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End of outbreak

Uganda is Ebola-free after 42 days without new cases, WHO declares

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More cities chosen for pilot programs in services sector

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Increasing demand

Vehicle sales in China expected to grow 3% this year; exports of NEVs also rising

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CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中国日报 FRIDAY, JANUARY 13, 2023

Children play on snow slides at Yuyuantan Park in Beijing on Wednesday. SHENG JIAPENG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Tourism market expects rebound during holiday

Longer stays over seven-day break favored by travelers, agencies say

By **CHENG SI**
chengsi@chinadaily.com.cn

China's tourism market is expecting a strong rebound during the Spring Festival holiday, with travelers eager to take long-distance trips and spend more money after the nation optimized its COVID-19 control measures.

Travel agency bookings and data show travelers are also ready for longer stays during the seven-day break that will start on Jan 21, with journeys to other regions in the country and overseas.

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During previous Spring Festival holidays, travelers preferred short-distance trips to destinations near their homes or workplaces due to virus control measures and health concerns.

Travel portal Tuniu said that 72 percent of its bookings for the upcoming holiday period were for cross-regional trips. Destinations with a coastal location or mild climate, such as Hainan province in the south and Yunnan province in the southwest, are high on travelers' lists.

540 percent
The increase in overseas bookings from the previous Spring Festival holiday on Trip.com

Longer stays are also favored, with around 31 percent of its online customers booking six-day trips, and 28 percent choosing four-day stays.

Travel agency LY.com is also seeing strong customer interest online.

On its platform, consultancy requests for long-distance travel during the holiday surged 20-fold in the week to Monday.

Consultancy requests for travel visas rose eightfold over the same period.

Winter locations with snow views and ice sports, such as Changbai Mountain in northeastern China's Jilin province, are also attracting a lot of interest.

According to a report by LY.com, bookings and interest in ice rinks and ski resorts are increasing. Beijing's Shichahai ice rink, for example, saw searches for the venue as a Spring Festival holiday destination on the agency's platform increase by 76 percent compared with the same period last year.

Ding Fan, who is in charge of travel portal Fliggy's Spring Festival holiday team, said that the tourism market will see growth in the number of travelers and the amount they spend.

However, the strong travel demand is also driving a rise in the prices of air tickets and hotels.

Travel portal Trip.com Group, said the price of a one-way flight to the popular beach destination of Sanya, Hainan, during the holiday period has surged 47 percent year-on-year to over 1,900 yuan ($280). A one-way air ticket to Dali, Yunnan, has jumped 65 percent to just over 1,500 yuan.

The group said that hotel rooms it offers on its online platform for Sanya and Yunnan's Xishuangbanna — a destination famous for its tropical landscape and ethnic Dai culture — are all booked for the holiday.

Outbound tourism during the Spring Festival holiday is also expected to surge after the optimization of the country's COVID-19 response policies.

Trip.com Group said bookings for overseas travel had surged by 540 percent from the previous Spring Festival holiday, while the average cost of overseas bookings has risen 32 percent.

Overseas destinations favored by travelers include Australia, Thailand and Malaysia.

Bookings for Melbourne, Australia, for example, have increased 50-fold from last year, while bookings for Bangkok, Thailand, rose tenfold.

Fliggy, the travel portal, said it has seen a spike in bookings for overseas trips on its platform. Bookings for international air tickets have tripled from last year, with reservations for the most popular destination, Thailand, increasing 200-fold.

Shen Jiani, a researcher at Trip.com Group, said that with the relaxation of travel policies, Chinese tourists are more confident about making overseas trips. "Chinese travelers will help energize the world's tourism," she said.

Special counsel named over Biden documents

By **BELINDA ROBINSON**
in New York
belindarobinson@chinadailyusa.com

US Attorney General Merrick Garland on Thursday appointed a special counsel to investigate President Joe Biden's handling of classified documents when he was vice-president in the Obama administration.

Biden acknowledged on Thursday that aides found a classified document in his "personal library" at his home in Wilmington, Delaware, and other documents in his garage, prompting the attorney general to name Robert Hur, a former Donald Trump-appointed US attorney in Maryland, to investigate the matter.

On Thursday, Biden reiterated that he and his attorneys are fully cooperating. The president said he will speak about the issue more, "God willing," soon.

Congressional Republicans had called on Garland to name a special counsel, just as he did over the classified documents found at former president Trump's Mar-a-Lago residence in Florida.

Information about the latest discovery came a few days after special counsel to the president Richard Sauber revealed that Biden's lawyers discovered a batch of 10 classified documents in a "locked closet" on Nov 2, while cleaning out an office formerly used by the president at the Penn Biden Center think tank in Washington DC. The discovery was only made public on Monday.

In appointing Hur, Garland said: "The extraordinary circumstances here require the appointment of a special counsel for this matter. This appointment underscores for the public the department's commitment to both independence and accountability in particularly sensitive matters and to making decisions indisputably guided only by the facts and the law."

Hur will take over from John Lausch, the top Justice Department prosecutor in Chicago, also a Trump-appointed attorney.

Hur said in a statement: "I will conduct the assigned investigation with fair, impartial, and dispassionate judgment. I intend to follow the facts swiftly and thoroughly, without fear or favor, and will honor the trust placed in me to perform this service."

The White House found out that Garland had appointed a special counsel when it was announced during a news conference Thursday afternoon, said White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre.

Following the appointment of Hur, Sauber said: As the president said, he takes classified information and materials seriously, and as we have said, we have cooperated from the moment we informed the archives that a small number of documents were found, and we will continue to cooperate.

"We are confident that a thorough review will show that these documents were inadvertently misplaced, and the president and his lawyers acted promptly upon discovery of this mistake," he said.

Garland said that on Nov 4, the archives informed the Justice Department about the first batch of classified documents. On Nov 9, the FBI assessed whether they had been mishandled.

See ***Counsel,*** *page 3*

Link of solidarity

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic (right) meets on Wednesday with Chinese and Serbian workers at the construction site of a 7.9-kilometer highway in Surcin, Serbia. The highway, which is being built by China Communications Construction Co, will open at the end of March.
SHI ZHONGYU / XINHUA

CROSS-BORDER LAND PORTS BUSTLING AGAIN AS RESTRICTIONS LIFTED

Officials, businesses welcome return of travelers and goods

in-depth

By **CHINA DAILY**

At 8 am on Sunday, Yan Feng arrived at the land port of Manzhouli, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, on a cross-border bus from Russia. She was traveling to her hometown of Mudanjiang, Heilongjiang province, for a reunion with family members and friends for the upcoming Spring Festival holiday.

Yan and 16 other passengers were the first inbound travelers to arrive at the port after it resumed customs clearance services on Sunday.

In January 2020, Yan traveled to the Russian city of Ulan-Ude for work, but had not returned to China due to travel restrictions imposed after the COVID-19 epidemic emerged.

"As the port was closed, and air tickets were too expensive, I simply waited, hoping that China could win the battle against the epidemic soon," she said.

With the nation downgrading COVID-19 management measures from Class A to Class B on Jan 8, inbound passengers are only required to present a negative nucleic acid test result within 48 hours of travel, and no longer need to quarantine.

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New blueprint promotes peace, prosperity

WORLD WATCH
By Hassan Ghafourifard

At the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in October, it was affirmed that China, under the leadership of the CPC, has established the foundation for building a "modern socialist country" by achieving a "moderately prosperous society in all respects".

By introducing a new development philosophy and creating a new pattern for development, China has waged a critical battle against poverty and succeeded in eradicating extreme poverty in the country 10 years earlier than the 2030 target of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

Since the worldwide spread of the novel coronavirus, China has given priority to saving human lives, and in tandem with the extensive fight against the virus inside China, it has provided widespread assistance to other countries in this tough fight.

Also, over the past decade, China has made great contributions to the development of the infrastructure of less-developed countries, contributing to the economic growth of countries and the prosperity of international trade with the Belt and Road Initiative.

This valuable public good has led to the formation of extensive cooperation between China and developing countries, and it has provided the basis for cooperation between China and countries participating in the BRI.

Today, China is pursuing modernization and high-quality development so that its huge population of 1.4 billion people can enjoy better lives, with prosperity for all and in harmony with nature.

China, under the leadership of the CPC, has put peace, development, cooperation and common interests at the forefront of its work, unlike the path taken by other major powers throughout history. In addition, based on the missions and tasks set by President Xi Jinping, who also is general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, it will contribute more to world peace and global development through its own development.

China's plan to modernize all aspects of Chinese people's lives, from economy, industry and agriculture to education, culture and politics, can be a good model for all developing countries.

A plan that aims to create a better and happier life for people can be a model of good governance for all people. This philosophy of development is based on people, and it will surely lead to convergence, peace and prosperity.

Furthermore, paying attention to the environment and stressing the harmonizing of development with nature can control the serious crisis facing humanity that has been caused by the longtime global neglect of the environment.

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PAGE TWO

Inbound travelers cross the China-Vietnam Nanxi River Bridge at Hekou Port, Yunnan province, on Sunday. The port is the largest in Yunnan on the Vietnamese border. LI XIAOPEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Ports: Travelers reunited with loved ones

Passengers wait to enter China at Dongxing Port, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Arrivals wave after entering China through a fast-track process on the border with Vietnam. CHEN RONGJIA / FOR CHINA DAILY

Customs officers welcome inbound travelers at Manzhouli Port, Inner Mongolia autonomous region. ANJILA / FOR CHINA DAILY

The national flag is waved by an arrival at Youyiguan Port, Guangxi. CHEN RONGJIA / FOR CHINA DAILY

From page 1

Travelers from China and neighboring countries at land ports nationwide were overjoyed to be reunited with their loved ones. Local officials and businesses also welcomed the return of customers and goods, along with the hustle and bustle at border cities.

Yan said: "I am very excited. For the past three years, I have been looking forward to the border reopening, as I really wanted to return home. I have been so sad not to have been with my parents and children."

Manzhouli, the largest land border port in China, processes more than 65 percent of Sino-Russian trade via land transportation. In 2019, the port handled 32.59 million metric tons of cargo and 1.9 million trips by travelers, according to figures from the facility.

At the port of Youyiguan in Pingxiang, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, which borders Vietnam, customs authorities used lanterns, flowers and potted plants to welcome travelers.

Some 2,800 passengers and 1,500 trucks passed through the port on Sunday, according to local authorities.

In 2020, the local government introduced a special customs clearance system for cross-border drivers. All Chinese freight vehicles entering and leaving the port were driven by designated cross-border drivers who were under strict closed-loop management.

Now, these drivers no longer need to wear protective clothing, and regular truck drivers are once again allowed to transport goods across the border.

Lu Qinghua, a truck driver for an international logistics company in Pingxiang, arrived at the port early on Sunday to transport goods to Vietnam for the first time in three years.

"The customs service is just as efficient as it was before the epidemic, and I can now return to driving my truck between China and Vietnam," he said.

Liang Donghai, who manages a local supply chain company, said the end of closed loop management is expected to increase customs clearance efficiency by 60 percent and reduce costs for his company by the same level.

"Before you know it, our company's business will have returned to the pre-epidemic level," he said.

Main channel

Youyiguan is an important exit and entry channel for travelers, and a main land channel from China to member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, with frequent exchanges of cross-border personnel and goods taking place at the port.

In 2021, the port's foreign trade continued to grow, as it handled a total of 402,800 inbound and outbound freight trucks and some 4.4 million tons of cargo imports and exports.

Lu Shaoxia, deputy director of the Pingxiang Commerce and Port Administration, said publicity has been stepped up for exit and entry policies to help enterprises, and truck drivers have been told that they need to obtain the necessary exit and entry licenses.

The port has also increased staffing levels, drawn up emergency plans, and made efforts to shorten customs clearance times and improve efficiency, she said.

Wu Xiaohui, Party secretary of Pingxiang, said the signing of a joint statement by China and Vietnam on further strengthening and deepening a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership and adjusting customs services at the port offers new opportunities for the city to boost its economic development.

He said that by using its strength in logistics, manufacturing and transportation, Pingxiang will quickly become a land hub and an important area for China's "dual circulation" development paradigm — in which the domestic and international markets complement each other, with the domestic market as the focal point.

> "I am very excited. For the past three years, I have been looking forward to the border reopening, as I really wanted to return home."
>
> **Yan Feng,** who traveled to Russia for work in January 2020, and arrived at the land port of Manzhouli, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, on a cross-border bus from Russia on Sunday

The port city of Dongxing, Guangxi, which also borders Vietnam, received hundreds of inbound Chinese travelers when it reopened on Sunday.

One of them, surnamed Liu, said: "I'm thrilled. Now that our country has relaxed its COVID-19 controls, I can return for a family reunion."

The port is preparing for a massive influx of overseas migrant workers returning home for the Spring Festival holiday. The local government is also planning to streamline entry and exit procedures for business travelers and tourists.

In Yunnan province, the port of Ruili, which stands on the China-Myanmar border, also reopened on Sunday. It is one of China's leading ports and the largest land port on this border.

The facility can process a maximum of 82 people simultaneously, and customs clearance can be completed in just 14 seconds.

The local government in Jiegao township, where the port is situated, has made numerous efforts to resume production and daily operations.

Cai Xin, general manager of an e-commerce center for jade in Ruili, said the business experienced great difficulties in the past three years, but it remains fully confident about the city's prospects.

He said the company spent 20 million yuan ($2.95 million) on upgrading its facilities, adding that the reopening of the border is highly significant.

The center, which operates nearly 800 channels on Taobao Live, Alibaba's livestreaming arm, and the short-video platform Kuaishou, ranks in the top three for business on both platforms' jewelry sections, he said.

"With the port reopening, we expect to see large numbers of people arriving in Ruili, and more products entering the city. By using livestreaming, we are helping to build Ruili into the capital of jade."

Right direction

Li Zhengjiang, general manager of a furniture company in Ruili, said that before the epidemic emerged, the business hired more than 200 workers from Myanmar, but for the past three years it experienced a shortage of employees.

"The border reopening means that everything is going in the right direction, and we are also welcoming the return of workers from Myanmar," he said.

Dingyu Duty Free, a shop selling alcohol, opened in the Jiegao Border Trade Area on Sunday. Total investment in the business is expected to reach 500 million yuan.

Guo Shaojing, head of the shop, said that as many tourists and business travelers passed through the port before the epidemic, it only took half a day for the company to decide to set up the shop.

"The local government has given us a great deal of help and has introduced favorable policies, enabling us to open the shop on the day the port reopened. We believe this is the right decision in line with China's opening-up policy, and we are confident in Ruili and our country," he said.

Hekou Port, the largest in Yunnan on the China-Vietnam border, resumed services on Sunday, with people from the two countries crossing the China-Vietnam Nanxi River Bridge and exchanging flowers to celebrate.

The port, which has reopened channels for pedestrians and vehicles, is connected to the Vietnamese province of Lao Cai by land and water. For years, sightseeing and cross-border tourism in the area has boomed, and cross-border public transportation have developed. In 2019, some 6.61 million inbound and outbound trips were made through Hekou Port.

Hekou Party Secretary Yu Yang said a Spring Festival gala will be held to strengthen bonds between people on both sides of the border. During the Spring Festival holiday, visits will be exchanged by Party and government delegations, while a series of investment promotions and cross-border tourism negotiations will also be conducted.

In Tibet autonomous region, Gyirong Port has reopened. Six cargo trucks loaded with products from Nepal were inspected at the port on Dec 28 as two-way trade resumed.

Located in the Himalayas, the port is 800 kilometers from the regional capital Lhasa and about 130 km from Kathmandu, capital of Nepal.

One of the biggest land ports between China and Nepal, it handles more than 60 percent of the two countries' trade.

The port went into full operation in 2014. Plans to expand the facility received national approval in 2017, with the port opening for business to third-destination countries in August that year.

Trade at the port was suspended in 2019 and 2020 due to the epidemic, but one-way freight services to Nepal resumed in July 2020 after cautious and strict measures were adopted to minimize any risks.

