable alternative to their traditional peers. It also vows to further step up the integrated development of power generation, grid network and energy storage, in addition to the research on clean energy resource evaluation and power prediction technology. An analyst said bringing upgrades in the power system will accelerate the country's pace of achieving its carbon goal while increasing renewable energy in its power mix. Wang Yongli, deputy director of the energy internet research center at North China Electric Power University, said the traditional power system has been challenged by extreme weather, high fuel prices, large-scale access to new energy sources as well as the ever-climbing peak load in recent years. All this gives the industry confidence to invest in a new type of power system in the country. The

China pushes efforts for new power system

Increase of clean energy seen as key to achieving nation's carbon goals

By ZHENG XIN
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blue book released by the administration has made the transformation more clear in sectors and pace, he said. According to a plan released in October by the State Council, China will vigorously improve the comprehensive regulation capability of the power system and accelerate the construction of flexible power regulation to build a strong smart grid and improve the grid security level. It will also actively develop the storage system for new energy to support the rational allocation of energy storage systems for distributed new energy sources. CITIC Securities said in a note that the document released by the administration has once again illustrated the importance of hydrogen in the energy system, highlighting the importance of hydrogen in energy storage as well as hydrogen-electric coupling. The efforts will further promote the scope and depth of hydrogen energy applications in the energy system in the country, it said. According to a report released by the Chinese Academy of Environmental Planning under the Ministry of Ecology and Environment, building such a new power system will accelerate not only the upgrading of clean coal power generation, flexible transmission and new energy storage technologies, but also carbon capture, utilization and storage as well as electricity market trading and carbon emission monitoring technologies in the coming decades.

Experts highlight role of quality assets in expanding REITs pilot program

By JIANG XUEQING
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China should encourage local governments and companies to bring a larger number of quality assets into the real estate investment trusts (REITs) pilot program to expand the size and scope of REITs, said industry experts at an online conference releasing research findings on China's publicly traded REITs. Xiao Gang, a member of the 13th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and former chairman of the China Securities Regulatory Commission, said the country should include all types of assets suitable to

join the pilot program for REITs as soon as possible and accelerate the expansion of the program, in order to build a brand-new financial system pursuing high-quality development around the theme of REITs. Participants of the pilot program must work together to find facts about REIT projects, build a classified project database, further strengthen the coordination among relevant departments of the central government and local governments, and speed up the approval of REIT projects, said Xiao at the conference recently held by the Research Center for Real Estate Finance at the Tsinghua University PBC School of Finance. Earlier last month, Li Chao, vice-

chairman of the CSRC, said the securities regulator will further expand the pilot program for REITs to cover more infrastructure fields such as new energy, water conservancy and new infrastructure. In addition, China will accelerate the development of affordable rental housing projects in the REITs market, and conduct research on expanding the pilot program to cover market-oriented long-term rental and commercial real estate sectors, Li said at a forum on Dec 8. Expanding the scope of the REIT pilot program and allowing more types of assets to be included in the program will help China's publicly traded REIT market to grow further and become mature, said Zuo Fei,

managing director of the investment banking committee and co-general manager of the fixed income financing department of China Merchants Securities Co. Participants and investors in the REIT market should pay more attention to the additional offerings of infrastructure REITs, which will demonstrate the sustainable development capacity of REIT products as a platform for the listing of assets, Zuo said at the online conference. China's public REIT market has developed rapidly since the country kicked off a public REIT pilot program in the infrastructure sector in April 2020, allowing certain types of infrastructure projects to be listed as part of the efforts to revitalize

existing assets and expand effective investments. As of Dec 30, a total of 25 infrastructure REITs had been approved for registration in the country. Among them, 24 had been listed on the Shanghai and Shenzhen bourses, raising 78.36 billion yuan (\$11.55 billion), with a combined market capitalization of 85.5 billion yuan, according to market tracker Wind Info. Currently, three major types of underlying assets — highways, industrial parks, and warehouses and logistics — account for nearly 85 percent of the combined market capitalization of domestic infrastructure REITs, said Liu Weimin, general manager of CITIC Goldstone Fund Management, an invest-

ment arm of CITIC Securities Co. Publicly traded REITs still have much room for growth in China in terms of market capitalization and their underlying assets are expected to further expand, Liu said. "According to our observations of REITs in the United States, we will see a divergence in the performance of REITs in China by the types of assets in which a REIT invests," he said. Generally speaking, REITs invested in office buildings and hotels are cyclical, in other words, more affected by changes in the economic cycle. On the contrary, REITs invested in rental housing projects are non-cyclical, which means their performance is not closely related to economic cycles, he added.

HOW MUCH DOES A DROP OF WATER MEAN TO AQUATIC LIFE?



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BUSINESSFOCUS



Employees work on a Schneider Electric production line in Beijing in February. CUI JUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Landmark law boosts China's appeal for foreign investors

Legal protections make nation more attractive place to conduct business, spur commerce

BEIJING — Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic some three years ago, the confidence of global investors has been dented by mounting uncertainties. However, China has remained a strong magnet for global investors over the past three years, with the country's landmark Foreign Investment Law offering a powerful guarantee for law-based opening-up.

On Jan 1, 2020, the world's second-largest economy enforced the milestone law, which includes a comprehensive and fundamental set of legal standards for foreign investors and aims to better protect their rights and interests. With the law in effect for three years now, the growing appeal of the Chinese market can be seen in the clear signs of foreign capital inflows.

Foreign direct investment into the Chinese mainland, in actual use, totaled 999.98 billion yuan (\$147.6 billion) in 2020 and jumped to 1.15 trillion yuan in 2021, said the Ministry of Commerce.

In the first 11 months of 2022, FDI inflow expanded 9.9 percent year-on-year to nearly 1.156 trillion yuan, guaranteeing that China would secure a record FDI inflow for another year.

"The Foreign Investment Law ensures China's investment environment and foreign investment system in legal form and plays an important role in stabilizing the confidence of multinational companies in China, as the world faces slower economic growth and surging inflation," said Zhao Beiweng, deputy director of the Institute of World Economy under the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences.

Better legal protection

With unified provisions for the entry, promotion, protection and management of foreign investment, China's Foreign Investment Law addresses foreign firms' concerns and provides facilitation and ease for foreign investment.

China has stressed a level playing field for domestic and foreign companies, banned forced technology transfers and improved the mechanism for foreign-invested firms to file complaints, according to the law and its implementing regulations.



A view of GLP's booth during the third China International Import Expo in Shanghai in November 2020. The Singapore-based company serves as a global real estate logistics provider and investment manager. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Hence, foreign-invested enterprises continue to expand their footprint in China, with an average of 43,000 foreign-invested enterprises newly established each year in 2020 and 2021, according to the MOC.

As of the end of September 2022, a total of 455,000 foreign enterprises were registered, and more than 2,000 regional headquarters and research and development centers of multinational companies had been set up in China, the ministry said.

In November last year, Schneider Electric set up its fifth-largest research institute in China.

"China's economy is bursting with new growth vitality and posts huge market potential," said Yin Zheng, executive vice-president of Schneider Electric and president of Schneider Electric China.

"Foreign enterprises, especially high-tech foreign-invested enterprises, pay more attention to intellectual property protection than labor-intensive ones. The Foreign Investment Law has ensured a fair competition environment with rules and transparency," Zhao said, adding that the protection of intellectual property rights has boosted China's attractiveness for foreign capital inflow.

From January to November 2022, FDI in high-tech manufacturing surged 58.8 percent from the same period of the previous year, while that in the high-tech service sector rose 23.5 percent year-on-year, the MOC added.

Broader opening-up

China has implemented the model of pre-establishment national treatment plus a negative list for foreign investment, according to the Foreign Investment Law.

Zhao said the moves were part of China's broader institutional opening-up efforts and demonstrated China's transition to actively integrate into international economic and trade systems.

"It shows China's determination to shift from commodity and element opening-up to rule-based opening-up in the form of laws and regulations," Zhao added.

In 2022, China fully implemented the shortened negative list for foreign investment, expanded the encouraged investment catalog and added more cities to the pilot program of opening the service sector.

From 2020 to 2022, China dropped laws, regulations and normative documents inconsistent with the Foreign Investment Law, and promoted the establishment, revision and abolition of more than 500 documents, said the National Development and Reform Commission.

A survey by the MOC and www.gov.cn questioning 3,130 foreign firms showed that the implementation of the Foreign Investment Law has boosted expectations and confidence in the Chinese market among nearly 90 percent of respondents.

GLP, a global investment manager and business builder in logistics, data infrastructure, renewable

energy and related technologies, has seen its business volume continuously expanding, with assets under management in China hitting \$72 billion.

"GLP has witnessed a continuous improvement of the business environment in China, with higher level of internationalization and opening-up," said Zhuge Wenjing, executive vice-chairperson of GLP China. "Our business has achieved sound growth as the country continues to deepen reform and opening-up."

The annual Central Economic Work Conference held in mid-December last year reaffirmed China's resolve on opening-up at a higher level.

The country will make greater efforts to attract and utilize foreign capital, widen market access, promote the opening-up of modern service industries, and grant foreign-funded enterprises national treatment, it was decided at the meeting.

