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Xi sends congratulatory message to Brazil's Lula

By MO JINGXI
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President Xi Jinping congratulated Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva on his inauguration as president of the Federative Republic of Brazil, saying that he is ready to work with Lula to take bilateral ties to a higher level.

In a congratulatory message sent to Lula on Monday, Xi noted that

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China and Brazil are both major developing countries with global influence and important emerging markets.

The two countries, which are comprehensive strategic partners, share broad common interests and shoulder common development responsibilities, he said.

Xi said that since the two countries established diplomatic ties 48 years ago, China-Brazil relations have witnessed sustained and in-depth development, thanks to joint efforts of both sides.

This increasingly mature and dynamic relationship has become a model of relations between major developing countries with rich content and broad prospects, he said.

Noting that he attaches great value to the development of the China-Brazil comprehensive strategic partnership, Xi said he stands ready to work with Lula to continue to firmly support each other in taking a development path in line with their own national conditions and respect each other's core interests.

He also expressed his willingness to lead and push the partnership to a higher level with Lula from a strategic and long-term perspective, in order to better benefit the two countries and their peoples.

Vice-President Wang Qishan, who led a delegation to Brazil from Saturday to Monday as Xi's special envoy, attended Lula's inauguration ceremony in Brasilia, the capital.

During their meeting, Wang conveyed Xi's warm congratulations and good wishes to Lula as well as his invitation for Lula to visit China.



Tourists from Gansu province visit Potala Palace in Lhasa, Tibet autonomous region, on Tuesday. The scenic spot, which is also a UNESCO World Heritage site, reopened to the public on Tuesday after its temporary closure on Aug 9. All visitors will be exempted from entrance ticket fees until March 15. LI LIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Farewell to Pele



A mourner holds up a jersey on Monday before passing the casket of Brazilian soccer legend Pele as he lies in state on the pitch of his former club Santos' Vila Belmiro stadium in Santos, Brazil. After holding three days of national mourning, the country has been paying its final respects to the player known as "The King", who died on Thursday at age 82 after a battle with cancer. CARLA CARNIEL / REUTERS

Holiday consumption shows robust recovery

New Year 'spending enthusiasm' welcomed as Spring Festival nears

By ZHU WENQIAN
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Restaurants, hotels and shopping malls across the country saw a return of the long-lost hustle and bustle of crowds during the New Year holiday, following China's optimization of COVID-19 control measures and as a large number of people recovered from coronavirus infections.

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The daily service sector saw robust recovery during the three-day holiday from Saturday to Monday, and daily online consumption in the sector was 75 percent higher than for the New Year holiday in 2019, before the pandemic, according to a new report by online platform Meituan, which provides a range of lifestyle and delivery services.

In particular, the amount of spending recorded in Guangdong, Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces, as well as Beijing and Shanghai, ranked at the top nationwide.

Meanwhile, nonlocal spending

— the amount spent by travelers — jumped significantly and helped drive overall holiday consumption, the report said.

"Chinese consumers have shown their spending enthusiasm as Spring Festival draws near, and there was pent-up demand, which was earlier limited by the pandemic, that needed to be released," said Song Xiangqing, vice-dean of Beijing Normal University's School of Government.

"Retail, catering, accommodations and scenic spots nationwide are expected to embrace another round of a spending spree," Song added.

During the first two days of the holiday, many restaurants, especially large-scale ones, saw people waiting in line to dine, and the total amount that dine-in customers paid in online transactions at restaurants was double that of the previous week, according to Meituan.

Liu Zihao, the owner of a flower shop in Beijing, said that as of the afternoon of New Year's Eve, which was Saturday, the volume of orders gradually began to increase. As of Sunday morning, he had sent out

Chinese consumers have shown a gradual recovery in their confidence to take trips, and this has contributed to the fast warming-up of the domestic tourism market over the New Year's holiday. In particular, the demand for long-haul travel picked up."

Cheng Chaogong, senior researcher at Tongcheng Travel

dozens of bouquets via express delivery, China Media Group reported.

Local entertainment, such as visiting karaoke venues and hot springs, was also favored by young

consumers during the holiday. The volume of orders at do-it-yourself handmade workshops surged 242 percent over the pre-holiday period, and the number of orders for having New Year-themed photos taken also jumped remarkably, according to Meituan.

Meanwhile, vacations at high-end hotels or bed-and-breakfast stays with distinctive features also were popular. On Dec 31, the occupancy rate of high-end hotels available through Meituan hit a record high for 2022, and more than 80 percent of those booking rooms were under 30 years old, the report said.

Many hotels at popular tourism destinations, such as Sanya in Hainan province, Xishuangbanna in Yunnan province and Zhangjiakou in Hebei province, saw their rooms fully booked during the holiday.

Prices of hotel rooms, especially those in warmer destinations, climbed significantly during the holiday, according to Suzhou-based online travel agency Tongcheng Travel.

"Chinese consumers have shown a gradual recovery in their confidence to take trips, and this has contributed to the fast warming-up of the domestic tourism market over the New Year's holiday. In particular, the demand for long-haul travel picked up," said Cheng Chaogong, a senior researcher at Tongcheng Travel.

"The business performance and the recovery of the tourism markets in some destinations have been better than expected, and this has laid a solid foundation for the further rebound of the tourism market for the whole year," Cheng said.

Marcos' visit to help boost regional stability

In this time of global economic and geopolitical tumult, Asian regional stability and economic resilience will get a big boost from the three-day state visit to China of Philippine President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr and his wife, Liza Araneta Marcos. They are accompanied by top government officials and a business delegation.

Marcos is visiting China from Tuesday to Thursday at the invitation of President Xi Jinping.

China is the world's biggest consumer market and second-largest economy, and the Philippines is competing with other Asian neighbors for a bigger share of Chinese trade, investment, tourism, technology and aid.

The Philippines is also consequential to China as the world's 12th-most-populous nation, and because it is a country strategically located at the crossroads of the Pacific Ocean and the South China Sea, and is the geographically closest

WORLD WATCH
By Wilson Lee Flores

neighbor to China's Taiwan island, it is therefore important to regional peace and stability.

Through most of the past two decades, former Philippine president Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, who is now deputy speaker of the Philippine Congress, and former president Rodrigo Duterte had both wisely guided the former United States colony into a more independent foreign policy. They deftly made the country a good friend of all the world's big powers. Marcos is expected to continue this pragmatic, constitutionally mandated and independent foreign policy, which is similar to the stance of most member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

The timing of Marcos' state visit

is auspicious, because China is now further opening up its economy and the visit is occurring at the outset of the new year.

Among the areas for high-level discussions and, hopefully, increased cooperation between the Philippines and China are trade, investment, aid, infrastructure, energy, security, possible joint oil and gas exploration, tourism, agriculture, technology, culture and people-to-people exchanges.

Marcos is not an ordinary Filipino politician. He is in Beijing as a true, sincere and old friend of China, because it was his parents, the late former president Ferdinand Edralin Marcos and Imelda Romualdez Marcos, who had audaciously opened official diplomatic relations between Manila and Beijing at the height of the Cold War era in 1975, four years ahead of Washington opening official diplomatic ties with Beijing.

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WETLANDS PROTECTION WORK STEPPED UP

Field monitoring stations and information platforms play key roles

By LI HONGYANG
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In November, China announced that about 11 million hectares of wetlands would be included in its national parks system.

This important decision was made at the 14th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

Several wetlands management committees and bureaus are pressing ahead with plans to



build national parks, including the Yellow River Estuary National Park in Shandong province and Qinghai Lake National Park in Qinghai province.

In June, the Shandong provincial government applied to the National Forestry and Grassland Administration to set up the Yellow River Estuary National Park to protect the waterway's delta.

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Left: A worker feeds black-necked cranes at a wetland reserve in Zhaotong, Yunnan province. CAO MENGYAO / XINHUA



Right: Visitors enjoy Qinghai Lake National Park in Qinghai province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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The authorities in Shandong have since completed the preparatory work and will start the project soon.

Xu Mingde, director of the Yellow River Estuary National Nature Reserve Management Committee, said an area of 3,518 square kilometers has been allocated for the national park.

The reserve is a global breeding ground for the Oriental White Stork and black-billed gull.

To prepare for the national park, the reserve returned thousands of hectares of farmland to wetlands and beaches. It also invested billions of yuan in projects such as connecting water systems, dredging tidal ditches, restoring sea grass beds, and treating invasive species.

After it is established, the national park is expected to integrate sea and land resources, Xu said.

Since the National Park Administration approved Qinghai Lake National Park in April, the Qinghai Lake National Nature Reserve has completed plans for ecological and water protection, and a scientific research and monitoring system in the lake's basin.

Some 16 key projects, including grassland treatment, sand prevention and control, and wetland protection and restoration, have been launched, according to officials at the reserve.

Consensus important

At the opening of the 14th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention, or COP14, in Wuhan, Hubei province, President Xi Jinping said via video link that it is important to build global consensus on valuing wetlands, respecting nature, minimizing disruption and damage to wetlands caused

by human activity, and protecting the ecological security of wetlands for future generations.

"China has recently drawn up a layout plan for national parks, under which a number of such parks will be designated, accounting for about 10 percent of the nation's land area," Xi said.

He added that wetlands national parks include Three-River-Source National Park, Qinghai Lake National Park, Ruoergai National Park, Yellow River Estuary National Park, Liao River Estuary National Park, and Songnen Plain Crane Homeland National Park.

COP14 was held from Nov 5-13 in Wuhan and Geneva, Switzerland. Every three years, representatives of contracting parties meet at COP, where they adopt decisions on administering the Ramsar Convention and guiding its implementation. Last year was the first time that such a meeting had been held in China.

After becoming a contracting party to the convention in 1992, China embarked on wetland protection. It was one of the first countries to complete three national wetland resource surveys via field monitoring stations and information management platforms.

Zhang Mingxiang, a professor at Beijing Forestry University's School of Ecology and Nature Conservation, explained the importance of wetland protection.

As one of the three major ecosystems, along with forests and oceans, wetlands store carbon within their plant communities and soil, instead of releasing it to the atmosphere as carbon dioxide. In this way, they help moderate global climate conditions, he said.

"While plants on land store carbon dioxide in the air through photosynthesis to produce what we call green carbon, creatures in the oceans store carbon dioxide, or blue carbon."



A snow leopard stands in Three-River-Source National Park, Qinghai province, in July 2020. XINHUA

Wetlands: National parks plan drawn up

"We still need more measures that mirror the natural way to restore wetlands, and also to protect wildlife habitats and vegetation."

Bao Daming, deputy head of the National Forestry and Grassland Administration's wetland management department

Tan Guangming, deputy head of the National Forestry and Grassland Administration, said at a news conference during COP14 that China will place more importance on protecting wetlands and restoring such areas.

As home to 4 percent of the world's wetland areas, China has met the needs of 20 percent of the global population for wetland-related life and culture, Tan said.

He added that wetlands protection work includes improving overall planning, a legal system and related technology.

Protection bolstered

According to a plan released by the central government in October, by 2025, China will have protected 55 percent of its wetlands and added 20 such areas of international importance and 50 of national importance.

After the nation's first specialized law on protecting wetlands was introduced on June 1, comprehensive protection was strengthened, according to the National Forestry and Grassland Administration.

The wetlands protection legislation clarifies the division of management and introduces harsher punishment for damaging wetland areas.

The law restricts construction at important national wetlands and bans harmful activities, including land reclamation, overgrazing, over-harvesting and discharging wastewater.

Human activities at wetlands, such as tourism, planting, animal husbandry, aquaculture and shipping, must be undertaken carefully to minimize adverse impact.

In July, a monitoring system, the first of its kind in Hubei, was given a trial run at Chenhu Lake Wetland in Wuhan. It has since recorded real-time data and helped with patrol work.

In 2021, the wetland was home to some 86,000 birds from 227 species, according to figures from the monitoring system.

Officials at the reserve said bird watchers and patrol guards may

inadvertently miss counting some of the birds, but the system performs this task accurately. It detects the type of birds arriving or leaving the wetland, and the areas they prefer, by identifying species through the sounds they make. It also monitors bird sounds in the wild and compares them with those in its database.

Yan Jun, head of the Wuhan Bird Watching Society, said that before 2015, just 30,000 birds spent the winter at Chenhu Lake Wetland, as the local environment was not ideal for them.

"At the time, nets were used for cage aquaculture in the lake, which should have been the wintering ground for birds. Fishing boats operated on the lake, and nets dotted the water surface," Yan said.

Since 2015, the local government has removed illegal fishponds in the lake and introduced environmental restoration projects. By January last year, the lake was home to about 86,000 birds, according to surveys carried out by Yan's team.

Central government data show that China's wetland protection rate now exceeds 50 percent, up from 43.5 percent in 2015, and the nation now has 64 wetland areas of international importance and 29 such areas of national importance.

Bao Daming, deputy head of the National Forestry and Grassland Administration's wetland management department, said at a news conference in November that despite the achievements made in conserving wetlands, China needs to strengthen their restoration scientifically and systematically.

"Specific measures are needed for wetland governance in different regions to improve the integrity of wetland ecosystems," Bao said.

"We still need more measures that mirror the natural way to restore wetlands, and also to protect wildlife habitats and vegetation."



Water levels have risen at the source of the Yangtze River in Three-River-Source National Park, Qinghai province. XIAO YIJU / XINHUA

By LI HONGYANG

Mangrove coverage in China has returned to the level it was in the 1980s after years of restoration efforts, according to a research report on wetlands released by the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

This result was achieved as the overall degradation of wetlands in China slowed from 2015 to 2020, according to the research findings, which were released on Dec 27.

A National Forestry and Grassland Administration survey shows that China's mangrove forests now cover 27,100 hectares. The country is

Mangrove forests on the rise after years of restoration work

among the few worldwide that have seen their mangrove areas increase.

Bao Daming, deputy head of the administration's wetland management department, said at a news conference in November that mangroves in the coastal intertidal zone form unique ecosystems.

"These trees and shrubs purify seawater, prevent winds and waves, maintain biodiversity and store carbon. China's nature reserves are home to about 55 percent of its

mangrove areas," Bao said.

According to the Special Action Plan for Mangrove Protection and Restoration (2020-2025), China will build and restore 18,800 hectares of mangrove forests by 2025.

Mangroves are important habitats for 341 threatened species globally, the National Forestry and Grassland Administration said.

For example, in Guangdong province, the Shenzhen Bay Area, which includes mangrove wetlands,

is home to migratory birds and is a major transit point on the north-south migration route. Tens of thousands of such birds rest there as they journey between East Asia and Australasia every year, the administration said.

Liao Baowen, a mangrove expert at the Chinese Academy of Forestry, told People's Daily that in the past, experts and workers focused more on planting and restoring vegetation. But now, more attention needs

to be paid to restoring the overall function of the mangrove ecosystem.

"For example, while planting trees, we should provide enough room for wildlife to rest, including tidal gullies, beaches and areas of shallow water," Liao was quoted as saying.

He added that no more than 60 percent of these areas should be filled with mangroves, leaving at least 40 percent of the space as habitats for birds and other creatures.

In November, at the 14th Meeting

of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention, China said it would promote international exchanges and cooperation to protect four migratory bird routes that pass through the country. It said it would also set up an international mangrove center in Shenzhen.

The National Forestry and Grassland Administration said this center will carry out training and technical exchanges, boost information sharing, and monitor and evaluate ecosystems. It will also provide services and assistance to all parties to the Ramsar Convention, especially developing countries.

TOP NEWS

New FM vows further support for Sino-US ties

He outlines hopes for key relationship, says he will encourage dialogue, mutual understanding

By ZHANG YUNBI
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China's newly appointed Foreign Minister Qin Gang pledged on Tuesday to "continue to care about and support the growth of China-US relations" as he left his post as Beijing's top envoy in Washington.

Qin, 56, was named foreign minister on Friday after he served as China's ambassador to the United States for about 17 months.

"I came to assume office in 2021 at a time of severe challenges for China-US relations," he said in one of the posts on his official Twitter page, as he bade farewell to the people of the US. "I want to pay sincere thanks to the people of the United States for the strong support and assistance given to me and the Chinese Embassy during this period," he wrote.

Qin said that during his tenure as ambassador, he worked to implement the common understandings of the presidents of both nations, served as a bridge and bond of communication between the two countries, and explored the right way for China and the US to get along in the new era.

He recalled that he visited 22 states in over 500 days during his stay in the US. "I went to government agencies, Congress, think tanks, enterprises, factories, ports, farms, schools and sports fields, and made many friends across the US. I have been deeply impressed by so many hardworking, friendly and talented American people that I met," he tweeted.

Speaking on the way forward, he wrote, "What's past is prologue. Going forward, I will continue to care about and support the growth of China-US relations, encourage dialogue, mutual understanding and affinity between the two peoples."

Qin also vowed to work for "mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation" between the two countries, and to

“What's past is prologue. Going forward, I will continue to care about and support the growth of China-US relations, encourage dialogue, mutual understanding and affinity between the two peoples.”

Qin Gang, China's newly appointed foreign minister in a farewell letter after 17 months as the nation's ambassador to the US

make his "due efforts for the well-being of the two peoples and for world peace, stability and development".

On Monday, Qin had issued two separate letters to bid farewell to overseas Chinese and Chinese students studying in the US. He noted that the total population of overseas Chinese in the US had reached more than 5 million, and they "have become an important part of the pluralistic society in the US".

The overseas Chinese community in the US has worked determinedly to promote people-to-people friendship despite unprecedented resistance and at a time when China-US relations are at a low, he wrote. The community has helped the two countries strengthen mutual understanding, enhance mutual trust and develop cooperation, he added.

In his letter addressed to Chinese students, Qin voiced his hope that they will make more friends, boost exchanges, act as grassroots envoys of China-US friendship and promote mutual understanding between the two peoples.

Lighting up the New Year



Chinese New Year lanterns decorate the Thean Hou Temple in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on Monday. People around the world will join in celebrations to welcome the Year of the Rabbit on Jan 22. WONG FOK LOY / GETTY IMAGES

Relief felt as bustling Beijing returns to normal

By DU JUAN
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Traffic jams in downtown Beijing, busy subway stations and bustling shopping malls indicated the city was returning to business as normal on Tuesday, amid the relaxed COVID-19 measures.

Vehicles crawled on all major city roads between 7 am and 9 am, a scene rarely witnessed since COVID-19 response measures were optimized in early December. Data from the Beijing Transportation Operations Coordination Center indicated a road network traffic index of 8.15, meaning "serious congestion". It lasted for about an hour.

Lin Fan, who took more than 40 minutes to reach his workplace on Tuesday, said it was the first time traffic jams in the city didn't cause frustration.