Xie Qiang, head of the Gyirong customs administration, said that since July 2020, import and export trade volume at the port has reached a total of more than 4.2 billion yuan, with total cargo throughput standing at 97,800 tons.

On Dec 28, imports at the port reached 38.7 tons and were valued at 825,800 yuan, he said.

Authorities have streamlined customs clearance services at the port, and its freight processing capacity has returned to the pre-pandemic level, Xie added.

Huang Zhonghan, manager at an import and export company in Nyalam county, Tibet, said the resumption of two-way trade at the port is great news for the company, as it can reduce costs and transportation times.

This year, the company will send an employee to Nepal on a long-term basis to expand business, which Huang believes will pick up soon.

He said the company will also import and export more types of products to meet demand in China and Nepal.

"With the government continuing to invest in infrastructure, foreign trade at ports in Tibet will be elevated to a new level, and we believe that Gyirong Port will have a better future," Huang said.

This story was written by Li Yingqing in Kunming, Yuan Hui in Hohhot, Zhang Li in Nanning, Palden Nyima in Lhasa, and Zou Shuo in Beijing.

Contact the writers at liyingqing@chinadaily.com.cn

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TOP NEWS

Thrilling exercises

A Palestinian youth practices parkour skills at Gaza Beach on Wednesday as others perform fire eating. SAMEH RAHMI / GETTY IMAGES

US schools step up security measures

By **AI HEPING** in New York
aiheping@chinadailyusa.com

The superintendent of public schools in Newport News, Virginia, said the district will increase its use of metal detectors after a 6-year-old boy shot a teacher in her classroom. The district has detectors, but they haven't been used daily.

On Thursday, new federal data showed random metal-detector use was reported in 9 percent of the nation's schools, with daily use at 6 percent.

The data was part of a report that shows how US public schools have increased security over the past five years. It was released by the National Center for Education Statistics, a research arm of the US Education Department. The data was collected in a survey of more than 1,000 public schools in November.

About two-thirds of the public schools surveyed now control access to school buildings and grounds, up from about half in the 2017-18 school year., according to the report.

"Panic buttons" or silent alarms are being used by an estimated 43 percent of schools to connect directly with police in case of an emergency, up from 29 percent five years ago.

Some 78 percent equip classrooms with locks, up from 65 percent.

Nearly a third of public schools reported holding evacuation drills nine or more times a year.

Just 3 percent of public schools reported arming teachers or other non-security employees.

In 2021, schools and colleges in the United States spent an estimated $3.1 billion on security products and services, compared with $2.7 billion in 2017, according to Omdia, a market-research company. Despite the expenditures, the number of gun incidents at schools has grown.

The shooting on Jan 6 in Newport News, Virginia, was the first school shooting this year. Police said the first grader brought a gun from home and used it to seriously injure his teacher.

Last year broke the record for the most school shootings in more than four decades and marked one of the most violent years for youth ages 12-17, according to various unofficial counts.

More than 330 people were fatally shot or wounded last year on school grounds, up from 218 in 2018, according to the K-12 School Shooting Database, which tracks instances in which a gun is fired or brandished on school property.

The overall number of incidents — which can include cases where no one was injured — also increased to more than 300, up from about 120 in 2018, and as few as 22 in 1999, the year of the Columbine High School shooting in Colorado, when two teenagers killed 13 people.

The counts include any acts of gun violence on K-12 public, private and charter school campuses, including mass shootings, gang shootings, domestic violence, shootings at sports games and after-hours school events, suicides and other incidents.

School shootings are "very, very rare", David Riedman, the founder of the K-12 School Shooting Database, told The New York Times.

His tracker identified 300 schools out of nearly 130,000 public schools with gun incidents last year.

"The most common occurrence — throughout history and throughout the last couple of years as things have dramatically increased — is there are fights that escalate into shootings," said Riedman. He said the data suggests that there are simply more people, even adults, bringing guns to school campuses.

Overall, shootings accounted for less than 1 percent of the total gun deaths for American children in 2021: 3,597 children died by gunfire, according to provisional statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

CHINA DAILY USA

NEW YORK HEADQUARTERS
1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,
New York, NY 10036
Telephone: 212-537-8888
Fax: 212-537-8898
editor@chinadailyusa.com
readers@chinadailyusa.com
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WASHINGTON
National Press Bldg, Suite 1108
529 14th Street NW
Washington, DC 20045
Tel: 202-662-7249
Fax: 202-662-7247

SAN FRANCISCO
235 Montgomery Street, Suite 900,
San Francisco, CA 94104
Tel: 415-348-8288
Fax: 415-348-8388

SEATTLE
800 Fifth Ave, Suite 4100
Seattle, WA 98104
Tel:206-922-2868

HOUSTON
1001 South Dairy Ashford Suite 100
Houston, TX 77077
Tel: 713-595-7660

CANADA | TORONTO
4711 Yonge Street, 10th Floor
Toronto, Ontario, M2N 6K8
Tel: 416-481-5706

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Counsel: AG cites 'circumstances'

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On Nov 14, Lausch was appointed to lead an investigation about the documents. On Dec 20, the documents in the garage were found. On Jan 5, Lausch advised Garland that appointing a special counsel was warranted.

Biden said earlier this week that he didn't know what was in the first documents found.

Sauber said that following the discovery, Biden's attorneys immediately alerted the White House counsel's office, which then contacted the National Archives and Records Administration, which picked up the documents the next day.

The first discovery prompted Biden's team to search other addresses. Garland said Biden's lawyers told the Justice Department about the discovery of more classified material at his home Thursday.

Biden created the Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement, which has headquarters at the University of Pennsylvania, and would use it occasionally from 2017 until he launched his 2020 presidential campaign in 2019.

The appointment of a special counsel to investigate Biden came shortly after Jack Smith was appointed special counsel for the criminal investigation into Trump, who had 300 documents at Mar-a-Lago.

Dozens of documents marked classified were found at Trump's Florida estate in August. The FBI carried out a raid only after attempts to recover them were rebuffed.

Biden lambasted Trump's mishandling of those highly classified documents as "irresponsible" in a September interview with CBS' *60 Minutes*.

Ohio Representative Mike Turner, the top Republican on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, urged Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines to conduct a review into the documents Biden had.

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, a California Republican, told reporters Thursday: "I think Congress has to investigate this.

"They knew this has happened to President Biden before the election, but they kept it a secret from the American public?" McCarthy said. "He goes on *60 Minutes*, criticizes President Trump, even knowing what he has done, and he wasn't president at the time?"

Democratic Georgia Representative Hank Johnson said he isn't "ruling out" foul play in the discovery of classified documents found in Biden's possession, suggesting they could have been planted.

"Things can be planted in places and then discovered conveniently. That may be what has occurred here. I'm not ruling that out. But I'm open in terms of the investigation needs to be investigated," he told Fox News on Thursday.

Foreign minister dismisses false 'debt trap' claims

Accusations about Chinese loans to Africa groundless, ignore development assistance

By **ZHANG YUNBI**
zhangyunbi@chinadaily.com.cn

Foreign Minister Qin Gang denied on Wednesday allegations by some foreign politicians and media that China's loans to African countries are creating "debt traps".

He made the remarks during a joint news conference with Moussa Faki Mahamat, chairman of the African Union Commission, at the body's headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Qin, who is on his first trip overseas as the country's top diplomat, labeled the claims "narrative traps" and groundless accusations.

Of the G20 members, China has offered the most debt suspension to African countries and has signed deals or reached agreement with 19 of them on suspending debt, he said.

President Xi Jinping announced in 2021 that "China is ready to channel to African countries $10 billion from its share of the IMF's (International Monetary Fund) new allocation of Special Drawing Rights".

Qin said, "relevant works have achieved progress in phases".

He cited a World Bank report that showed multilateral finance institutions and private creditors account for nearly three-quarters of Africa's total debt. "They could and should play a bigger role in the debt relief issue of Africa," Qin said.

Observers said raising the "debt trap" hype again is not helpful to relieving the financial burden that least developed countries African countries face, given the lingering COVID-19 pandemic, the global economic downturn and geopolitical conflicts.

"The ultimate solution for resolving the debt issue of African countries is to push for their progress in development, poverty relief and achieving their economic potential," said He Wenping, a senior researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of West-Asian and African Studies.

"China has done more than many Western countries in terms of creating job opportunities, making investment and building factories in African countries," she said.

Hassan Khanenje, director of the HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies, told Turkey's Anadolu Agency: "If you look at the extent and the degree of (China's) investment, even just starting with Ethiopia, many African countries have been extremely receptive to Chinese investment."

Media claims of the creation of a "debt trap" in Africa have pointed to loans under the Belt and Road Initiative, after China signed cooperation deals with some African countries.

Ren Lin, head of the Department of Global Governance at the CASS' Institute of World Economics and Politics, said some developed countries with ulterior motives have demonized BRI cooperation between China and partner countries, by claiming that building projects under the initiative leads to debt traps.

"The debt issues of those countries involved in the BRI should be attributed to other factors such as unsettled ongoing issues, the impact of the global financial crisis, the stimulus packages of those countries themselves and excessive financing in financial markets," she said.

In contrast with some Western countries pushing other nations' economies to the point of collapse, China has been earnest in suspending the debts of African countries within the G20 framework, she said.

Asked by reporters about the second US-Africa leaders' summit held last month in Washington, Qin said, "Africa should be a big stage for international cooperation, not an arena for competition among major countries".

Since the start of this century, China has built over 6,000 kilometers of railway, more than 6,000 km of roads, nearly 20 ports, and over 80 major power facilities in Africa, Qin said. "We are glad to see any country — no matter who it is — that is sincere in helping Africa achieve peace and development," he said.

China is willing to embark on trilateral and multilateral cooperation with African countries to jointly make greater contributions to the revitalization of Africa, he added.

Foreign Minister Qin Gang attends the completion ceremony on Wednesday of the Headquarters of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. DONG JIANGHUI / XINHUA

Philosophy: Nation to play bigger intl role in future

From page 1

Today, everyone has come to an understanding that the continuation of the current destructive trends in the world will cause deep crises and catastrophes that will seriously affect the current generation and future generations.

The attention and commitment of the CPC to world peace and the promotion of common interests, along with respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other countries and the serious opposition of the Party to all kinds of hegemonism, the Cold War mentality and interference in the internal affairs of other countries, are the grounds for China to play a strong role in the years to come.

China's adherence to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and its commitment to promote a new type of international relations based on deepening and expanding global cooperation through a commitment to equality, openness, cooperation and expanding the convergence of interests with other countries provides a clear perspective of China's attitude to the issue of international interactions.

The insight of the leadership of the CPC on global peace and development has provided the basis for extensive international cooperation to build a better world for all.

The role of civil societies in promoting this approach and expanding cooperation is very prominent. People-to-people diplomacy, cultural exchanges, social interactions, party cooperation and the cooperation of nongovernmental organizations, along with the diplomatic relations of governments with each other and the interactions of governments within the framework of the UN, can provide the basis for the end of extremism, violence, war and bloodshed and lead humanity to a new direction for development.

Continuing our long-standing cooperation with the CPC and its affiliated organizations, we at the International Foundation for Islamic Development are very pleased that the approach to the development of international exchanges has been approved at the 20th CPC National Congress.

The international foundation believes that the current issues facing humanity, including the environmental crisis, securing access to water, food and energy, overcoming health issues, eradicating poverty, and preventing violence and extremism, cannot be solved by any country on its own, and that to solve these problems, extensive international cooperation and interaction will be required in the framework of multilateralism and mutual respect.

The author is a former vice-president of Iran and also chairman of the International Foundation for Islamic Development. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

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CHINA

Relaxed controls to unleash potential in culture, tourism

Scenic spots to operate as normal with some virus safety measures remaining

By **CHENG SI**
chengsi@chinadaily.com.cn

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism scrapped eight guidelines related to COVID-19 controls on Wednesday, requiring local authorities to ensure the normal operation of cultural and tourist activities and traveler mobility under the recently optimized COVID-19 policies.

The eight previous guidelines listed COVID-19 control requirements for travel agencies, entertainment venues and tourist attractions, as well as libraries. For example, travel agencies were not allowed to organize group tours to destinations with high infection risks, nor receive tour groups from those places.

Under the new guideline, the ministry said that the tourism and cultural industries have already seen positive results.

It said that the government's focus is on switching from eliminating infections to protecting health and preventing severe infections, following the downgrading of COVID-19 management earlier this month.

The ministry emphasized in the guideline that the downgrading of management aims to control the epidemic in a more scientific, precise and effective way, which can better balance epidemic control and socioeconomic development.

Under the guideline, local authorities are required to plan epidemic containment in accordance with the new national-level policy, but may take temporary control measures in case of a severe outbreak. Local authorities should help tourist and cultural site operators undertake regular epidemic prevention measures, such as wearing masks and carrying out regular disinfection, to lower the risk of infection.

It also stated that cultural and tourism bureaus at all levels should gain a better understanding of the downgraded management policy. It's necessary to spread awareness of epidemic prevention via online platforms including websites, WeChat accounts and apps to explain the changes to the public.

The ministry stressed that tourist and cultural operators should make sure their employees follow epidemic prevention rules and make a habit of washing their hands and wearing masks, and that proper training should be carried out.

Cultural and tourism bureaus at all levels are required to supervise public cultural and tourism organizations and operators and help correct improper behavior in the process of implementing the optimized COVID-19 control measures.

Earlier this month, Hu Heping, minister of culture and tourism, said at a video conference that the nation's epidemic prevention and control work has entered a new period, which requires more scientific and precise measures and policies to protect people's health and lives, and also to minimize the side effects the epidemic has brought to tourism and cultural industries.

HK, mainland to restart high-speed rail on Sunday

By **XI TIANQI** and **WILLIAM XU** in Hong Kong

A total of 10,000 daily tickets for high-speed trains between the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong went on sale at noon on Thursday, with tickets for days in the run-up to the Chinese New Year quickly snapped up hours after.

Hong Kong and the mainland will resume their high-speed train services on Sunday, with tickets each way capped at 5,000 per day.

The number of high-speed train tickets is in addition to the 60,000 daily quota currently set for HK residents traveling to the mainland.

Passengers in Hong Kong can purchase high-speed train tickets to stations in Shenzhen, Dongguan and Guangzhou, all in Guangdong province, via the 12306 website and mobile application — the national railway ticketing system — or from designated travel agencies, the MTR, the city's high-speed railway operator, announced on Thursday.

China Railway Guangzhou Group said that it will arrange an average of 38.5 pairs of high-speed trains every day running from stations in Guangzhou and Shenzhen to Hong Kong's West Kowloon Station.

Initially, West Kowloon Station will provide trains to Shenzhen's Futian, Shenzhen North and Guangzhou South and Guangzhou East stations.

In a news briefing on Thursday morning, Secretary for Transport and Logistics Lam Sai-hung said that the resumption of the high-speed rail service is attractive to travelers because it has been suspended for three years due to the pandemic, and that there are already many attractions near West Kowloon terminus, such as M+ and the Hong Kong Palace Museum.

No prior bookings for checkpoint services are required for passengers boarding high-speed trains departing from or entering the city, Lam added. The West Kowloon Station checkpoint will operate from 6:30 am to 11:30 pm every day, as it did before closing due to the pandemic.

High-speed train tickets will be sold on a real-name basis and passengers can board trains with their identification documents. Cross-border train passengers are required to produce a negative COVID-19 nucleic acid test taken within 48 hours of traveling across the border.

People line up to buy tickets in Hong Kong West Kowloon Station on Thursday, as cross-boundary high-speed rail linking Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland will resume on Sunday. CALVIN NG / CHINA DAILY

A high-speed test train arrives at Guangzhou South Railway Station from Hong Kong on Wednesday. PARKER ZHENG / CHINA DAILY

The MTR said passengers boarding the trains should wear a mask throughout the journey, and that alcohol-based hand rubs and sprays are not permitted on trains.