"The conference stressed efforts to attract and utilize foreign capital and made precise arrangements. It is unprecedented in my memory," said Long Guoqiang, deputy head of the Development Research Center of the State Council, China's Cabinet.

On improving the business environment, Long said that more should be done to align high-standard economic and trade rules, and steadily expand institutional opening-up regarding rules, regulations, management and standards.

XINHUA

Country remains magnet for long-term investment

BEIJING — The COVID-19 outbreaks and the downward economic pressure posed short-term challenges to certain market players in China in 2022. But many foreign-funded firms have remained upbeat and even upped their local investment, indicating their confidence in the country's growth over the long run.

In the first 11 months of 2022, China's foreign direct investment totaled 1.156 trillion yuan (\$170.6 billion), up 9.9 percent year-on-year. The amount has already surpassed the total for 2021.

Over 99 percent of the surveyed foreign firms are confident about China's economic outlook in 2023, and 98.7 percent said they would maintain and expand their investment in China, a report by the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade said last month.

As China continues to expand domestic market demand, presses ahead with industrial innovation and facilitates the circulation of domestic and international markets, many foreign-invested firms are seeking to reorient their roles in the country's new development pattern, underscoring their long-term confidence in operating in China.

Finer consumer tastes

Home to the largest middle-income group in the world, China's per capita GDP has exceeded \$12,000. "China is the world's most promising consumer market with optimizing and upgrading consumption and modern modes of production," said Zhao Chenxin, deputy director of the National Development and Reform Commission, the country's top economic regulator.

With growing affluence, Chinese consumers tend to spend more on products and services to better their lives, such as health and beauty products.

Global pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca announced in June that it would set up a new regional headquarters and a manufacturing and supply base in Qingdao, Shandong province, further expanding its regional presence in the company's second-largest market worldwide.

"While containing the pandemic, China has achieved all-round economic and social development, with it not being easy to strike such a balance. At the same time, the country has continued to deepen reform across the board and taken effective measures to boost market confidence," said Leon Wang, president of AstraZeneca China. "We can feel that China's opening-up stance has never changed."

In November, Japanese cosmetics giant Shiseido Group vowed to continue to invest in building its second-largest research and development center in China, bolstered by an innovation fund worth up to 1 billion yuan.

"We are full of confidence in the huge potential in China and are even more committed to our long-term investment in the market," said Shiseido Group CEO Masahiko Uotani, calling China "a key growth engine" of the company's development.

Modern 'made in China'

China has the most complete industrial system globally. The country's manufacturing industry accounts for 30 percent of the world's total, making it an important hub of the global manufacturing industry.

High-end manufacturing has



We are full of confidence in the huge potential in China and are even more committed to our long-term investment in the market."

Masahiko Uotani,
CEO of Shiseido Group

become a major FDI destination this year, and many foreign manufacturers have made China an innovation base. Official data showed that China's actual utilized foreign investment in high-tech manufacturing soared 58.8 percent year-on-year during the January-November period.

German firms are big investors in the sector. BMW Group's joint venture in China, BMW Brilliance Automotive Ltd, said in November that it would invest 10 billion yuan in a new battery production project in Liaoning province.

The new investment follows a phase of extensive upgrading at the BMW production base in the province, including a 15-billion-yuan plant that opened in June 2022.

In late 2022, Swiss tech giant ABB opened a state-of-the-art robotics megafactory in Shanghai. The vast production and research facility represents a \$150 million investment in the world's largest robotics market.

"Our innovative, automated and flexible factory plays a key role in our strategy of 'in China, for China', strengthening our full value chain here," said Sami Atiya, president of ABB Robotics and Discrete Automation.

Shared financial dividends

China's stock, bond and futures markets rank second in the world in terms of size, while the country has further opened up its financial markets to share growth dividends.

Chinese financial authorities have released regulations to encourage foreign institutional investors to make long-term investments in its bond market, offering them more channels for foreign exchange hedging and making it easier to remit investment funds.

The range of stocks eligible under the Stock Connect program between the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong will also expand, giving mainland and international investors wider direct access to each other's stock markets.

In November, the country officially rolled out a private pension program, opening up a lucrative new market for global banks and financial institutions.

"We are very optimistic about the scale of the capital inflow into the private pension market," said Helen Huang, managing director of Fidelity International China. The company has recently gained Chinese regulatory approval to conduct retail business in the country's vast mutual fund industry, shortly after US asset manager Neuberger Berman got the same regulatory nod.

"The market might attract 5 trillion yuan to 10 trillion yuan in 10 years," Huang said.

XINHUA



Visitors gather at Shiseido Group's booth during the fifth China International Import Expo in Shanghai in November. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

COMMENT

Editorials

Criticism of changes to China's pandemic policies doesn't fly

China's implementation of its adjusted protocol for international travel on Sunday has spurred a handful of US politicians and media outlets to misinterpret it in order to smear the country's effective epidemic prevention and control measures.

The sour grapes they are serving will find few customers, as all reasonable minds will acknowledge that China has made great efforts to adjust its policies, including its quarantine policies for arrivals, in light of the changing pandemic situation.

Be it the tightening of the virus control measures three years ago or the latest optimization, China's adjustment of its COVID-19 policies has always been made in light of the actual situation both within and outside the country, and under the guiding principle of scientific prudence.

The US critics of China's policies have also changed their tune in light of the actual situation, calling for the prevention and control measures to be scrapped when they need to be strict, and unyielding now that it is possible to relax them.

They not only turn a jaundiced eye on China's pandemic measures but a blind eye to their own country's ineffectual response to the novel coronavirus. With less than 4 percent of the global population, the US accounts for 20 percent of all the

deaths due to COVID-19 worldwide, as well as about the same percentage of global infections.

By calling black white and trying to scapegoat China for the pandemic, these critics are just trying to divert attention from the US' failure to respond to the pandemic effectively. Something these same politicians and media organizations do when it comes to other problems the US faces.

While doing all it can to share key information with the world and providing essential medical supplies and life necessities to other countries, China has taken full advantage of what it has and remained committed to a science-based approach to protect people's lives and health. This has resulted in the world's most populous country having one of the lowest COVID-19 death rates among all major countries.

At the same time, while the US has never ceased creating crises, erecting trade and technology barriers, manufacturing and exporting inflation, and trying to consolidate the new Cold War it has sought to start, China has been doing its best to stabilize the global industry and supply chains, promote cooperation and common development, and provide the world with public goods of various kinds.

Those eager to look for flaws in others should address their own first.

Tokyo's new militarism leading Japan astray

The focus of the upcoming high-level meetings between Japan and the United States, which will culminate with a summit between US President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida at the White House on Friday, is security cooperation.

Right before the summit, Japanese Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada and Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi will join their US counterparts Lloyd Austin and Antony Blinken in Washington for "2+2" security talks on Wednesday, which Hamada said will discuss the "strengthening of deterrence" and the "response capability of the Japan-US alliance".

The upcoming US-Japan "2+2" security talks will reportedly synergize the two countries' national security strategies with the explicit strategic goal of containing China.

In addition, in his meeting with Biden, Kishida is expected to discuss revising the Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation. These stipulate the division of responsibilities between the Japan Self-Defense Forces and the US military.

Former Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe made big strides toward remilitarizing Japan, and Kishida's government is advancing further along that path as it seeks to revive Japan as a regional military power.

To realize such an ambition, Japan has not only taken steps to beef up its own military, but is also using the country's military alliance with the US to draw the latter closer to it by voluntarily serving as a strategic pawn of the US in Washington's implementation of its "Indo-Pacific" strategy.

On Dec 16, the Japanese Cabinet approved three

defense documents, the National Security Strategy, the National Defense Program Guidelines and the Mid-Term Defense Program, which pave the way for Japan's biggest post-war build-up of its defense forces.

Under the plan, Japan will spend 4.3 trillion yen (\$313 billion) in the next five years to boost its military muscle, including buying cruise missiles "capable of striking China".

Japan's National Security Strategy breaks the country's constitutional principle of force exclusively for defense by granting the country first-strike capability. Yet Tokyo should beware acting in haste in its desire for Japan to be viewed as a military power. Japan's role in the US' regional strategy will gradually develop from supporting it as the so-called "shield" to becoming a "spear". This means that in the future, Japan will be further included in the strategic plans of the US, and the possibility of Japan and the US joining hands to cause trouble in the region will continue to increase, with Japan as pointman for the US.

Both Tokyo and Washington need to be reminded that the foundation for postwar peace in East Asia is a demilitarized Japan, governed by its so-called pacifist Constitution. This is part of the international order that Washington and Tokyo have been trumpeting the values of and wrongly accuses China of challenging.

Regrettably, the US-Japan military alliance is being reshaped into a tool for bloc confrontation thanks to the two allies' mutual intent to contain China and fish for their own strategic gains in the Asia-Pacific region.

submarines cannot be operated without US supervision, which essentially means they will be under US control. And although the US does have military bases in Australia, it does not have a naval base capable of supporting its nuclear submarines, although plans have reportedly been drawn up for a new port facility just outside Darwin.

Despite that, it seems that some in the US are less than enthralled with the proposal, arguing that it would scupper the US' plan to have a fleet of 60 nuclear submarines given the US' own building-capacity constraints.