"I felt a sense of relief to see so many people outdoors, getting their lives back," he said. According to the transportation

“The city government has taken multiple measures to boost consumption, which has given us huge confidence.”

Zhao Zesheng, co-president of Hopson Commercial, a real estate developer headquartered in Beijing

center, 2.41 million people entered or exited subway stations by 9 am on Tuesday, an increase of 28 percent compared with that of last week. The number of bus passengers reached 970,000, an increase of 17 percent.

Commercial establishments and tourism businesses in the city showed promising numbers as well.

Between Saturday and Monday, the three-day New Year's Day holiday, Beijing's major department stores, supermarkets, restaurants and online commerce platforms racked up 3.53 billion yuan (\$511 million) in total revenue, which was equal to 83.8 percent of the total revenue during the same period the previous year.

According to the Beijing Municipal Commerce Bureau, 52 major commercial areas in the capital saw about 12.18 million visits during the holiday.

Zhao Zesheng, co-president of Hopson Commercial, a real estate developer headquartered in Beijing, said the company's shopping malls recorded a rapid increase in the number of customers in the past two weeks, especially on weekends and during the New Year's Day holiday.

"The city government has taken multiple measures to boost consumption, which has given us huge confidence. The soaring number of shoppers and diners in

our malls has shown that those measures have been effective," he said.

Buoyed by optimistic predictions about an economic rebound, Hopson Commercial opened a new mall, called MOHO, in Shanghai's Jing'an district on Dec 31.

"It covers an area of 80,000 square meters and boasts more than 80 top brands, which are expected to establish a new fashion landmark and further drive consumption," Zhao said.

In the past weeks, Beijing has promoted New Year-themed skating and skiing activities, which have attracted many consumers.

Holidaymakers also felt more optimistic about going out. A total of 151 major attractions in the city received 2.69 million visits during the holiday, which led to a total revenue of 248.27 million yuan, up 44.5 percent compared with 2019, when there was no pandemic.

Wang Songsong contributed to this story.

Sarcophagus returned



Mostafa Waziri, top official at the Supreme Council of Antiquities, examines an ancient wooden sarcophagus during a handover ceremony at the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Cairo on Monday. The sarcophagus was returned to Egypt after US authorities determined it had been looted, Egyptian officials said on Monday. MOHAMED SALAH / AP

China not in 'space race', industry insiders say

By ZHAO LEI
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All of China's activities in outer space are intended for the country's social, economic and technological development rather than for a "space race" with other nations, according to insiders in China's space industry.

"We carry out spaceflights to develop high technology and improve economic growth and people's living standard. We don't take part in a space race with any other countries because competition in this regard is meaningless," said Yang Yuguang, a senior space industry observer in Beijing and vice-chair of the International Astronautical Federation's space transportation committee.

"If some people are so fond of a

space race, then it is their own space race, and we will not get involved," he said on Tuesday in Beijing. "In terms of moon landing, it is our business to decide when we will send our astronauts there, and it is no one else's business. And when others will land their people on the moon is none of China's business."

Yang made the remarks to rebut NASA Administrator Bill Nelson's recent claim that there already is a space race between the United States and China and that China is likely to dominate the field of lunar exploration and try to keep others out.

According to plans made by the China National Space Administration, the country intends to send its Chang'e 6 robotic mission to the moon's far side and then collect

and bring samples back. After that, the Chang'e 7 and 8 unmanned spacecraft are scheduled to land on the moon's South Pole to establish a science outpost.

"We've chosen the South Pole as the location of our future research station, and that means we will deploy our probes there. But that should not be translated into 'Chinese occupation' of the region," Yang said. "As long as your spacecraft will not affect the safety of ours, you can place them anywhere you wish, but if you deliberately land a spacecraft very close to ours and its engines' blaze damages our equipment, then such acts are nothing but provocations."

The researcher said there are rules in any line of work, and lunar exploration is no exception.

"It is universally accepted that a

spacecraft should not disrupt the operations of others that have already been there before it," he added.

Wang Yanan, editor-in-chief of Aerospace Knowledge magazine, said the nature of China's space activities is peaceful, as the nation has never wanted to use its space endeavors to harm other countries.

"Nelson seems to enjoy his personal hobby of sensationalizing 'China's threat in space'. I don't know the exact reasons behind his move, but I am convinced that it is largely related to money, or more specifically, his struggle for more funds to his agency," he said.

China always welcomes other nations' goodwill and invitation of cooperation when it comes to space exploration, Wang said.

Visit: Trip is a great opportunity to expand trade, investment and other cooperation

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There also was the pivotal September 1974 visit by Imelda Marcos, who met as a special envoy with Chairman Mao Zedong and was accompanied by her son, the then 17-year-old Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr.

That visit was unforgettable due to Imelda respectfully putting Mao's hand to her cheek, and then Mao surprisingly kissing her hand in a classic Western gesture. The scene was captured by photographers, becoming what Chinese media described as "the No 1 kiss in the world" and "the only

photograph of Mao Zedong kissing a woman".

Now Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr is again visiting, but this time as president. So this state visit is not only strategic and historic, but also is sentimental and a reaffirmation of the traditional close friendship between the two countries. May diplomacy and the strong bonds of history between these two countries result in many great win-win and mutually beneficial economic gains.

The economies of the Philippines and China are now sustaining the positive momentum of economic growth and recovery following the

So this state visit is not only strategic and historic, but also is sentimental and a reaffirmation of the traditional close friendship between the two countries. May diplomacy and the strong bonds of history between these two countries result in many great win-win and mutually beneficial economic gains.

impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Marcos' state visit to Beijing is a great opportunity to vigorously expand trade, investment and other cooperation.

In a wider context, the Philippines is an important part of the resource-rich ASEAN, which has already replaced the US as the second-largest trading partner of

China after the European Union.

Another positive factor for the success of Marcos' state visit and for bilateral cooperation is the fact that the economies of the Philippines and China are complementary, and the two nations are not competitors.

The Philippines can offer rich natural and agricultural resources, great tourism potential, a high-quality and English-speaking service industry, and a market of 110 million mostly young people. On the other hand, China can offer the Philippines its advanced industrial and technological resources, vast finance

capabilities and the world's biggest consumer market.

In this turbulent period of geopolitical and economic uncertainties, the strengthening of Philippines-China economic and strategic cooperation will boost the economic growth prospects, resilience and stability of the two countries, as well as of ASEAN and Asia.

The author, who is the moderator of the *Pandesa Forum* and a columnist for *The Philippine Star*, is an economic and political analyst. The views do not necessarily reflect those of *China Daily*.

CHINA

Rail sector seeks recovery in new year

Network predicts strong growth ahead as country returns to normalized travel

By LUO WANGSHU
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More than 4,000 kilometers of new railway lines were put into operation last year, bringing the total network of China's railway system to 155,000 km, with 42,000 km being high-speed railways, according to the national railway operator China State Railway Group on Tuesday.

Last year, the sector built more railway infrastructure to stabilize economic growth despite the downward pressure on the economy caused by the epidemic and external challenges.

A total of 4,100 km of new railway lines opened to traffic last year, and 2,082 km were high-speed railways, Liu Zhenfang, president of the company, said at the company's annual conference in Beijing.

The network plans to build more railways this year. More than 3,000 km of new railway lines are expected to be put into operation this year, and 2,500 km will be high-speed railways, he added.

It is part of the company's annual goals in 2023 to promote the sector's high-quality development and contribute to the country's resurgence following COVID-19.

A total of 2.69 billion passenger trips are expected to be made this year, a significant year-on-year increase of 67.6 percent.

Some 3.97 billion metric tons of freight are expected to be handled this year, up 1.8 percent year-on-year, Liu added.

The sector aims to receive 817 bil-

lion yuan (\$118 billion) in total transportation revenue this year, a year-on-year increase of 17.9 percent.

The expected revenue is back to the amount of 2019 — prior to the pandemic — when the sector gained 818 billion yuan as revenue.

Among them, passenger services are expected to bring in 332 billion yuan in revenue, a year-on-year increase of 54.6 percent.

Affected by the epidemic, fewer people traveled last year, with the network handling 1.61 billion passenger trips.

However, the network played a key role in transporting goods during the epidemic last year. The amount of cargo transported via the railway network was 3.9 billion tons, up 4.7 percent year-on-year.

A total of 1.49 billion tons of cargo were coal for power production, a year-on-year increase of 13 percent.

Despite the downward pressure on the economy, the sector completed 710 billion yuan in fixed asset investment last year to stabilize economic growth.

The railway sector, especially its passenger services, was badly hit by the epidemic in the past three years.

Fewer people traveled and fewer services were arranged, and shops were shut at railway stations.

As China has downgraded its COVID-19 management, transport hubs including railway stations are gradually resuming their hustle and bustle.

The railway sector is preparing for the upcoming Spring Festival travel rush, which will begin on Jan 7 and end on Feb 15.

Pair of provincial Party officials take up posts

By CANG WEI in Nanjing
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The Communist Party of China Central Committee announced the appointments of new Party secretaries for Jiangsu and Qinghai provinces on Tuesday.

Xin Changxing, former Party chief of Qinghai, was appointed Party chief of Jiangsu, replacing Wu Zhenglou.

Born in 1963, Xin is a native of East China's Shandong province and served as vice-minister of human resources and social security, and director of the National Civil Service Administration. He served as the deputy Party chief of Anhui province in 2016.

In 2020, Xin served as deputy Party chief of Qinghai province before he was appointed governor the same year. In 2022, he was appointed Party chief of the Communist Party of China Qinghai Provincial Committee.

Also on Tuesday, Chen Gang, born in 1965 and a native of East China's Jiangsu province, was



Xin Changxing



Chen Gang

appointed Party chief of Qinghai province.

Chen has worked in various positions including as a member of the Beijing CPC Standing Committee, Party chief of Guiyang city in Guizhou province and member of the Guizhou CPC Standing Committee, and then he served in many positions in Hebei province including as deputy governor and Party chief of Xiong'an New Area, and deputy Party chief of Hebei.

He was secretary of the Leading Party Members Group of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions in December, 2020, and then became the vice-president of the federation in February, 2021.

Good-time gathering



Tourists and villagers in special costumes gather to enjoy shows celebrating Lusheng Festival in the village of Dali in Liuzhou, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, on Jan 3. The Miao ethnic festival features the *lusheng* — a bamboo pipe instrument — and is held to honor ancestors and pray for a good harvest in the coming year. LONG TAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

Environment, economy advance as one in Yangtze River Basin

By HOU LIQIANG
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China has managed to advance environmental protection and economic development in parallel in the Yangtze River Basin, but more efforts are needed to address some prominent environmental problems, according to a senior national legislator.

"The Yangtze River Basin has experienced continuous improvement in its water quality at the same time as increasing high-quality economic development," Wang Chen, vice-chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee, said on Dec 28.

In 2021, 97.1 percent of the national monitoring sections in the basin registered "fairly good" water quality, he said while reporting to the committee the results of an NPC inspection on the implementation of the Yangtze River Protection Law.

Adopted in late 2020, the law went into effect on March 1, 2021.

The country has a five-tier water quality system for surface water, with Grade I the best. Water quality is considered "fairly good" if it is at or above Grade III. According to the Ministry of Ecology and Environment, the proportion of national monitoring sections with fairly good water quality in the basin stood at 85 percent at the end of 2020.

The basin contributed 46.6 percent of the country's GDP in 2021, he said. The rate is 4.3 percentage

points higher than that in 2015, according to the National Development and Reform Commission.

The achievements were the result of a series of measures taken by various government bodies and local governments to implement the Yangtze River Protection Law, the vice-chairman said.

The Ministry of Finance, for example, has made consistent efforts to enhance support for Yangtze protection. From 2021 to 2022, it allocated 440 billion yuan (\$63 billion) in transfer payments for protection efforts, he said, adding the payments made last year went up by almost 11.3 percentage points from 2021.

Since 2021, about 16,900 kilometers of sewage pipes have been built or renovated in the basin, he noted. The total daily capacity of newly built sewage treatment plants since then has reached over 6 million cubic meters.

The vice-chairman also highlighted the great efforts the country has made to impose a 10-year fishing moratorium in the basin as stipulated in the law.

Thanks to a joint law enforcement mechanism of different government bodies, he said, a grid-based system has been established and a dedicated fleet for law enforcement was founded in the Yangtze to enhance fishing management.

The 15 provincial-level regions along the Yangtze have signed agreements on cross-border law

enforcement to crack down on illegal fishing, he added.

He said law enforcement officers in the basin have confiscated 300,000 sets of netting gear and investigated roughly 16,000 people for illegal fishing since 2021.

Amid the country's resolute efforts to crack down on illegal fishing, however, many illegal fishing vessels tend to operate at night in some small tributaries. Some people have resorted to hiding fishing nets. "These actions have made it more difficult to find and crack down on illegal fishing," he said.

Some local governments have complained about fish resources in some water bodies that have experienced a quick recovery following the fishing ban that came into force on Jan 1, 2020, he said. There has been an excessively large quantity of fish in some closed water bodies, posing risks to the health of local water ecosystems.

He suggested rolling out fishing as a measure for ecological adjustment and control in some water bodies with too many fish and an imbalanced fish population, based on scientific appraisal and rigid examination and approval.

Wang also noted a series of environmental problems that have yet to be solved in the Yangtze River Basin, including a large number of waste mining sites that have not been remediated, inadequate sewage disposal infrastructure and a low utilization rate of waste from livestock breeding.

Truth-seeking pioneer dies age 87

By CAO YIN
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Officials, teachers and students from Nanjing University expressed their deep sorrow over the death of alumni Hu Fuming, who died at 87 on Monday.

Hu, a native of Wuxi, Jiangsu province, was well-known as being the main author of the famous article "Practice is the Sole Criterion for Testing the Truth", which was published in Guangming Daily in 1978.

Hu's funeral will be held at 9:30 am on Friday at Nanjing Funeral Home.

The university posted an obituary and the funeral notice via its official WeChat account, expressing great sorrow over the alumni's death. It said that Hu lived his life on the road of thought, lauding his contributions, wisdom and strength in the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

Guo Guangyin, former Party secretary of the university's Department of Philosophy, where Hu worked, recalled that Hu pro-

vided the orientation when he arrived at the school to study in 1973.

"Hu told us that those studying philosophy should be knowledgeable and have a reasonable knowledge structure, with good writing and communication skills. They also need to believe and apply Marxism to be talented and good at debate," Guo told Modern Express, a Jiangsu-based news outlet.

"We followed and implemented Hu's requirements in our studies, careers and our own lives after the orientation," the paper quoted Guo as saying.

Li Yang, one of the university students, said that Hu's pursuit of the truth is what every student in the department as well as media workers in the new era should learn, regarding it as the most precious inspiration for the youth, the report added.



Hu Fuming

FROM THE FRONT LINE DELEGATE'S TALE

Congress inspires village on path to prosperity

By ZHENG CAIXIONG
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Chen Yanhong has an ambitious goal of transforming her village of Gekeng in Yangshan county, Guangdong province, into a paradise for the integrated development of agriculture and tourism.

The Party chief and director of the village said she's confident of achieving the goal after attending the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, which concluded in Beijing in October last year.

"The work report of the 20th CPC National Congress and its mentioning of advancing rural vitalization across the board has inspired me and increased my confidence," she said.

Chen, a delegate to the congress, has mapped out a plan to develop the economy of her village to focus on agriculture and tourism and how they can be utilized together for mutual benefit.

After Chen returned to Gekeng, she held meetings with village cadres and visited households to discuss and ask for their opinions on the direction of the village's development, and extol the messages of the 20th CPC National Congress.

Located in the northern part of Guangdong province, Yangshan county, administered by the city of Qingyuan, has beautiful natural scenery and the agricultural products that come out of Gekeng are of high quality, said Chen.

"We have no problem with production, we only lack sales chains and need to further develop our deep-processing industry," she said.

To this end, priority will be given to the construction of roads, the expansion of logistics and distribution networks and the improvement of the village's environment and ecology while introducing new technologies and popularizing mechanization to increase agricultural efficiencies, Chen said.

According to Chen, great changes have already taken place in Gekeng since the village started promoting "the construction of a beautiful countryside" in 2014.

The once poverty-stricken Gekeng has become a village with a beautiful environment, excellent ecological conditions and a strong harmonious atmosphere, Chen said.

The village's economy has also developed rapidly in the past few years, she added.

Five cooperatives, three large family farms and more than 20 large poultry breeding households and major agricultural product growers have been established in the village, providing more than 200 jobs to locals.

Li Yundi, a Gekeng resident, said there used to be a big garbage problem in the village.

"After the sanitation infrastructure was upgraded, the village's environment has now become beautiful and the river is cleaner," she said.

Wu Jianhao, a social worker in the village from Qigong township, said the villagers have become more engaged since the environment has improved and their incomes have increased.

"I can clearly sense in my daily work, with the common goal of rural vitalization and the leading role that Party members and village cadres play, villagers are more energetic in participating in rural construction," he said.

Tang Xuting contributed to this story.

Rough ride



A man competes in a kayaking competition held in the Laohutiao section of the Nujiang River in Yunnan province on Sunday. The section of the river, with its long stretches of turbulent whitewater rapids, is known as "the No. 1 rapid of the Nujiang River". DENG BIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

CHINA

Medical moves



COVID-19 patients are hooked up to intravenous drips at a community medical center in Beijing's Chaoyang district on Monday. The patients had been transferred from hospitals to make room for those with more urgent needs during the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak.
CHENG GONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Global COVID-19 cooperation maintained

By ZOU SHUO

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China has maintained pragmatic cooperation and open, transparent communication with the World Health Organization and countries and regions worldwide since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic three years ago, Mi Feng, a spokesman for the National Health Commission, said on Tuesday.

In January 2020, the country offered to establish a technical communication mechanism with the WHO, and over the past three years, Chinese technical departments, institutions and experts have closely communicated with the organization, Mi said at a news conference.

The two sides have held more than 60 technical discussions on COVID-19 epidemic control, medical treatment, vaccine development and virus origin tracing, he said.

China has also held more than 300 epidemic control talks and conducted related activities with more than 180 countries and regions and over 10 international organizations, and it has shared its experiences in epidemic control without reservations, Mi said.

Since China announced 10 new optimized epidemic control measures last month, it has held two conferences with the WHO — one on Dec 9 and the other on Dec 30, with in-depth discussions on the nation's epidemic situation and its medical treatment and vaccination efforts, he said.

China is willing to continue cooperating with the WHO and the international community to contribute to ending the pandemic, he added.