More cross-border traffic is gradually returning to normal. Ferry services between Hong Kong and Zhuhai Jiuzhou Port will resume from Sunday, with a 66-percent discount on the first day, according to Zhuhai Jiuzhou Harbor Passenger Transport Services.

The company will have four ferry trips between Zhuhai Jiuzhou Port and Hong Kong-Macau Ferry Terminal between Jan 15 to 21, the eve of Chinese New Year. It will be extended to seven ferry trips on Jan 22, with four more ferries between the port and China Ferry Terminal in Hong Kong.

No prior booking is necessary for the ferry services, according to the company's spokesperson.

Asked when cross-boundary bus services will resume, Lam said that the government would first need to consult with relevant mainland authorities after reviewing the resumption of high-speed rail services, adding that there was no timetable for resuming those bus services at present.

On Jan 8, Hong Kong reopened four checkpoints connecting with the mainland. In the initial stage, 60,000 people are allowed to travel each way between Hong Kong and the mainland through the checkpoints in operation every day.

They are not subject to quarantine measures, but they must provide a negative COVID-19 test result taken within 48 hours prior to traveling. They also need to have made a prior booking through designated websites if they opt to pass through the three land ports.

Contact the writers at lindaxi@chinadailyhk.com

Tibet releases work plan for COVID-19 downgrade

By **DAQIONG** and **PALDEN NYIMA** in Lhasa

The leading group office for COVID-19 in the Tibet autonomous region released its plan for downgrading COVID-19 management from Class A to Class B to the public on Monday.

The plan outlines 11 measures, including the vaccination of elderly people, investing in healthcare, enforcing new prevention and control measures and managing infections coming from overseas.

People at high risk of infection, those older than 60, those with manageable diseases or with low immunity or low antibody levels, will be instructed and encouraged to actively obtain a second booster shot of the COVID-19 vaccine.

The plan instructs medical institutions to prepare enough Western, Chinese and Tibetan medicines to treat and prevent infections, as well as enough antigen test kits.

"According to the plan, on the basis of 15 to 20 percent of the patient population served by the center, we have already stocked various types of medication — including Lianhua Qingwen capsules, cough and antipyretic medicines, and traditional Tibetan medicines," said Champa, head of the Tsalgongthang Township Health Center in Lhasa.

Champa said his center has a fever clinic and the stocked medications can meet the needs of at least 1,000 patients. He said the center has served an average of 30 patients a day in the last two months.

"For elderly and immobile patients above the age of 60, we provide door-to-door medical consultations and offer follow-ups over the telephone," he said.

The plan says that medical centers are required to prepare enough beds and equipment for treating severe patients, including oxygen supply.

Tsering Tso, deputy head of the People's Hospital of Yadong in the region's Shigatse city, said her hospital is actively implementing the plan.

The hospital has set up a fever clinic financed by the Yadong county government, and aims to provide more convenient and better services for patients.

"The new fever clinic is located near the entrance of the hospital, so it is closer and more convenient for patients," Tsering Tso said, adding the former fever clinic was not easy to find and reach.

"In terms of providing intensive care for severe patients and targeted groups, our county has 66 severe monitored patients, and every patient is assigned with medics to follow up," she said.

"We have purchased more than 200 sets of medical equipment for our intensive care units, added more beds, and our county has seven ambulances ready to become operational 24 hours a day to transfer severe patients to higher-level hospitals."

Contact the writers at palden_nyima@chinadaily.com.cn

Climate change envoys for China, US hold talks

By **HOU LIQIANG**
houliqiang@chinadaily.com.cn

Xie Zhenhua, China's special envoy for climate change, spoke with his United States counterpart John Kerry via video on Wednesday, according to a media release from the Ministry of Ecology and Environment.

Xie and Kerry exchanged ideas on the implementation of a consensus reached in Bali, Indonesia, and discussed cooperation on promoting a global multilateral effort to address climate change, the release said.

The two sides agreed to hold further talks as both China and the US are striving to cope with the problem, it added.

China suspended climate talks with the US in August to protest then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan.

Before the Wednesday talks, Xie and Kerry had held formal consultations on the sidelines of the COP27 United Nations climate change conference in Egypt in November.

The consultations happened soon after President Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden had a candid and in-depth exchange of views on Nov 14 on issues of strategic importance in China-US relations and on major global and regional issues ahead of the G20 Summit in Bali.

It is in the interest of both countries to promote the global recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, tackle climate change and resolve regional issues through China-US coordination and cooperation, Xi said during the meeting.

Biden said the US is committed to keeping the channels of communication open between the two presidents and at all levels of government, in order to strengthen necessary cooperation and play a key role in addressing climate change, food security and other important global challenges.

Nation claws back land suffering from erosion

By **HOU LIQIANG**
houliqiang@chinadaily.com.cn

China has made consistent progress in reducing its land area affected by severe water and soil erosion in the past decade, according to the Ministry of Water Resources.

The total area of eroded land across the country had decreased to about 2.7 million square kilometers by 2021, down by 274,900 sq km from 10 years ago, Vice-Minister of Water Resources Zhu Chengqing said at a news conference organized by the State Council Information Office on Thursday.

China has a six-tier system to classify the severity of water and soil erosion, with "extremely severe" representing the worst, followed by "severe".

In 2021, about 18.9 percent of land plagued by water and soil erosion fell into the classifications of "severe" and "extremely severe", compared with 33.8 percent in 2012, Zhu said.

"The water and soil loss control work has effectively improved the conditions for agricultural production and the living environment in rural China, and thus boosted socioeconomic development," she said.

China has released a guideline to strengthen the conservation of water and soil to promote the construction of an ecological civilization, a concept promoted by President Xi Jinping for balanced and sustainable development that features harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature.

The guideline, released by the general offices of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council early this month, details targets for strengthening water and soil conservation by 2025 and 2035.

By the end of 2021, 28 percent of China's land was affected by water and soil erosion to some extent. The country aims to see the proportion decrease to 27 percent by 2025 and to 25 percent by 2035, according to the guideline.

Wu Wenqing, the ministry's chief planner, has stressed the challenges in realizing the targets.

Almost 46 percent of the country's land troubled by water and soil loss is located in deserts and alpine regions with high altitude where there are not adequate conditions for treatment, he said.

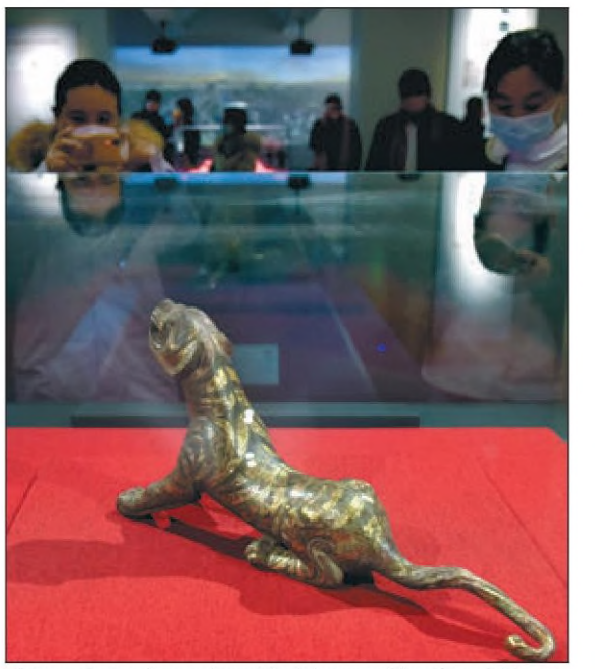
With geographical and other natural conditions, as well as the country's technological capabilities brought into consideration, he said, China is only able to completely remediate about 19.4 percent, or 520,000 sq km, of the remaining area affected by water and soil erosion.

"This means that the remaining areas with water and soil erosion are all hard nuts to crack. It will be increasingly challenging to treat them," he said.

Wu noted forest and grassland with water and soil loss as one of the ministry's priorities in its endeavor to make the 2025 and 2035 goals a reality.

The ministry will strive to increase the vegetation coverage rate in forests and grasslands and enhance the capabilities of ecosystems in conserving water and soil, he said.

Pride of place


Visitors admire a bronze tiger at the Museum of Han Prince's Mausoleum at Dayun Mountain in Xuyi, Jiangsu province, on Thursday, at the museum's opening. Some 1,000 relics showcase the life of Liu Fei (168-128 BC), a prince during the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220), and the burial customs of the people of that time. YU PING / FOR CHINA DAILY

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POLICY REVIEW

More service sector programs announced

Six cities selected for opening-up as country eyes economic recovery

By ZHANG YUE
zhangyue@chinadaily.com.cn

China has recently established pilot programs related to the service industry in six cities as it looks to expand opening-up nationwide and accelerate economic recovery, officials and experts said.

On Dec 20, the State Council, China's Cabinet, approved three-year pilot programs in Shenyang, Liaoning province; Nanjing, Jiangsu province; Hangzhou, Zhejiang province; Wuhan, Hubei province; Guangzhou, Guangdong province; and Chengdu, Sichuan province, bringing the total number of cities with similar programs to 11.

It was the third time that the list has been expanded since the first list started in Beijing in 2015.

According to the guideline, the six cities will encourage opening-up by improving industrial regulations, standards and management while focusing on development. In addition, local governments will advance reform and develop modern services that exploit their unique resources, making them more competitive globally and helping contribute to overall national growth.

The pilot programs in Beijing led to specific opening-up measures, including advancing reforms in technological services and innovation, boosting the development of the digital economy and trade, strengthening reform and innovation in financial services and fostering greater global cooperation through internet services.

One of the main reasons that these programs are important is because they help increase foreign investment, which is at the heart of opening-up efforts, according to a statement from the Ministry of Commerce. For example, a spike in foreign investment has driven the optimization and upgrading of China's industrial structure, which has helped the country's ability to meet demands.

With seven years' experience of piloting opening-up programs in the service industry, officials and experts believe that the addition of the programs, particularly since the optimization of COVID-19 containment measures, will significantly increase economic activity this year and in particular, boost economic recovery and create even more experience to draw on that can contribute to China's overall agenda for opening-up.

Tu Xinquan, a professor at the China Institute for World Trade Organization Studies at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, said that when the country first started the programs in the capital, the government's aim was to accumulate experience that other cities could learn from.

"That was also only two years after the Shanghai Free Trade Zone was established," Tu said. "One thing about Beijing is that the service industry makes up a greater proportion of the city's economic landscape, while manufacturing makes up a relatively smaller portion. Therefore, in terms of opening-up of the service industry, Beijing is playing a similar role to Shanghai's FTZ."

He added that overall, the level of opening up in the service industry is low.

Tu said that over the past seven years, the pilot programs in Beijing and four other provincial-level regions — Tianjin, Shanghai, Chongqing and Hainan — have been successful, and he expects that the six recently added cities will gain valuable knowledge from their own attempts.

For years, the service industry has been the primary means of attracting foreign investment and driving growth. During the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-20) period, the average annual growth rate of foreign investment in the industry was 4.4 percent, accounting for more than 70 percent of the actual use of foreign capital.

From January to November last year, China's actual use of foreign capital in total stood at roughly 1.16 trillion yuan ($171 billion), marking a 9.9 percent increase year-on-year. Of that figure, the actual use of foreign capital in the service industry was 842.61 billion yuan, accounting for about 73 percent of the total.

Li Jun, director of the Institute of International Trade in Services at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation in Beijing, said that he expects the six new cities to take greater strides to boost opening-up in the high-tech production service industries.

"One common feature among the six cities is that they all have a solid development base in production and manufacturing," he said. "They can combine this with the pilot opening-up programs and developments in the modern service industry to explore and create new advantages for themselves."

Tu said that the expansion of pilot programs in the six cities was well-timed as the country is optimizing its COVID-19 containment strategies, and he expects the programs to achieve their stated goal.

"The COVID-19 situation over the past three years has dealt a heavy blow to the service industry, particularly endeavors that require contact between people, such as catering, transportation and tourism, which are also important areas in which China needs to expand opening-up," he said. "I believe the current optimization of containment measures and reopening will create new opportunities for the six cities to open up their service industries more effectively."

SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

> "One common feature among the six cities (Shenyang, Nanjing, Hangzhou, Wuhan, Guangzhou and Chengdu) is that they all have a solid development base in production and manufacturing. They can combine this with the pilot opening-up programs and developments in the modern service industry to explore and create new advantages for themselves."
>
> **Li Jun,** director of the Institute of International Trade in Services at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation in Beijing

Local governments should play vital role in opening-up effort

By ZHANG YUE
zhangyue@chinadaily.com.cn

With China advancing reform and opening-up on all fronts, the role that local governments play in pushing forward opening-up in the service industry is particularly important compared to other industries, expert said.

Six cities were recently added to a list of those in which pilot programs focused on expanding opening-up measures have been established. Their efforts will target the service industry and should aim to better support local businesses while also increasing investment opportunities, he continued.

Tu Xinquan, a professor at the China Institute for World Trade Organization Studies at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, said all six cities are important in their regions, have a solid foundation in the service industry and are strong manufacturing hubs. "I think the governments should concentrate on developing service industries that are closely related to production and manufacturing," he said.

For example, Hangzhou in Zhejiang province, which has a strong digital economy, should focus on combining digital services with its manufacturing industry, Tu explained.

He stressed that to make the pilot programs more effective, the role of local governments is crucial. They must help companies compete with global counterparts and improve local business and investment environments, he said.

"In the process of opening up the service industry, local governments usually play a bigger role than that in manufacturing. This is because, for one thing, the service industry is very closely related to socioeconomic activity. Also, in the service industry, local businesses are more likely to compete with global peers," he said.

"Therefore, I think local governments should have a more open and active attitude regarding the opening-up of the industry. Their job should be to aid the entire service industry, rather than just specific businesses."

Tu also said he believes proper opening-up and competition will help push forward local economic growth and facilitate the upgrading of specific areas in the service industry in the six cities.

Policy Digest

Plan aims to increase planting of tea oil trees

Authorities have set a target of ensuring that more than 6 million hectares of tea-oil camellias are planted by 2025, according to a three-year action plan released on Monday by the National Forestry and Grassland Administration, the National Development and Reform Commission and the Ministry of Finance.

The tea-oil camellia is a woody plant, and its exploitation has a long history in China. Given its environmental and economic importance, the document stated that China will expand plantation by 1.3 million hectares between this year and 2025, to produce more than 2 million metric tons of tea oil a year.

In addition, the country will upgrade about 850,666 hectares of forest by planting tea-oil camellias over the next three years, it said.

According to the plan, more than 992,000 hectares will be planted in 600 counties covering eight provinces and autonomous regions, including the provinces of Hunan and Jiangxi and the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, which are core areas for the trade.

Meanwhile, nearly 200 counties in seven provincial-level regions, including Chongqing and the provinces of Yunnan and Henan, have been designated as priority areas for expansion. More than 285,000 hectares are expected to be planted in those regions.

Fourth cultural heritage survey to be conducted

China's National Cultural Heritage Administration will launch a national survey of cultural heritage later this year, according to a meeting attended by cultural heritage authorities on Jan 5.

According to Li Qun, head of the administration, the survey will be active for three to four years so officials can get to know the number, location, features and condition of immovable cultural heritage nationwide.

Based on the results, a national catalog will be created to better assess their situation and help create policies to better protect cultural heritage, Li said.

Deng Chao, an official with the administration, said that apart from examining, registering and identifying newly found immovable heritage, the survey will focus on reexamining examples that have already been identified and registered.

A list of institutions focusing on the protection of cultural heritage will be made public along with the catalog, Deng said, adding that the survey also aims to help improve the skills of those engaged in heritage protection and raise public awareness of the need to protect sites.

The survey will be the fourth of its kind. The third was organized between April 2007 and December 2011, during which more than 760,000 immovable objects were examined and registered.

Authorities to better monitor rural poor

Authorities will bolster efforts to carry out regular monitoring of and to provide assistance to low-income residents in rural areas to prevent a large-scale lapse back into poverty due to illness, according to a notice published on Jan 3.