According to reports, Democratic Senator Jack Reed, who is chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and Republican Senator James Inhofe warned President Biden on Dec 21 that "We believe current conditions require a sober assessment of the facts to avoid stressing the US submarine industrial base to breaking point." The two politicians urged Biden to adopt a "do no harm" approach to ensure that the US' national security capabilities "are not diminished".

A spokesperson for the Australian Department of Defense played down relevant reports saying that "the optimal pathway for Australia to acquire nuclear-powered submarines is taking shape", and an announcement would be made this year.

Whatever that announcement is, Canberra is sure to be paying through the nose to hand over its sovereignty to the US, if it proceeds with its plans to acquire nuclear subs.

Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Recession not moderation after sabotaging of trade

There is no doubt that the United States will continue to raise interest rates in the first half of 2023, but its stubbornly high inflation will not be easily tamed and the risk of economic recession looms large despite the introduction of the CHIPS and Science Act to rejuvenate its hard-hit manufacturing sector.

The US Fed raised interest rates seven times in 2022, pushing the rate to the highest level in 15 years. In an attempt to rein in double-digit inflation in the early 1980s, then Fed chairman Paul Volcker aggressively raised interest rates, ushering in an era for the "great moderation" of the US economy. Incumbent Fed Chairman Jerome Powell has tried to follow Volcker's example, but when Volcker took over as Fed chairman in August 1979, the US was in an era of rapid expansion,

which provided him with solid external conditions to fight inflation. In contrast, Powell now faces not only a US which is seeing excessive money printing, but also a foreign trade system sabotaged by the US itself.

When the US embraced the world with an open and inclusive mind, Volcker certainly had the resources to fight inflation. However, as the US now treats other countries unequally, Powell lacks Volcker's strength, and what awaits him is not the "great moderation" of the US economy, but various forms of recession. Now, the US housing market is in decline, banks are tightening lending standards, and demand has weakened to recession levels.

US economic circles admire the economic models of Germany, Japan and China, which boost eco-

nomics by implementing industrial policies. However, in the US the term "industrial policies" is seen as taking the road to socialism, when it is in the nature of US-style capitalism to implement the market economy. The US wants to resort to industrial policies to rejuvenate its feeble manufacturing, just as it did after its founding, but the times are different now.

In recent decades, the US government has partially lost its ability to make detailed plans and implement them effectively because of its high degree of laissez-faire. The US government is also short of human resources and the environment to implement its industrial policies. The introduction of the Chip Bill quenches US thirst for industrial policies, but it now lacks the ability to digest it.

— ECONOMIC DAILY

Pfizer prices Paxlovid off the healthcare list

The National Healthcare and Security Administration officially ended its negotiations for the 2022 national healthcare list on Sunday. Three anti-COVID-19 drugs that were discussed include Azvudine developed by a domestic company; Qingfei Paidu granules, a widely used traditional Chinese medicine; and Paxlovid, developed by Pfizer.

While the first two drugs made it to the list, Paxlovid failed to do so because of its high price, prompting some to blame the administration for being too stingy in its spending.

However, it is right for the NHSA

to be tightfisted with the budget.

A pack of Paxlovid costs between 1,980 yuan (\$291.93) to 2,300 yuan. Considering the fact that the average disposable income per capita in China in 2021 was 35,128 yuan, the price is almost more than half an individual's monthly income, which is rather expensive.

Including it in the basic medical security drug list will be a good way to make it affordable. However, unlike commercial insurance, the basic medical security fund is to cover people's basic medical needs. If Paxlovid is added to the list, it

will ultimately be paid for from money contributed by the people, and drain public funds.

The NHSA is obliged to ensure the money people pay is spent in a way that best serves their purpose.

A win-win result would have been for Pfizer to lower Paxlovid's price to make it acceptable for the NHSA. In order to cope with the pandemic, the NHSA has, however, said that it will continue to pay for Paxlovid till March 31 to meet people's needs. That shows the country is doing all it can to protect people's health.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Launch of corn export corridor significant

A cargo ship from Brazil docked at the port of Mayong in Guangdong province on Monday, carrying 68,000 metric tons of Brazilian corn imported by China Oil and Foodstuffs Corporation. The corn will be quickly delivered to domestic feed companies after completing inspection and quarantine.

According to COFCO, this is the first time China has imported Brazilian corn in bulk, and it marks the opening of a corn export corridor from Brazil to China. And that will help China form a diversified corn circulation pattern in which North America, South America and the Black Sea region complement each other, so that it can better balance seasonal and regional fluctuations and hedge against risks at a time China's relations with the US, normally a big corn exporter to China, are becoming increasingly uncertain.

China has mainly imported corn from the US and Ukraine in past years, but those import channels have become fragile due to the fraught relations between China

and the US, and the outbreak of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

For Brazil, keeping a balance between China and the US will naturally raise its profile on the world stage as a major country that can maintain its strategic independence, and therefore make its own contribution to world stability and common development.

Opening up the export channel for Brazilian corn to China will have a positive and far-reaching influence on strengthening China-Brazil agricultural cooperation and help maintain the security and stability of the global agricultural supply chain as well.

Brazil, the world's third-largest corn producer and the world's second-largest corn exporter, exports more than 40 million tons of corn a year, about one-fourth of the global total.

As the US consistently steps up its attempts to contain China's rise, it is becoming imperative that China must always think of the worst-

case scenario when it comes to food security — for instance what if several major sources of food cease trading with it at the same time for an infinite period of time.

It should not be forgotten that the world's most populous country still relies heavily on imports of soybeans for edible oil and corn for husbandry feed.

Therefore, starting to import the latter from Brazil marks a good beginning for it to further diversify its food import sources. Putting its eggs in more baskets is conducive to China managing and controlling potential food security risks in case of an emergency.

China needs to actively participate in international agricultural cooperation and further optimize the structure of its food trade. In the process, State-owned enterprises in relevant fields should establish stable food corridors between major agricultural and grain producing areas in the world.

This will be win-win cooperation for its trade partners as well.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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COMMENT

Jasna Plevnik

Revised virus protocol at the right time

China adjusting its COVID-19 protocol after almost three years of the strict pandemic prevention and control policy should be a monumental event for the Chinese people, and for the world as well. It is a significant move to revive the global economy, particularly the global tourism industry.

Yet Europe's response to China's move appears ambiguous and in stark contrast to the soft COVID-19 policy that European countries have been following at home.

Many Western politicians and observers have been criticizing China for drastically easing the anti-pandemic policy. The West viewed life under lockdown in China through the ideological lens as if the policy emerged out of China's political system and not because of the threat the novel coronavirus posed to people's lives and health at that time.

China puts people's lives before profit, which distinguishes it from the West. And although the people-first approach cost China a lot of money, it saved millions of lives.

But ever since China announced that it would ease the strict anti-pandemic measures from Sunday, an atmosphere of fear for public health has been building not only in Europe but also in many other parts of the world.

The rising fear in Europe and North America that visitors from China will carry some new variants or sub-variants of the virus and spread it in those regions is nothing but speculation, and bad speculation at that. Also, many claim that the Chinese COVID-19 vaccines are not as effective as the Western ones, even though many cases of Westerners being infected (even twice or thrice) by the virus despite being fully vaccinated have been reported.

Some Western media even claim that not enough people have been vaccinated in China when the truth is that China has one of the highest vaccination rates in the world: nine out of 10 Chinese have been vaccinated.

China has had 300 times fewer deaths than the United States. But the West has been using the surge in Omicron infections across China to question the country's official data on COVID-19 deaths.

Besides, for Chinese people visiting some countries, it is not enough to show a pre-boarding negative COVID-19 test or proof of full vaccination to enter a country. Italy was the first European country to start testing passengers arriving from China at its main airports and has urged the European Union to take coordinated action.

What will Europe gain by imposing strict restrictions on travellers from China? Leading medical experts and some reputable institutions in Europe say the restrictions are unjustified, and politically motivated, and will not prevent the rise in cases or protect the people in



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

Europe against the "twindemic" of flu and COVID-19. The number of people infected with other variants in Europe is already very high and it has nothing to do with China.

Europe is not yet COVID-19-free. Still, European countries abolished testing and quarantine, because the Omicron sub-variants, in general, are not life threatening in spite of being more infectious. As such, China's move to adjust its policies is rational, especially because the Omicron sub-variants are the dominant novel coronavirus strains in the country.

Why then is Europe so concerned about China's decision?

That's a very difficult question to answer. But the European Union and the United Kingdom initially welcomed China's decision to relax its travel protocol. And yet 48 hours later their governments changed course, subjecting travellers from China to strict COVID-19 checks.

The moves by the EU, the UK, as well as Japan, can be seen as their attempt to

remain politically aligned with the US, which first started testing visitors from China for COVID-19 at its airports.

More important, the West has no authority to decide China's anti-pandemic policy. But for almost a year now, it has been pressing China to allow visitors from other countries to enter the country without quarantine or testing for the virus. In other words, the West has been asking China to abandon its dynamic clearing policy, because it's too harsh and has been in effect for too long. Ironically, some Western politicians and media are criticizing China for lifting those very anti-pandemic measures now.

The West's reaction to China easing its anti-pandemic measures exposes its double standard. In fact, the measures to strictly check visitors from China tell us a lot about the geopolitical games the West plays.