Speaking at a news briefing on Tuesday, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said that since the outbreak of the epidemic, China has been actively participating in international anti-epidemic cooperation, and worked together with the international community to respond to the challenges of the epidemic as soon as possible.

A few days ago, the Chinese authority and the WHO held a special video conference. The two sides exchanged views on the current epidemic situation, medical treatment, vaccination and other technical issues, and agreed to continue technical exchanges to help the world end the pandemic as soon as possible, she said.

Cross-border passenger road services to resume

Preparations underway to slowly return foreign transits to pre-pandemic levels

By LUO WANGSHU

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China will gradually reopen cross-border passenger transport via road starting on Sunday, according to a work plan released by the Ministry of Transport following the nation's adjustment in its COVID-19 policies.

Local transport departments are required to propose plans to restore cross-border services by studying previous international passenger volumes, market demand and the development of enterprises that provide international road transportation.

Communication with authorities overseas will be strengthened, and after both parties reach an agreement upon the resumption of serv-

ices, the information will be released to the public.

The authority should assist enterprises to renew their operation permits and inspect vehicles, according to the plan.

It will strengthen cooperation with foreign transport service providers and bus stations, as well as ensure facilities along routes such as rest stops and gas stations are operating.

Training should also be provided before the resumption of services to improve drivers' understanding of transport policies and epidemic control measures.

For international cruise ships, pilot programs will be carried out first and then full services will be phased in.

The country will also offer more convenience for Chinese and foreign sailors to change shifts in China.

According to a statement released by the General Administration of Customs last week, provinces and autonomous regions will promote the orderly and steady resumption of transportation at borders.

It also said that all nucleic acid testing for COVID-19 for imported food at ports will be canceled starting on Sunday.

China announced last week it was downgrading its management of COVID-19 from Class A to Class B. As a major change to the country's antivirus strategy, the downgrade will ease restrictions for inbound travelers, and they will no longer have to undergo quarantine or take a nucleic acid test upon arrival in China.

Yang Zekun contributed to this story.

HK to normalize travel with mainland

By OASIS HU in Hong Kong

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The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region is getting ready to resume cross-border travel with the Chinese mainland as early as Sunday.

Customs and clearance officers have been recalled to border checkpoints, cross-boundary buses are undergoing mechanical checks after three years of being idle, and train staff have been summoned to re-familiarize themselves with their work.

Chief Secretary for Administration Eric Chan Kwok-ki revealed in a Sunday social media post that Hong Kong is striving to gradually resume normal travel with the mainland on Jan 8 at the earliest, and a quota will be set at the initial stage.

Beginning Jan 8, travelers to the mainland will no longer need to quarantine.

Local media reported that the Hong Kong government has submitted its proposal to the central government on the resumption of cross-boundary travel with the mainland and it will be made open on Wednesday at the earliest.

Citing sources, local media reported that the quota will be initially set at 30,000 to 50,000 people per day.

Lawmaker Michael Tien Puk-sun told China Daily on Tuesday that quotas will be allocated to different checkpoints to avoid crowds at any one particular spot.

Tien, a former chairman of Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation before it merged with MTR Corp,

“MTR is fully cooperating with the government ... to work out a plan to ensure its railroad service will gradually, orderly and comprehensively connect the SAR and the mainland.”

MTR Corp, Hong Kong railway operator

told China Daily that ticketing services for high-speed rail between Hong Kong and the mainland will be available on Thursday at the earliest.

The number of tickets up for grabs will be up to the initial quota that is set for cross-boundary travel, Tien added.

The rail operator has arranged for staff to return to their posts at stations for cross-boundary travel, including Lo Wu and Lok Ma Chau and West Kowloon Station for high-speed rail.

It was reported that train services for short-distance routes, such as Futian, Shenzhen North, Guangzhou South, will be resumed first. Medium-range routes to Changsha of Hunan province and Xiamen of Fujian province will follow. Long-haul trips to Beijing and Shanghai will be restored after that.

In an earlier local radio program,

Shenzhen's 1st new intl route in 3 years jets off

By ZHENG CAIXIONG

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A China Southern Airlines plane took off from Shenzhen International Airport bound for Amsterdam, the Netherlands, on Monday as the airline resumed the overseas route after a long hiatus.

Tickets for the flight have become hot items, with return tickets for Monday set to sell out, according to a statement released by China Southern Airlines on Tuesday.

With the Chinese Lunar New Year approaching, there is a strong demand for international air tickets as China has optimized its COVID-19 policies and the Civil Aviation Administration of China will relax restrictions on international flights starting on Sunday, authorities said.

In a notice, the CAAC said China will no longer define high-risk inbound flights and will cancel their 75 percent seat occupancy limit.

The round-trip between Shenzhen and Amsterdam will operate twice a week — on Mondays and Wednesdays — according to the statement from China Southern. The aircraft is an Airbus A330, it said.

It marked the opening of the first direct passenger route linking Shenzhen with the Netherlands,

which is also the first new international passenger route opened by the airport in the past three years, signaling a potential recovery in the international passenger transport business once decimated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

It's expected to help build an air bridge between Shenzhen and Amsterdam, an aviation hub in Europe, playing a role to enhance economic and trade cooperation and cultural and personnel exchanges between the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and the European Union, said Shang Huili, route manager with China Southern Shenzhen branch.

As of the end of December, the airline had resumed international routes from Shenzhen to Jakarta, Moscow, Dubai and Singapore.

China Southern's Shenzhen branch said it is planning to gradually restart routes to the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and major cities around the world this year.

Pan Qingzhong, a professor from Tsinghua University, said domestic and foreign airlines are now operating only 840 international passenger flights every week in China, compared with 18,230 before COVID-19.

He made the remarks at a forum recently hosted by the Academic Center for Chinese Economic Practice and Thinking, which is part of Tsinghua University.



A medical worker prepares a traditional Chinese medicinal soup at a TCM hospital in Yinan, Shandong province, on Dec 26.
WANG YANBING / FOR CHINA DAILY

TCM plays key role in virus treatment mix

By WANG XIAOYU

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Traditional Chinese Medicine has played an effective role in preventing and treating serious COVID-19 infections, as well as accelerating rehabilitation, as TCM hospitals have ramped up fever clinics and intensive care capacity to adjust to the latest virus control strategy, authorities said on Tuesday.

Huang Luqi, deputy director of the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine, said that over the past three years, China has developed and improved its treatment protocol that integrates TCM and Western medicine.

Home-based TCM therapies mean that patients are able to deliver TCM medications by themselves, and thus reduce the pressure on healthcare facilities, he said.

“TCM can also shorten the period it takes for mild and moderate cases to clear the virus from their bodies and thus reduce hospital stays. For patients at risk of developing serious symptoms, combining TCM with Western therapies can help halt or slow worsening conditions and reduce death rates,” he said.

“In addition, many patients have felt that TCM can help ease coughing, fatigue, sweating and other lingering symptoms after testing negative again for the virus,” Huang added.

As the focus of the country's COVID-19 response shifts from preventing infections to safeguarding health and preventing severe cases, Huang said TCM hospitals have been building more fever clinics and increasing intensive care capacity.

All secondary and tertiary TCM hospitals are now equipped with

fever facilities. More intensive care beds are being added and training on critical care has been strengthened, he said, adding that online medical consultations have also been promoted to relieve strain on in-person healthcare services.

“We have published a guideline on home-based TCM treatment for COVID-19 patients, which recommends 70 TCM drugs and encourages localities to come up with their own prescriptions,” he said.

To counter a shortage of drug supplies triggered by infection peaks in some regions, Huang said that the administration has worked with the Ministry of Information Technology and Industry to survey and expand the manufacturing capacity of drugmakers and advance the provision of a wider variety of TCM medications based on the availability of local resources.

Qi Wensheng, head of the emergency care department at China Academy of Chinese Medical Sciences' Guang'anmen Hospital, said that by observing patients' symptoms, monitoring their body temperatures, appetite and energy, TCM specialists can help identify patients potentially at risk of becoming more serious.

Zhang Zhongde, president of the Traditional Chinese Medicine Hospital in Guangdong province, said that TCM and Western medicine doctors have cooperated efficiently in treating serious COVID-19 patients.

For instance, patients who are intubated or put on a respirator due to breathing difficulty often suffer bloating and constipation as a result.

Zhang said TCM prescriptions and massage can help relieve these symptoms.

CHINA

Taiwan fruit farmer flourishing in Hainan

For wax apple grower, success doesn't fall far from the tree

By CHEN BOWEN in Haikou
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At the largest wax apple plantation in Hainan province, there is a slogan on the wall: "Taiwan's experience, shared and rooted in Hainan".

Huang Yifeng, general manager of Hainan Jindefeng Agricultural Development, is the first person to apply intensive farming to wax apples on the Chinese mainland.

"And now, my wax apple plantation blooms and bears fruit all year round," the Taiwan native said.

The 61-year-old added that the combination of his experience with agricultural technology and management in Taiwan, along with the vast Chinese mainland market, has enabled the production and sale of Hainan's wax apples to flourish.

Back in 1997, Huang came to the mainland from Pingtung county in Taiwan on an inspection trip. He planned to plant wax apples and visited two provinces — Guangdong and Hainan — before choosing the latter for the project.

"Hainan's climate, as well as its culture and customs, are similar to Taiwan, and the mainland's huge market offers infinite possibilities for business development," he said.

Like many Taiwan entrepreneurs, Huang seems to have a natural instinct for finding opportunities. At the time, he was confident that if Taiwan could grow wax apples, so could Hainan, but he



Huang Yifeng (second from left) poses with three visitors at one of his wax apple plantations in Hainan province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

later realized that starting was the hardest part.

Few people knew about wax apples at the time. When they first saw the fruit, many asked him what kind of flower it was and whether they could eat it.

The public's lack of knowledge about the fruit aside, it was also difficult to keep the wax apples fresh. If left for too long on the shelf, the fruit quickly loses its taste.

In Taiwan, the entire process from

picking to selling usually takes less than a day, so wax apples are always at their best. But on the Chinese mainland, that process used to take five or more days, particularly when selling the fruit in major cities such as Beijing and Shanghai. Huang said that he was forced to pick the apples before they were ripe, but even so, half of each consignment would be rotten by the time they arrived in big city stores.

Later, thanks to improvements in

cold chain transport, this problem was gradually resolved, and his company started marketing online. He said that the Hainan government helped introduce him to many online platforms, including e-commerce giants JD and Taobao.

For over two decades, Huang has dedicated himself to introducing and promoting the fruit, frequently visiting Beijing, Shanghai and other major cities across the country. Today, Hainan Jindefeng Agricultur-

Development has three plantations in Haikou, Wenchang and Tunchang, growing roughly 50,000 trees on about 1,113 hectares of land.

The company's self-developed variety, known as "China Red", is a national bestseller, and Huang has become known as the "king of wax apples". His plantations are held up as successful models of agricultural cooperation between Hainan and Taiwan and have won the title of "key leading enterprise of agricultural

industrialization in Hainan province", while their products have been certified as both organic and green.

Huang is also helping with the development of Hainan's wax apple sector. He has trained 700 students at the Hainan Agricultural School and has helped villagers around his plantations plant 33.33 hectares of the fruit.

As one of the few places in the country suited to growing wax apples, Hainan is now engaged in large-scale cultivation. The emerging sector is raising farming incomes and efficiency, and wax apples have come to symbolize Hainan's efficient tropical agriculture.

In recent years, to expand the industrial chain and improve the fruit's added value, Huang's company has produced wax apple wine, juice and vinegar. Now, with the construction of the Hainan Free Trade Port, he believes development in the province has good momentum, and he wants to continue importing other high-end fruits as well as agricultural experience from Taiwan.

"Taiwan's experience, shared and rooted in Hainan" is not an empty phrase," he said. "Now, with Hainan making headway in building a free trade port, and with the deepening of reform and opening-up, I believe Taiwan business owners in Hainan will enjoy greater dividends as a result of local policies."

He encourages more young people from Taiwan to come to the mainland.

"The Chinese mainland market has a very bright future, and there are great opportunities for young Taiwan people to develop their careers here, especially in agriculture," he added.



From left: A worker prepares materials for making bamboo utensils in Jiaohu village in Yichun city, Jiangxi province, in July 2021. Craftsman Wu Hunan makes a bamboo basket at home in Jinjiang village, Yichun, on Dec 16. PHOTOS BY DENG LONGHUA / FOR CHINA DAILY



Jiangxi's bamboo forges green alternative to plastics

NANCHANG — Bamboo utensils have been the main products of Okuda Shizuko's company in Nanchang, Jiangxi province, for nearly three decades.

Bullish on the potential of the industry under China's green initiative, Shizuko injected several million yuan this year in upgrading the factory from a traditional assembly line to an intelligent production line.

Growing up in a binational family, Shizuko lived in China until she was 20 before leaving for Japan for further studies. Yet her experiences during childhood left an indelible impression on her.

In the 1990s, she returned to Nanchang and founded Nanchang Sanyou Eco Technology, which specializes in eco-friendly products such as bamboo and wooden utensils. The company has been in business for 29 years.

"Today, about 80 percent of our products are sold in Japan, Europe and the United States," said Shizuko, adding that the company's smooth operation mirrors the sustained efforts China has been making in recent decades to further green economic development and upgrade its manufacturing sector.

China is the largest source of bamboo resources in the world. Its bamboo forest area and output account for one-fourth and one-third of the global total, respectively.

At the Second Global Bamboo and Rattan Congress held in November, the Chinese government and the International Bamboo and Rattan Organization launched the Bamboo as a Substitute for Plastic Initiative to encourage countries to reduce plastic pollution, respond to climate change and accelerate the

implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Shizuko said that as China has paid more attention to environmental protection, environmental awareness has been greatly enhanced, thus giving the sector promising prospects for development.

"We plan to increase the research, development and production of bamboo products such as spoons, bowls and chopsticks next year and continue to upgrade production lines to improve efficiency and expand the domestic market share," she said.

Bamboo and rattan have potential in developing a green economy, addressing climate change, building disaster-resistant infrastructure, alleviating poverty, vitalizing rural areas and protecting the environment, according to the UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre.

It further notes that bamboo's lightweight and linear-splitting nature makes it comparatively easier to process than timber, giving

farmers, many of whom are women, opportunities to engage in the initial processing and further increase their share of the profits.

At Shizuko's company, about 80 percent of the employees are women. She also hires people with disabilities.

"Many of our employees have been working for us for more than 20 years and have a strong sense of belonging," she said.

Yuan Shaoqing, a deaf-mute employee who has been with the company for 27 years, said that she felt at ease working at the company and that it offered a good platform for her to develop self-worth and grow continuously.

Shizuko said that Nanchang is no longer the city of her childhood memories, with high-rises and avenues replacing old, narrow blocks. But the lush mountains remain, and she often visits them with friends.

"I hope to hike Huangshan and Taishan next year, and also hope my family in Japan can also come and appreciate China's magnificent scenery," she said.

XINHUA

Animal biofeed industry breaks new ground

In Longzhou county, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, farmers are busy harvesting sugar cane. The leaves, which used to be waste, will be processed and turned into cattle feed at local factories.

"In the past, sugar cane leaves and corn stalks were either dumped or burned. Now, they can be used as feed," said farmer Ruan Zhenhong, who added that he has profited from the effort. "Last year, I earned 26,000 yuan (\$3,728) from selling stalks."

A new method for the industrial use of rice straw has also recently been developed in Changde, Hunan province, where people are recycling and processing rice straw, turning it into silage.

"Rice straw cannot be burned. Rotting straw left in the fields is an ecological burden that can affect cultivation and lead to plant diseases and pests," said Luo Yuanfeng, an official at Changde's bureau of agriculture and rural affairs.

The national feed industry is undergoing rapid development, transformation and upgrades. Promoting biological feed technology is a logical direction and a strategic measure to ensure the high-quality development of the feed industry, according to Xin Guochang, an official at the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

Biological feed is the general term for new feed and feed additives that are safe, efficient, environmentally friendly and residue-free, and developed by means of modern biotechnology such as genetic, protein or enzyme engineering or fermentation, according to a report on China's biological feed industry.

It makes use of a wide range of materials. It is renewable and less expensive than other feed, and it is helpful in developing unconventional resources, thus reducing breeding costs. It is also conducive to curbing waste and easing competition between people and animals for food.

Biological feed can also lessen the amount of nitrogen and phosphorus in livestock and poultry manure, greatly reducing pollution and promoting the healthy and sustainable development of the animal feed industry.

In recent years, fermentation has achieved good results in improving feed quality and feed use efficiency, and in promoting animal health. Ecological pig feed is a good example. "Bio-fermented feed is a kind of bioactive feed containing probiotics and metabolites. Microbial fermentation can improve the digestibility of feed by changing the physicochemical properties of feed substrate," said Wang Yizhen, a professor at Zhejiang University.

He added that bio-fermented feed can also improve the intestinal functions and bodily immunity of pigs through the effect of probiotics, helping ensure pig health and high-quality production.

China attaches great importance to the development of its biological feed industry. It currently has around 1,000 companies engaged in bio-fermented feed production. The country has taken measures to promote the standardization of the industry's management system and technical standards.

XINHUA

New village emerges from ashes in Yunnan

KUNMING — On an early Wednesday, 69-year-old Xiao Qunfeng put on his traditional costume and began working at the observation deck in Wengding, a Wa ethnic village in Yunnan province.

Xiao made tea for the visitors and told them about local customs and stories.

Wengding is in the Awa Mountains near the China-Myanmar border. It used to rely on slash-and-burn agriculture but adopted a more contemporary lifestyle after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

In the Wa language, Wengding

means "the place where clouds float". Mist is common throughout the year and often cloaks the mountains and cottages in the area.

Located in the remote mountains, Wengding was long disconnected from the outside world, but tourism has subsequently transformed the village's fortunes.

In February last year however, a fire broke out and reduced about 100 traditional Wa thatched cottages to ashes.

Reconstruction and upgrading at the original site was undertaken with support from various parties. A village gate, a wooden drum house

and a granary were among structures that had to be rebuilt, and the projects ended up taking over a year before the village could be readied to be reopened to the public.

Xiao and his family contributed to rebuilding whenever they had time, and he was not able to conceal his excitement at seeing his village gradually regain its original appearance.

"We are finally back!" he said.

Since reconstruction, the government of Cangyuan county, which administers Wengding, has explored new ways of protection, inheritance and development, and

has sped up upgrades to infrastructure based on the advantages and attractions of Wa ethnic culture.

Villagers have also participated in reconstruction, hoping to present a better Wengding to tourists.

The new village, which is home to 490 people in 113 households, will be turned into a modern living space with multiple integrated tourist and business functions designed to encourage villagers to work near home and expand their sources of income, according to Xiao Wenjun, village Party secretary.