The notice, issued by the National Healthcare Security Administration and four other central departments, stressed the importance of establishing a long-term mechanism to aid the effort.

It stated that in rural areas, more than 99 percent of low-income people need to be covered by basic insurance. Moreover, targeted assistance needs to be provided to qualifying patients with high medical expenses.

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WORLD

Tokyo-London military pact raises tensions

Experts say deal risks exacerbating mistrust between Asia-Pacific nations

By **ZHAO RUINAN**
zhaoruinan@chinadaily.com.cn

The Tokyo-London defense agreement signed on Wednesday, seen as "a bilateral version of NATO", will stir tensions in the Asia-Pacific and undermine regional peace and development, experts have warned.

The Reciprocal Access Agreement signed by British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida creates a legal basis for the deployment of British and Japanese troops on each other's territory for training and other operations.

Zhou Yongsheng, a professor at the Institute of International Relations, China Foreign Affairs University, said the pact would exacerbate regional tensions and undermine stability.

"The deal is no doubt a bilateral version of NATO," he said, explaining that, according to the agreement, the UK, a NATO member, can send troops to Japan. This is tantamount to Japan bringing more NATO defense forces into East Asia, further mixing NATO forces with Japan's military presence in the region, and further building the US-Japan military alliance, he said.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said on Wednesday that the pact should be "conducive to enhancing mutual understanding, trust and cooperation between countries".

"It should not target any imaginary enemies, still less replicate the obsolete mindset of bloc confrontation in the Asia-Pacific," he said. "The Asia-Pacific is an anchor for peace and development, not a wrestling ground for geopolitical competition."

The pact also allows Japan and the UK to hold joint military exercises. The deal had been in the works for years and was discussed when Kishida met with former prime minister Boris Johnson in London in May.

Zhou warned that the pact would set a bad example that could lead to a more chaotic Asia-Pacific, which over the past year has seen the spillover of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and Pyongyang's all-too-frequent missile launches.

"Is it possible that other NATO countries want to follow suit and deploy troops to Japan? That would be terrible," the professor said.

Also on Wednesday, Japan's defense and foreign ministers met with their US counterparts in Washington and vowed to strengthen their military alliance in the Asia-Pacific region.

The talks finalized a plan by the United States to send a so-called Marine Littoral Regiment, a more agile unit that can operate both sea and air defenses, to Japan's southern island of Okinawa. US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said the unit would be in place by 2025 after a reorganization of an existing artillery regiment.

Xu Liping, director of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said that the US-Japan alliance has slid into military deterrence, which can only exacerbate the mistrust between countries in the region.

'Cold War mentality'

"It's clearly a Cold War mentality that provokes more confrontations in the region. It's irresponsible and runs counter to peace and development, the theme and trend of our time," Xu said.

Kishida is on a weeklong trip to G7 countries including France, Italy, Canada and the United States. He will meet US President Joe Biden on Friday.

Wednesday's agreements also follow Japan's announcement in December that it will increase its defense spending to 2 percent of GDP over five years, a benchmark adopted by NATO members in 2014. That would also make Japan's defense budget the third largest in the world.

"The country's move to revise defense regulations and increase its military spending is illegitimate in essence," Zhou said.

"In the past, Japan was more cautious and restrained in expanding its military capacity, but now it is using the Ukraine crisis and rising tensions on the Korean Peninsula as excuses to grow its influence on the region," said Zhou, adding that this desire to expand could push the region to the brink of fresh conflict.

Grand celebration

World War II veteran Joseph Eskenazi, who is the oldest living veteran to survive the attack on Pearl Harbor, holds a photo of his younger self at an event celebrating his 105th birthday at the National World War II Museum in New Orleans on Wednesday. GERALD HERBERT / AP

Fossil finds

A scientist works at a fossil site in the Cerro Guido, some 2,800 kilometers south of the Chilean capital Santiago on Wednesday. Scientists have found the remains of four types of dinosaurs in the Chilean Patagonia, an inhospitable area that has become a major fossil site over the past decade. INACH / AFP

US cancer deaths drop by one-third

By **MAY ZHOU** in Houston
mayzhou@chinadailyusa.com

The cancer death rate in the US continues to decline and dropped 33 percent from 1991 to 2019, saving an estimated 3.8 million lives during that time, the American Cancer Society said Thursday.

In the US, cancer has been the second-leading cause of death after heart disease. In 2020, more than 600,000 Americans died of cancer.

However, fewer people now are dying of cancer. The Cancer Society's annual statistics report shows that the five-year relative survival rate for all cancers combined has increased from 49 percent in the mid-1970s to 68 percent from 2012 through 2018.

The current survival rate is highest for cancer of the thyroid (98 percent), prostate (97 percent), testes (95 percent) and for melanoma (94 percent), and lowest for cancer of the pancreas (12 percent).

The study indicated that over the course of a lifetime, men have a 40 percent probability of developing some type of invasive cancer. Women fare slightly better, with a 39 percent probability.

The most dramatic reduction of cancer incidence is cervical cancer among young women. The analysis found that among women aged 20-24, the incidence of invasive cervical cancer declined by 11.4 percent annually from 2012 through 2019, with an overall reduction of 65 percent.

Researchers pointed out that it is the result of the vaccine against the two strains of HPV that cause 70 percent of all cervical cancers. It was approved in 2006 for females ages 9-26. The first group of vaccinated adolescents are now in their 20s.

This "totally follows the time when HPV vaccines were put into use", Dr William Dahut, the society's chief scientific officer, told CNN. "There are other cancers that are HPV-related — whether that's head and neck cancers or anal cancers – so there's optimism this will have importance beyond this," he said.

For both genders across age groups, lung and bronchus cancers are No 1 in incidents and cause of cancer death; colon and rectal cancer ranked third in both incidence and cause of cancer death.

For women, the second most prominent cancer type is breast cancer, which is also the second-leading cause of cancer death among women. Incidents of breast cancer are on a slight uptick trajectory, up by 0.5 percent every year since mid-2000. Researchers contributed the uptrend "at least in part to continued declines in the fertility rate and increases in excess body weight".

For men, the second-largest cancer type is prostate, which is also the No 2 cause of cancer death for men. Prostate cancer incidence also has been on an upward trend, rising 3 percent per year between 2014-19. That translated to 99,000 more cases.

"Unfortunately, prostate cancer remains the number one most frequently diagnosed malignancy amongst men in this country, with almost 290,000 men expected to be diagnosed with prostate cancer this year," Karen Knudsen, CEO of the American Cancer Society, told CNN.

The study also found some racial disparities among cancer patients. Overall cancer incidence is highest among white people, followed closely by Native Americans and black people.

However, sex-specific incidence is highest in black men, whose rates during 2015 through 2019 were 79 percent higher than those in AAPI men and 5 percent higher than those in white men. High cancer incidence in black men is largely due to prostate cancer.

While white women have the highest incidence with cancer rates 10 percent higher than black women, black women have the highest cancer mortality rate.

Czech voters prepare to choose new president

By **JULIAN SHEA** in London
julian@mail.chinadailyuk.com

Three candidates — a billionaire ex-premier, a former NATO general and an economist — lead the polls ahead of Friday's first round of the Czech presidential election.

The winner will become head of state of a country battling record inflation and bulging public finance deficits because of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

The polls suggest that the three leading contenders are the only ones in the running, Josef Mlejnek, an analyst at Charles University in Prague, told Agence France-Presse. "It is 99 percent clear that two out of the three will make the runoff," Mlejnek said.

Five other candidates have been trailing in opinion polls behind former prime minister Andrej Babis, former paratrooper Petr Pavel and economist Danuse Nerudova, the only woman running.

Unless someone wins more than 50 percent in the first round, which is considered unlikely, a second round will pit the top two contenders on Jan 27 and 28.

The winner will succeed the 78-year-old Milos Zeman, whose final term ends in March.

While the role is largely ceremonial, it is the head of state who names the government, picks the central bank governor and constitutional judges, and serves as the top commander of the armed forces.

Babis, who has a tiny edge in opinion polls, has a net worth of just over $4 billion, according to Forbes magazine.

Euronews quoted a survey by local polling company Median, which had Pavel in the lead at 29.5 percent, three points ahead of Babis, though another poll by Ipsos gave Babis a narrow lead, with both having Nerudova in third place, well clear of any other candidates.

Doubts have been expressed about the fact that she has never held political office, but Nerudova is keen to turn this to her advantage, emphasizing that she would usher in a new era and a new approach.

"Our country was managed as a company for eight years," she said in a recent speech, in a nod to a pledge made by Babis when he became prime minister.

Babis has in the past been a vocal critic of the European Union.

But despite his sometimes strained relationship with Brussels, Babis was keen to draw attention to his meeting this week with French President Emmanuel Macron, one of Europe's biggest power brokers.

"I am glad that Europe's most important politician found time for me and that we have such a friendly relationship," Babis tweeted after their meeting.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Eased policy a boost to trade with Nigeria

By **KAYODE OGUNBUNMI**
in Lagos, Nigeria
For China Daily

Nigerian business leaders have welcomed China's optimization of COVID-19 control policies that allow inbound visitors to enter the country without quarantine, saying it will boost trade between the two nations.

Bayo Adeleke, secretary of the Independent Shareholders Association of Nigeria and chief executive officer of investment firm Lancelot Ventures, said China's latest policy for international travelers is "heartwarming news" for Nigerian-Chinese trade.

Due to interruptions in travel caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, trade between Nigeria and China has been affected over the past three years, and has had an impact on the Nigerian economy, he said.

China lifting mandatory quarantine requirements for all inbound visitors "would facilitate Nigeria's economic growth and increase bilateral relations between the two nations", he said.

Muda Yusuf, CEO of the Centre for the Promotion of Private Enterprise in Lagos, described the new policy as a welcomed one that is likely to further boost the economies of African countries such as Nigeria.

"Business is about connectivity and communication. Though the internet has made virtual communication easier, there is a level of business you cannot consummate online. Therefore the decision is good for business and for our economy," Yusuf said.

"Without a doubt, we are likely to see an increase in velocity in economic transactions between Nigeria and China."

Positive movement

Yusuf expects to see more positive movement in the global supply chain because of China's strategic role in the global economy.

"The reopening of factories across China is a very good thing as a lot of businesses across the world depend on Chinese manufacturers as suppliers of either finished products or parts," he said.

In his New Year message to Nigerians, Chinese Ambassador to Nigeria Cui Jianchun warned against what he described as a "political virus" that might be deployed by certain countries against China.

"Compared with the natural virus, what we should be much more vigilant on is the political virus," he said.

"Political manipulation of COVID-19 response measures by a few countries would only bring chaos to the world's solidarity. In this regard, we highly commend the federal government of Nigeria for its science-based and proportionate COVID-19 response measures, which have featured from the very beginning of its response."

Hans Kluge, the World Health Organization's regional director for Europe, has urged countries to take science-based precautionary COVID-19 entry restrictions that are proportionate and non-discriminatory.

"For those countries in our region introducing precautionary travel measures at this time, we are calling for such to be rooted in science, to be proportionate and non-discriminatory," Kluge said.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

WHO declares end of Ebola outbreak in Uganda

By **NELSON KIVA** in Kampala, Uganda
For China Daily

The World Health Organization has announced the end of the Ebola outbreak in Uganda, which came less than four months since the first case of the Ebola Sudan strain was confirmed in the country's central Mubende district in September.

"I congratulate Uganda for its robust and comprehensive response, which has resulted in today's victory against Ebola. Uganda has shown that Ebola can be defeated when the whole system works together," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a statement on Wednesday.

The WHO made the declaration after the 42-day mandatory period without a new case, which is needed to declare that the outbreak is over.

The incubation period for the virus that causes Ebola is between two and 21 days. Patients have a fever as an early symptom, but later pass blood from the mouth, nose and eyes. The fatality of the disease is up to 90 percent.

Matshidiso Moeti, the WHO's regional director for Africa, said the Ebola outbreak was the most challenging in the past five years, but Uganda had stayed put and continuously fine-tuned its response even without vaccines.

"Two months back, it looked as if Ebola would cast a dark shadow over the country well into 2023, as the outbreak reached major cities such as Kampala and Jinja, but this win starts off the year on a note of great hope for Africa," she said.

Moeti added that right from the start when Uganda declared the outbreak, the WHO worked with a range of partners, including vaccine developers, researchers, donors and the Ugandan health authorities.

"Three candidate vaccines were identified and over 5,000 doses of these arrived in the country with the first batch on Dec 8. The speed of this collaboration marks a milestone in the global capacity to respond rapidly to evolving outbreaks and prevent them from becoming larger," she said.

Despite the vaccines not being used during the outbreak, Yonas Tegegn Woldemariam, the WHO representative in Uganda, said they remain a contribution of Uganda and its partners to the fight against Ebola.

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.

Doctors prepare to visit a patient who was in contact with an Ebola victim, in the isolation section of Entebbe Regional Referral Hospital in Uganda on Oct 20. HAJARAH NALWADDA / AP

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WORLD US

Nurses' 3-day strike in New York City ends

By **MINLU ZHANG** in New York
minluzhang@chinadailyusa.com

A three-day strike by more than 7,000 nurses at two major New York City hospitals ended Thursday after tentative deals that include wage increases and the creation of hundreds of new nursing positions.

The deals at Mount Sinai Hospital in Manhattan and Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx include a commitment to safer staffing ratios. Nurses began returning to work at both hospitals Thursday morning after the deals were announced.

The New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA), New York's largest union, which represents more than 42,000 members, said in a statement Thursday that for nurses at Montefiore, the tentative deal would include a 19.1 percent wage increase over three years, the creation of more than 170 new nursing positions and healthcare coverage for eligible nurses, according to The New York Times.

The tentative agreement at Mount Sinai also includes the same wage increases and establishes staffing ratios for the first time for all inpatient units with an enforcement mechanism, the union said, according to the Times.

Nurses will vote next week to approve the deal.

Union President Nancy Hagans on Thursday said in a statement that the tentative deals are "a historic victory for New York City nurses and for nurses across the country".

"Today, we can return to work with our heads held high, knowing that our victory means safer care for our patients and more sustainable jobs for our profession," she said.

Union officials said there were more than 700 open nursing positions at Montefiore and 3,500 working nurses. At Mount Sinai, there were about 500 open positions, and 3,600 working nurses, according to the Times.

The hospitals have remained open during the three-day strike, using higher-cost temporary nursing services to provide care and transferring other staff to non-medical nursing duties. They had to postpone non-emergency surgeries and transferred some patients to other hospitals.

People enter Mount Sinai Hospital in New York on Thursday. Two New York City hospitals reached a tentative contract agreement with thousands of striking nurses that ended the walkout. SETH WENIG / AP

The United States Postal Office issues its first stamp of the Year of the Rabbit Thursday at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco. Joining the dedication ceremony are from left: Jay Xu, president of the Asian Art Museum; Derek Kan, representative of the USPS Board of Governors; and San Francisco Mayor London Breed. CHANG JUN / CHINA DAILY

Rabbit stamp's issuance special

By **CHANG JUN** in San Francisco
junechang@chinadailyusa.com

A diverse crowd of several hundred people queued up in front of the Asian Art Museum on Thursday morning for a ceremony that meant more to them than just the issuance of a popular postage stamp.

The United States Postal Service (USPS) announced the launch of a special stamp to highlight the Year of the Rabbit, which according to the Chinese lunar calendar falls on Jan 22 and ends on Feb 9, 2024.

One of the most celebrated Chinese traditional holidays, approximately 1.5 billion people around the world observe the Lunar New Year, or Spring Festival.

USPS Art Director Antonio Alcala worked on the rabbit stamp design with artist Camille Chew to create imagery inspired by decorated masks used in dragon and lion dances. The well-received stamps are available in strips of 20.