Perhaps there is a connection between subjecting visitors from China to rigorous tests and the US' geopolitical strategy vis-à-vis China. To be sure, the US is

the main architect of a relatively new policy to contain China's technological and economic progress, and has been misusing the pandemic to hurt China.

Washington believes the best way to deal with China is to continue spreading lies against it. Anti-pandemic measures including requiring visitors from China to undergo a series of medical checks should be seen as a demonstration of the unity of the West. But that makes the West look more chaotic than united.

The world can't go back to 2019. But it can enter a new era free of lockdowns and mass testing. President Xi Jinping has urged all countries to follow that path, because in the end, what matters is whether the people are happy or not. And the West and China need and have the ability to cooperate to make sure people across the world live a happier, better life.

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Reviving travel rush indicates colorful Spring Festival despite pandemic

Editor's note: China's adjustment and optimization of epidemic prevention measures provide favorable conditions for the recovery of the international air transport market and tourism, writes a veteran journalist with China Daily.

Despite the concerns of some epidemiologists and virologists that large-scale human mobility could more expeditiously spread the Omicron variant and sub-variants across the country, hundreds of millions of people living away from home are packing their bags to travel back home for the Spring Festival family reunion.

The tradition of Spring Festival family reunion came to a stop three years ago because of the novel coronavirus outbreak in January 2020. People were then advised to celebrate the festival in the city (or town) they were stationed and avoid travelling unless absolutely necessary.

But now that the government has eased the anti-pandemic restrictions making it possible for people to move freely, hundreds of millions of people will travel back home for the family reunion even before and after the Golden Week seven-day holiday.

It's estimated 2 billion trips will be made during this year's Spring Festival, it will be close to the data for 2019 before the pandemic broke out, when people made 2.98 billion trips during the Spring Festival travel season.

Although hundreds of millions of people still return home for the family reunion dinner on the eve of the Lunar New Year — which falls on Jan 22 this year — many festival traditions have changed.

Such family gatherings are still popular on Lunar New Year Eve, but in cities they are likely to take place in a restaurant or a hotel, for which one needs to book a table about one month in advance.

Trains and long-distance buses used to be the most popular modes of transport two decades ago when it took about 24 hours for a train to cover the 1,300 kilometers between Beijing and Shanghai, and the limited number of trains and thus tickets made getting a train ticket during Spring Festival a nightmare.

Those who failed to get train tickets had to travel home by long-distance buses. But bus travel was exhausting, because a bus took about 48 hours to cover the 1,700-kilometer distance from Shenzhen to Chongqing.

Now, people have many more choices. A Beijing resident can book a seat in a high-speed train and reach Shanghai in less than six hours, and a Shenzhen resident can take a plane to reach Chongqing in two hours. And those who prefer driving back home during the seven-day Spring Festival holiday will be exempted from paying expressway tolls.

Visiting relatives, friends and colleagues with gifts such as fruits and cakes used to be an important part of the festival. My fondest memory of Spring Festival as a kid is about enjoying such delicacies. But mutual visits are fast becoming outdated, because people nowadays send festival greetings and virtual gifts through WeChat.

Family reunion feasts used to be the dream of family members, especially the children till three decades ago. Although food was still rationed and people could hardly get enough to eat, parents would use almost all the ingredients at hand to prepare a once-a-year dinner at home, hoping that it would bring the family good luck in the New Year.

Such family gatherings are still popular on Lunar New Year Eve, but in cities they are likely to take place in a restaurant or a hotel, for which one needs to book a table about one month in advance. But despite the food being better cooked and tasting a lot better these days, there is a lack of compassion and feeling at the dinner table. For most, the Spring Festival family reunion dinner is just like any other dinner in any other restaurant.

Bursting firecrackers, a traditional Spring Festival practice meant to scare away evil, has long been banned in most urban areas, because it creates noise and air pollution both, and is a fire hazard. But for most people, Spring Festival is not complete without firecrackers. Many people choose to drive outside the city to stay in a village for a couple of days so they could burst firecrackers and "enjoy" the sound they make.

Also, earlier, many people used to go to foreign destinations on vacation during the seven-day holiday. Their travel plans were frustrated by the pandemic-prevention and control measures for three years. But the world is likely to see a lot of Chinese travelers this Spring Festival. And despite the demise of some traditional Spring Festival customs, I keep my fingers crossed that the newly-added customs will make the festival more colorful and enjoyable.

Song Luzheng

Evil tactics to demonize fight against virus

Because of the widespread increase in human activities in heretofore untouched places including natural environs and forests, epidemics caused by unknown viruses and bacteria have become more frequent in recent times. While swine flu broke out in North America in 2009, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (also caused by a coronavirus) was diagnosed in 2012 and COVID-19 in 2020.

Confronted with such common threats to humankind, all countries should come together to neutralize the threat. However, when COVID-19 broke out, some politicians and media outlets in the West began acting selfishly, which was reflected in their denial of China's contribution to the fight against the novel coronavirus.

China immediately notified the World Health Organization and major countries including the US after the COVID-19 outbreak. It referred its genome sequencing results to the WHO on Jan 12, 2020, which became the key to comprehensively understanding the effects of viruses on humans.

During the first wave of the pandemic, the fatality rate was extremely high with no vaccine in sight. Under such circumstances, China locked down some cities to prevent the spread of the virus, and thus effectively controlled the pandemic. However, Europe and the US were slow to adopt the methods that had proven effective in China to contain the spread of the virus. Some countries didn't even make wearing face masks in public places mandatory.

After containing the pandemic, China provided medical supplies and sent

medical teams to other countries. Later, it shared the vaccines it developed with other countries and international organizations, in order to build a community with a shared future for mankind.

In contrast, the US was hoarding vaccines in large quantities at the time, which prompted the WHO to warn developed countries in January 2021 that stockpiling vaccines would cause a "catastrophic moral failure" to help other countries, especially the least-developed ones, contain the pandemic. For example, at a time when vaccines were hard to come by in developing countries, Canada had stockpiled vaccines more than five times its population, while the US destroyed millions of expired vaccines later because it could not use them.

Although vaccines are being administered globally since 2021, their effectiveness remains to be tested, because the Delta variant of the novel coronavirus had a high fatality rate despite the vaccination. In France, for instance, COVID-19 claimed about 64,000 lives in 2020 and 59,000 in 2021 separately. In the US, over 370,000 people died of COVID-19 in 2020 and more than 450,000 in 2021 separately — a total of more than 800,000 deaths with an average of more than 1,000 deaths a day.

Given the high death rate, China had no choice but to take strict prevention and control measures when the West decided that people would have to coexist with the virus.

In 2022, Omicron became the prevalent variant of the virus across the world, but its fatality rate was significantly lower because of widespread vaccination. At

that time, however, no country could be certain about the impacts of the Omicron variant, with the European and American medical communities referring to the situation in South Africa to make an informed guess.

That's why, despite having vaccinated more than 90 percent of its population, China persisted with a very cautious approach while closely observing the situation in other countries. It issued 20 new guidelines for easing the strict anti-pandemic restrictions on Nov 11 after determining that the vaccines are effective, and a 10-point plan on Dec 7 to optimize the COVID-19 response to further normalize the situation.

Globally, China may seem to be the last major country to ease restrictions, but it has done so just a few months later than other countries. Take the lifting of entry restrictions for example. Most countries removed restrictions in 2022. Japan, Spain, Syria all did so in October, that is, less than three months before China.

China's anti-epidemic measures not only put people's lives first but also strike a balance between pandemic-prevention and control and economic development. No wonder China is the only major economy to achieve positive growth in 2020, with its growth rate reaching 8.1 percent in 2021. And China's growth rate is widely expected to top the world in 2023.

Yet the Western critics deny China's valuable contributions to the global fight against the pandemic and the global human rights cause and, instead, claim that China has infringed on human rights and curbed people's freedom.

They even questioned China's "motive" for providing medical assistance and vaccine supplies for other countries, calling it "vaccine diplomacy" and geographical expansionism. That's because those people in the West perceive China's development and Chinese people's yearning for a better life as a threat to the West.

But they cannot digest China's economic success perhaps because China achieved the miracle without adhering to the Western development model and has thereby challenged the superiority of the Western model.

Over the past three years, China has fought the pandemic using a different anti-pandemic model and done better than the West in terms of protecting life and promoting economic development. This is something the West has apparently not been able to accept.

In short, at a time when humankind urgently needs all countries to join hands to overcome a common enemy, the US-led West has chosen to politicize the pandemic and stigmatize a country, and thus weakening the global fight against the virus.

Human beings will face similar challenges in the future, because a pandemic could break out in any country or region at any time. In order to more smoothly contain a pandemic in the future, the world needs to learn valuable lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic.

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GLOBAL VIEWS



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

FAN SHENGEN AND ZHANG YUMEI

Rebuilding agriculture

Making China an agriculturally strong country is essential for its modernization

This year's Central Rural Work Conference stressed that a strong agricultural sector is the foundation of a strong and modern country, and agricultural development is indispensable to meeting people's needs for a better life, achieving high-quality development and solidifying the foundation of national security. Building an agriculturally strong country should be based on not only domestic, but also international development experience and universal lessons. Analyzing the basic features of agriculturally strong countries and identifying the gaps between China and these countries will help to develop pathways for China to become an agriculturally strong country. China's agricultural development has made remarkable achievements and the agricultural economy has seen rapid growth for more than 60 years. The capacity for ensuring the country's food supply has improved significantly. Food and Agriculture Organization data shows that China's total agricultural output value accounted for 22.5 percent of the global total, ranking first in the world in 2018. However, China's agricultural development still faces many challenges.