XINHUA



Visitors take photos of traditional Wa thatched cottages in Wengding village in Yunnan province in March 2018. JING HUIHUI / XINHUA

WORLD

Europe's conflict sees Africa reeling from costs

Whether it's soaring fuel bills or pricier food, the most vulnerable are hit the hardest on continent under pressure

By OTIATO OPALI in Nairobi, Kenya
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Rising fuel prices in Kenya give Francis Karanja, a Nairobi taxi driver, plenty to worry about as he has watched his already meager income take a hit over the past year.

During the Christmas holiday period, he was spending about \$1.70 for a liter of diesel to keep his cab on the road; in the prior year, he was paying just a dollar. But Karanja is reluctant to ask for higher fares from his passengers.

"The customers themselves complain that their salaries have not increased, and I will lose customers if I increase the fare," said the 35-year-old, who works on commission. "It is like I am doing nothing since the profit I used to make will now have to go on fuel."

Driven by the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, prices of fuel and other basic commodities in Kenya and other African countries have kept on the rise, bringing economic hardships to hundreds of millions of people across the continent.

According to Kenya's National Bureau of Statistics, prices of diesel and petrol climbed by around 18 percent and 13 percent, respectively, from August to September last year. The cost of gas and electricity, along with those related to housing and water, rose by nearly 3 percent over the month, with the rising fuel costs to blame, it said.

A recent United Nations Development Programme study found that the most visible impacts of the military operation in Ukraine on Africa are the rising prices for fuel and food, and the financial instability associated with inflation.

The study suggests that the poorest countries in Africa have been hit the hardest, as a larger proportion of cash-strapped consumers' expenditure goes on food and transport.

2022
year in
Review

In Kenya, purchases of cooking gas in the first half of the year dropped to a four-year low, highlighting the impact of the high prices of fuel due to the reintroduction of a value-added tax after the start of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

According to data from Kenya's National Bureau of Statistics, homes and businesses used 123,150 metric tons of cooking gas in the six months to June last year, a drop of 35 percent from the same period in the prior year.

The UNDP study says that the conflict is threatening to derail development progress in African countries, pushing the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and the aspirations of the African Union's Agenda 2063 further out of reach.

According to Macharia Munene, a lecturer of history and international relations at the United States International University in Kenya, the conflict in Europe is bound to affect the prices of key commodities like oil and grains.

Negative effect

"While Ukraine is far from Africa, the fact that the global price of oil is going up has a negative effect and direct impact on the African economy. For anything we import, the price will likely go up because of the problem in Eastern Europe," Munene said.

According to the UNDP study, there are also indirect impacts of the crisis in Ukraine, including imported inflation, difficult energy transitions and a potential geopolitical realignment.



Kenyan motorcycle taxi riders wait to fill up with costly fuel in Nairobi on April 4. SIMON MAINA / AFP

“While Ukraine is far from Africa, the fact that the global price of oil is going up has a negative effect and direct impact on the African economy.”

Macharia Munene, lecturer of history and international relations at the United States International University in Kenya

The impact of the conflict “could push Africa into serious debt distress”, making countries less likely to meet their debt obligations, the study said. “It could also increase inequality because high food and fuel prices typically hit the most vulnerable households hardest,” it said.

Munene believes that increased oil and food prices will exacerbate inflationary pressures that have been building up in the wake of the pandemic and contribute to further monetary tightening and higher interest rates that will dampen global economic growth.

“The hike in fuel and food prices also comes at a time when African

countries are faced with the negative impacts of changes in seasonal climate patterns on agricultural production, causing droughts in some areas and floods in others,” Munene said.

Research from Statista, an online platform providing market and consumer data, indicates that sub-Saharan African countries have found themselves facing another severe shock because the conflict in Europe has prompted the surge in food and fuel prices that threatens the region's economic outlook.

When it comes to energy, consumers in the Central African Republic pay the highest price — one liter of

gasoline cost an average of \$2.40 in July, while in Zimbabwe, the retail price for the fuel was nearly \$2, according to the research.

Details from an International Monetary Fund study on the impact of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on Africa indicate that growth in Africa was expected to slow to 3.8 percent in 2022 from the previous year's rate of 4.5 percent.

In addition, inflation in the region is expected to remain elevated in 2023 at nearly 10 percent. This will be the first time since 2008 that average inflation in Africa reaches that level.

Trade strains

“Higher oil prices will increase the import bill for Africa's oil importers by about \$19 billion, worsening trade imbalances and raising transport and other consumer costs. Oil-importing fragile states will be hit hardest, with fiscal balances expected to deteriorate by around 0.8 percent of gross domestic product compared to the October 2021 forecast,” the IMF report said.

“Half of Africa's low-income countries are already in or at high risk of distress. Rising oil prices also represent a direct fiscal cost for countries through fuel subsidies, while inflation will make reducing these subsidies unpopular,” it added.

The IMF also pointed out that spending pressures on governments in Africa will only increase as growth slows, and rising interest rates in advanced economies may make financing more costly and harder to obtain for some governments.

According to Karanja, the passengers he transports in the Kenyan capital should get ready for at least a 20 percent increase in fares if fuel prices remain high.

“Fuel is everything and it is not our wish to hike the fare,” Karanja said.

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CHINA DAILY

Public AD: 0069

WORLD

Russia loses 63 troops in Ukraine raid

Anger grows over highest casualty count since start of conflict last year

By REN QI in Moscow
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Russia's Defense Ministry confirmed on Monday that 63 soldiers had been killed on New Year's Eve in a fiery blast that destroyed a temporary barracks in a vocational college in Makiivka, twin city of the regional capital Donetsk.

Russian nationalists and some lawmakers have demanded punishment for those they accused of ignoring dangers, as fury grows over the killing of so many soldiers in the biggest loss of life reported by Moscow so far.

Some military bloggers said the soldiers were being housed alongside an ammunition dump at the site, which the Russian Defense Ministry said was hit by four rockets fired from US-made HIMARS launchers.

The New Year's Eve strike on Makiivka came as Russia was launching what have become nightly waves of drone attacks on Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities.

Ukraine said the Russian death toll in Makiivka was in the hundreds, though pro-Russian officials called that an exaggeration.

Russian military bloggers said the extent of the destruction was a result of storing ammunition in the same building as the barracks, despite commanders knowing it was within range of Ukrainian rockets.

Igor Girkin, former commander of militias in eastern Ukraine who is now a high-profile Russian nationalist military blogger, said the death toll could be even higher.

The vocational college was "destroyed almost entirely" as a result of the detonation of an ammunition dump in the same building. "Almost all the military equipment, parked next to the building without any camouflage, was also destroyed," Girkin said.

"What happened in Makiivka is horrible. There were a significant number of killed and wounded. Yesterday evening, they were still sorting through the rubble," wrote Archangel Spetzna Z, a Russian military blogger with more than 700,000 followers on Telegram.

"Who came up with the idea to place personnel in large numbers in one building, where even a fool

understands that even if they hit with artillery, there will be many wounded or dead?"

Ukraine almost never publicly claims responsibility for attacks on Russian-controlled territories, and President Volodymyr Zelensky did not address the Makiivka strike in his speech on Monday.

But the General Staff of Ukraine's Armed Forces reported the Makiivka attack as "a strike on Russian manpower and military equipment". It did not mention casualties, but said 10 pieces of military equipment were destroyed.

Criminal liability

The fury in Russia extended to lawmakers.

Grigory Karasin, a Russian Federal Assembly member and former deputy foreign minister, had not only demanded vengeance against Ukraine and its NATO supporters but also "an exacting internal analysis".

Sergey Mironov, a legislator and former chairman of the Federation Council of the Russian Federal Assembly, demanded criminal liability for the officials who had "allowed the concentration of military personnel in an unprotected building" and "all the higher authorities who did not provide the proper level of security".

Unverified footage posted online of the aftermath showed a huge building reduced to smoking rubble.

Some of the dead came from the southwestern Russian region of Samara, the region's governor told Russian media, urging concerned relatives to contact recruitment centers for information.

Andrey Medvedev, deputy speaker of the Moscow City Duma, said authorities, whether civilian or military, must value Russian lives.

"Either a person is of the highest value — and then punish for stupid losses of personnel, as for treason to the fatherland — or the country is over," he wrote on Telegram.

Meanwhile, Russian military enterprises are working nonstop during the New Year holidays, Sergey Chemezov, head of Russia's state defense military conglomerate Rostec, told TASS news agency.

Agencies via Xinhua contributed to this story.

Latest bloodshed



Relatives mourn during the funeral on Monday of a Palestinian man who was killed in an Israeli raid in Kafr-Dan village in the occupied West Bank. Two Palestinians were killed during a confrontation that erupted when troops entered the village. RANEEN SAWAFTA / REUTERS

US House adjourns without new speaker after three votes

By AI HEPING in New York
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A politically divided new US Congress convened on Tuesday and became even more divided as the Republican majority in the House failed to elect a speaker on the first ballot, the first time since the Civil War.

Then after California Republican Kevin McCarthy failed to secure a majority of votes on second and third ballots, the House adjourned until noon Wednesday. The last time a speaker vote went to multiple ballots was in 1923, when Speaker Frederick Gillett, a Republican from Massachusetts, won re-election on the ninth ballot.

After the second ballot, McCarthy insisted to reporters that the party is "unified".

"This isn't about me," McCarthy said. "This is about the conference now because the members who are holding out, they want something for their personal selves."

A small but determined band of conservatives refused to drop their no votes, leaving McCarthy short of the 218 votes needed for election on the first two ballots. He got just 203 in two rounds — less than Democrat Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York in the GOP-controlled chamber — and fared even worse with 202 in round three as a supporter who had pledged to support him on the first two ballots but not the third switched to Ohio Representative Jim Jordan.

House Democrats nominated and approved Jeffries to succeed Nancy Pelosi as leader of the Democratic minority in the chamber, the first black lawmaker to lead a party in Congress.

McCarthy's opponents have coalesced around Jordan even



US Representative Kevin McCarthy (left) of California casts his vote during the third round of voting for House speaker on the opening day of the 118th Congress at the US Capitol on Tuesday in Washington. ALEX BRANDON / AP

though Jordan gave the speech nominating McCarthy for the second round of voting and asked House members not to vote for him.

Jordan is the founder of the conservative House Freedom Caucus whose members don't think McCarthy is conservative enough or tough enough to battle Democrats. They have made specific demands of McCarthy in exchange for their votes. He did meet some of their demands but refused to agree to several other conditions.

Florida Representative Matt Gaetz and Arizona Representative Andy Biggs have said they are willing to go to any length to derail McCarthy. "It is true that we struggle with trust with Mr. McCarthy because time and again his viewpoints, his positions, they shift like sands underneath you," Gaetz told reporters before Tuesday's vote. "If you want to drain the swamp, you cannot put the biggest alligator

in charge of the exercise."

McCarthy has pledged a "battle on the floor" for as long as it takes, forcing multiple votes if necessary until he wins the top post.

House rules require lawmakers to keep holding votes for speaker until someone secures 218 votes or a simple majority of members voting. No other House business can occur until a speaker is selected, which means floor votes, committee hearings and other congressional work will grind to a halt if Republicans can't agree on a new leader.

Even if the 57-year-old McCarthy gets the speakership, he will be faced with deep divisions among Republicans, and the deal he has been forced into making may weaken his authority.

The speakership has been a career ambition for McCarthy, a former House staffer and minority leader of the California Assembly who rose through the ranks of the House GOP leadership team for the past 14 years.

Germany's job market best since reunification

By JULIAN SHEA in London
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Germany's employment market hit a post-reunification high in 2022, new data from the country's official statistics agency has shown, but there are fears that the strength of the labor market could force up wages, putting more pressure on interest rates.

The country has such a position of economic significance within the 20-member eurozone that its health and performance have a major impact on the other members, so should wages in Germany be pushed up, the economic ripples would be felt across the continent.

Figures published by the Destatis agency show that last year, around 45.6 million people in Germany were in employment, up almost 600,000 on the previous year, and the highest figure since the former East Germany and West Germany were reunited in 1990. The unemployment rate of 2.8 percent was also the lowest total recorded since reunification.

In October, the country's Economy Minister Robert Habeck admitted that Germany would head into recession in 2023, with shrinkage of 0.4 percent expected, rather than the growth of 2.5 percent that had been predicted previously.

Preemptive measures

Growth forecasts for 2022 were also rounded down from 2.2 percent to 1.4 percent, but the DW news service quoted Habeck as saying that the situation showed that the government's preemptive measures to preserve the economy had saved the country from an even worse outcome, and Munich University's Ifo Institute for Economic Research said in December that the recession would be milder than expected.

"In the two quarters of the winter half-year 2022/23, the gross domestic product shrinks, but then it goes up again," the institute's head of forecasts, Timo Wollmershauser, told Reuters.

Across the eurozone as a whole, unemployment has remained low, at 6.5 percent in October, the latest month for which figures are available, and Bert Colijn, a senior economist at financial services organization ING, told the Financial Times that "modest upward pressure on wages is set to stay".

The European Central Bank, or ECB, which is scheduled to meet again on Feb 2, pays close attention to the labor market across Europe as an economic barometer, and in December, ECB President Christine Lagarde acknowledged that wage growth was "strengthening", which is likely to extend the period of high inflation.

Despite a slight fall in November, currently the eurozone inflation rate is around 10 percent, compared to the ECB's 2 percent target.

In a recent interview with Croatian newspaper Jutarnji list to coincide with the country becoming the newest member of the eurozone, Lagarde said the ECB has to "take the necessary measures" to bring inflation back under control, making it more likely that an already anticipated interest rate rise will be approved at February's meeting.

Briefly

UNITED STATES

Top congressional job still hangs in balance

US Representative Kevin McCarthy struggled to beat back hard-line conservative opposition and secure enough votes to give him the speakership when the new House of Representatives convenes with a narrow Republican majority on Tuesday. With a narrow 222-213 Republican majority, McCarthy can afford to lose just four votes from his caucus to win the 218 he needs, or half of the chamber's 435 members. No Democrats are likely to vote for him.

RUSSIA

Japan's course 'makes treaty talks impossible'

Japan's "anti-Russian course" makes peace treaty talks impossible, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Rudenko said on Tuesday. Russia and Japan have not formally ended World War II hostilities because of four islands off Japan's northernmost island of Hokkaido. The islands are known in Russia as the Kurils and in Japan as the Northern Territories.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

CDC: New virus variant appears to evade vaccines

By MAY ZHOU in Houston
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As Omicron variants of the coronavirus continue to evolve, one strain called XBB.1.5 appears to evade vaccines and past infections and has grown at a fast pace in the US, doubling its infection numbers every week for the last four weeks, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

CDC data showed that between Dec 25 and 31 of 2022, XBB.1.5 accounted for more than 40 percent of all new COVID-19 cases. It has been spreading especially fast in the Northeast, where the variant accounted for about 75 percent of all new infections.

CNN reported that Dr David Ho, a professor of microbiology and immunology at Columbia

University, found in his lab that XBB.1 was the most slippery of all subvariants. It was 63 times less likely to be neutralized by antibodies in the blood of infected and vaccinated people than BA.2, and 49 times less likely to be neutralized compared with BA.4 and BA.5.

That means the XBB.1.5 strain easily evades antibodies from prior infection, vaccines and existing monoclonal antibody treatments. Ho said these levels of immune evasion are "alarming" and they could further compromise the efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccines.

In addition, XBB.1.5 has proved to be highly contagious. The new variant has a key mutation that allows it to bind more tightly to ACE2, the hooks the virus uses to enter cells.

Virologists and epidemiologists are concerned that the new

Omicron sublineage could potentially drive a new surge of coronavirus cases in the US.

However, some experts say it's hard to know how much of XBB.1.5's growth can be attributed to properties of the virus and how much to the holiday timing when people were more likely to travel and gather, thus giving the virus more opportunities to infect people.

Some experts expressed optimism when looking at the situation in Northeast.

Michael Osterholm, director at Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota, told CNN that updated boosters should provide some protection.

"They still provide a level of immunity that may not prevent you from getting infected but

may have a significant impact on whether or not you become seriously ill and die," he told CNN. "I mean, right now, the most recent data we have shown that for those who have the bivalent vaccine, they have a threefold lower risk of dying than those who don't."

Dr Jay Varma, an epidemiologist and director of the Cornell Center for Pandemic Prevention and Response, told PBS that while the XBB.1.5 variant is going to cause some ups and downs, "it doesn't appear that it's going to increase their risk of hospitalization and death beyond what has already happened in the past before."

Experts also pointed out that although antibody treatments aren't working against XBB.1.5, antivirals such as Paxlovid and remdesivir are still effective.

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BUSINESS

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Green energy, IT, healthcare lift A shares

First day of trading in 2023 nets volume worth \$116b on attractive valuations

By SHI JING in Shanghai
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China's A-share market began trading in the new year on a positive note on Tuesday, riding a bounce in the shares of companies in the fields of information technology, green energy and healthcare.

The benchmark Shanghai Composite Index rose 0.88 percent to 3116.51 points and the Shenzhen Component Index closed 0.92 percent higher at 11117.13 points.

The combined trading value on the Shanghai and Shenzhen bourses approached 800 billion yuan (\$116 billion) on Tuesday. Stocks of internet service providers, software developers and wind power equipment makers swelled, lifting the key indexes. Each of the three sectors reported an average daily increase of more than 5 percent.

While more COVID-19 cases have been reported across China recently, listed traditional Chinese medicine makers in the A-share market reported an average daily price gain of 3.36 percent on Tuesday. Healthcare share prices rose more than 3 percent on average.

Kaiyuan Securities said industries and fields like innovative IT, infrastructure construction, software and internet security will likely see their market size expand at a faster clip in 2023. Companies in these sectors are expected to land more business orders this year as more supportive policies are expected, they said.

CITIC Securities' Chief Strategist Qin Peijing said January is an important month for investors as they map out their A-share market strategy for the entire year. For one, China's COVID-19 cases may peak earlier than expected, which would create more room for economic recovery. For another, a time window will likely open by then for investors to increase their A-share positions, he said.

The A-share market's trading value and valuations were relatively

low at the end of 2022. More capital inflows from both domestic and overseas investors are anticipated at the beginning of this year. If they materialize as expected, they could help break the deadlock. While supportive government policies will spur A-share market recovery at the first stage, better business outlook of A-share companies will further drive up the market performance in the following months, Qin said.

Analysts from Everbright Securities said current low valuations may sustain continued capital inflows from overseas investors, which could prop up the market in the short term. Although the market will continue to fluctuate before the Chinese Lunar New Year or Spring Festival break from Jan 23 to 27, there is little room for the benchmark indexes to head further south, so investors should seize this opportunity.