Also joining the jubilant gathering, where different languages could be heard, were San Francisco Mayor London Breed; China's Consul General in San Francisco Zhang Jianmin; and his counterparts from Indonesia and Japan; California State Treasurer Fiona Ma; Jay Xu, director of the Asian Art Museum; and numerous elected officials from the city of San Francisco and county.

"We constantly talk about celebrations of our diversity as strengths," said Breed. "The Lunar New Year represents thousands of years of history. It is the time to promote this (Asian) community in such an extraordinary way."

Breed emphasized that San Francisco is a place where discrimination against Asians is unacceptable.

"We also know that this community has not been without challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic," said Breed, referring to the rise in hate crimes against Asians in the past three years. Through joint efforts among many departments, organizations and volunteers, "We've seen a significant decline in the numbers of anti-Asian crimes," she said.

Breed also promoted San Francisco's Lunar New Year Parade in early February, joking that Washington and Los Angeles are not comparable in scale or popularity.

The Lunar New Year celebrations and the stamp event, said Xu, all reflect the recognition of "our community's fine integrity and essentialism to the United States. It enables us to tell more stories — our past, our present and our future."

As a stamp collector since his youth, Xu said that through the collection of artifacts such as stamps, people could strike up a conversation.

"Stamps can go everywhere and can define friendship (between different countries and cultures)," he said, adding "This stamp (of the rabbit) is for all. The Lunar New Year is for all."

Derek Kan, of the USPS Board of governors, flew from Washington to oversee the stamp's issuance.

"For more than three decades, USPS has issued stamps highlighting the Lunar New Year, and they are some of the most successful stamp releases in our history," Kan said.

Chloe Chan, a second-generation Chinese immigrant, told China Daily that the rabbit stamp is very "artistic" and worthy of her long wait in line.

She has collected every stamp the USPS has issued for the Chinese New Year celebration. Now in a big family of four generations, Chan is hopeful that her children and grandchildren observe the Lunar New Year the same way she does — with housecleaning, holiday decorations, rituals and food to honor family roots and Chinese culture.

The USPS on Dec 30, 1992, issued its first Chinese New Year stamp, for the Year of the Rooster. Created by first-time stamp designer, Clarence Lee from Honolulu, Hawaii, the unique modern, Chinese design inspired by China's traditional papercut look was very popular. Many post offices sold out in just a few days, and the stamp was in high demand in Asia.

The USPS released a second Lunar New Year Series starting in 2008, beginning with the Year of the Rat. That series ran until 2019.

In 2020, the third Lunar New Year Series began with a new Year of the Rat stamp.

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BUSINESS

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RMB use in foreign trade may increase

Govt, PBOC in joint drive to cut exchange rate risks, capital costs of enterprises

By LIU ZHIHUA
liuzhihua@chinadaily.com.cn

China will step up efforts to expand the use of the renminbi in cross-border trade and investment, the Ministry of Commerce said on Thursday.

Shu Jueting, the ministry's spokeswoman, told an online news conference that the ministry and the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, will direct their local branches to take specific measures to implement a newly released circular on expanding the use of the renminbi in cross-border trade and investment.

They will jointly urge local authorities to report enterprises' relevant needs in a timely manner, in order to expand the use of the renminbi in cross-border trade and investment, while motivating financial institutions to provide innovative and quality products and services to enterprises, she said.

The moves are part of the country's broader push to facilitate foreign trade growth and stabilize enterprise operations, experts said.

The ministry and the central bank recently issued the joint circular, which underlined the positive role of cross-border renminbi use in serving the real economy and promoting trade and investment facilitation.

"Using the renminbi in cross-border trade and investment can help enterprises control risks associated with exchange rate fluctuations and manage the cost of capital to achieve stable operations," Shu said.

"Against the changes in international economic and financial context and increased fluctuations in the exchange rates of major currencies, enterprises have developed a stronger desire for renminbi settlements. Their demand for cross-border renminbi investment, financing and risk management has also increased remarkably," she said.

The joint circular asked the authorities concerned to study and match the needs of industries and enterprises in a timely manner and take targeted measures in accordance with local conditions, to create a good environment for the cross-border use of the renminbi.

The circular urged banks to provide more convenient and efficient services for cross-border settlements in the renminbi. It also encouraged banks to extend renminbi-denominated overseas loans and highlighted the capability of certain platforms in boosting cross-border use of the renminbi. Such platforms promote China's opening-up policy, and include pilot free trade zones, Hainan Free Trade Port and overseas economic and trade cooperation zones.

Zhou Mi, a senior researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said renminbi pricing and renminbi settlements are becoming increasingly popular among enterprises undertaking international trade and investment, mostly because China's role in the global economy is growing, and the infrastructure for cross-border use of the renminbi continues to improve.

Shu said China will step up efforts to stabilize foreign trade growth while also improving the quality of its trade. Related measures will focus on stabilizing foreign trade enterprises and export orders, and helping enterprises solve problems.

The ministry and business chambers will facilitate enterprises to participate in overseas expos and other events to land orders, attract more overseas enterprises to expos like the Canton Fair, and direct enterprises to make better use of export credit insurance policies, in order to boost their confidence in accepting orders.

The authorities will offer guidance to enterprises so that the latter could benefit more from supportive policies, such as inclusive finance and those stabilizing employment, while financial institutions will provide more credit support to foreign trade enterprises, especially micro, small and medium-sized enterprises.

China also recently announced that nine regions, including Beijing, Shanghai and Jiangsu province, had been selected to carry out pilot programs for the integrated development of domestic and foreign trade.

An employee oversees the production line of a carmaker in Chongqing. CHEN SHICHUAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Auto sales seen up 3% nationwide this year; NEV exports also on ascent

By LI FUSHENG
lifusheng@chinadaily.com.cn

Vehicle sales in China are expected to grow 3 percent to 27.66 million units this year following a hard-won 2.1 percent growth in 2022, said the country's leading industry association on Thursday.

Automakers delivered 26.86 million vehicles in 2022, despite monthslong production disruptions across the country caused by semiconductor shortages and the lingering COVID-19, said the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers.

The growth reflected strong market demand as well as favorable and timely policies rolled out by the government, said Chen Shihua, deputy secretary-general of the CAAM.

The halved purchase tax, which was in place from June to December, was estimated to have increased passenger vehicle sales last year by at least 1.45 million units, according to the China Passenger Car Association.

NEVs saw "explosive" growth last year, said Chen. A total of 6.89 million electric cars and plug-in hybrids were sold in 2022, up 93 percent year-on-year. They accounted for a quarter of total vehicle sales for the year.

The surging popularity of NEVs saw China's BYD overtake FAW-Volkswagen as the best-selling carmaker in China in 2022, with 1.86 million vehicles sold during the period, up 14.9 percent year-on-year.

Chen said as both the macroeconomy and consumer confidence will take a turn for the better this year, vehicle sales will grow accordingly in the country.

Major carmakers share such optimism, especially with regard to NEVs. Great Wall Motors, China's largest SUV maker, expects to sell 1.6 million units this year, up from 1.06 million sold last year. It will launch 10 new NEV models this year.

Volkswagen saw its China sales dip last year, but sales of its electric ID Series more than doubled.

Ralf Brandstaetter, chairman and CEO of Volkswagen Group China, estimates that one in three new passenger vehicles sold in China will be an NEV in 2023, up from one in four in 2022.

"No other markets have seen such rapid NEV growth," Brandstaetter said, adding that the company is speeding up efforts to introduce new models into China this year, including the ID.7 sedan showcased earlier this month at the Consumer Electronics Show held in Las Vega.

By 2030, up to 40 percent of the car group's models in China will be electrified varieties, and it will invest up to 14 billion euros ($15.06 billion) in e-mobility with its Chinese joint ventures by 2024, he added.

Paul Gong, an automotive analyst at UBS, expects passenger NEV sales in China will reach 8.8 million units in 2023, accounting for 38 percent of total passenger vehicle sales.

Gong said the Chinese market is driven by customer preferences instead of subsidies, and more people will be attracted to NEVs as they see more such vehicles on the road.

He said China's NEV exports will further grow in 2023 as well. Last year, carmakers in China exported 3.11 million vehicles, up 54 percent from 2021, of which 679,000 units were NEVs.

Overseas trips key to winning clients

By ZHONG NAN
zhongnan@chinadaily.com.cn

At a workshop of Rollmax Shutter Component Co Ltd, a Ningbo, Zhejiang province-based roller shutter component manufacturer, workers are busy welding, inspecting and packing octagonal tubes and other accessories for windows that will make their way to many homes in Poland, Hungary and Saudi Arabia later this year.

These orders were brought back by Ding Yandong, the company's president, during his trips to Hungary and the United Arab Emirates late last year.

Holding more than $2 million worth of foreign orders in his hand, Ding said he will travel to countries including the United States, Spain and Indonesia after the Chinese Lunar New Year, which falls on Jan 22 this year, to secure more orders in overseas markets, retain existing clients and further mitigate the negative impact caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

With more Chinese exporters preparing to travel abroad to expand their sales channels and book booth spaces at the offline China Import and Export Fair, or Canton Fair, in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, this year, these efforts will enable them to conduct more face-to-face meetings with foreign clients, and better understand global market demand and challenges, said Lin Meng, a researcher of supply chain management at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation in Beijing.

Amid faltering global trade and softening demand for various goods, owners and sales heads of Chinese export-oriented companies in provinces including Shandong, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Guangdong, Fujian and Sichuan have taken both chartered and commercial flights to several countries to participate in business events, such as Asia Fashion Fair 2022 Tokyo, Food Ingredients Europe 2022 in Paris and China Homelife Dubai 2022 over the past two months.

Together with the government's latest opening-up measures, these moves will help stabilize China's foreign trade in the first half of the year. Participating in international exhibitions can be a practical way for Chinese exporters to build relationships with new clients, judging from the deals sealed in overseas markets over the past two months, said Lian Ping, chief economist at Zhixin Investment.

Facing fierce competition from Southeast Asian countries, high energy prices and surging inflationary pressure in the US and Europe, China must step up its efforts to stabilize foreign trade and avoid a decline in foreign trade growth, said Lian.

The Zhejiang provincial government has made plans to organize more than 1,000 business delegations to explore overseas markets this year, with over 10,800 companies participating.

"Support will be granted to companies in aspects such as funding sources and approval processes," said Chen Zhicheng, deputy director-general of the Zhejiang Provincial Department of Commerce.

In December alone, Zhejiang's 20 economic and trade delegations attracted overseas orders valued at more than 18 billion yuan ($2.66 billion).

By sending 100 delegations and sales representatives from more than 1,000 companies abroad between January and April this year, Ningbo, one of Zhejiang's export hubs, has also set a goal to gain $10 billion in foreign trade orders by the end of April.

After winning a number of orders at last month's China Homelife Dubai 2022, a trade fair that provides a sourcing platform for Chinese goods, Cam Chen, sales manager of Garis International Hardware Produce Co Ltd — a Dongguan, Guangdong province-based hardware manufacturer — said the company has registered to attend eight overseas exhibitions in 2023 to further improve its brand awareness and win more foreign customers.

Apart from grabbing overseas orders, a delegation from Hubei province signed an agreement with Rohde & Schwarz GmbH & Co KG to establish a regional center in Wuhan, Hubei's provincial capital, during its eight-day trip to Germany and Sweden in December. Rohde & Schwarz is a German manufacturer of network testing technology.

Once completed, the center will be responsible for the company's sales, import and export of electronic measuring instruments and wireless communications, broadcasting and IT security technologies in Central China, said Zhu Yanlin, head of the foreign investment division, Hubei Provincial Department of Commerce.

"Attracting foreign investment in the areas of electric vehicle production, hydrogen energy development, cross-border e-commerce and high-end manufacturing is our work priorities this year," said Zhu.

Briefly

New energy power generation up in Shanxi

North China's coal-rich Shanxi province's new energy power generation surpassed 68.55 billion kilowatt-hours in 2022, according to State Grid Shanxi Electric Power Co. It means that around 16.67 percent of electricity was generated by green power in the province, and the utilization rate of green power production reached 98.6 percent. By the end of last year, the province's total installed power generation capacity had surpassed 120 million kilowatts, among which capacity produced by wind and solar power accounted for 33.23 percent, rising to over 40.13 million kilowatts. As China's leading energy base, Shanxi is key to the country's energy supply and electricity transmission.

Reverse repos net 117b yuan, buoy liquidity

The People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, on Thursday conducted 117 billion yuan ($17.3 billion) of reverse repos to keep liquidity stable ahead of the weeklong Spring Festival holiday starting Jan 22. The amount included 65 billion yuan of seven-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 2 percent, and 52 billion yuan of 14-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 2.15 percent. A reverse repo is a process in which the central bank purchases securities from commercial banks through bidding, with an agreement to sell them back in the future.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

Restaurants, ready-to-eat meals get holiday boost

By ZHU WENQIAN
zhuwenqian@chinadaily.com.cn

Many restaurant chains in major Chinese cities are witnessing a boom in reservations for Lunar New Year's Eve family reunion dinners on Jan 21. In addition, they have introduced ready-to-eat meals for delivery to their patrons' homes as not everyone can be accommodated for the dine-in service.

Following the optimization of COVID measures, demand for dining in at restaurants, particularly during the upcoming weeklong Spring Festival holiday, has grown, market watchers said.

Some popular major restaurants in Beijing are already seeing customers wait in queues to be seated during peak hours.

Quanjude, one of China's best-known roast duck restaurant chains, has seen its Olympic Village branch — which has some 400 dining seats, including those in the main hall and 17 private rooms — fully booked for dinners on Jan 21.

"In the past few days, we have received an increasing number of inquiries about family reunion dinners. We have also launched different kinds of ready-to-eat meals for consumers," said Fan Hui, general manager of the branch.

The ready-to-cook packages mainly include several main courses, such as roast duck, fish, beef and chicken. They require about eight minutes of steaming. Those having family reunions at home will be able to enjoy restaurant-grade food and beverages.

The ready-to-eat meal sector has been gaining traction ever since the COVID-19 pandemic started spreading. Market insiders attributed this trend to the convenience such meals offer as they require minimum preparation.

Annual sales of China's ready meals market are expected to exceed 1 trillion yuan ($148 billion) in the next six to seven years, based on an estimated compound annual growth rate of 20 percent, according to Shenzhen-based research firm Askci Consulting.

Meanwhile, restaurant chain Xuji Seafood said for the Jan 21 Lunar New Year's Eve and the first day of the Lunar New Year, its 60 branches across China have been nearly fully booked, and only some branches located in remote areas have a few tables and private rooms still available for reservation. The company said this year's bookings may have already reached 90 percent of the level seen during the Spring Festival holiday of 2019.

"Since the fourth quarter of 2022, the catering sector in China started to rebound gradually. Some popular restaurants in Beijing, and some in Wuhan in Hubei province, Chengdu in Sichuan province and Changsha in Hunan province have seen common scenes of long lines of diners waiting to be seated," said Zhongtai Securities in a note circulated among its clients.

"Some restaurants have even witnessed hotter sales compared with the same period of 2019, when there was no pandemic. In January, food and beverage consumption in many places across the country has significantly beaten our expectations."

This could prove a positive for stocks of companies from the catering sector and related segments listed in the A-share market, observers said.

Shoppers buy ready-to-cook products in preparation for upcoming Chinese Lunar New Year's Eve at a restaurant in Shanghai.
YANG JIANZHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

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BUSINESS

AVIC plans backdoor listing for unit

Aviation giant mulls A-share float for aircraft making subsidiary in Chengdu

By ZHU WENQIAN
zhuwenqian@chinadaily.com.cn

AVIC Zhonghang Electronic Measuring Instruments Co Ltd, a subsidiary of Aviation Industry Corp of China Ltd, announced on Wednesday evening that it plans to purchase 100 percent of the equity of AVIC Chengdu Aircraft Industrial (Group) Co Ltd by issuing shares to AVIC.

Shares of Zhonghang Electronic Measuring Instruments have suspended trading on Shenzhen Stock Exchange since Thursday. The company said it would disclose the detailed transaction plan within 10 trading days, or before Feb 2, according to its statement.