First, China's agricultural labor employment share is still high and labor productivity far lower than that of the world's agricultural powers. In 2021, the number of employed agriculture laborers in China was 170 million, accounting for 23 percent of total labor employment, with agricultural added value of 50,000 yuan (\$7,248) per worker. In terms of international comparison, the agricultural added value per worker in China was \$5,609 in 2019 (at 2015 constant US\$), equivalent to only 5.6 percent of the United States, 5 percent of Canada and 22 percent of the European Union.

Second, China has made remarkable progress in agricultural science and technology, but there are still significant gaps. The contribution rate of China's agricultural S&T progress in agricultural growth was only 61 percent in 2021, compared to more than 80 percent in the OECD countries. In terms of investment in agricultural research, the agricultural research intensity (the ratio of spending on agricultural research to agricultural GDP) is less than 1 percent, much lower than that of the US and Europe at about

2-3 percent. Private investment in agricultural research is seriously insufficient. In developed countries, private sector investment in agricultural research is dominant. As a result, China relies on imports for some key seed provenances and agricultural machinery and equipment.

Third, an agricultural development model with high input and high output faces the challenge of sustainability. China has attached great importance to the green and high-quality development in recent years. The intensity of fertilizer and pesticide application in China has decreased, but is still higher than the international level. In 2019, the fertilizer used per hectare in China was 198 kilograms, much higher than that of the US at 72 kg/ha and Canada at 66 kg/ha.

Fourth, the degree of integration of agricultural supply chains is still low. According to national statistics, in 2021, the contribution of agriculture and related industries to total GDP was 16.05 percent, only 2.1 times of the added value of agriculture in China, which was far lower than the agriculturally strong countries, such as the US, where the added value of agriculture, food and related industries is more than eight times the added value of agriculture.

Finally, while Chinese transnational agribusinesses continue to develop and grow, they are relatively small in number and scale. The scale of China's transnational agricultural companies is smaller, and there are large gaps in terms of agricultural trade, control of the supply chain and core technologies. The global top 170 leading transnational agribusiness companies are mainly located in developed countries in Europe and the US, with 64 in Europe and 61 in North America, of which 56 are headquartered in the US. In 2022, COFCO International's revenue was \$48 billion, while Cargill of the US recorded a revenue of \$165 billion.

To transform China into an agriculturally strong country, it is critical to draw on international experience, and adapt to local conditions with Chinese characteristics.

First, the support of agricultural S&T should be enhanced to solidify the foundation of food security in all aspects. A diversified agricultural research and development system, or R&D, and extension system should be built, and multiple measures should be taken to encourage

the private sector to invest in agricultural R&D to enhance the innovation of agricultural technology and strengthen the transformation and application of agricultural S&T. The country should also improve land productivity and labor productivity through farmland management and the application of modern technologies.

Second, agricultural support policies should be reformed to achieve the multiple goals including productivity improvement, nutrition enhancement, and environmental sustainability. Financial support for nutritious, healthy and sustainable food should be increased, especially for climate adaptation, green agricultural R&D and extension. Guided by the "Big Food" approach, it is important to build a diversified food supply system, exploring new food sources, and promoting the development of a nutrition-oriented food sector and a health-oriented food consumption pattern.

Third, the agriculture supply chain should be extended to improve farmers' incomes. The construction of infrastructure for the agricultural product supply chain should be strengthened, including the construction of e-commerce and a modern agricultural circulation system, and upgrading of agricultural supply chain to enhance the system's resilience, and improve farmers' income.

Fourth, the development of transnational agricultural companies should be hastened and their international influence enhanced. Agricultural trade should be optimized and agricultural imports should be diversified to reduce the trade risks and shocks. The country also should strengthen its bilateral cooperation with developing regions and countries along the Belt and Road routes through South-South cooperation and technology transfer to improve food security in these countries as well as in China.

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LU FENG

Getting it in good repair

Policymakers are taking measures to address the challenges facing Chinese economy and boost its recovery

In 2023, there will be more favorable factors for China's economy. It is highly probable that there will be a substantial post-pandemic recovery relative to last year, and China's contribution to global economic growth is also expected to increase significantly. But there are several challenges that policymakers are seeking to address.

First, for the past three years, China adopted a containment strategy in fighting against the pandemic, known as the dynamic zero-COVID policy. This containment strategy attained its goal of containing outbreaks when the Delta variant of the novel coronavirus was the dominant strain in 2021, even though the pressure on economic performance had started to rise significantly. In 2022, with the prevalence of the more transmissible Omicron variant, a higher level of social mobilization of resources and social distance control were required to follow this containment strategy. Meanwhile, the frequent lockdown measures became a drag on the economy. Although the government rolled out several rounds of measures to stabilize growth, the momentum of the economic downturn was not reversed under the impact from the pandemic. In this context, with the Omicron variants proving to be less virulent, the nation's adjustment of its COVID policies at the end of the year — was a pragmatic and reasonable move, and it is one of the most important positive factors for economic recovery in 2023.

However, both international experience and the recent situation in China show that a shift in containment strategies inevitably leads to a spike in number of severe cases and even deaths. The spike in infections may weigh on domestic economic growth early this year, as the restart of spending will not be immediate. The pandemic, which has so far lasted three years, has affected consumers' psychological expectations and hit the balance sheets of small and micro-sized enterprises. Whether these can be repaired quickly will affect the speed of economic recovery.

Second, China's macroeconomic policy has undergone a saddle-shaped evolution with two positive ends and a tightening in the middle over the past three years. In early 2020, an extraordinarily proactive macro policy, led by the rollout of 1 trillion yuan (\$147.4 billion) in special government bonds and over 5 trillion yuan in currency expansion, played an important role in spurring a strong economic recovery after the initial outbreaks were contained.

The stimulus measures were gradually withdrawn starting from the second half of 2020 to the summer of 2021. This policy exit, coupled with the impact of stronger regulatory measures launched by several departments, resulted in the formation of a tightened policy environment. Starting from the autumn of 2021, especially with the heightened downward pressure on the economy starting from the end of the year, the government launched multiple rounds of measures to stabilize growth, including more accommodating monetary, fiscal policies and infrastructure development measures. The Central Economic Work Conference in December 2022 signaled that the macro policy this year is expected to continue to maintain a pro-active stance. However, given the expansionary macro policies in 2022, there may be difficulties in balancing the measures to promote economic recovery this year while ensuring effective prevention and the resolution of major economic and financial risks.

Third, from the second half of 2020 to the summer and autumn of 2021, a series of strict regulatory measures were launched to tackle the financial risks in the real estate sector, strengthen the antitrust regulation for the internet platforms, crack down on irregularities in the private tutoring sector, and introduce strict restriction of energy consumption for individual provinces and regions. There are complex reasons for these regulatory measures, and they have attained some positive results. However, the measures have weighed on economic growth. The Central Economic Work Conference in December signaled greater efforts to fine tune the policies. The current policy is now obviously more accommodating. But we must wait and see how much the policy adjustments can yield positive results.

Fourth, banking on the international competitive edge of China's manufacturing industry, China's foreign trade volume has exceeded levels of \$5 trillion and \$6 trillion over the past three years. The faster growth of exports has pushed up the nation's trade surplus, with external demand contributing to 25 to 30 percent of economic growth. In 2021, the United States and other Western economies were hit by the highest level of inflation in 40 years, forcing policymakers to put in place a tightening monetary policy from the end of the year. The policy tightening has led to a sharp economic slowdown and mounting risks of recession, which has resulted in a drop in demand for Chinese exports.

China's exports in dollar terms fell in October and the decline further expanded in November. In this context, most analysts believe that the contraction of external demand in 2023 will become a drag on China's economic growth. However, the exact extent of the downturn in the West and global economies in 2023 remains uncertain. In addition, China's trade policies, local governments, and businesses will all adjust their responses to adverse changes in the external environment.

Finally, the lack of vigorosity in China's economic growth is not an entirely new problem confined to the pandemic period. In 2018 and 2019, senior officials pointed out, on different occasions, that the Chinese economy was facing real downward pressure. There are undoubtedly complex reasons behind the lingering downward pressure on China's economy, including changes in the external environment, especially China-US relations, China's evolving demographic structure, and a decline in the potential growth rate of the economy at a relatively high growth stage. In addition, another factor that deserves strong attention is the vitality of the private sector, which has been an important engine for China's growth since the launch of reform and opening-up. There has been a change of opinion in relation to the private economy in recent years that has inhibited its growth. This, coupled with the difficult environment for businesses to conduct their operations during the pandemic, has weakened the enthusiasm for private companies to make new investments and people to start new businesses, which has held back economic growth. This development has caught the attention of policymakers. The Central Economic Work Conference in December reaffirmed the nation's commitment to unswervingly consolidate and develop the public sector and unswervingly encourage, support, and guide the development of the non-public sector, making work on this front one of the key tasks for the country's economic work in 2023.