But analysts from China Securities said market volatility cannot be avoided in the short term as some market mavens feel the policy stimulus announced after the Central Economic Work Conference in mid-December is not as strong as they had expected.

The rising number of COVID-19 cases has created a wait-and-watch mood among some market people. External risks, including the hawkish signals expected to be given by the US Federal Reserve and the deterioration of economic data among major economies, may also lead to fluctuations in the A-share market, experts said.

Caitong Securities said A-share investors would do well to hold shares of SSE 50 companies till the Chinese Lunar New Year, which starts on Jan 22 this year.

Blue chips will lead the A-share market rally once trading resumes on Jan 30 after Spring Festival. Shares of enterprises with a track record of unusually rapid growth relative to industry peers, will likely have a bullish run in the later months, Caitong experts said.

Briefly

Tarim oilfield sees record output of oil

The Tarim oilfield of China National Petroleum Corp, China's leading oil and gas producer, produced a record 33.1 million metric tons of oil and gas equivalent in 2022, said the company. The figure marked a year-on-year increase of 1.28 million tons of oil and gas equivalent. To date, the annual oil and gas equivalent output of the field has increased by over 1 million tons for six consecutive years.

New air route to Amsterdam opens

A China Southern Airlines passenger flight departed on Monday from Shenzhen Bao'an International Airport in South China's Guangdong province, heading for Amsterdam in the Netherlands. It marked the opening of the first direct passenger route linking Shenzhen with the Netherlands.

XINHUA · CHINA DAILY



Engineering machinery is loaded at Yantai Port, Shandong province, for export to Indonesia.

TANG KE / FOR CHINA DAILY

Chinese exporters see win-win deals as RCEP takes effect in Indonesia

By MA ZHENHUAN in Hangzhou and XIE CHUANJIAO in Qingdao, Shandong

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, or RCEP, agreement took effect in Indonesia on Monday, further deepening regional cooperation between China and ASEAN countries.

Indonesia's new regulations have specified the procedure of obtaining certificates of origin for goods exported from the Southeast Asian country, as part of implementing the RCEP agreement, said Indonesian Trade Minister Zulkifli Hasan.

The RCEP comprises 10 member states of ASEAN plus China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. In 13 of the 15 member economies, the RCEP agreement had taken effect at different points in time last year. With Indonesia joining them now, only the Philippines remains where the agreement is yet to be ratified and implemented.

Over the past year, the RCEP has helped lower tariffs, facilitated integration of industrial chains and benefited consumers in the 14 markets.

"The implementation of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement in the past meant that the tariff rate on our exports of bicycle accessories to Indonesia was 5 percent. Now, thanks to the RCEP, the tariff rate has been further reduced to zero, which greatly reinforces the competitiveness of our products," said Huang Xinzhen, manager of Yiwu Zhihong Import and Export Co in East China's Zhejiang province.

The company, which mainly exports daily necessities and machine parts to Southeast Asia, received Zhejiang's first certificate of origin, which helped it to export to Indonesia under the RCEP.

With such certificates, Zhihong can now enjoy preferential tariffs on its exports to RCEP member countries.

Jiaying Xin'an Packing Materials

Co, another foreign trade firm in Zhejiang, is one of the prominent heat-shrinkable film producers based in Jiaxing city. The RCEP has boosted the firm's competitiveness and expanded its reach in overseas markets and global production networks, said Yang Liteng, its general manager.

"The basic tax rate on PVC heat-shrinkable film exports to Indonesia was 10 percent, and the preferential tax rate under the China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement was 5 percent. But now, the import tariff has been reduced to zero," said Yang.

He said the introduction of the zero tariff under the RCEP is expected to reduce or exempt tariffs worth about 370,000 yuan (\$53,710) per year based on 2022 data.

Meanwhile, Hangzhou Customs has reportedly developed a smart service platform to help companies in Zhejiang to plan their taxes so as to make full use of tax reductions, expand their international footprint and enhance their competitiveness.

In Qingdao, Shandong province, local Customs issued the province's first RCEP- and Indonesia-related certificate of origin to Qingdao SanMu Aquatic Products Co Ltd, which exported a batch of frozen salmon fillets.

With the certificate, the exports can enjoy the zero-tariff policy, said Sun Zhijun, the company's general manager, adding the previous tax rate was 10 percent.

According to Sun's calculations, the new policy could help his company save more than 100,000 yuan by way of tariff cuts when the exported goods arrive in Indonesia and go through local Customs clearance.

"Every year, our company exports more than 20 million yuan worth of frozen salmon fillets to Indonesia and it is expected to save over 2 million yuan by way of tariff cuts the whole year," said Sun.

It is a big tariff concession for the fishery business as it does not

make considerable profits. It will be beneficial for the business to land more business orders from other RCEP markets and accelerate exports, said Sun.

ASEAN is the largest trade market for Shandong province. Indonesia is the biggest ASEAN country to accord Shandong favorable export tariffs. From January to November 2022, Shandong exported 39 billion yuan worth of goods to Indonesia, up more than 29 percent year-on-year.

In the same period, Qingdao Customs issued Free Trade Area-related certificates of origin to some 240,000 batches of Indonesia-bound goods entailing tariff cuts or exemptions worth 13.6 billion yuan.

Bi Haijun, an official with Qingdao Customs, said aquatic products and non-slip mats can enjoy more favorable tariffs with the RCEP agreement taking effect in Indonesia.

"Since July last year, clients in Japan and Southeast Asia have been more willing to choose us for cooperation, for they know that the RCEP tariff reduction will bring more benefits," said Li Yonghong, deputy CEO of a Guangdong-based medical technology company. So far, the company has applied for 72 certificates of origin under the RCEP, involving goods worth 7 million yuan.

From January to November 2022, Guangzhou Customs issued 14,021 preferential export certificates of origin under the RCEP, which led to tariff cuts or exemptions worth 4.75 billion yuan.

Customs data for the period showed China's imports and exports with the other 14 RCEP members were worth 11.79 trillion yuan, up 7.9 percent year-on-year.

Fang Xiaoying in Hangzhou contributed to this story.

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Smart watch, bracelet sales surge

By MA SI
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Smart watches and smart fitness bracelets are gaining in popularity in China as consumers turn to such devices for tracking health amid the optimization of COVID-19 prevention and control measures.

As pulse oximeters, which measure blood-oxygen levels, are in short supply amid surging demand, sales of smart watches and fitness bracelets, which claim to have similar functions, have been rising in recent weeks.

Online retailer Suning.com said sales of bracelets and watches with oximeter functions surged 330 percent year-on-year in December on its platform.

Sales of Huawei's smart bracelets increased by about 130 percent month-on-month in the past two weeks, and sales of its smart watches also jumped by more than 100 percent month-on-month, according to the company.

A salesman at a Huawei store in Beijing said the company's GT3 Pro smart watch has been certified by the National Medical Product Administration as a Class II medical device. "But if you talk about blood oxygen monitoring, it can only be used as a reference, not as a basis for a clinical diagnosis."

An online customer service agent for Xiaomi's smart watches said: "A growing number of consumers asked whether the watches can measure the oxygen concentration in arterial blood. But the function is just meant for casual daily tracking, not for medical use."

Wang Liming, a 32-year-old white-collar worker in Anyang, Henan province, said she recently bought a smart watch for her father to measure his blood-oxygen levels. "I know the data is not that accurate. But it can offer a rough picture. That's enough at present, as the oximeters are out of stock," Wang said.

The recent rising demand for fitness-oriented smart wearables is in line with a broader market trend of consumers paying more attention to their health and becoming increasingly willing to embrace electronic devices to track body data.

In the third quarter of 2022, shipments of smart watches hit 10.8 million units in China, marking a year-on-year increase of 1.8 percent, according to data from market research company International Data Corp.

Among the total, sales of adult smart watches increased 13.3 percent, driven by the release of new products from Huawei, Apple and other brands. IDC expects that future market challenges and opportunities will coexist. Amid COVID-19, people are paying more attention to health, including monitoring blood oxygen levels, blood pressure, body fat and other indicators. With the continuous improvement of technology, more and more new health functions will be applied to smart watches, and this field will continue to gain momentum, IDC added.

Manufacturing confidence bounces back

By ZHOU LANXU and OUYANG SHIJIA

Business confidence in factory output going forward strengthened in China to a 10-month high upon expectations of waning COVID-19 disruptions even as a rise in infections dented manufacturing activity in December, a private survey said on Tuesday.

The Caixin China General Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index — which gauges operating conditions in the manufacturing sector — fell to a three-month low of 49 in December, versus 49.4 in November, indicating a further slight deterioration in overall business conditions, media group Caixin said on Tuesday.

Staying below the 50-point mark for the fifth straight month, the latest PMI reading indicates that manufacturing activity continued to shrink in December as COVID-19

outbreaks weighed on output and demand, Caixin said in a report.

Manufacturers, however, expressed stronger optimism for the new year. The level of positive sentiment improved to the highest level in 10 months, with surveyed companies anticipating output to increase as the pandemic situation improves and market conditions strengthen, the report said.

"Overall, the pandemic continued to take a toll on the economy in December," said Wang Zhe, senior economist at Caixin Insight Group.

"But optimism in the sector significantly improved thanks to further optimized COVID controls," Wang said, adding that companies expressed strong confidence in economic recovery following the adjustments of COVID-19 containment measures.

The PMI survey performed by the National Bureau of Statistics also pointed to brightening market con-

fidence despite a slowdown in manufacturing activity. While December's official manufacturing PMI dropped to 47, the lowest level in nearly three years, most polled enterprises believe that market conditions are likely to pick up as the pandemic situation improves, the bureau said on Saturday.

The improvements in business expectations came as no surprise as high-frequency data have shown signs of a recovery in economic activity over the past couple of weeks.

For instance, domestic air passenger volume — measured by the ratio of actual flights to scheduled flights on a seven-day moving average basis — improved to 50.9 percent on Sunday, up from 41.3 percent a week earlier, analysts at Nomura said in a note, albeit cautioning that a full recovery from the pandemic remains distant.

"The economy is likely to have hit bottom in December," said Wen Bin,

chief economist at China Minsheng Bank.

As the peak of infections gradually passes, population mobility should recover, Wen said. This may help the Chinese economy kick off a recovery trajectory from January, especially after factoring in the boost offered by the Spring Festival holiday.

While the economy may be poised for a gradual pickup, experts said it is still essential for the country to step up growth stabilization efforts as the foundation for domestic consumption recovery is not yet firm while overseas demand could deteriorate.

The Caixin survey said the reading for new export orders remained in contraction for the fifth straight month, while the employment sub-gauge has not shown signs of a significant rebound, logging the second-worst performance in 34 months.

As part of the country's efforts to



Employees work on the production line of miniature motors at a company in Yueqing, Zhejiang province. CAI KUANYUAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

promote economic recovery, China has announced it will adjust tariffs on a series of goods this year, bringing down the country's overall tariff level from 7.4 percent to 7.3 percent. Starting Sunday, the country has imposed a provisional import tax rate lower than the "most-favored nation" tariff rate on 1,020 items.

It is necessary for various policies to work together to stabilize the job market and increase household disposable incomes, which will be key to expanding consumption, said Wang of Caixin Insight Group.

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BUSINESSFOCUS

Autonomous vehicles eye bigger business opportunities

Authorities roll out series of supportive policies to promote robotaxi technology

By FAN FEIFEI
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2022
year in
Review

Autonomous driving vehicles may be more ubiquitous much sooner than we originally expected. The commercialization of self-driving technology is expected to gain momentum in China in the next few years, thanks to continuous technological innovation and considerable policy support, industry experts said.

China has taken the lead in the research and development as well as application of autonomous driving technology around the world and it is the first country to allow fully driverless paid robotaxi operations, as the market potential of this technology continues to grow in the nation, they added.

The self-driving industry is set to witness robust growth in the coming years. The market size of China's self-driving taxi services is expected to surpass 1.3 trillion yuan (\$188.6 billion) by 2030, accounting for 60 percent of the country's ride-hailing market by then, said a report by global consultancy IHS Markit.

It is noteworthy that the domestic robotaxi market will eventually be dominated by two to three major service providers, with the top providers occupying more than 40 percent of the total market share.

Chinese tech companies have been striving to advance the technology and accelerate the commercial use of autonomous driving vehicles. Baidu Inc recently announced it plans to put an additional 200 fully autonomous driving robotaxis into operation across the country in 2023 and build the world's largest fully driverless ride-hailing service area.

"The massive cost reduction will enable us to deploy tens of thousands of autonomous vehicles across China. We are moving toward a future where taking a robotaxi will be half the cost of taking a taxi today," said Robin Li, co-founder and CEO of Baidu.

Li said the company plans to expand its autonomous ride-hailing platform Apollo Go services to 65 cities in 2025, and 100 in 2030. Currently, Apollo Go covers more than 10 cities in China, including Beijing, Shanghai and Guangdong province's Guangzhou and Shenzhen.

So far, Baidu has accumulated more than 40 million kilometers of L4 autonomous driving test mileage. By the end of the third quarter of 2022, the cumulative order volume for Apollo Go rides exceeded 1.4 million, making Baidu the world's largest robotaxi service provider.

Autonomous driving is categorized from L1 to L5 — the higher the level, the more intelligent the technology. L4 autonomy means the car can drive by itself in most conditions without a human backup driver. It is one level below L5, which is generally described as full automation, able to drive by itself in all conditions.

Chinese authorities have rolled out a slew of supportive policies to promote the commercialization of self-driving technology. In November, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology and the Ministry of Public Security unveiled a draft guideline to expand road tests for autonomous driving vehicles nationwide.

On Dec 30, Beijing granted its latest autonomous driving permits to two robotaxi operators — Baidu and Ponyai — to test their fully driverless vehicles on public roads, with no driver or safety operator in the car, a major step in its autonomous ride-hailing business in the capital.

With permits issued by the head office of the Beijing High-Level Automated Driving Demonstration Area, the two companies can provide up to 10 autonomous vehicles each in a designated area in Yizhuang, a southern suburb of Beijing, covering a series of complex road scenarios. A remote safety operator will take control of the vehicle in case of emergency via an online assistance platform.

In August, China released its first national draft guideline on the use of self-driving vehicles for public transport. Local governments in Wuhan, Hubei province, and Chongqing's Yongchuan district granted Baidu the country's first permits to charge fares for fully driverless ride-hailing services — completely without human drivers in the car — in designated areas the same month.

In addition, the South China metropolis of Shenzhen has allowed fully autonomous vehicles without human drivers to run on certain roads since Aug 1, when a local regulation on smart and internet-connected vehicles came into effect.

"Continuous testing on public roads, easing regulations as well as cost reductions in autonomous vehicle manufacturing will help accelerate



Passengers experience Baidu's Apollo Go robotaxi services in Beijing in December 2021. JIAO HONGTAO / FOR CHINA DAILY



Visitors gather at the booth of DeepRoute.ai, a Shenzhen-based autonomous driving startup, during an expo in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, in November. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

the deployment and commercialization of self-driving cars," said Lyu Jinghong, an intelligent mobility analyst at research firm BloombergNEF.

Saying that China has caught up with the United States in the development of autonomous driving, Lyu added that clear regulations at the national level will encourage local governments and autonomous driving companies to speed up the application of self-driving technology, which is crucial to achieving commercialization targets.

According to BloombergNEF's 2022 Electric Vehicle Outlook, China will operate the world's largest robotaxi fleet with about 12 million units by 2040, followed by the US, with around 7 million autonomous vehicles.

China is planning to realize the scale production of vehicles capable of conditional autonomous driving and commercialization of highly autonomous vehicles in certain circumstances by 2025, according to a blueprint issued by the National Development and Reform Commission and 10 other ministries.

Self-driving startup Ponyai is ratcheting up efforts to push forward

the commercial application of self-driving technologies. It has received permits to operate 100 autonomous vehicles in Guangzhou's Nansha district, charging fares based on local standard taxi pricing for its robotaxi services.

Ponyai plans to expand its commercialized robotaxi footprint to Shanghai and Shenzhen this year and to more cities in 2024. It has also inked partnerships with OnTime, Chinese carmaker GAC's ride-hailing app, and Caoao, another ride-hailing platform, in an effort to deploy more robotaxis on the streets and gradually improve the public's trust in autonomous driving.

"The inclusion of autonomous vehicles in the unified and standardized management of taxis proves that both government policy and the public are increasingly accepting robotaxis as a form of everyday transportation, recognizing the ride experience and technical stability of Ponyai's robotaxi," said Lou Tiancheng, co-founder and chief technology officer of Ponyai.

Moreover, the company is collaborating with SAIC artificial intelligence

lab, a division of auto manufacturer SAIC Motor, to jointly explore and advance driverless technology.

Data from market research firm Research and Markets showed the global autonomous vehicle market was valued at \$76.13 billion in 2020 and is projected to hit \$2.16 trillion by 2030, registering a compound annual growth rate of 40.1 percent from 2021 to 2030.

"Autonomous driving is definitely the future development direction of the automobile industry. It not only solves traffic safety problems, but also greatly improves the efficiency of transportation, brings about economic benefits and liberates people from repetitive driving," said Jiang Zheng, a self-driving expert at China's GAC R&D Center.

"Currently, China has gained an upper hand in the testing scenarios of autonomous driving vehicles and accumulated massive data compared with other countries by establishing intelligent connected vehicle pilot zones in several cities," said Zhang Xiang, a researcher at Jiangxi New Energy Technology Institute. The small-scale commercial opera-

tion of fully driverless robotaxis is expected to become a reality in 2025 considering the complicated traffic conditions, Zhang said, adding that the manufacturing costs of driverless vehicle components, such as lidar sensor systems, have declined along with advances in self-driving technology and maturation of related industrial chains.

He called for efforts to strengthen the construction of intelligent transportation infrastructure, such as 5G-enabled vehicle-road coordination systems, which support the transfer of information from vehicles to roadway networks as a way to improve traffic efficiency.

According to a report from global management consulting firm McKinsey & Co, China will become the world's largest market for self-driving vehicles, with revenue from sales of such new vehicles and mobility services expected to exceed \$500 billion by 2030.

Shenzhen-based autonomous driving startup DeepRoute.ai aims to make autonomous driving less costly. It has cut the cost of L4 autonomous driving solutions to less than \$10,000 and applied them to its robotaxi fleet and medium-duty trucks, said Maxwell Zhou, CEO of DeepRoute.ai.

DeepRoute.ai is working with automakers to mass-produce consumer vehicles that will be available for consumer purchase beginning in 2025, as well as used for robotaxi operations.