Based on the current weight rules, the company's potential listing is expected to account for 10 percent of the index weight, and the military sector is likely to embrace a leading stock in the A-share market, TF Securities predicted.

The market value of AVIC Chengdu Aircraft could reach 200 billion yuan ($29.6 billion) after it goes public through a backdoor listing, while the company's current market value stands at 6.25 billion yuan. This year, the net profit of AVIC Chengdu Aircraft is foreseen to reach 4 billion yuan, according to TF Securities.

"Backdoor listings can help provide a new channel for equity financing and create an opportunity for listed companies to restructure and improve their balance sheets," said the China Index Academy.

An employee of AVIC Chengdu Aircraft Industrial (Group) Co Ltd works at a production facility in Chengdu, Sichuan province. LIU ZHONGJUN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

In the first three quarters of 2022, sales revenue of AVIC Zhonghang Electronic Measuring reached 1.45 billion yuan and net profit came in at 195 million yuan. In 2021, sales of the company achieved 1.94 billion yuan and net profit reached 307 million yuan, according to its earnings reports.

Founded in 1958, AVIC Chengdu Aircraft has been a major base for the development, production and export of China's aviation weapons and equipment. The company has also been a key manufacturer of civil aircraft parts.

For military aircraft, the company has developed and produced thousands of J-5, J-7 and J-10 stealth fighter jets. The company also developed the nose of the AG600, a large amphibious aircraft. For civil aircraft, it has carried out some related tasks in helping develop the homegrown single-aisle aircraft C919 and the regional aircraft ARJ21, along with their manufacturer Commercial Aircraft Corp of China.

AVIC Chengdu Aircraft has accumulatively produced and delivered more than 10,000 civil aircraft subcontracted products, according to the company.

By the end of 2021, the total assets of AVIC Chengdu Aircraft reached 151.18 billion yuan. In 2021, operating income of the group achieved 56.73 billion yuan and net profit reached 98.9 million yuan, according to its earnings.

State-owned enterprises have accelerated their reform, which is expected to boost sentiment in the sector, according to a research note by CITIC Securities.

Snack makers eye crispy Chinese market; more forays expected

By WANG YING in Shanghai
wang_ying@chinadaily.com.cn

After more than four decades of development, China's snacks have formed a market of over 800 billion yuan ($118.3 billion) as of 2021. It is projected to cross the mark of 1 trillion yuan by 2025 and further double in scale in another decade, a report suggested.

In the past five years, the Chinese snack food industry has grown at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of more than 6 percent, said Wang Chongyang, founding partner of Doc&Doc Strategy Consulting, a Shanghai-based consulting firm.

"We forecast the Chinese snack market to expand to 2 trillion yuan in the forthcoming 10 years through 2035," Wang said, citing a joint report by Doc&Doc Strategy Consulting and the industrial research institute of the 21st Century Business Herald.

According to Wang, by analyzing the dietary habits and consumption preferences of the Chinese people and foreign consumers, their research discovered that there is a huge gap in snack consumption per person in China compared with their counterparts in Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Due to their varied eating habits, merely 7 kilograms of snacks are consumed per person per year in China, which is less than half that of Japan (18 kg), one-fifth of the UK (36 kg) and about one-sixth of the US (42 kg), according to the research data.

In the meantime, the proportion of snack consumption per person in Chinese per capita disposable income is also far below their international peers.

"Currently, innovation is the key to surviving fierce competition and succeeding. It is important to grasp the market trend, which is healthy," said Wang.

> "Currently, innovation is the key to surviving fierce competition and succeeding. It is important to grasp the market trend, which is healthy."
>
> **Wang Chongyang,** founding partner of Doc&Doc Strategy Consulting, a Shanghai-based consulting firm

Italian confectionery maker Ferrero made a foray into the dark chocolate segment last year, a particularly dynamic and promising segment of the China market.

"China represents a strategic pillar of Ferrero Group's growth. We have the vision to become one of the leaders of the sweet packaged food arena in China," said Mauro De Felip, general manager of Ferrero China.

According to De Felip, China is the second-largest sweet packaged food market worldwide after the US, with a market value of more than 40 billion euros ($43 billion).

"The middle-income group in China is expanding and will continue to grow more and more in the years to come. For us, and other companies like us, it is not an option but an obligation. We must grab the opportunity to take over in the future," De Felip added.

While enjoying the sector's explosive growth, various categories of snacks are expected to see differentiated outlooks, the report added.

Candies, chocolates and preserved fruits are currently taking up the greatest market share with a 4.4 percent CAGR, and the segment saw its sales revenue rise from 151 billion yuan in 2015 to 187.2 billion yuan in 2020, and may form a market scale of 221.6 billion yuan by 2025.

As Chinese consumers are pursuing healthier lifestyles, sweets brands that are launching low-sugar or even no-sugar products are winning more favor among consumers, Wang suggested.

For example, Coca-Cola's sales volume across China saw a 28 percent year-on-year growth in the 10 months between January and October 2022, while sugar-free Cola reported a growth of 132 percent during the same period, according to data from Chinese food delivery company Meituan.

Known for rich nutrition, nuts are widely regarded as the most healthy between-meal snacks, and along with Chinese people's rising awareness of eating healthily, this specific category has seen its market scale expand rapidly from 95.4 billion yuan in 2015 to 141.5 billion yuan in 2020 at a CAGR of 8.2 percent, possibly reaching a sales revenue of 217.3 billion yuan by 2025, the report added.

Although China has become the world's third-largest nuts market after the EU and the US, the average consumption per person in China is even lower than the global average.

For example, the Chinese people on average consume 30 grams of almonds per year, much lower than the global average of 170 grams, 260 grams in Japan, and 1,070 grams in the US, the report added.

State Grid Corp vows investment to stabilize consumption, employment

By ZHENG XIN
zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

State Grid Corp of China will further step up investment in domestic grid construction this year to stabilize power consumption as well as employment in the country, said a top company official.

The Beijing-based State-owned company said that it will invest an all-time high of more than 520 billion yuan ($76.95 billion) in power grid projects this year, after a 500-billion-yuan investment in 2022, considering power consumption this year is expected to further pick up as follow-up measures for stabilizing the economy have driven the economy to recover, Xin Baoan, chairman of the centrally administered SOE, was quoted as saying by China Media Group.

520 billion yuan
investment State Grid Corp plans for power grid projects this year

Xin said the company will start the construction of five pumped-storage power stations in 2023 and put four more into operation. The installed capacity of pumped-storage power stations operated by State Grid Corp will exceed 38 million kilowatts by the end of this year.

The world's biggest pumped-storage hydroelectric power plant, the Fengning pumped-storage power station in Hebei province, is currently carrying out installation and commissioning work, said the company, its operator.

With a designed annual power generation capacity of 6.612 billion kilowatt-hours and an annual pumped-storage power capacity of 8.716 billion kilowatt-hours, it also has the largest pumping storage underground plant.

China is expected to further step up the development of pumped-storage hydroelectricity during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-25), as part of the efforts to peak carbon dioxide emissions by 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality by 2060.

According to Luo Zuoxian, head of intelligence and research at the Sinopec Economics and Development Research Institute, massive amounts of flexible electricity supplies will become increasingly important for the grid as renewable power capacity in China continues to grow.

Stable operation of the grid plays a key role in dealing with the fluctuating output of intermittent energy sources, he said.

State Grid employees check power lines in Yantai, Shandong province, on Jan 6. TANG KE / FOR CHINA DAILY

According to Xin, as China's largest State-owned utility firm, the company currently sees new energy installations connected to the grid exceeding 670 million kW, with a utilization rate above 97 percent.

"With the rapid development of renewable energies in the country, speeding up the consumption of green power plays a critical role in the country's low-carbon transition," he said.

The company currently runs 33 ultra-high-voltage transmission lines. Cross-provincial power transmission capacity has exceeded 300 million kW, said the company.

Health checks on ascent nationwide

By ZHENG YIRAN
zhengyiran@chinadaily.com.cn

Physical examination bookings are on the rise in China, especially after more people recover from COVID-19, as many have growing concerns about their overall health condition post-infection.

With a rise in such demand, physical examination centers and hospitals launched special packages to tap the rising patient demand.

The examination packages for the recovered, based on prices, offer services on various bodily systems that may be affected by the virus, such as the respiratory and immune systems.

Richard Li, a 30-year-old office clerk based in Huizhou, Guangdong province, is among such patients.

"I still coughed for a few days even though my antigen test result for COVID turned negative. It is said that infected patients may get 'white lung' disease, so I got a CT (computed tomography) test just to be on the safe side," Li said.

"I took the test, which cost me around 400 yuan ($59.18), at a physical exam center nearby," he added.

Xuan Jiyou, general manager of Shanghai-based Qianmen Fund, said: "After recovering from COVID-19 infection, people pay attention to how well they have recovered. As the virus has many variants, and people have different symptoms when infected with different variants, they want to know about their body condition. Such a physical exam trend is expected to last for half a year," he said.

On Dec 27, Shanghai-based private medical institution Meinian OneHealth Healthcare Group launched its recovery physical exam packages on its official website, and e-commerce platforms such as JD, Pinduoduo, Tmall and Douyin. By Thursday, on its official website, its standard recovery physical exam package, priced at 529 yuan, sold more than 160,000 units, while its premium recovery physical exam package, priced at 599 yuan, sold more than 10,000 units.

After calculations, within two weeks, the company's sales revenue in COVID recovery physical exam packages was nearly 100 million yuan.

Shanghai-based Rich Healthcare also launched COVID prevention screening packages, with its standard version and premium version priced at 599 yuan and 999 yuan, respectively. Xmedic, the high-end sub-brand of Rich Healthcare, launched similar packages on Dazhong Dianping, with prices ranging between 2,643 yuan and 4,173 yuan.

As reported by China Securities Journal, during the past week, the search for "recovery physical examination package" grew 350 percent, while that of "parent physical examination package" surged 530 percent from the week before.

A customer service staff from T-mall told China Securities Journal that the recovery physical exam package pays special attention to the examinations of the lungs, heart, liver and kidneys, which are prone to be attacked by the virus. The special package helps consumers have better management of their health conditions and health trends post-recovery.

For the Omicron XBB.1.5 recombinant variant, which has been raising concerns globally, Meinian OneHealth said that it is expected to launch physical exams related to the digestive system, which the XBB variant is said to possibly attack.

"Ever since the pandemic broke out, we have witnessed a steady growth of the physical examination market. This is also true for public hospitals and other institutions," said a spokesperson at Meinian OneHealth.

Data from the industry information network Chyxx showed that in 2021, China's physical exam market totaled 189 billion yuan, up 7 percent year-on-year. Between 2009 and 2020, China's physical exam visits surged from 230 million to 431 million, with a compound annual growth rate of 5.37 percent.

"With the growing market, physical exam institutions may follow the example of gyms and launch membership cards. In this way, they may set up patient health profiles, have deeper connections with consumers and cultivate their consumption habits for better growth," Xuan said.

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BUSINESSFOCUS

Consumption seen boosting economic vigor

FMCG, entertainment, catering, tourism, aviation and more may shine in 2023

By ZHU WENQIAN
zhuwenqian@chinadaily.com.cn

In 2023, China will continue to expand domestic consumption, and sectors such as tourism, catering, entertainment and aviation are expected to benefit from the relaxation of COVID-19 prevention and control measures, government officials and industry experts said.

According to the latest projection by financial services provider Goldman Sachs, consumption will become a main driver of economic vitality, and the annual growth of consumption is expected to be 7 percent this year, while China's GDP growth is expected to reach 4.5 percent. The unemployment rate is expected to decline and average incomes are likely to improve in 2023.

UBS predicts China's GDP growth will reach 5 percent this year, if investment in infrastructure is strong, and manufacturing and consumption sectors show resilience.

The views are echoed by Zhu Guangyao, former vice-minister of finance, who expects China's economy will achieve better growth and sustain healthy development this year, with a GDP growth rate of 5-6 percent.

Despite the pandemic exerting pressure on consumer spending, some sectors such as fast-moving consumer goods and those related to public social benefits have been given a boost by the growth of new trends and support of favorable policies.

Looking back on 2022, China's FMCG sector showed resilience with 3.6 percent year-on-year growth in the first three quarters. For the first time since 2020, it exceeded the country's GDP growth in the second and third quarters, according to joint research released in December by Bain & Company and Kantar Worldpanel Greater China.

In particular, packaged foods and household-related product sales saw growth during the first three quarters due to COVID-19-led stockpiling and heightened health and hygiene concerns. Overall, China's FMCG market demonstrated some buoyancy in rough waters, signaling that there is hope for the months and years ahead, Bain & Company said.

"The year 2023 is likely to remain volatile, resuming some of the trends we have witnessed in 2022 while seeing improvement in other areas. However, we do see a gradual optimization of COVID-19 measures taking place in China, bringing back some consumer confidence," said Derek Deng, a partner at Bain & Company.

"There are other fundamental reasons to be optimistic as well. China's FMCG sector has demonstrated remarkable resilience in the first three quarters, as both brands and consumers have honed their adaptability to changing circumstances. If companies can keep their fingers on the pulse of consumer needs and remain nimble, they can chart a path toward healthy performance," Deng said.

In 2023, China will focus on expanding domestic demand and give priority to restoring and expanding consumption, and continue to strengthen household consumption abilities, improve consumption conditions and make innovations in more consumption scenarios, according to the plan outlined at the Central Economic Work Conference in December — the yearly meeting that sets plans for China's economic performance this year.

Culture and tourism, elder care and childcare, medical care, education, sports, leisure and other service-based consumption sectors have become new hot spots and growth points of urban and rural consumption patterns, and the growth rate of service consumption has continued to be higher than that of commodity consumption, said Wang Wei, head of the market economy research institute at the Development Research Center of the State Council, China's Cabinet.

"There is ample room for the growth of domestic demand led by consumption expansion. Consumption has become the biggest driver and potential source to help boost domestic demand," Wang said.

By 2025, final consumption is expected to account for 60 percent of the annual GDP, and the final consumption scale is likely to reach about 90 trillion yuan ($13.3 trillion), Wang predicted.

Final consumption is defined as the total amount of goods and services bought and used in an economy.

Consumers shop at a duty-free mall in Haikou, capital of Hainan province, on Jan 1. SU BIKUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

People enjoy a meal at a night market in Huaying, Sichuan province, in December. QIU HAIYING / FOR CHINA DAILY

2022 year in Review

In addition, the outline made clear that the government will help increase urban and rural household incomes through multiple channels and support the improvement of housing conditions. The country will also continue to support purchases of new energy vehicles.

The meeting said government investment and policy incentives should be applied to effectively drive investment in all of society. It also called for speeding up the implementation of major projects during the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) period, and strengthening infrastructure connectivity between different regions.

"There is sufficient room for boosting consumption growth on the demand side. The government could consider issuing temporary measures to subsidize employees and further reduce burdens facing enterprises. It could also help boost household consumption demand by issuing consumption vouchers on a larger scale and in more diversified forms," said Lian Ping, chief economist at Zhixin Investment and head of the Zhixin Investment Research Institute.

The government has provided subsidies for sales of NEVs and smart home appliances in rural areas. From January to October, sales of electric and plug-in hybrid passenger vehicles totaled 4.43 million units, up 107.5 percent year-on-year, and NEV market share had exceeded 25 percent, said the China Passenger Car Association.

"The increase in the spending of consumer goods such as household appliances and automobiles is key to helping expand consumption," said Yang Chang, an analyst at Zhongtai Securities.

In another development, duty-free consumption in Hainan province has gradually recovered from the impacts of COVID-19. Fueled by the free trade port under construction, Hainan has been continuing to play an important role in China's consumption.

Major duty-free operators have increased their investment in the tropical island. In late October, China Duty Free Group opened a new shopping complex in Haikou, the provincial capital.