The new policy signals will have an effect. But there are deep-rooted problems, and it remains to be seen whether there can be substantial improvement soon.

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LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

LIFE

Tourists make up for lost time

People across the country hit the trail again, much to the relief of travel agencies, **Yang Feiyue** reports.

Zhang Guangqi indulged his wanderlust with a vengeance after he got back on his feet from a COVID-19 infection. The Beijing resident boarded a plane to Haikou, capital of South China's Hainan province, on Dec 21, about a week after his full recovery.

"I just felt like I needed to get out of my apartment," says Zhang.

He was assured that he wouldn't catch the virus again, at least, in the near future, which convinced him to see other parts of the country.

After enjoying the sunlight, zoning out by the sea, soaking in the hot spring and savoring the distinctive local cuisine, Zhang went on with his journey, traveling to Guilin in South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region and then Guiyang, capital of Guizhou province, in the southwest of the country, to experience what those places had to offer.

He wrapped up his journey at the end of last month, just in time to celebrate the New Year with his friends in Beijing.

"We had a nearly five-hour hotpot dinner at Haidilao restaurant to usher in the New Year, and caught up with one another face-to-face," Zhang says. "Everything finally feels like it's getting back to normal."

Zhang is just one of many people whose wanderlust has been reignited by the relaxation of the country's travel controls that were put in place to curb the spread of the pandemic.

For the past New Year's Day holiday, a robust recovery took the tourism market by storm, as the major domestic online travel agency Trip.com Group saw nearly 60 percent of its customers purchase cross-provincial trips during the holiday, as opposed to 40 percent in the same period last year.

Passenger traffic at the nation's biggest airports, such as Beijing Capital International Airport and Shanghai Pudong International Airport, also rose by 20 percent year-on-year.

For the whole domestic tourism market, 52.71 million trips were made during the holiday, according to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. It represented a year-on-year increase of 0.44 percent and accounted for 43 percent of pre-pandemic levels in 2019.

Revenue generated during the holiday broke 26.52 billion yuan (\$3.91 billion), up 4 percent year-on-year, the ministry reports.

Travelers were mostly from Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu in Sichuan province, and Guangzhou in Guangdong province.

Destinations offering a mild climate and frequent sunshine proved popular among the holiday



Top: Tourists play on the ice at Shichahai scenic area in Beijing on Dec 31. **Above left:** Travelers cycle by Erhai Lake in Dali, Southwest China's Yunnan province, on Aug 11. **Above right:** A family spends a relaxing time at the beach in Sanya, South China's Hainan province, on Jan 4. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

travelers, most of whom decided to give themselves a treat after their COVID-19 recovery.

Flight bookings to those destinations, including Sanya, Hainan province; Zhuhai, Guangdong province; and Xishuangbanna and the Dali Bai autonomous prefecture, Yunnan province, all rose by more than 10 percent, according to the travel agency.

Those born after 1990 were the driving force of the tourism recovery, with trip bookings from that age group surging by 36 percent

year-on-year, while those from family travelers rising by 41 percent.

"We received the first batch of tourists at the beginning of last month, and a considerable number of our guests chose to stay for as long as 30 days," says Zhao Ming, a private tour operator in Sanya. "We can sense their eagerness to relax and have fun."

Most of his clients placed orders without much planning, while some couldn't wait to cash in the bargain deals they stocked up on during the Nov 11 Singles Day national online

shopping carnival.

The island city has seen all its beach fun activities get back up and running.

"It is evident that more people are coming in groups," Zhao says.

His company has recently reached potential customers through livestreaming platforms and acquired a good number of orders.

Zhao is confident about the upcoming Spring Festival holiday. "We have developed a number of excursion packages and look forward to leveraging online sales channels to

bring in more guests," he says.

Li Xin, a homestay business owner in Dali, has guest bookings lined up for weeks, with most orders coming from Beijing and Shanghai.

"Some of the guests have even booked rooms for their summer vacations, for fear of price hikes," Li says.

His homestay features seven rooms offering lake views, and was under renovation between May and October.

"Although the going was rough, we've always believed tourism will bounce back and thrive," Li says,

adding that the renovation was necessary to cater to the rising demand of Chinese visitors and stay competitive.

To date, Li has received about 200 guest inquiries every day, and he has to recommend many guests to other homestays in the neighborhood.

"We remain confident in the future, and will open a second homestay in Dali this year," Li says.

Beijing also saw its tourism and cultural activities bouncing back to pre-COVID-19 levels during the New Year holiday. Approximately 2.7 million people visited the city's 151 key scenic spots over the holiday, reaching 86.4 percent of the number registered in the same period of 2019, according to the Beijing Bureau of Culture and Tourism.

The tourist attractions reported a total revenue of about 248 million yuan, up 44.5 percent from 2019, the bureau reports.

The number of cultural activities on offer also rose, compared with the same period a year ago. The city's 75 theaters held 303 commercial performances during the holiday, roughly the same as the figure logged in 2019.

Zhang Meinan, the Beijing-based Cichang Comedy standup operator in Beijing, saw audience numbers suddenly spike and sold out 150 seats since the last week of December. He attributed the success to the public need to blow off steam after being cooped up at home for a long time due to the pandemic.

He's thrilled about the quick recovery in the city's performance market, noting that his company doesn't plan to take a break and will continue offering standup comedy performance during Spring Festival.

Now that the country has scrapped the quarantine requirements for international arrivals and downgraded management of COVID-19 cases from Class A to Class B, Zhang Guangqi is motivated to head overseas during his next trip.

"I've seen some of my friends already book trips to Thailand and Singapore," he says.

Outbound flight bookings surged by 145 percent year-on-year during the New Year holiday, while the figure has surpassed 260 percent for the Spring Festival holiday, according to Trip.com Group.

Before the outbreak of the pandemic, Zhang Guangqi usually took at least two long-distance trips a year, including one to another country in Southeast Asia or Europe.

"I'm still checking out the tourism policies of destinations I have in mind and will make the bookings when the flight and hotel prices are favorable," he says.

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LIFE

Wearing his long hair in a bun, a goatee and a Taoist robe, Jake Pinnick easily stands out among many Chinese kung fu practitioners on the Wudang Mountains, although they are all dressed up pretty much the same.

With his blond hair, blue eyes, high nose and white skin, Pinnick often draws the attention of visitors, especially as he adroitly performs the tai chi moves with precision and a panache.

The 32-year-old from Kewanee, a small city in Illinois, United States, has committed himself to learning Chinese martial arts for 12 years and his efforts resulted in him becoming a disciple of Yuan Shimao, the 15th inheritor of the Wudang Sanfeng Sect, a martial arts academy in the mountains, Central China's Hubei province.

Years of learning and practice have enabled Pinnick to grasp multiple forms of martial arts, such as the Xingyi Boxing that carries out the mind's will and the Baxian (eight immortals) cudgel that combines rigidity and flexibility and enables him to catch rivals off guard.

"The martial arts have brought me great benefits, and the training is actually fun," Pinnick says.

"You can break down the moves, try to understand them, approach them differently, while the training keeps your mind very active and body very healthy," he adds.

Already being an experienced martial arts teacher himself, Pinnick has taken on an additional challenge of playing the Chinese bamboo flute in recent years.

His latest English-language book, introducing the history of the bamboo flute and the skills required to play it, has got raving reviews online.

"I found that many of my online followers were curious about the Chinese instrument after I uploaded my playing, so I thought I should publish an English tutorial so that my fans could learn along with me," Pinnick says.

He looked up a large volume of related Chinese books, extrapolated the key information and integrated his personal experiences.

It took him nearly a year to finish the book, which also covers 108 classic musical works for bamboo flute.

"I hope my book will enable foreigners online to understand the charm of the ancient Chinese traditional instrument," he says.

Journey to the East

Pinnick has been fascinated by Chinese martial arts since he was a kid, when he really enjoyed watching films featuring Chinese kung fu stars, such as Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan.

"In our small town, there were no martial arts schools, and the ones in other cities didn't feel very authentic to me," Pinnick says.

At the beginning of 2009, he chanced upon the website of Yuan's academy, which was offering a five-year program for foreigners.

"I thought it would be a great opportunity to learn kung fu and other disciplines and experience a new challenge," he recalls.

When he announced his plan to his family, they were supportive and felt that the experience would be a beneficial one.

Pinnick then had to save up for his journey, so he started working two jobs. In May 2010, he got his visa and passport, and booked a one-way ticket to Wuhan, Hubei's provincial capital.

The trip was anything but smooth, as he took four flights, lost his luggage and ended up arriving in Wuhan exhausted. He didn't even



Jake Pinnick (center) performs the Baxian cudgel with Doline Charmillot (left) from Switzerland and Mario Papadopoulos from the United Kingdom.

MAKING THE RIGHT MOVES

Martial arts enthusiast from the US finds his place in Wudang Mountains, writing a book, building a happy family life and an online following, **Yang Feiyue** reports.

have time for a break, heading straight from there to the Wudang Mountains via train, bus and taxi.

"It was quite the adventure just getting there, because I didn't speak any Chinese," he says.

His mind, however, was set at ease upon arriving at the academy, where he found other international kung fu students were also training there.

"It was a nice transition, and they taught me Mandarin and showed me where to get groceries," Pinnick says, adding that it made it very easy for him to get used to the local way of life.