Yang Diange, a professor from the School of Vehicle and Mobility at Tsinghua University, said, "L4 self-driving technology will initially be deployed in taxis and trucks and in some designated areas, and large-scale application of such technology in private vehicles might be seen by 2030."

Yang said the commercial operation of self-driving vehicles will promote the iteration and innovation of technologies, and help enterprises explore reasonable business models, thus allowing autonomous driving technologies to create more value.

Self-driving trucks poised to overhaul long-haul logistics

By FAN FEIFEI

Commercialization of autonomous trucks will see speedy growth as self-driving startups are stepping up efforts to conduct road tests and mass-produce autonomous heavy-duty commercial vehicles, fueled by rising demand for faster deliveries.

Chinese autonomous driving startup Ponyai has been making forays into the self-driving truck segment. The company announced in November it had formed a strategic alliance with two partners — Chinese logistics company Sinotrans Ltd and machinery manufacturer Sany Group — to work on promoting smart logistics, high-level autonomous driving, and mass production of high-end smart heavy trucks.

Ponyai has already established joint ventures with Sinotrans and Sany Heavy Truck, a subsidiary of Sany Group, in a bid to develop autonomous trucks for logistics transportation.

The latest move will enable the three parties to work together to build the industry's first smart heavy-duty truck fleets and provide

smart logistics solutions.

Meanwhile, the first batch of 30 smart heavy-duty trucks produced by the JV between Ponyai and Sany Heavy Truck rolled off the production line in November and were delivered to Cyantron, the smart logistics JV established by Ponyai and Sinotrans. Over the next three years, Cyantron will purchase an additional 500 autonomous heavy-duty trucks.

Li Hengyu, vice-president of Ponyai and head of the company's truck division, said there is huge development potential for autonomous driving in the logistics segment, and the core value of self-driving trucks is to liberate manpower when facing huge driver shortages in the sector.

"We have been exploring how to empower and change the logistics industry with autonomous driving technologies," Li said. The company hopes to test self-driving trucks on more expressways, providing safer and more effective solutions to fill the labor gap, as well as improve logistics efficiency.

The company completed the

country's first test of high-level autonomous trucks on open expressways in December 2021. The vehicles under normalized testing were autonomous driving trucks developed on the FAW Jiefang J7 vehicle platform, which is mainly used for logistics and is able to achieve L4 autonomous driving on busy expressways.

According to a report by Beijing-based think tank EqualOcean, the number of heavy-duty trucks in China's logistics system is expected to reach 6.27 million in 2030, with revenue from autonomous trucks hitting 853.9 billion yuan (\$123.9 billion) by then.

"Road conditions that autonomous trucks face are simpler than those faced by self-driving, passenger-carrying taxis, given that there are no traffic lights or passengers once they get on expressways," said Zhang Xiang, a researcher at the Jiangxi New Energy Technology Institute.

Zhang said autonomous trucks can be equipped with more advanced sensors and radars, and the large-scale application of self-driving trucks in logistics will

reduce delivery costs, save workforce costs, enhance operational efficiency and make freight transportation safer.

The global self-driving truck market may have generated as much as \$1 billion in revenue in 2020 and is further expected to generate \$12.67 billion by 2025, growing at a compound annual growth rate of 10.4 percent from 2020 to 2025, according to Allied Market Research, a global consulting services provider.

Plus, an autonomous trucking startup, is speeding up mass production and global deployment of its autonomous driving technology. It has collaborated with FAW Jiefang, China's oldest and largest truck manufacturer, to develop autonomous trucks, and completed a driverless L4 truck demonstration on the Wufengshan highway in Jiangsu province in June 2021.

"Thanks to the convergence of machine learning and artificial intelligence, big data, mobility and advanced sensors, the autonomous revolution is on the horizon. Autonomous trucks are one of the best applications for autonomous



A Ponyai autonomous truck is displayed during the World Artificial Intelligence Conference in Shanghai in July 2021. CHEN YUYU / FOR CHINA DAILY

driving in the near term, and this application is close to becoming a reality," said David Liu, CEO and co-founder of Plus.

At present, autonomous trucks are mainly tested or applied in relatively simple scenarios, such as ports, mines and some closed roads, said Jiang Zheng, an expert at the research and development center affiliated with GAC Group.

Jiang said that compared with self-driving passenger-carrying

robotaxis, the routes of autonomous trucks are more fixed, which provides certain conditions for the large-scale commercialization of autonomous driving technology.

"Logistics companies see rising demand for autonomous trucks, which can help increase work efficiency, save labor costs as well as reduce delivery and transportation costs," said Jiang, adding that he is bullish on autonomous truck prospects.

COMMENT

Editorials

Stronger China-Brazil relations have rich connotations, broad prospects

The presence of Chinese Vice-President Wang Qishan, as a special representative of Chinese President Xi Jinping, at the inauguration ceremony of Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in Brasilia on Sunday speaks volumes about the great significance China attaches to relations with Brazil.

In the congratulatory message he sent, President Xi expressed China's willingness to expand and upgrade its cooperation with Brazil. To which the Brazilian leader, a long-term advocate of developing Sino-Brazilian relations, tweeted: "China is our biggest trading partner and we can further expand relations between our countries."

Along with the positive attitude he has unequivocally expressed since winning the October election, this is another good sign that he will look to further boost the two countries' comprehensive strategic partnership and bring it to new heights.

That Argentina, China and the United States are the first three countries he plans to visit in the first three months of his presidency, and his stressing of the European Union's strategic importance to Brazil's economy and trade, indicate that his government will pursue balanced diplomacy and seek to maintain the country's independence as a major player on the world stage.

That's also what the world expects from the veteran statesman who emphasized unity and rebuilding

in his inauguration speech. Although neither is an easy task, as long as the Lula government adheres to its rational and balanced development and diplomacy models, it can stay clear from the either-or choice the US is trying to enforce upon other countries, and continuously accumulate favorable factors to inject more positive energy into socioeconomic development by expanding and deepening win-win cooperation with various sides in the world.

The cooperation between the two largest developing countries in the Eastern Hemisphere and Western Hemisphere will deliver more concrete benefits for both countries and peoples. Their bilateral trade volume was \$164 billion in 2021, up 36.2 percent from the previous year, and they can further upgrade the current trade and cooperation model that is dominated by exports of and collaboration in natural resources, primary industrial products and basic life necessities to in-depth cooperation in aerospace, information technology, biotechnology, agricultural technologies as well as medicine and health.

Amid the global uncertainties and volatility, the strengthening of China-Brazil relations can help promote regional and global peace, stability and prosperity, as it sets a good model for other emerging market economies to strengthen their mutual trust, strategic coordination and win-win cooperation, which accords with their common aspirations and interests.

Rollout of RCEP significant on many levels

January 1 marks the one-year anniversary of the entry into force of the world's largest trading bloc, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, consisting of the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations along with China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

Against the backdrop of sluggish global economic growth, this free trade bloc, covering the largest population and the largest scale of economy and trade, has not only injected vigor into the development of the regional economy. It also serves as a model for common development among countries of different political systems and different cultures.

China's participation in the RCEP showcases the country's resolve to further open up and to promote multilateralism as well as free trade, which China believes are the ways to ensure the common development of all countries.

As the world's second-largest economy, China accounts for 60 percent of the RCEP's total economic volume, and its huge market, as well as the transformation of economic structure, provides impetus for the growth of the regional economy.

The RCEP stimulates regional economic dynamism by reducing impediments to greater economic exchanges and the regional division of labor, such as tariffs and non-tariff measures. This paves the way for the more efficient allocation of production factors, more efficient design and deployment of cross-border supply and value chains, and regionally coordinated trading rules and best practices in

relation to international commerce.

E-commerce is a good example. Facilitated by non-tariff measures and customs clearance convenience, the RCEP region has the most active cross-border e-commerce and enjoys the highest growth rate in the world.

The total volume of imports and exports between China and other RCEP members reached 11.8 trillion yuan (\$1.71 trillion) from January to November last year, an increase of 7.9 percent year-on-year. This speaks volumes about how the RCEP has promoted economic and trade cooperation between China and the other participating countries and the development of the regional economy.

The lower tariffs facilitated by the RCEP have greatly reduced the cost of imports for the ASEAN members, while at the same time considerably increasing the opportunities for their exports.

The RCEP reduced the tariffs between China and its ASEAN partners on more than 65 percent of commodities to zero immediately after the treaty took effect last year. From January to October last year, China's imports and exports with ASEAN countries reached \$798.4 billion, an increase of 13.8 percent year-on-year.

The RCEP is also the first free trade treaty China, Japan and the ROK are jointly participating in, and it will further promote economic cooperation and trade among the three major countries in East Asia.

The importance of the RCEP, therefore, can never be overestimated for the development of both the regional and global economies.

COVID arrivals measures should be science-based

In light of the current pandemic situation, as part of the adjustment to its prevention and control policy, China has announced it will resume outbound tourism, on a pilot basis to start with, and scrap tests and quarantine for arrivals from Jan 8.

Many countries have extended a warm welcome to Chinese visitors following the announcement. Yet a number of Western countries, including the United States, Japan and several members of the European Union, have run counter to the favorable reception that has greeted the move and instead announced strict measures for arrivals from the Chinese mainland.

These measures are not based on science, as many health experts, including those in Western countries, have already pointed out it is unnecessary and ineffective to test arrivals from the Chinese mainland, or with a travel history there within seven days, as the rest of the world already has all the variants that are spreading in China.

Like the European branch of Airports Council International said in a news release on New Year's Eve, the systematic pre-departure or on-arrival testing of travelers from China for COVID-19 is "neither scientifically justified nor risk-based." The organization also expressed its "regret" at the unilaterally imposed COVID-related travel requirements imposed on travelers from the mainland.

Seemingly in response to the many such voices who say the measures are unjustified, unreasonable and discriminatory, the United Kingdom has

reportedly changed its position and said passengers from the Chinese mainland will not face compulsory COVID-19 tests on arrival.

With members of the EU adopting different measures with regard to the imminent arrival of travelers from the Chinese mainland, with several of its members having adopted discriminatory COVID policies targeting arrivals from the mainland and others extending a warm welcome, the EU is expected to work out a coordinated approach on Wednesday on whether and what measures the bloc should adopt with regard to arrivals from the Chinese mainland. It is crucial that the bloc allow science and impartiality to prevail, and not let discrimination and political calculation hijack its decision.

Those who are smearing China's pandemic policy shift and hyping up or even distorting China's epidemic prevention and control policy are two-faced and hypocritical as they were also the ones who constantly criticized China's strict COVID measures and repeatedly urged China to reopen its borders. It seems that for these politically biased people whatever China does must be wrong.

Since the pathogenicity and virulence of the virus have significantly weakened, and China's optimized COVID strategy is in line with the majority of countries, a responsible and science-based approach should be adhered to and countries should make concerted efforts to ensure safe cross-border travel, keep global industry and supply chains stable and restore world economic growth.

Luo Jie



Opinion Line

Consumption reviving economy, but time to consolidate results

The Central Economic Work Conference convened in mid-December said that China should give priority to the recovery of consumption, strive to enhance consumption capacity, improve consumption conditions, and create more consumption scenarios.

Fully tapping the potential of the domestic market and strengthening the role of consumption should be an important task for the authorities.

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012, China has built a consumption-led domestic demand development pattern, which has strengthened the internal driving force for innovation-driven development.

China is the largest developing country with a vast domestic market. In 2012, the country's total retail sales of consumer goods amounted to 20.6 trillion yuan (\$2.99 trillion), but that had more than doubled to 44.1 trillion yuan in 2021, with an average annual

growth rate of nearly 9 percent, making it the second-largest consumer market in the world after the United States. In 2021, consumption accounted for 56.0 percent of domestic demand, 3.4 percentage points higher than in 2012. From 2012 to 2021, the country's per capita consumption expenditure rose from 12,054 yuan to 24,100 yuan, with an average annual nominal growth of 8.0 percent.

The Engel Coefficient of Chinese residents has dropped by 3.2 percentage points, and the gap with the developed countries has gradually narrowed. As consumption plays a bigger role than investment in economic growth, China's economic growth has gradually achieved a from-investment-to-consumption-driven transformation.

While seeing an ever-increasing level of consumption, the quality of China's consumption has also upgraded significantly. In 2021, China's per capita consumption expenditure on services was 10,645 yuan, 44.2 percent of its total per

capita consumption expenditure, 4.5 percentage points higher than in 2013.

As new technologies represented by the internet, big data, cloud computing and artificial intelligence play an increasing role, China's consumption has accelerated. The emergence of innovative consumption products in the fields of mobile intelligent terminals, intelligent robots, smart homes and intelligent transportation, and new consumption models such as virtual reality, augmented reality and interactive consumption have also offered consumers more consumption scenarios.

While recognizing the role of consumption in supporting economic growth, the country still needs to make greater efforts to consolidate the achieved results in boosting consumption, better coordinate supply-side structural reform and support the expansion of domestic demand through multiple channels in order to support the economy.

— ECONOMIC DAILY

US has got to realize TikTok not a problem

"It's highly addictive and destructive and we're seeing troubling data about the corrosive impact of constant social media use, particularly on young men and women here in America." This is what Mike Gallagher, a Republican Congressman from Wisconsin, said about TikTok on the first day of 2023. He also described the smartphone app with at least 100 million users in the United States as "digital fentanyl".

Why does Gallagher hate TikTok so much? It is right for a Congressman to see a problem in so many people viewing video clips at the tap of a smartphone screen when there are myriad other problems plaguing the US. By the end of 2020, 44 percent of students in the

US have used marijuana, which is legal for recreational purposes in over 20 states. There were 42,700 deaths caused by fentanyl overdoses in 2020 alone. TikTok, or "digital fentanyl" as Gallagher calls it, at least doesn't kill people.

There is no dearth of addictive things in the US, be it Hollywood, or YouTube or Twitter. So many people pick up their phones and browse various apps first thing in the morning.

Gallagher, of course, does not see a problem there. It is only TikTok he is worried about.

The reason Gallagher finds TikTok "destructive", as anybody would have guessed, is the fact that TikTok is affiliated to Chinese company ByteDance. It matters little to him that

some people even make money by sharing videos and attracting followers on the app.

For some time now, it is politically correct in the US to blame China for anything and everything and take harsh measures against Chinese companies such as Huawei, ZTE, and TikTok.

Maybe the authorities in the US need to be reminded that TikTok is totally run by US teams, and by demonizing TikTok they are stopping their own residents from making something creative and their own people from enjoying life.

They would actually do better to spare TikTok and attend to some bigger problems.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

EU has no reasons not to reject Washington's wedge

More than one year has passed since the European Union proposed its Global Gateway Initiative. Yet it remains unclear how much money has been disbursed under the framework. No wonder it was reported that confusion reigns in Brussels about how it should be materialized into concrete projects, or whether it still exists at all.

The confidence and ambition with which the EU leaders declared the launch of the initiative in late 2021 is in sharp contrast with the studied silence they maintain on it now. Misled by Washington, some in Brussels mistakenly regard China as a security threat and ideological enemy of the EU.

It is clear that neither the EU nor the US is willing to meaningfully assist developing countries, and the

Global Gateway Initiative is only a pie the EU has painted in the sky with pigments made in the US.

The Belt and Road Initiative is an open platform and public good, and China welcomes the EU and the US to take part in the initiative or complement it with initiatives of their own.

It is a pity that Brussels, under the influence of Washington, has been relinquishing its independence when it comes to handling issues related to China, and its Global Gateway Initiative is intended to counter the Belt and Road Initiative rather than promote the development of developing countries.

European Council President Charles Michel's visit to Beijing last month, as well as the recent constructive exchanges between Chinese

and German and French leaders on different occasions, have all indicated the significance the two sides attach to Sino-EU relations, and the broad common interests they can serve by keeping bilateral relations on a healthy development track.

Docking the Global Gateway Initiative with the Belt and Road Initiative would help breathe life back into the former, as that would prompt the EU and China to better tap into their complementarity so that they can work together to address not only the development and governance deficits of the world, but also the trust deficit.

Differences should never be a cause for confrontation but instead encourage dialogue that facilitates cooperation and mutual learning.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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COMMENT

Khalid Taimur Akram

China's pandemic fight praiseworthy

A detailed analysis of China's efforts and innovative medical actions shows that the Chinese leadership has left no stone unturned to safeguard people's lives and health in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic has disrupted the socio-economic structures of economies around the world, highlighting the importance of paramedical staff and resources. Even in this chaotic situation, China was one of the few countries to maintain healthy economic growth, and help other countries to sustain their development and provide them with COVID-19 vaccines and medical aid so they can prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus.

The visionary leadership of President Xi Jinping has protected the Chinese people from the worst effects of the virus, for which China had to impose strict restrictions and take necessary measures needed to conduct more targeted health campaigns. And given the improving pandemic situation, mainly because the virus variants have become less lethal despite being more infectious, China recently eased the anti-pandemic restrictions.

However, some Western countries have launched a hostile propaganda against China after it eased the restrictions,

which is ironic, because for a long time, they said China had no reason to continue the strict restrictions.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Western media has been calculating the human and economic costs of China's strict anti-pandemic policy, claiming the policy's success in containing the virus was limited. Thus, negating these claims and false accusations is important to control the spread of the virus.

It is also important to prioritize protection of the elderly and the children, extend the vaccination coverage and take all necessary preventive measures against the virus.

Strict anti-pandemic measures including vaccination and the use of public health tools were the hallmark of China's nearly three-year pandemic fight. More important, China's anti-pandemic policy is still aimed at keeping the number of cases as low as possible, and implementing scientific and targeted epidemic control measures while facilitating socioeconomic development.

This policy has saved precious lives and helped life return to normal in a relatively short time. And thanks to the Chinese leadership's robust policies and their implementation, the country has continued to provide goods and services for the world, including goods direly needed by many countries to fight the pandemic.

In a nutshell, China has been bolstering medical resources and mobilizing medical institutions at all levels to appropriately respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, and ensure people who have contracted the virus get proper medical treatment.

Amid the fight against the pandemic, China has helped many countries to stabilize their economies and thus protect people against the virus. As a result, Western countries' efforts to launch an anti-Chinese propaganda campaign are bound to fail.

China's anti-pandemic policies and precautionary measures have helped lower the risks of infection in the country. The fight against the pandemic over the past almost three years has been supported by Chinese people, from the frontline medical staff and local residents to college students and community volunteers, showing that the strict prevention and control policy was effective in containing

the virus.

In a nutshell, China has been bolstering medical resources and mobilizing medical institutions at all levels to appropriately respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, and ensure people who have contracted the virus get proper medical treatment.