Major domestic retailer Wangfujing Group plans to launch a new duty-free mall in Wanning, Hainan, this month. After its launch, the number of offshore duty-free malls in the province is expected to reach 12, which will give full play to the role of consumption in driving economic growth in Hainan.

In the first half of 2022, due to sporadic resurgences of local COVID-19 cases, the offshore duty-free shopping market in Hainan was negatively affected. Since late June, sales began to resume a year-on-year growth trend, according to China Tourism Group, parent of China Duty Free Group, the world's largest travel retailer in terms of sales revenue.

"China's consumer market is one of the largest and most promising markets globally. The fundamental role of consumption in boosting economic growth in China will not change," said Wang Haimin, president of China Tourism Group.

"With further construction of Hainan FTP, its potential is immeasurable. We are fully confident in the growth potential of the offshore duty-free shopping market in Hainan and will continue to increase investment there," Wang said.

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COMMENT

Editorials

Opening Japan's Pandora's box will sabotage regional peace

Since Tokyo announced last year it would increase defense spending to 2 percent of its GDP over five years, it has been aggressively seeking to expand its military partnerships.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's ongoing visits to five of the G7 countries represent a forceful stepping up of those endeavors. And as far as Tokyo is concerned a successful stepping up in light of the developments on Wednesday, which was a day of remarkable significance for Japan.

It was the day when Kishida and his British counterpart Rishi Sunak signed in London what the UK government has called the most important defense treaty between the UK and Japan since 1902. It was also the day when the visiting Japanese foreign and defense ministers signed in Washington "a vision of a modernized Alliance postured to prevail in a new era of strategic competition" with the US secretaries of state and defense.

Under the Japan-UK Reciprocal Access Agreement, the two countries will be able to deploy troops on each other's soil. While the joint statement the US-Japan Security Consultative Committee released on Wednesday took further strides in bolstering deterrence against what Washington and Tokyo describe as an impending China threat.

US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan boasted, "Japan is stepping up big time and doing so in lockstep with the United States, partners in the Indo-Pacific, and in Europe". The Japanese and US ministers touted the US-Japan alliance as "the cornerstone of regional peace, security, and prosperity". But obviously it will do the very opposite as it escalates geopolitical tensions in the region.

Wednesday's discussions will be followed by a meeting on Friday between President Joe Biden and Kishida at which they are expected to underscore the importance of the alliance to containing China.

With Japan adopting a new national security strategy that breaks with the country's self-defense postwar stance with the inclusion of strike capability, the two sides are expected to take the opportunity to rethink and update the structure and the mechanisms of the alliance to reflect that. This will facilitate the US' efforts to set the theater for war in the region, which the commander of US marine forces in Japan has revealed it is already busy doing.

Over the years, the Asia-Pacific has stayed together as one big family, defusing risks and overcoming challenges in solidarity. It is this that has enabled it to achieve the Asia-Pacific miracle. With the importance and standing of the Asia-Pacific region continuing to grow, the Western countries, led by the US, are determined that the region should serve to uphold their standing rather than stride to the center of the world stage on its own feet.

If the US, for its narrow ends of containing China, fails to heed the lessons of history and it indulges the militarism of Japan's right-wingers, it will bring mishap to the whole region and beyond. Washington should realize that Tokyo's smoldering ambitions mean it will by no means be content with it acting as a pointman of the US. After that Pandora's box is opened, the US too will pay a price for what emerges.

McCarthyism revives in a new disguise

In the speech he delivered on winning the House Speaker election, US Congress majority leader Kevin McCarthy promised to establish a select committee to tackle the alleged "multi-faceted threats" of China to the United States.

On Tuesday, the US House of Representatives voted 365 to 65 to establish the House Select Committee on the Strategic Competition between the US and the Chinese Communist Party. All the Republicans in the House and 146 Democrats supported the move, a rare meeting of minds, considering the deep split between the two parties that disagree with each other on almost everything else.

But it is symptomatic of the anti-China consensus that prevails in Washington. Among the anti-China chorus on Capitol Hill, the new House Speaker has been one of the most prominent voices. On Aug 3, one day after his predecessor in the role, Nancy Pelosi provocatively visited Taiwan, McCarthy said he "would have gone with her had she asked".

China-bashing politicians such as McCarthy are attempting to portray China as an enemy and have no qualms about reviving the ism of his namesake. Their anti-China rhetoric harkens back to the 1950s, when Senator Joseph McCarthy launched a witch hunt against anyone who could be accused of being a communist or communist sympathizer. Film stars, government staff members, politicians, even scientists such as Albert Einstein, came under scrutiny. Today, the same thing is being done to silence any voices with a more rational and objective view of China.

On Jan 16, 2022, New York-based media Daily Freeman published a letter to the editor that compared Kevin McCarthy to Joseph McCarthy. It said that the difference between the two is that "Senator Joseph McCarthy was stopped by some of his own party because they recognized his dangerous conduct".

Seven decades have passed and such dangerous conduct is not only being condoned but encouraged by both parties.

Of course, given the public humiliation he suffered in securing the role of speaker and the concessions he had to make to even harder-liners in his party, McCarthy had his own personal motivation for so quickly bringing the House together in its unwarranted animosity toward China. He needed to create the impression that he is not in the hole to the uber-conservative members of his own party who have effectively hijacked the interests of the US people with their unwillingness to compromise on any issue.

But with the country's many economic and social problems certain to continue to fester as a result of their intransigence, it can be expected that the noise about China will be amplified to create the illusion that something is being done. That in turn will likely pull US foreign policy by the nose along an ill-considered path.

Country remains 'magnet' for world business

No matter how far the small number of China-bashing politicians in the United States go in their efforts to besmirch China's optimized COVID-19 prevention and control policies, they are failing to dent global investors' confidence in and zeal for the Chinese market.

Many foreign business councils in China have expressed that their member enterprises are arranging the itineraries for senior executives' trips to China and rebooting relevant projects. Likewise, the executives of many of China's export enterprises have itineraries for business trips overseas.

The foreign business community has immunity to the China-bashers' lies about the world's second-largest economy. Foreign entrepreneurs recognize the Chinese economy's stability and scale provide a strong foundation for its long-term prospects, while its resilience and recovery capability ensure it has potential to tap in the near term. The government's consistent efforts to improve the domestic business environment and dock the domestic market systems with those of the world market give practical support to consolidate these.

In 2020, the amount of foreign investment utilized in China increased by 6.2 percent year-on-year. In 2021, the growth rate reached 14.9 percent, breaking the 1-trillion-yuan ($148.1 billion) mark for the first time. And in the first 11 months of 2022, it had already exceeded the level of 2021, up 9.9 percent year-on-year. China's foreign trade surged 1.9 percent year-on-year in 2020 — the only major economy in the world that saw positive growth in trade that year — 21.4 percent in 2021, and 8.6 percent, despite the impacts of the pandemic, over the first eleven months of 2022. These figures demonstrate that the Chinese market has remained a magnet for foreign investment. Now that the pandemic prevention and control measures have been adjusted enabling economic operations to gain steam, China's foreign trade will see a robust rebound.

The many appeals of US enterprises for the US government to stop hindering their business operations highlight the extent to which the US political system has been poisoned by the toxicity of the China-bashers, if not how much the US economy and consumers are paying for that.

China's status as a global market, major investment destination and source, manufacturing base, logistics hub and increasingly influential creative center are by no means condescending gifts from the US but a result of its own comparative advantages, that will only be strengthened with its higher-level opening-up and development.

The future of the global economic recovery hinges upon the extent to which countries are willing to work together to dismantle trade and institutional barriers, maintain the stability of global supply chains, shorten negative lists, align their development strategies and coordinate their macro-policy-making, all of which China has been promoting.

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Contact us at:

China Daily
15 Huixin Dongjie Chaoyang District, Beijing 100029
News: +86 (0) 10 6491-8366
editor@chinadaily.com.cn
Advertisement: +86 (0) 10 6491-8631
ads@chinadaily.com.cn
Subscription: +86-400-699-0203
subscription.chinadaily.com.cn
App: www.chinadaily.com.cn/mobile/daily.html

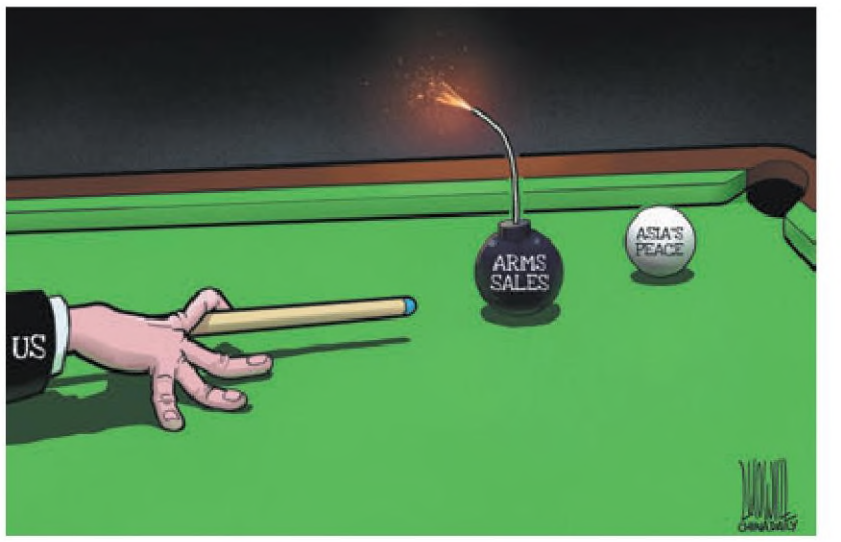
China Daily UK
90 Cannon St, London EC4N 6HA, UK
+44 (0) 207 398 8270
editor@chinadailyuk.com

China Daily Asia Pacific
China Daily Hong Kong
Unit 1818, Hing Wai Centre, 7 Tin Wan Praya Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong
+852 2518 5111
editor@chinadailyhk.com
editor@chinadailyasia.com

China Daily USA
1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036
+1 212 537 8888
editor@chinadailyusa.com

China Daily Africa
P.O. Box 27281-00100, Nairobi, Kenya
+254(0)20 242 8589 (Nairobi)
editor@chinadailyafrica.com
enquiries@chinadailyafrica.com
subscription@chinadailyafrica.com

Luo Jie



Opinion Line

China continues to bring new opportunities globally

Foreign media outlets have successively predicted that with the implementation of favorable economic policies, China's ultra-large market will release more dividends and bring new opportunities for the recovery of the world economy, and a number of foreign investment banks have also raised their forecast for China's economic growth this year.

Due to intensified geopolitical tensions, pandemic outbreaks and high inflation, the prospect for the global economy is not optimistic. In this context, the international community is shifting more attention eastward, especially to China. China is committed to keeping its economy on the track of high-quality development driven by innovation and new growth drivers, while trying to expand domestic demand.

China's high-tech industry is becoming a hotspot for global investment. Despite its economic downturn and pandemic pressure, China has made remarkable achievements in electric vehicles, artificial intelligence, the digital economy, aerospace technology, deep-sea exploration and other fields, and its high-quality development has enhanced its economic innovation and sustainability and injected new impetus into world economic development.

With a population of over 1.4 billion and a middle-income group of over 400 million, China imports about $2.5 trillion in goods and services every year, making it the world's mega-large market. In the long run, China's consumer market is still resilient and its overall trend of consumption expansion and upgrading has not changed. China's top authorities have repeatedly stressed that the country will focus on expanding domestic demand and prioritize consumption. This will release more dividends for other countries. That is why Goldman Sachs and other international banks have raised their forecasts for China's economic growth in 2023.

China began to lower its overall tariffs again on Jan 1, and 1,020 categories of goods now can enjoy a tariff lower than the most-favored-nation tariffs. The agreed tariff rate on some goods originating in Indonesia under the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership was also implemented from Jan 2. China has also submitted entry applications to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement. All this shows that China's desire to bring new opportunities to other countries will not change.

— BEIJING YOUTH DAILY

US taxpayers' money funds such lies

Q: Which film star can give up his career in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region to become a policeman in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region?

A: If a database is to be believed, then even Chow Yun-fat and Andy Lau Tak-wah.

On Jan 6, an entity called "Xinjiang Victims Database" posted on its Twitter handle what it claimed was a list of over 2,000 Urumqi police officers who it blamed for "thousands of documented victims". Yet among the mugshots, were those of the two Hong Kong stars.

The propaganda fell flat only because Chow and Lau are too famous for anyone to miss them. That leaves one in no doubt that many of the other photographs must also be fake.

The handle even claimed that "Another 8,000+ have been added but remain invisible as they have not been linked to anyone". One wonders as to how they got the photographs. After all, it does not look like a rumor any more, but a lie being spread intentionally.

After the tweet became viral as a joke, the handle disabled the comments zone, letting only a few handles it follows to reply.

The lies don't come for free. The database claims its efforts are crowdfunded through social networking sites, but it is hard to imagine anyone with a rational mind wants to fund such a group. Without doubt organizations of its kind are spreading lies about China to gain influence so that the West will bankroll them for political reasons.

The management teams of such funding groups, of which the US-based National Endowment for Democracy is a typical example, are either too foolish to believe the lies or just evil enough to join them in spreading lies. Their money comes from the US government, which in turn comes from taxpayers in the United States.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Testament to vibrancy of Sino-African friendship

The completion ceremony for the Africa Center for Disease Control and Prevention Headquarters, which China assisted the African Union to build, was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on Wednesday. It is irrefutable proof to the world that China always supports Africa with concrete actions and is another public good China has provided to the continent amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Along with the AU Conference Center and other projects including the Mombasa-Nairobi Railway and the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway, the Africa CDC Headquarters is a monument to the friendship between China and Africa, as visiting Foreign Minister Qin Gang said.

Attending the ceremony with African Union Commission Chairman Moussa Faki Mahamat, Qin remarked that strengthening solidarity and cooperation with African countries will always be a diplomatic priority for China, and no matter how the international environment changes, China and Africa will always be a community with a shared future.

In 2013, President Xi Jinping put forward the principles of sincerity, real results, amity and good faith, and of pursuing the greater good and shared interests for China's relations with Africa. And the past decade has seen tremendous achievements being made in Sino-African cooperation under the guidance of these principles that have brought tangible benefits to both sides, particularly the African people. China has remained Africa's largest trading partner for 13 years in a row. Two-way trade last year is expected to exceed $260 billion.

As Qin proposed, the two sides should further intensify their in-person interactions and connectivity of ideas, deepen the friendly relations between China and the AU, do more to upgrade and elevate China-Africa cooperation, and continue to stand firm in defending the unity and cooperation of developing countries.

China and African countries should continue to maintain the sound momentum of their cooperation, constantly enhance their political mutual trust and support each other on issues concerning their respective core interests and major concerns. That will not only serve their interests and contribute to their common development but also uphold fairness and justice.

In the foreseeable future, China should further align its own development projects with Africa's development strategies such as the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa and the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme, and deepen bilateral cooperation in the financial sector, digital economy, green technology, public health and aerospace.

Africa's needs have always been the priorities in China-Africa cooperation, and as Qin noted, "China makes no empty promises, still less presses others against their own will".

Shame on those smearing China-Africa relations and paying only lip service to the well-being of African people.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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COMMENT

Wang Sheng

ROK must lift entry curbs for own good

In response to the discriminatory entry restrictions imposed by the Republic of Korea and Japan on Chinese travelers, Chinese embassies on Tuesday halted issuing short-term visas to visitors from the two countries.

Although it is understandable that the authorities of the two countries are worried that the influx of Chinese travelers could give rise to new sub-variants of the Omicron variant, the ROK government's move, targeted specifically at Chinese visitors, undeniably has political overtones, not least because many diplomats and security officials in the Yoon Suk-yeol administration are conservatives and pro-American.

For more than half a year of its tenure, it has been, together with the Japanese government, dancing to the tune of the US administration on many major diplomatic issues including its "Indo-Pacific" strategy.