A few months later, something happened that reinforced Pinnick's pursuit of kung fu dream in Wudang. It was when he took a break and returned home after the first six months of study.

"I found it hard to leave China, and there was kind of a reverse culture shock when I arrived back in the US," he says.

The Wudang Mountains are famous for their Taoist temples and monasteries, and the area is widely considered to be the birthplace of tai chi. The region's deep history with traditional martial arts has appealed to many kung fu practitioners from home and abroad.

Before the pandemic, about 400,000 international visitors came to the mountains for sightseeing and to appreciate its culture, according to the Wudang Mountains management committee.

More than 8,000 of those visitors



I slowly found that the foundation of martial arts has helped me a lot in trying to play the bamboo flute."

Jake Pinnick, kung fu practitioner



Pinnick studies the classical philosophical text *Dao De Jing*. He plays bamboo flute with his daughter in Yuxu Temple, Wudang Mountains. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

have stayed to practice martial arts, but very few of them can become official disciples of the masters.

It is a select few who can gain approval from the masters, and are taken on as new students.

Pinnick's efforts saw him make great strides in martial arts and, as a result, he managed to make the cut.

Cultural confidence

Pinnick finished his training at the academy in 2018 and decided to stay and help teach his own classes there.

He had an advantage in teaching international martial arts students in terms of language and way of thinking.

"I can often put myself in their shoes when it comes to dealing with problems," he says.

Pinnick usually gets up at 5:30 am, and practices tai chi from 6 to 7 am. One-and-a-half hours later, he goes to the academy's Yuxu Temple to give

instruction to kung fu students. After a short break, he will go on to teach another session in the afternoon. When the night falls, he will share his understanding of Wudang kung fu and traditional Chinese culture online.

"Life is just cozy here," he says.

Now he has a wife, whom he met in China, and a daughter.

In addition to martial arts, Pinnick has exposed himself to Chinese culture, especially Taoism, and explores the idea of living in harmony with the universe.

He has also taken the time to learn Chinese musical instruments, such as *guqin*, a seven-stringed plucked instrument, with Yuan's son, who is a *guqin* specialist.

Then, he got his hands on a bamboo flute afterward, and was instantly taken with it.

"Since much of the music theory of ancient Chinese traditional instruments is similar, I figured I could learn bamboo flute by myself," he says.

"In the process of searching for materials, I found that there were very few teaching books for the bamboo flute in foreign languages, almost none in fact. I had to find Chinese materials and then translate them, before attempting to learn the techniques and methods of playing."

In the beginning, his obsession with the instrument saw him practice almost every day.

Pinnick's wife Cao Lingling says she admires his perseverance.

"He will give 100 percent to whatever he is focused on," Cao says.

"When he was getting over the most difficult phase of learning the bamboo flute, after eating, sleeping and martial arts practice, he spent almost the rest of the time playing the flute," she says.

To Pinnick, the most difficult part of learning the instrument was making it produce sound.

"When I first started playing, I couldn't even get it to make a sound, let alone play a musical scale," he recalls.

Then, he started to understand the importance of details.

"Your mouth has to open in the right place, with the lower lip gently on top of the mouthpiece. It can't be too tight," he says.

"Just imagine a full cup of tea before you, and then try to blow it like you blow away the floating tea leaves with a thin, steady and persistent breath."

As his bamboo flute skills improved, Pinnick came to realize how the instrument also has something in common with the martial arts.

"To ensure the instrument produces a nice sound, it requires constant breath control, which is also important in kung fu practice," he explains.

"I slowly found that the foundation of martial arts has helped me a lot in trying to play the bamboo flute."

Pinnick's sharing of his life in Wudang has attracted nearly 1 million followers on social media platforms, such as Douyin and Xiaohongshu. His online followers have said that it looks like he is living in the world from a martial arts movie.

Speaking about his future plans, Pinnick says there is still a lot of things he wants to do.

He will continue to hone his martial arts and musical skills, while reaching out to a larger audience through training and his books.

"I'd also like to try my hand on the official bamboo flute exams, and hopefully embark on a professional music career," he says.

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Ruins of secret passages on Great Wall discovered

TIANJIN — Ruins of over 130 hidden doors on the Great Wall, one of the world's great wonders, have been recently unveiled through close to centimeter-resolution continuous shooting, according to a research team on the Great Wall's defense system.

Based on further picture analysis and field trips to the secret doors, the team found each hidden door designed to be highly compatible with the local topography. In history, those secret passages were for scouts to pass through, while some were built as channels for communication between inside and outside of the Great Wall, or for trade and commerce in ancient times.

According to some official documents dating back to the Ming

Dynasty (1368-1644), nomadic tribes were allowed to use such secret gates for grazing their cattle between Northwest China's Qinghai province and Hetao, a region with abundant water and grass resources at that time. Such practice is also evidenced by some large secret doors that could allow two horses to pass in both directions, says Zhang Yukun, a professor from Tianjin University and head of the research team.

"These all help prove that the Great Wall is not completely closed, but 'open' in order," Zhang adds.

Previously, China has very few studies on such secret passages. The new discovery can help present a complete and vivid architectural mechanism of the Great Wall.

The most mysterious exits of

those secret passages were also found by the team. Such exits were recorded by scholars in the Tang (618-907), Song (960-1279), Ming and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. However, never had any physical evidence of such a secret exit been discovered before.

The exit's side facing the enemy is camouflaged with brick, while its side facing the soldiers in defense is built to be hollow. It is almost impossible for the enemy to distinguish the location of the exit from the outside, but when the nearby main pass is attacked, soldiers can break the gate from the inside, like breaking an eggshell, and carry out their surprise attack.

"This is a great demonstration of ancient China's military wisdom," says Li Zhe with the research team.

The Great Wall, with a total length of more than 20,000 kilometers, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and consists of many interconnected walls.

XINHUA

More waterfowl wintering in China's largest saltwater lake

XINING — The number of wintering waterfowl in Qinghai Lake, China's largest inland saltwater lake, increased 3.5 times to more than 11,100 year-on-year during this winter, according to the national nature reserve administration of the lake.

The monitoring data was collected by the administration during its winter patrol.

Data shows that the number of whooper swans under second-class national protection reached over 600 this winter, an increase of 2 times compared with the same period last year; while the number of ruddy shelducks rose 3.9 times to more than 10,500.

Meanwhile, the monitoring

team has also found that an increasing number of ruddy shelducks settle in Qinghai Lake because of the improved habitat environment and abundant food.

"An important reason for the apparent increase in wintering waterfowl is because more and more summer migratory ruddy shelducks reside in the lake," says Sun Jianqing from the administration.

Sun has participated in lake patrol and monitoring since 2007.

"Through years of monitoring, I've found that the number of wildlife and species is increasing, and their habitats continue to improve. The increasing number

of waterbirds also shows that the function of wetlands in the Qinghai Lake basin is improving."

In recent years, the local government has been making efforts to establish a monitoring system covering the whole lake, strengthen ecological protection, and raise the ecological and environmental awareness of local farmers and herdsmen.

Located in Northwest China's Qinghai province, the lake is a major transit point for migratory birds from Central Asia to India and East Asia to Australia. It also serves as an important winter home for waterbirds on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau.

XINHUA

LIFE



Innovation boosts vocational success

Hands-on experience gives students practical lessons, **Xing Wen** reports.

Pu Xiaoxuan, a student from Fengxian secondary technical school in Shanghai, has been determined to be a livestreamer who can boost sales of her Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region hometown specialties.

She attended the first National Campus New Media Marketing Innovation Competition, which ended early last year.

Throughout the intensive competition, comprising several rounds of simulated livestreaming sessions, she grew to be a livestreaming host who no longer felt uneasy before a camera but was able to introduce the goods in a natural way during a promotional event.

"Teamwork helped me to tap my potential and I have become more willing to express myself in public," she says.

Growing up in the Ili Kazak autonomous prefecture, Pu plans to jump into the livestreaming segment after graduation and help expand the market of the nuts, fruits and other agricultural products from her hometown.

Lu Xinyu, a 22-year-old graduate from Shanghai University of International Business and Economics, shares a similar story to Pu's.

She also competed in the event and got to open new vistas on her future career.

"The competition lasted 145 days during which I cooperated with my teammates to write scripts for livestreaming sessions, learn how to stimulate customer interest when showcasing commodities, form our own style, as well as do the pertinent warm-ups and reviews," she recalls.

"Practice makes perfect, we have grown to be increasingly skilled and confident when conducting a livestreaming session. That brings me a great sense of achievement."

The experience sparked her inter-



From top: Yang Yu, a new media marketing mentor, livestreams tutorials at the first National Campus New Media Marketing Innovation Competition; participants practice how to conduct an e-commerce livestreaming session; Li Yang, another mentor from the Inmyshow Digital Technology Group. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

est in e-commerce. Then a senior student majoring in brand marketing, she applied to be an intern in new media business group Inmyshow's e-commerce department after the competition. During the three-month internship, she created 80 short videos and hosted 25 livestreaming sessions.

"I also learned how to analyze such data as gross merchandise volume and number of unique visitors to assess a session and make adjustments to improve the performance of the next one," Lu adds.

The fruitful journey convinced her to spread her wings in the thriving e-commerce sector.