The Chinese government is fully aware of the challenges, and has been working tirelessly to protect the Chinese people from the virus. Thus, any allegation against China prompts us to question the so-called preventative measures taken by the Western countries against the virus and to maintain economic stability. So instead of accusing China of being irresponsible for lifting the strict restrictions or blaming it for triggering another wave of infections across the world, Western countries should work with China to ensure the world is free of COVID-19.

False accusations and hostile campaigns against China will not impact China's global outreach. Instead, they will expose the forces detrimental to global peace and security.

The author is executive director of the Pakistan Research Center for a Community with Shared Future, Islamabad. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



Kang Bing

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Eat healthy food in moderation to help stay fit

Editor's note: Food loss and waste is a huge problem that should be minimized. It is important that people should take actions to promote their awareness against food waste and form healthy consumption behavior, writes a veteran journalist with China Daily.

"Eating simple food and in moderate quantity" has become a popular mantra for many Chinese people, while high-calorie intake and excessive eating have become a social problem, forcing many people to go on a diet to control their weight.

While having lunch with colleagues in the China Daily canteen, I often see people picking just a sweet potato or an orange and leaving the canteen which serves more than a dozen dishes, including dumplings, noodles, cakes and soups. Then there are those that are not seen in the canteen in the day time because they deliberately skip lunch.

Even at home, we have decided to reduce the four-dish dinner to three-dish dinner because there was always food left over. As a person who grew up in poverty and knows what hunger is, I hate to waste food.

Last year's statistics show that more than 50 percent of Chinese people above the age of 18 are overweight. As a result, over 40 percent of the Chinese people have an abnormal lipid profile and 60 percent have or need to guard against diabetes.

Since the food was rationed, people got a limited amount of food and therefore ate simple food in moderate quantity and hence did not have to worry about becoming overweight.

Excess calorie intake is the main reason behind the rising levels of cholesterol, high blood pressure and diabetes cases. To control their weight, many people either go on a diet, or hit the gym, or seek doctor's advice, or begin to play some sports to burn the excess calories.

My family and I have taken all three measures. After a simple dinner, we take both Western and traditional Chinese medicines before going out for a walk for an hour or so. If it's raining or very cold, we go to an indoor swimming pool to swim.

If we can control our weight, our lipid profile can be normal or close to normal. Trying to check my weight, I very often miss my "good old days" half a century ago when the supply of rice, cooking oil, meat and eggs was rationed. Since the food was rationed, people got a limited amount of food and therefore ate simple food in moderate quantity and hence did not have to worry about becoming overweight.

In the first two decades of my life, I didn't have enough to eat. Then for the next three to four decades, I had plenty of food thanks to China's economic boom. Now, I have perforce reduced my diet. The difference is that during my childhood and early youth, my longing for food was a compulsion — due to the country's development level — while now "eating little and simple" is my own choice.

While excess calorie intake is believed to be the main reason behind the rising number of overweight people, including children, many nutritionists say that the imbalanced nutrition pattern plays a big role in people gaining weight.

Their suggestion is to reduce the use of oil, salt and sugar in cooking, minimize the intake of meat and eggs, and eat more vegetables, fruits and coarse cereals. China Daily's canteen has been serving food on the basis of this principle, although some colleagues have complained against the "bland, tasteless" food served in the canteen.

Rural areas have their own problem. While excess calorie intake has become a big problem for urban residents, many rural residents including better-off villagers in China's eastern and southern coast are battling under-nutrition. China eradicated absolute poverty just two years ago. The poverty line — set at about 5,000 yuan (\$724) per rural resident per year — may be enough to provide protection against hunger, but not enough to prevent under-nutrition in some families that don't earn that much.

Although the government has taken measure to help rural children by providing free lunches for them, the quality of the food needs to be improved to ensure students get sufficient nutrition, as well as prevent villagers from slipping back into poverty.

With increasing awareness of eating healthy and with the consistent support of the government, hopefully excessive calorie intake as well as under-nutrition will soon become things of the past.

Michael Spence

Is it time to give up on 1.5°C?

Net-zero commitments are all the rage. Countries, companies, and others worldwide have committed to eliminating their net greenhouse-gas emissions by a particular date — for some, as early as 2030. But net-zero targets are not tantamount to limiting global warming to the Paris climate agreement's goal of 1.5°C Celsius — or any particular level of warming, for that matter. It is the path to net-zero emissions that makes all the difference.

This is well understood among experts. A 2021 report by the International Energy Agency, for example, charts a detailed path, divided into five-year intervals, toward achieving net-zero emissions by 2050 — and giving the world "an even chance of limiting the global temperature rise to 1.5°C". The most striking feature of this analysis, at least to me, is the magnitude of the decline that is required by 2030: roughly eight billion tons of fossil-fuel-based emissions, taking us from the 34 gigatons carbon dioxide today to 26 Gt.

To achieve this, emissions would have to decline by 5.8 percent per year. If the global economy grows at a conservatively estimated annual rate of 2 percent over that period, the global economy's carbon intensity (CO₂ emissions per \$1,000 of GDP) would need to decline by 7.8 percent per year. While carbon intensity has been declining over the last 40 years, the trend has been nowhere near this rate: from 1980 to 2021, carbon intensity fell by just 1.3 percent per year, on average.

That rate was not high enough to keep CO₂ emissions anywhere near constant, let alone cause them to decline. In fact, with global GDP growth exceeding the rate of carbon-intensity decline by about two percentage points, emissions roughly doubled during that period. One reason is precious little effort was made to reduce carbon intensity for most of that time. The decline that occurred was largely a byproduct of emerging economies becoming wealthier. (More developed economies have lower carbon intensities.)

To be sure, as climate change gained more attention from policymakers, the rate of decline did accelerate, averaging 1.9 percent per year since 2010. And with supply-side constraints now encumbering the global economy — annual growth could well run at just 2 percent in the next few years — a modest further reduction in carbon intensity could be enough to put the global economy at or near the peak of its total CO₂ emissions. Higher global growth might not even set back efforts to reduce the economy's carbon intensity, if it is fueled by the proliferation of digital technologies.

An emissions peak would be an important milestone. But unless it was followed immediately by a sharp decline, we would still be pumping some 34 Gt of CO₂ into the atmosphere



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

each year. While the IEA report does not address what would happen if we fell significantly short of the first two interim targets (2025 and 2030), one can probably assume that it will be next to impossible to avoid crossing the 1.5°C threshold.

We have the tools to reach the IEA's targets. As the report makes clear, no new technological breakthroughs are needed in the first decade. Moreover, the costs do not appear to be prohibitive. The prices of wind and solar energy, for example, have declined substantially in recent years. But there would have to be huge changes in almost every corner of the global economy, and those changes do not appear to be occurring nearly as fast as the IEA timeline would demand.

The sobering fact is that the IEA report's target of 26 Gt of CO₂ by 2030 is not within reach, because the global economy's carbon intensity is declining at barely a quarter of the required rate. A sharp discontinuity in this variable is possible, and perhaps some would argue that 26 Gt remains a useful aspirational target. But it does not seem particularly realistic.

Is it better to cling to an unattainable target, because it represents the best path for people and the planet, or revise

A concerted and coordinated effort in these large economies would make a material difference in emissions trajectories and, perhaps more important, generate the technologies and management approaches that will be needed to reach the net-zero goal.

that goal to something more feasible? Can continuing to tout an unrealistic goal hamper progress, as people become demotivated or simply stop viewing the effort as credible? Or is it worse to acquiesce to the consequences of abandoning the ambitious path, including the risk of crossing irreversible tipping points?

Whichever route the world chooses, the challenge will remain the same: reduce CO₂ emissions dramatically — and fast. Of course, that is easier said than done. The world economy comprises 195 countries with different cultures and political systems and at

different stages of economic development, as well as countless businesses of all sizes and types, and eight billion individuals. Complicating matters further, the widespread distributional effects of both action (rapid energy transitions) and inaction (climate change) are difficult to address, especially in international negotiations.

But there are ways to simplify the challenge. Half of global greenhouse gas emissions come from just eight economies: China, the United States, the European Union, Japan, India, Canada, Australia, and Russia. The G20 economies account for 70 percent. A concerted and coordinated effort in these large economies would make a material difference in emissions trajectories and, perhaps more important, generate the technologies and management approaches that will be needed to reach the net-zero goal.

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GLOBAL VIEWS



WU HAOZE / FOR CHINA DAILY

YU YONGDING

Unknown unknowns

It is in the interests of all the major economies to strengthen their economic cooperation

The top event for the world economy this year has undoubtedly been the interest rate hiking by the US Federal Reserve. The Fed was originally highly dovish over the inflation issue, but after November 2021, it pivoted to being super hawkish. The Fed has conducted seven interest rate hikes so far this year, and the federal funds rate has risen substantially.

The direction and intensity of monetary policy should be based on judgments over the nature of inflation. If inflation is caused by excessive demand, there is no doubt that a contractionary monetary policy should be put in place. However, if inflation is caused by supply shocks, such as the disruptions to supply chains caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the surge in energy prices caused by the Russia-Ukraine conflict, or geopolitical conflicts followed by tariff wars, it will be difficult to use interest rate hikes to curb inflation. Instead, such a move is more likely to increase the costs of enterprises, which will shift the rising costs to the users and consumers of products. The rising costs of production will, to a large extent, negate the effect of contractionary fiscal and monetary policies on curbing rising prices. With supply shocks and backlashes in globalization, the rush to maintain inflation at around 2 percent, a target set 20 years ago, is likely to result in stagflation.

The extremely expansionary fiscal policy put in place by the US government in 2020 and 2021, and the extremely expansionary monetary policy adopted by the Fed since 2020 to prevent a stock market crash are key reasons for the rapidly deteriorating inflation situation in the United States starting from March. Even so, the inflation in the US so far has largely resulted from supply shocks.

The inflation rate in the US has fallen for four consecutive months. The US GDP contracted for two consecutive quarters in the first half of this year. Although the US economy grew by 2.6 percent year-on-year in the third quarter, a surge in exports contributed 2.7 percentage points to this growth, while domestic demand continued to shrink. It is extremely rare for the US economic growth to mainly come from exports, and thus it is doubtful whether this economic growth can be sustained.

As long as we abandon prejudice and strengthen cooperation, countries in the world will be able to overcome difficulties in the world economy next year and achieve prosperity and development.

The economic performance of Europe in 2023 could be even more difficult than that of the US, with a higher possibility of stagflation. The Japanese economy could also slip into recession next year. The situation in developing countries might be better. India, in particular, may achieve relatively high economic growth in 2023.

The Chinese government set a GDP growth target of around 5.5 percent at the beginning of this year, and then carried out expansionary fiscal and monetary policies. This growth target was reasonable and within reach at the beginning of the year. The macroeconomic policies adopted by the government are generally correct. However, due to well-known factors, social and economic activities were greatly affected, and it was difficult for these expansionary macroeconomic policies to be implemented in full. China's economic growth in the first three quarters was lower than expected. Although the current inflation rate in China is lower than 2 percent, it may rise significantly sometime in the future.

The primary challenge that China needs to tackle is to stabilize and accelerate economic growth. We cannot give up eating for fear of choking, and we cannot turn to austerity policies as soon as the risk of inflation arises. There are no easy short-term solutions in macro policies. In order to maintain a proper economic growth rate, China may need to endure a relatively high inflation rate within a certain period of time.

The year 2023 could be difficult for economies across the world. It is extremely important to strengthen economic cooperation and policy coordination

among countries and regions, and to avoid beggar-thy-neighbor approaches. For example, the frictions in trade, the tariffs and the technology suppression instigated by the US targeting China not only hurt both economies but also the global economy as a whole. China and the US, although competitors, are in the same boat. Neither side should rock the boat.

China and Europe need to strengthen cooperation. When Europe imports manufactured products from China, it is actually conducting energy imports. Also, China can purchase EU bonds in order to diversify its foreign exchange reserves and respond to the bloc's Next Generation EU plan, which would be a win-win choice. The two sides should find a suitable way to renew talks on the China-EU Comprehensive Agreement on Investment as soon as possible.

China and India are the world's two most populous countries. As neighboring countries, China will benefit from India's rapid growth, and India's development also needs China. India should join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and strengthen cooperation with neighboring countries, including China, with an open attitude.

China and East Asian countries are close neighbors and key links in the global industry chains. Despite changing times and geopolitical landscapes, there is still a firm economic foundation for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Plus China, Japan and the Republic of Korea to achieve regional economic integration. In the face of new realities in geopolitics, East Asian countries should adopt a longer-term perspective and strive to deepen, instead of abandoning, the regional financial cooperation that began 25 years ago to attain greater regional prosperity.

As long as we abandon prejudice and strengthen cooperation, countries in the world will be able to overcome the difficulties in the global economy next year and achieve prosperity and development.

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CHEN WENLING

Six sense

China and the Central Asian Countries are effectively building a regional community with a shared future

The year of 2022 marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the Central Asian countries. At a virtual summit held in January 2022 to celebrate this 30th anniversary, President Xi Jinping delivered an important speech, proposing new goals and charting new directions for building a closer China-Central Asia community with a shared future.

China and the five Central Asian countries, being geographically connected, now share similar positions on international affairs and regional issues. The prosperity and security of this region is related to the common interests and development prospects of all six countries. Under the banner of building a community with a shared future for mankind, China and the five Central Asian countries should cooperate in the following six aspects.

The first is to build a community of development with a shared future for China and the five Central Asian countries. After over 40 years since it launched reform and opening-up, China is now the world's second-largest economy, with its per capita GDP reaching \$12,551 in 2021. President Xi proposed the Global Development Initiative in September in 2021, and buoyed by new opportunities and momentum for growth, the five Central Asian countries can work with China to build a community of development with a shared future, and jointly draw a blueprint for common development for the next 30 years.

Second, the two sides can jointly build a community of health for all. At the China International Import Expo in November 2022, an alliance for China and Central Asia in the field of medical care and health was established. The founding members of the alliance will constitute a joint force to promote medical and health cooperation between China and Central Asia in the future.

China's bioengineering and pharmaceutical sector is growing rapidly. The pharmaceuticals produced in China, compared with those of developed economies, are characterized by their affordable prices, high quality and high index of safety. Many innovative products are also emerging. More importantly, many multinational companies in China have transferred their Phase I and II clinical trials to China, as well as their original innovation, research and development arms. China has led the international community in the R&D, production and trade of innovative medicines. The five Central Asian countries can benefit from sharing resources with China in terms of healthcare.

Third, it is important to build a

community with a shared future between China and the five Central Asian countries with regard to infrastructure. The joint advancing of the Belt and Road Initiative has secured major progress over the past nine years, with landmark achievements attained in infrastructure connectivity in particular. At present, a preliminary framework of projects involving six corridors, six routes, multiple countries and a number of ports have been established. Among this framework are the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, China-Europe freight train services, the China-Laos Railway, the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway, the Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway, and the China-Thailand Railway, which is still under construction.

There is still a big gap between China and the five Central Asian countries in connectivity, which represents opportunities and broad room for cooperation.

For example, the construction of the China-Central Asia transport corridor can be accelerated, a move that could make the region the fastest growing area in infrastructure construction. The construction of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway, which was on hold for 25 years, has now started. Upon its completion, the railway can shorten the travel time by seven to eight days compared with the original Eurasian land bridge. It will directly benefit the three countries as well as neighboring countries. The project will reduce costs and improve the efficiency of the China-Europe freight train services.

Fourth, China and the five Central Asian countries need to build a community with a shared future in cyberspace.

The acceleration of a new round of technological revolution and industrial transformation has given more prominence to the importance of network interconnection. Building a community with a shared future in cyberspace is now in the pipeline between the two sides. China has made remarkable progress in the digital economy, digital ecology, and the development of cyberspace. The construction of new infrastructure that will serve as a pillar to the building of a community with a shared future in cyberspace, including 5G and 6G, Beidou Navigation Satellite System, supercomputing capabilities, big data and artificial intelligence, has put China in a leading position in the world.

As of September 2022, the num-

ber of 5G base stations being built in China had reached 2.2 million, with a total of over 11 million base stations already completed. The popularity of 5G in China, the nation's supercomputing capabilities and the Beidou system are no inferior to those of the United States. China has signed service agreements on services provided by the Beidou system with more than 140 Belt and Road participating countries. Therefore, there is broad space for building a community with a shared future in cyberspace.

Fifth, it is imperative to build a community with a shared future for man and nature.

The latest edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook noted that the world has only attained six of the 20 goals proposed previously, and there are still grave threats to global biodiversity. China and the five Central Asian countries can lead the world on cooperation in this front. China's ecological and environmental governance practices are worth borrowing, and the two sides have a lot of room for cooperation on new energy, clean energy, and ecological restoration and protection.

Sixth, China and the five Central Asian countries need to build a community with a shared future for peace and security.

The security situation in Central Asia is highly complex, with many unstable and uncertain factors, and the deterioration of the external environment has further amplified internal conflicts. China and the Central Asian countries have conducted increasingly extensive security cooperation, and the two sides have strengthened bilateral interactions in a more targeted manner. China and the five Central Asian countries have remained committed to following a path of peaceful development, serving as a shield for peace and security and contributing to the peaceful development of the global community, which is the reason why they share the same position on international affairs.

The Global Security Initiative was proposed by President Xi at this year's Boao Forum for Asia. This initiative proposes common, comprehensive and sustainable security, and calls for efforts to jointly foster a balanced, effective and sustainable security architecture. China and the five Central Asian countries have made key contributions to the peace, stability, development and prosperity of the region and the world.

The author is chief economist at the China Center for International Economic Exchanges. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



SUN XIAONING / FOR CHINA DAILY

LIFE

Artist with a bird's eye view

Imagination soars above the ordinary as illustrator paints a whole new world, **Li Yingxue** reports.



When Liu Jiayi looks at a bunch of sparrows, in her eyes, she imagines them as a group of schoolchildren in traditional clothes on a study tour, with each having his or her own attitude and characteristics.

With wonderful imagination and exquisite drawing skills, Liu, also known as illustrator Lumingshan, turns her wildest thoughts into lively paintings.

From girls and teenagers of yesteryear, she anthropomorphizes species of birds into different human characters. The 28-year-old's paintings are so adorable that they have attracted countless fans on the internet, and people online call her "the most beautiful illustrator who draws fairies".

Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin also forwarded her drawings on Facebook, describing them as "cute group portraits in traditional costumes by Chinese artist, based on photos of birds".

Liu recalls that, when she heard the news of her paintings being endorsed by Wang, she was so excited that she jumped out of bed. "I have been engaged in the creation of Chinese-style illustrations for a long time, and in the future, I'll stick to my creation style and hope more people from home and abroad like my works," she says.