This year, the second National

Campus New Media Marketing Innovation Competition will wrap up in March. This time, the event strives to get younger generations closer to China's traditional rural culture and inspire them to contribute to vitalization.

More than 1,500 students from 200 universities, colleges and vocational schools signed up for the event.

The event, co-held by Inmyshow Digital Technology Group, Shanghai University of International Business and Economics, Shanghai Normal University Tianhua College, Shanghai Business School and Shanghai Urban Construction Vocational College, aims to further

integrate vocational education with regular education through providing equal opportunities for both vocational school students and university students and stressing practical, job-oriented skills.

The revised Vocational Education Law, which came into effect on May 1, has sent positive signals for the improvement of vocational education, a move that encourages Inmyshow to advance its vocational education-related services in the scope of digital economy, says Guo Lei, chief manager of the company's education department.

Over the past two years, the company's education department has developed a set of textbooks encompassing systematic knowledge about new media marketing, e-commerce media, short-video platforms and livestreaming market, as well as offering internship to students from vocational schools.

It has also carried out software systems for students to have immersive learning experiences, for example, a simulation of a complete livestreaming session by which students can practice how to promote commodities in that form and analyze relevant data for the improvement of marketing strategies.

To deepen the integration of vocational education with industries, the company has set up e-commerce training centers in many cities across the country. For instance, a 3,000-square-meter e-commerce industrial zone was built near a cluster of vocational schools and universities in Tianjin's Haihe district. Teachers and students from nearby have free entry into the place where they can learn and practice the whole process of a livestreaming promotion event.

As Inmyshow remains to be in close contact with loads of enterprises who seek to develop new media business, it also serves as a bridge that links job hunters and corresponding positions.

"Enterprises send us their recruitment requirements, then we turn to those vocational schools and universities we've been cooperating with to match a suitable one for them," Guo explains.

Currently, Inmyshow has signed cooperation contracts with around 50 vocational schools across the country. The Shulan Vocational School in Jilin province is among them.

Fang Yajie, president of the school, highlights the importance of promoting school-enterprise cooperation for the further development of vocational education and deeper integration of education with industry.

He says that, in relation to the pillar industry of Shulan city, the school has been running courses in such fields as rural tourism, modern agronomy, e-commerce and agricultural machinery.

The school has also maintained close cooperation with local enterprises, including travel agencies and scenic spot operators, which enables students to have a hands-on experience in varied positions before graduation.

The school started to partner with Inmyshow in November 2021. After that, a series of training sessions were co-conducted by both sides to cultivate more talent for the sound development of local e-commerce sector in Shulan.

"That's a solid step for promoting school-enterprise cooperation," says Fang.

"We plan to equip students and local e-commerce practitioners with required new media skills to bolster the selling of agricultural products and other local specialties."

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Medical professionals conduct health checkups for rural residents and provide them with treatment and medicines in Miaoqian village, Changning, Hunan province, on Thursday. XINHUA

Grassroots doctors play a crucial role in anti-COVID fight

CHANGSHA — Hou Luobo, 27, became a rural doctor in Youxian county, Central China's Hunan province, in October 2019. About two months later, unprecedented challenges posed by a new virus made for an unusual start to his medical career.

For the past three years, the main focus of his job was COVID-19 prevention and control. Now with China having optimized relevant COVID-response measures, the priorities of his daily work have shifted to monitoring the health conditions of villagers and providing them with timely medical support.

"Compared with the intensity of doing mass nucleic acid testing, conducting door-to-door inspections and follow-up observations for people under quarantine in the past, the workload is less heavy now, but we still dare not slacken in our efforts," says Hou.

Yanliang village in Yajiangqiao township, where Hou works, is located in a remote mountainous area administered by Zhuzhou city. With many young people working or settling in the city proper, most of the dwellers in the village are the elderly and children.

"Since we fine-tuned the measures for pandemic response, the villagers are commuting more frequently between these two places, so we need to conduct health assessments for key populations and provide classified services in a timely manner," he notes.

Recently, the number of COVID-19 patients has increased visibly in Yanliang village, and Hou receives about 80 outpatient visits every day.

"Some of the elderly are physically weak or have underlying diseases, and I will follow up on patients with chronic diseases or mobility difficulties and deliver medicines to their homes," he says, adding that most of the patients in the village only have mild symptoms.

Hou is one of the millions of doctors and health workers in rural China who have long put down roots and safeguarded people's health in the countryside.

Data from the National Health Commission shows that with the continuous improvement of the

medical care capacity of primary hospitals — more than 90 percent of patients in the countryside receive treatment at county-level hospitals — rural doctors like Hou are the first line of defense against the virus.

In Dangcha village, Northwest China's Ningxia Hui autonomous region, "shared medicine kits" are sources of great assistance to Hu Zhenglie, a village doctor.

Dangcha village is home to more than 800 residents, most of whom are "left-behind" elderly.

"Though the COVID-19 infection rate in rural areas is relatively low due to lighter residential density, the demand for antipyretic and cough medicines has been high recently, because the residents here usually don't stock medicine in advance," explains Hu. "The 'shared medicine kits' initiated by the local Party branch have been a huge help."

In Shagou township, Ningxia's Xiji county, the local government raised 4,000 antipyretic tablets and dispatched them to families in need — free of charge.

Ma Hongliang, a villager in Shagou township, had a family of seven infected with the virus a few days ago.

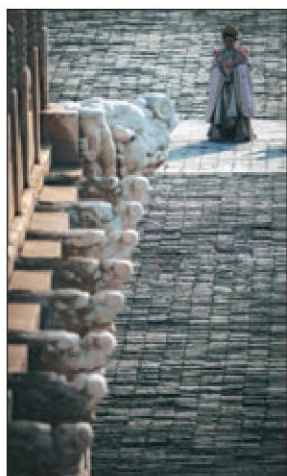
"There was no medicine at home. Fortunately, the doctor soon delivered antipyretics to us," Ma says.

Official data shows that as of October, a total of 19,400 fever clinics (outpatient clinics) had been built in township hospitals and community health service centers nationwide. Doctors at grassroots level have made tremendous contributions to China's anti-pandemic fight over the past years.

Right after a heavy snowfall, Xiang Kaimin, a doctor in Shuanglong township, Hunan's Xiangxi Tujia and Miao autonomous prefecture, commenced his rounds of visits to local households.

"More people have recently returned home and the number of COVID infections is on the rise. However, we can only visit four families as of noon due to roads made slippery by snow," says Xiang. "But I believe everything will get better, as spring will arrive soon."

XINHUA



A tourist dressed in period clothing has her photo taken at the Forbidden City. MICHAEL RHYS CARD / CHINA DAILY

A beacon of history at the heart of China

With restrictions slowly lifting in the capital, I took the opportunity to visit the Forbidden City, also known as the Palace Museum, arguably one of the most iconic landmarks in the country if not the world, before the inevitable crowds return in their droves.

Sitting along the city's central axis, the Forbidden City is the literal and figurative beating heart of the capital. Occupying 720,000 square meters, the palace is three times larger than the Louvre in France and was declared as the world's largest preservation of wooden structures from the ancient world, alongside being named as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987.

The long history of the palace is just as enthralling as the building

that stands in the city today. The complex was completed in 1420 by Emperor Yongle during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) after 16 years of construction, with an estimated 1 million laborers taking part in the building process. The Forbidden City was the seat of power to 14 Ming Dynasty emperors and a further 10 during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) over a period of nearly 500 years.

I have visited the palace complex on several occasions in the past, and have always been in awe of its sheer scale and the incredible details of its construction and design, but if I were to have one quibble, it would be the overwhelming number of tourists (14 million annual visitors) scattered throughout the palace grounds. So I was pleasantly surprised, despite the



Michael Rhys Card
Second Thoughts

pandemic-related reason behind it, to find the complex was almost empty on this occasion.

This, compounded with the fact that majority of the small number of visitors were dressed in period clothing, led to an interesting visiting experience where it almost felt as if I was walking through the palace in its heyday, when no one could enter or leave the Forbidden City without permission from the emperor himself.

Despite only 80 percent of the palace being open to the public, with the remaining 20 percent, including areas that haven't been repaired, and that are used for special purposes such as the storage and protection of cultural relics, it would take far more than a day to be able to see everything the Forbidden City has to offer, with more than 90 palace quarters and courtyards, more than 1,000 buildings and over 8,700 rooms.

There are countless unique aspects to the Forbidden City that are worth exploring, such as the beautifully crafted ridge beasts on the roofs of the buildings.

Appearing as a common feature on all imperial buildings, the size and number of these creatures played multiple roles in the past, protecting the building from evil spirits and preventing fire, while the total number of creatures on the roof

would denote its importance, with the Hall of Supreme Harmony in the Forbidden City having the highest number. And the roofs themselves are designed in such a way to keep birds from landing on them, to allow the palace to retain its magnificence.

The importance of numbers is also prevalent throughout the palace, with each of its gates, excluding the Donghuanmen Gate (East Prosperity Gate), being adorned with gilded door studs in a nine-by-nine pattern as the number nine implies supremacy and eternity.

With this quieter and more peaceful visiting experience, it is easy to see why the Forbidden City has the reputation it does, with its grand scale and long and fascinating history, it deservedly sits at the center of China's long story.

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