Liu's route to becoming a professional illustrator was not an easy one, but it was fueled by her persistence in painting. She gave up being a doctor after eight years in college to work as an illustrator.

Born in Guiyang, capital of Guizhou province, Liu discovered her interest in painting during her childhood. "Painting has accompanied me for my entire childhood, and I learned from various painting books," she recalls.

In 2012, even though she liked drawing, she followed her parents' suggestion, and studied traditional Chinese medicine at Chengdu Sport University in Chengdu, capital of Sichuan province. Five years later, she continued to study for her master's degree at the same university, yet she never forgot her dream of painting and devoted all her spare time to it.

The summer vacation before she became a postgraduate changed her life, as she found a part-time job working as an assistant for an illustrator in Chengdu.

"That's the period when I made the most progress. Besides improving my drawing skills, I also learned how to use Photoshop software, how to communicate with people who give me drawing tasks and how to take business orders," Liu recalls.

Liu says she likes classical things and she's a fan of the "retro" aesthetic. During that time, she found her interest in ancient Chinese culture, especially the epic literary work, *Shanhaijing*, or *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*.

"The imaginary space for the book is huge, as the wording is beautiful and the stories are fantastic," Liu says, adding that she plans to publish an illustration book of *Shanhaijing* next year.

"I noticed that on the market, most of the illustrations of *Shanhaijing* are drawn by men, so I wanted to bring a feminine expression to the stories of the book," she says. "Some are romantic,



Above: Liu Jiayi has been engaged in the creation of Chinese-style illustrations for a long time.

Left, from top: Comparisons of birds with Liu's artworks featuring the characters they inspire.



A painting must resonate with people and it is a good piece of work if it can help people heal. I want to draw something that makes people feel happy, carefree and comfortable."

Liu Jiayi, 28, illustrator

and I'll select the beautiful mythical creatures to draw."

After finishing her postgraduate studies in 2020, Liu decided that it was time to become a full-time illustrator, as she can support herself with the money made by painting. She is often commissioned by magazines, book editors and video game companies to draw for them.

During her postgraduate years, she also co-published a book, titled *Zhongguo Shenhua Ditu* ("a map of Chinese myths"), for which she drew 30 illustrations.

Liu likes to read stories, especially short fiction that inspires her paintings, and she finds that ancient Chinese fairy stories inspire her a lot. "Animal photography can also be revelatory to me," she says.

The anthropomorphic bird drawing actually came about by Liu casually killing time while taking care of her father, who was hospitalized last year. She saw a photo of some sparrows and decided to draw them into human figures.

"I think birds are lovely, like elves, and their feathers are like colorful clothes, so I was thinking what if I turn them into lovely girls and their feathers into *hanfu* (a traditional Chinese style of clothing)," she recalls, adding that she is a fan of *hanfu*.

It only took her a couple of hours to finish the painting.

After she posted the drawing online, it soon attracted praise. Liu is collaborating with an animal protection NGO to help them design anthropomorphic figures of different birds and to popularize science at the same time.

In November, Liu held her first exhibition in Guiyang International Fashion Release Center, which will last until Jan 15. The exhibition, titled *Mountains and Seas*, showcases around 120 of her works in three series, *Shanhaijing*, ancient Chinese myths and anthropomorphic birds.

She is proud that the exhibition can be held in her hometown and that the local government set up a special bus service for residents to go and enjoy the exhibition.

On the opening day, Liu's family and friends were there to support her and got a guided tour from Liu. It took over an hour to introduce all of her paintings to the audience.

"My parents were quite happy that day. The exhibition showed them what I've been doing," she says.

One Sina Weibo user, with the handle "Yunduanxiade Shengjiezhihuang" commented about the exhibition: "When I saw Lumingshan's anthropomorphic birds, I realized that they are such pretty, lovely, cute and playful elves! I hope she will become an artist known by everyone!"

Li Liu'an, general manager of China Railway Construction Real Estate Group's Guizhou branch, a sponsor of the exhibition, says: "The introduction of Liu's exhibition not only provides a space for artistic exchange but also adds color to the city."

Liu enjoys communicating with her audience through her paintings, she says. When she plans an illustration, she will design the outline of the subject and their emotions. "As an illustrator, you need to tell the audience the whole story in one single painting," Liu says.

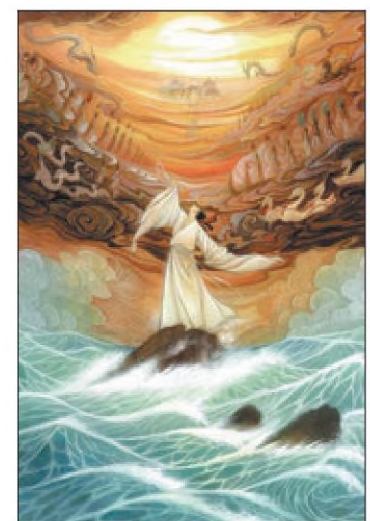
Besides the actual drawing aspect, she also runs her own accounts on social media. "Thanks to the social media era, I can be known by more people, and this made it possible for me to make a living through painting," she adds.

Part of the sense of accomplishment that comes with being an illustrator is the continuous learning, she says. "You can always get in touch with new subjects, and you have to learn all about them," she adds.

When she finds that she needs to strengthen some of her painting skills, such as coloring and drawing the human form, she will find relevant books and courses to improve herself.

"A painting must resonate with people and it is a good piece of work if it can help people heal," she says. "I want to draw something that makes people feel happy, carefree and comfortable."

Contact the writer at liyixue@chinadaily.com.cn



From top: Liu's other paintings, including a depiction of a female warrior called "the mysterious lady of the nine heavens"; Tang Dynasty (618-907) poet Li Bai; and the Fengyun-3 meteorological satellite with "the vermilion bird", or "the god of the south" in ancient Chinese myths. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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



CHINADAILY
Public Interest AD: 009
LI DONGHANG AND MA XUEJING / FOR CHINA DAILY

LIFE



From 2019 to 2021, Ju Anqi traveled around the country with his team to make *Lou*, which features historical and modern architecture and more than 50 architects, scholars and experts. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Education ties 'boost Pakistan project'

ISLAMABAD — Educational cooperation and exchanges between Pakistan and China are playing an important role in promoting the high-quality development of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, a flagship project of the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative, a Pakistani scholar said.

"BRI is a framework for multinational economic development. It is providing a window of opportunity that will bring socioeconomic stability for countries around the globe including Pakistan," said Safdar Ali Shah, director general of CPEC cell at the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan.

With CPEC entering an advanced stage, Shah said the exchanges and cooperation between the two countries in higher education have been reaching a new level over the past few years, adding that further collaboration in higher education is crucial to the building of CPEC and the development of the country.



It is providing a window of opportunity that will bring socioeconomic stability for countries around the globe."

Safdar Ali Shah, CPEC official

"Pakistan needs to produce young talent that meets the requirements of Chinese companies which want to invest in the country and are in desperate need of skilled people acquainted with the local conditions and languages ... so there is a need to ramp up educational cooperation for providing strong intellectual and talent support to Chinese companies," the scholar said.

According to Shah, 18 universities from China and Pakistan established the CPEC Consortium of Universities back in 2017 to promote academic exchanges for the high-quality development of CPEC. The number of member universities has increased to more than 110, indicating a substantial rise in academic and educational exchanges over the years.

The academic collaboration under the CPEC Consortium of Universities included the establishment of China study centers at various universities across Pakistan, joint research projects, language training and talent cultivation, cultural activities and joint conferences, workshops and exhibitions, he added.

"The number of Pakistani students learning Chinese language and the number of Chinese students learning Pakistan's national language Urdu have also increased considerably over the years, bringing the people of the two countries closer and closer," he noted.

Under the educational cooperation programs between the two neighbors, Shah said thousands of Pakistani students are studying in China, learning Chinese culture, language and majors, adding that most of these students are studying on Chinese scholarships.

Besides providing opportunities to Pakistani students, Chinese universities are going the extra mile to improve the education quality for the students to meet the needs of the two countries' major projects like CPEC and other vital fields, he said.

"Measures such as transforming the talent training concept to cultivate applied and compound talent, improving the teaching level by assembling a team of teachers with high professional standards, and designing tailored textbooks, are being taken for Pakistani students in Chinese universities to enhance the standard of education and training," he said.

XINHUA

Building nostalgia

After two films on Chinese architecture, experimental filmmaker Ju Anqi is now working on a third, **Chen Nan** reports.

Life can sometimes be defined by random events.

For Ju Anqi, a Chinese filmmaker, a chance to visit the Visions du Reel International Film Festival, a leading non-fiction film event in Nyon, Switzerland, in 2009, led to a project that he has been pursuing for the past decade.

That year, Ju's film, *Night in China*, which showcases a side of the country rarely examined, by capturing people's lives in darkness, from 6 pm to 6 am, won the jury prize at the festival. During the event, Ju watched a documentary on Japanese architecture and its influence on the world, especially on architects from Northern Europe. The documentary intrigued Ju.

"It inspired me to think of Chinese architecture, which has a long history and rich regional diversity. I wanted to make a film about Chinese architecture and the idea kept on growing, though I wasn't quite sure if I could make it," recalls Ju.

Ju then started doing research, talking to Chinese architects and experts, and busying himself with finding financial support. The result of his labor is three films under the theme, "China's architectural heritage": *Lou* (Building), *Chang* (Factory) and *Xiang* (village).

On Dec 19, the first film, *Lou*, premiered during the Hainan Island International Film Festival in Sanya from Dec 18 to 25. The second film, *Chang*, was selected as one of nine finalists for the H!Action Project Market at the same festival. The film will premiere in March. The shooting of *Xiang* will be completed in 2023.

"It felt like a longtime wish had finally been fulfilled. I was relieved and thrilled," says Ju, adding that audience feedback for *Lou* was beyond his expectations.

"The 90-minute film is not commercial. I was very happy to see how engaged audiences were. During the hour-long Q&A session after the premiere, they asked me lots of questions."

The shooting for the film started in 2019. From then and until 2021, Ju traveled around the country with his small team of eight people and interviewed over 50 architects, scholars and experts, who showed him different buildings, both historical and modern.

Ju recalls the first day of shooting for *Lou*. It was March 2019 and he went to the former site of the Sino-French University in Beijing along with a teacher of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, who introduced the history of the buildings



Director Ju Anqi (second from left) walks on the red carpet of the Hainan Island International Film Festival, which was held in Sanya from Dec 18 to 25. Ju's film, *Lou*, premiered during the event.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



I started the film project out of pure personal interest but as the shooting developed gradually, it became a responsibility."

Ju Anqi, film director



and the stories behind them.

Founded in 1920, the Sino-French University, located in the heart of Beijing, built a "bridge" for the exchange of culture and art between the East and the West. Chinese educator Cai Yuanpei was a co-founder of the university and its first president.

The buildings, designed by Wang Shenbo and containing important relics such as a plaque written by Sun Yat-sen, were included in protected cultural heritage in 1987 by the Beijing municipal government.

"I agree with the design philosophy of American architect Louis Kahn, who was interested in community life and the social responsi-

bility of architecture. When I looked at the buildings, I saw distinctive styles, and most importantly, I learned about the buildings' relationship with people," says Ju.

"I started the film project out of pure personal interest but as the shooting developed gradually, it became a responsibility."

One of the buildings where Ju shot during the making of *Lou* was the Zhenfeng Pagoda, which is located inside Yingjiang Temple on the banks of the Yangtze River in Anqing city, Anhui province. Built during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), the brick temple is over 60 meters tall and has eight sides. In May 2021, the pagoda was hit hard

by a rainstorm and the top collapsed. The local government in Anqing tried to restore it but had no photos or videos of the original look of the pagoda.

"We've taken videos and photos of the pagoda when we went to Anqing to shoot the film, including some aerial shots. So I offered the government our videos and photos, helping them to restore the top of the pagoda," says Ju. "The enthusiastic response made me very happy. The project is not only dear to me but also to lots of others who are keen on protecting old buildings."

The idea of shooting two more films, based on buildings in China, was born when Ju was shooting *Lou*. He says he met many people who told him that factories and buildings in villages in the country should be documented via camera, because they represent different eras and local lifestyles.

The director visited over 30 sites of former factories, and found that most had been renovated as art zones and office spaces. Ju used his camera to tell stories about the factories, linking history with the present.

As for the subject of his third film, *Xiang*, Ju says, "I want to make a film that is about villages in China and people's nostalgia."

So far, he has collected information on some 80 buildings in villages, such as in Quanzhou, Fujian province, and Kashgar, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

Ju has launched the China Architectural Heritage Film Center that works on "documenting, protecting and preserving old buildings in China", by working with local governments across provinces.

"The trilogy allowed me to delve into Chinese architecture and I hope the three films can eventually help to change things, such as having more people involved in filming and protecting old buildings," Ju says.

Born in 1975 in Urumqi, Xinjiang, he graduated from the directing department of Beijing Film Academy. He is regarded a pioneer among China's new generation of experimental filmmakers and his work covers videos, photography, narrative films and paintings.

In 2000, Ju's debut film, *There Is a Strong Wind in Beijing*, was shown at the 50th Berlin International Film Festival. In 2003, his documentary, *Quilts*, premiered at the Amsterdam Documentary Film Festival.

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SPORTS

YEAR-ENDER



Manager Dusty Baker Jr. and the Houston Astros celebrate their 4-1 World Series win against the Philadelphia Phillies in Game 6, in Houston, on Nov 5, 2022. AP

Memorable moments of 2022

A year of upsets and surprises but it also gave us some brilliant individual and team performances

Dusty Baker's run to a World Series title win was one of the several memorable sports stories in 2022, on and off the field.

One of the most respected people in baseball, the one thing missing from Baker's resume: a World Series ring as a manager.

Baker finally got the elusive ring with the Houston Astros while erasing some of the taint of sign-stealing the 2017 title in one of the best moments of the year in sports.

"Had this happened years ago, I might not even be here," Baker said. "So maybe it wasn't supposed to happen so that I could hopefully influence a few young men's lives and their families and a number of people in the country through showing what perseverance and character can do for you in the long run."

Baker won a World Series with the Los Angeles Dodgers, but had gone 25 years without winning one as a manager. He had been to the Fall Classic twice before without winning and was the most successful manager without a title before the Astros beat the Philadelphia Phillies in six games.

"To be the team that was able to pull it off for him, I know how much it means to him and it means so much to us," Astros pitcher Justin Verlander said.

Aaron Judge also made the headlines by breaking the American League record with his 62nd homer, leading to a record nine-year, \$360 million contract.

There were several off-field stories that made headlines — Brittney Griner, Dan Snyder and the Commanders, Suns owner Robert Sarver — but Baker's long-awaited title win wasn't the only redemptive sports story in 2022.

On the courts:

- In the NBA, the Golden State Warriors regained their past magic and solidified their dynasty with a fourth NBA title in eight years, but first since 2018. Stephen Curry was again the catalyst, solidifying his claim as the greatest shooter in NBA history with another dynamic performance.

- In men's college basketball, Kansas re-established its blue-blood status by mounting the biggest comeback in national championship history, rallying from 16 points down to beat North Carolina for its fourth national championship. The win came after an epic Final Four matchup between Tobacco Road rivals North Carolina and Duke.

- In women's college hoops, South Carolina did something no other team had been able to accomplish, handing UConn's Geno Auriemma his first loss in 12 national title games.

- The veterans ruled most of the men's tennis majors, with Rafael Nadal winning the Australian Open and French Open to stretch his Grand Slam record to 22 titles. Novak Djokovic won Wimbledon, but didn't get a chance to play in Australia or the US Open because of his vaccination status.

- Spain's Carlos Alcaraz was the lone youngster among the Grand Slam winners, breaking through to win the US Open at 19. Iga Swiatek won two Grand Slam titles in 2022, including a US Open that saw the farewell of Serena Williams after 23 titles.

On the ice:

- The Colorado Avalanche cranked up the way-



Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry (30) celebrates after guard Klay Thompson (right) shot a 3-point basket during Game 5 of the NBA Finals against the Boston Celtics in San Francisco on June 13. AP



Rafael Nadal of Spain celebrates his win over Daniil Medvedev of Russia after the Australian Open final in Melbourne on Jan 31. AP



Scottie Scheffler tees off on the 11th hole during the third round at the Masters on April 9. AP



Ochai Agbaji celebrates beating North Carolina as Kansas wins its fourth national college championship on April 4. AP

back machine, winning their first Stanley Cup title since 2001 by beating the reigning champion Tampa Bay Lightning in six games. The uber-talented core that suffered through several early postseason exits looks like a group that could be more than one-and-done with the Cup.

On the gridiron:

- The Los Angeles Rams proved that home cooking is best, beating the Cincinnati Bengals 23-20 to become the second straight team to win the Super Bowl at their home stadium after Tampa Bay did it the year before. The Super Bowl title was the Rams' first since 2000, when the franchise was in St. Louis.

- In the College Football Playoffs, Georgia pulled off a similar move in football, knocking off Alabama and Nick Saban for the program's first national championship in 41 years.

At the Olympics:

The Winter Olympics in Beijing, still grappling with the effects of the pandemic, saw American figure skater Nathan Chen earn gold after his flameout at the Pyeongchang Games four years earlier.

Lindsey Jacobellis, long known for her blunder at the 2006 Torino Games, finally won gold in snowboard cross and added another in the mixed-team event.

Chloe Kim proved she was the queen of the halfpipe, winning her second straight gold and Finland won its first hockey gold by beating favored Russia in the final.

Out on the fairways:

- LIV: The Saudi-backed LIV made waves that reverberated across the golf world, with several major players abandoning the PGA and European tours to cash in on the riches of the lucrative tour.

- On the PGA Tour, the young guys moved to the forefront. Scottie Scheffler won The Masters, Justin Thomas the PGA Championship, Matt Fitzpatrick took the US Open and Cameron Smith won the British Open, marking the first time all four majors were won by players under 30 in the same year.

On the track:

Youth prevailed at the Daytona 500 as well, with rookie Austin Cindric taking the checkers. Marcus Ericsson, a former Formula One backmarker, became the second Swedish driver to win the Indianapolis 500 by holding off some of the biggest names in North American auto racing.

Off the field:

- In Phoenix, Sarver made news for all the wrong reasons. He was suspended one year and fined \$10 million on Sept. 13 by the NBA over workplace misconduct that included racist speech and hostile behavior toward employees. Sarver then announced his intention to sell the team.

- Snyder had problems of his own in the nation's capital with a House committee investigating hundreds of instances of sexual harassment by men at the top levels of the organization. The franchise was fined \$10 million and Snyder hired a firm to look into his sale of the team.

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