The ROK and Japan could be under pressure from the United States to impose entry curbs on Chinese visitors as the US was among the first batch of countries to announce restrictions following China's decision to ease the strict pandemic prevention and control measures.

For its own good and to promote the interests of both peoples, the ROK should realize that the damage its move could cause to bilateral ties and its economy, and adjust its policy in order to help put bilateral relations on the right track.

The sudden yet expected cooling down of the ROK's attitude toward China is more likely than not in sync with Washington's announcement, and highlights their alliance and common interests.

Yet we should guard against some Chinese media outlets playing up the ROK's discriminatory policy against Chinese travelers to grab eyeballs, or spur populism, especially since tensions between Chinese and ROK citizens have risen in recent years.

However, we should bear in mind that a good neighbor is better than a brother far away. China has extended the olive branch many a time to the ROK. For example, Qin Gang, China's new foreign minister, called his counterpart Park Jin, soon after taking office. And Vice-President Wang Qishan attended the inauguration of Yoon Suk-yeol in Seoul in May, and China has telecast Korean TV series via its official TV channels.

China's favor should have been returned by its neighbor. And the Yoon Suk-yeol administration shouldn't believe that only by standing with the Joe Biden administration and keeping China at arm's length can it earn the respect of its neighboring developing economy.

The ROK will inflict damage on itself if it alienates China. Before the COVID-19 outbreak, Chinese tourists contributed the largest percentage of tourism revenue to the ROK, and accounted for about 70 percent of the country's department store sales. Thus the importance of Chinese visitors to the ROK's economy is self-evident. As such, the restrictions imposed on Chinese visitors will harm ROK entrepreneurs, companies and students working and studying in China.

For its own good and to promote the interests of both peoples, the ROK should realize that the damage its move could cause to bilateral ties and its economy, and adjust its policy in order to help put bilateral relations on the right track. Most importantly, it should help restore normal people-to-people exchanges and boost common interests, and regional peace and prosperity.

It is gratifying that some positive signs have emerged up to now. President Yoon Suk-yeol has asked the ROK Foreign Ministry to explain its position on the entry conditions of Chinese visitors to China and Prime Minister Han Duck-soo claimed to hope to maintain communication with the Chinese side. That at least shows that the ROK has no intention to further intensify the tensions and there is room for dialogue even though the two countries are mired in a deep-rooted dilemma.

The author is a Kuang Yaming professor at Jilin University. This is an excerpt from his interview with China Daily's Liu Jianna. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

Yan Lun

US, China play contrasting roles in Latin America

The attack on the Brazilian Supreme Court, Congress and presidential palace by former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro's supporters on Sunday after his election defeat drew immediate parallels with the Jan 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol by former US president Donald Trump's followers.

True, Latin America needs to bridge the socioeconomic divide by accelerating development, but some US politicians insist on exporting the so-called US-style democracy to Latin America — and other parts of the world — and thus exacerbating the chaos there.

China, however, has been playing a sharply contrasting role in Latin America.

The easing of anti-pandemic restrictions in China is good news for the global economy, especially because China is expected to see accelerated economic growth in 2023 which in turn will boost local trade, particularly commodity exports to China. This also means deepening economic cooperation between China and Latin America.

From the rise of protectionism in several Western countries, which culminated in Brexit and Donald Trump's election as US president, to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the world has encountered many challenges in the past few years, which have disrupted the global supply chains.

But despite the global economic shocks, Sino-Latin American economic ties have remained strong. In 2021, for instance, trade between the two sides reached $451.4 billion, compared with $317.6 billion in 2019. And from January to November 2022, Sino-Latin American trade increased 9.2 percent year-on-year to $448.3 billion. And the unleashing of China's dormant demand in 2023 will be a shot in the arm for Sino-Latin American trade.

And third, China and Latin American countries need to fix their development priorities and coordinate their policies so that their partnerships can better serve both sides' long-term interests.

China's top trading partners in Latin America have been Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Peru, Colombia and Argentina for the past five years. In 2022, China's exports to the region consisted mainly of manufactured goods, such as machinery and equipment, vehicles and vehicle parts, and organic chemicals. China's imports from Latin America differ from country to country, but are mainly primary commodities such as iron ore, copper, petroleum, soybean, fruits and meat, although Mexican exports to China also include electronic integrated circuits, medical instruments and appliances, and vehicle parts.

As for Chinese investments in Latin America, they are expected to grow in line with the increase in China's outward foreign direct investment in the region ($436 billion in 2019, $629.8 billion in 2020, and $693.7 billion in 2021) despite the lingering pandemic.

According to Enrique Dussel Peters, a keen observer of Chinese investments in the region, 76.9 percent of China's FDI in Latin America went to Brazil during 2000-04, but from 2015 to 2021, the figure fell to 35.1 percent. China's other trading partners in Latin America, such as Chile, Mexico and Peru, received an increasingly large share of Chinese FDI. China's investments, too, shifted from the raw materials sector to the manufacturing and services sectors.

Chinese investment in the region's infrastructure projects is likely to grow, and help lower the "deficit" in infrastructure investment. It will also help offset, to a certain extent, the ongoing global monetary tightening due to the economic effects of the pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine conflict, especially because Chinese companies are now more interested in investing in infrastructure — and renewable energy and transportation — projects overseas.

According to Dussel Peters, Chinese companies invested $32.2 billion in 57 infrastructure projects in 2020-21, creating 170,337 jobs — a significant increase from the 2005-19 period.

However, there are a few challenges China and Latin American countries need to address to deepen their economic ties. First, future economic cooperation needs to take the environmental impacts into account in their pursuit of economic growth. In fact, Colombian President Gustavo Petro is leading a campaign to move his country away from fossil fuels to combat climate change, and China is committed to peaking its carbon emissions before 2030 and achieving carbon neutrality before 2060. Such environmental awareness should and will form the basis of bilateral economic cooperation in the coming years.

Second, Chinese companies need to guard against the risk of political instability in Latin American countries, because some of them are experiencing high inflation and rising borrowing costs, while people's living standards have fallen. Economic downturns in the region could also lead to social unrest and a political crisis.

In Peru, for example, the impeachment of former president Pedro Castillo in December 2022 triggered a wave of protests, in which at least 26 people were killed, interrupting economic activities. It is therefore important for Chinese companies to assess the social and political risks before making investment decisions.

And third, China and Latin American countries need to fix their development priorities and coordinate their policies so that their partnerships can better serve both sides' long-term interests. Brazil, for instance, has been worried that its trade with China could lead to de-industrialization because it primarily imports finished goods from China. Such worries can be addressed through cooperation. For instance, Chinese company BYD has invested in Brazil to manufacture electric bus chassis and solar photovoltaic panels, and is thus contributing to the development of the country's industrial sector.

As such, there are many ways in which China and Latin American countries can achieve win-win cooperation and better coordinate their development policies.

The author is a writer with China Daily. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Chen Weihua

The author is chief of China Daily EU Bureau based in Brussels.
chenweihua@chinadaily.com.cn

European Union's strategic autonomy in peril under sway of Washington

The term "strategic autonomy" has been trending in Brussels over the past few years and described as the heart of the European Union's foreign policy.

Not anymore.

Josep Borrell, EU high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, famously said that the election of Donald Trump as US president in 2016 "awakened" the EU and made it realize that it was too dependent on Washington.

He also said strategic autonomy is intended to ensure that Europeans take charge of themselves, and added that the EU does not need to choose between the United States and China. A briefing by the European Commission last July reiterated that the EU's strategic autonomy refers to the EU's capacity and capability to act autonomously — that is, without being dependent on other economies — in strategically important policy areas.

Just a few years ago, French President Emmanuel Macron and the then German Chancellor Angela Merkel championed the EU's strategic autonomy. France and Germany were the EU states, under then French President Jacques Chirac and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroder, which exercised real strategic autonomy in 2003 and firmly opposed the US-led Iraq War.

China, as the second-largest economy and home to one-fifth of the world's population, wants to improve the global order and governance.

That is sadly not the case today.

Macron has remained relatively quiet of late after some EU circles accused him of trying to appease Russia for urging talks between Russia and Ukraine in order to end the conflict. They also accused him of hyping Russia's concerns for security guarantee and cautioning that Russia should not be humiliated.

As a result, almost no diplomatic efforts have been made by the EU to mediate talks between Russia and Ukraine or help broker a cease-fire to end the conflict, because such efforts are no longer politically correct in Brussels even though they would be great news for the EU and the rest of the world, especially the Ukrainian people.

The answer I got when I asked the European Commission and current Swedish presidency of the Council of the EU is that Russia is not ready for talks. But Russian President Vladimir Putin reiterated just two weeks ago that Moscow is ready for talks.

The EU's answer is not surprising because that is Washington's talking point. And EU leaders must be familiar with, rather practising, it. Ian Bremmer, head of the political risk research firm Eurasia Group, was blunt when talking to DW News and CNN last week. He said that "it's a proxy war and NATO is not fighting it directly: We're fighting it through Ukraine." But this fact, though stated by many foreign policy experts, has not yet been confirmed by EU or US officials.

Not surprisingly, European Council President Charles Michel and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen were asked at a press conference on Tuesday after the signing of a 14-point EU-NATO cooperation deal whether the EU's strategic autonomy is "dead".

The EU certainly did not exercise strategic autonomy when it buckled under US pressure — based on sheer lies — to ban Huawei from its 5G network. It is risking committing a similar mistake by not stopping the US from forcing Dutch chip equipment manufacturer ASML to ban exports to China, something that violates the sovereignty of both the EU and the Netherlands, the interests of EU businesses as well as World Trade Organization rules.

EU leaders are not going all out to defend EU interests but mimicking Washington's China-bashing policy, with von der Leyen saying on Tuesday that "we also witness China increasingly attempting to reshape the international order to its benefits".

China, as the second-largest economy and home to one-fifth of the world's population, wants to improve the global order and governance. India, South Africa and other developing countries might also be thinking the same thing because the developing world is vastly underrepresented in the global system.

That must be the thinking of the EU, too, when years ago it put forward its concept of strategic autonomy, something that it seems to have lost these days.

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GLOBAL VIEWS

Editor's note: *The world has undergone many changes and shocks in recent years. Enhanced dialogue between scholars from China and overseas is needed to build mutual understanding on many problems the world faces. For this purpose, the China Watch Institute of China Daily and the National Institute for Global Strategy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, jointly present this special column: The Global Strategy Dialogue, in which experts from China and abroad will offer insightful views, analysis and fresh perspectives on long-term strategic issues of global importance.*

YAO ZHIZHONG

Staring at a new crisis

Inflation remains the greatest challenge in 2023. If not reduced soon, the world economy could see a deeper decline in growth rate

The global average consumer price index was up by 8.8 percent in 2022, according to estimates by the International Monetary Fund. Last year, the global inflation rate increased significantly compared with the growth rate in 2021, reaching the highest level since the beginning of the 21st century.

Inflation rates of the world's major economies have increased significantly, with China being an exception. The annual average growth rate of the consumer price index was about 8.1 percent in the United States, the highest in 40 years, and about 8.3 percent in the eurozone, the highest level since the Treaty on European Union was signed in 1992. The average CPI growth rate in all developed economies reached 7.2 percent. Even Japan, which has the most stable prices among developed economies, saw its CPI rising to 3.7 percent in October.

The annual average CPI growth rate of the emerging economies in Europe was as high as 27.8 percent last year and about 14 percent in Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. The emerging economies in Asia saw an average CPI growth rate of 4.1 percent last year, compared with 2.2 percent in 2021.

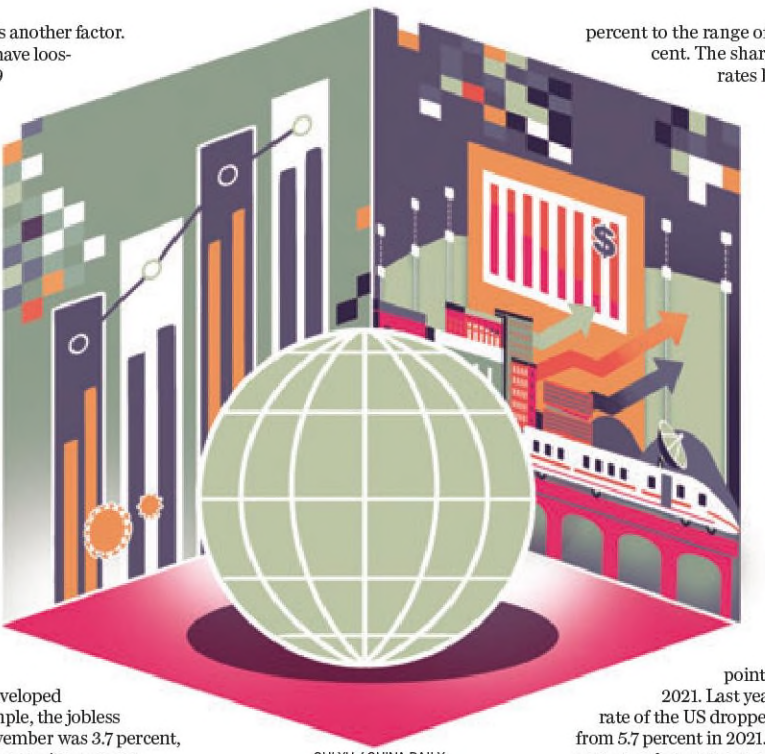
The Ukraine crisis played a major role in fueling this round of global inflation. As Russia is a major exporter of oil and natural gas, and Russia and Ukraine are major food exporters, the crisis pushed up international energy and food prices.

The competition among major powers, especially that between China and the US, is another factor. The US has weaponized supply chains from emphasizing efficiency to prioritizing security and politics, raising the cost of supply and driving up prices.

The pandemic has also led to a shrinking labor force in many countries and supply shortages in the labor market, bringing about wage increases and further pushing up inflation. For example, in the US, there was a labor shortage of up to 3.5 million people in 2022, of which 2 million people retired ahead of schedule due to pandemic-related factors. In the third quarter of 2022, the wage index of domestic workers in the US was up by 5.1 percent year-on-year, the highest increase this century.

Surging demand is another factor. Different countries have loosened their COVID-19 response policies since 2021 and demand has gradually begun to recover. However, the recovery of supply is slower. In 2022, demand recovered further, giving rise to global inflation.

The large-scale expansionary fiscal and monetary policies put in place by various countries have also driven up demand. When inflation is fueled by surging demand, unemployment falls, especially in developed economies. For example, the jobless rate in the US in November was 3.7 percent, down by 0.5 percentage points year-on-year, marking the lowest level since the 1960s.



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Global inflation is also a source of instability in the global economy. The response measures put in place by various countries have resulted in a decline in growth of the real economy, shrinking financial wealth, depreciation of currencies other than the US dollar, and foreign debt crises in some countries.

The greatest harm is that inflation leads to a decline in the real income and living standards of people, especially the low-income group. It could even fuel public protests and social unrest. In fact, in 2022, people in Europe, Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia hit the streets to protest against high prices. Therefore, dealing with rising inflation was the top priority of macroeconomic policies last year. The US Federal Reserve has raised interest rates seven times in a row since March, raising the target level of the federal funds rate from the range of 0 to 0.25 percent to the range of 4.25 to 4.5 percent. The sharp rise in interest rates has resulted in fresh global economic turmoil.

Cost-driven inflation would exert downward pressure on economic growth, and raising interest rates to curb consumption and investment demand would result in more economic downturn. The IMF lowered the world economic growth forecast four times in a row last year. In October, it estimated that the annual growth rate of the world GDP in 2022 would be 3.2 percent, a sharp drop of 2.8 percentage points compared with 2021. Last year, the GDP growth rate of the US dropped to 1.6 percent from 5.7 percent in 2021. The growth of the eurozone from 5.2 percent to 3.1 percent, and the average growth rate of all developed economies from 5.2 percent to 2.4 percent.

Emerging markets and developing economies saw their average growth rate drop from 6.6 percent in 2021 to 3.7 percent last year.

Rising interest rates and economic slowdowns have negative impacts on financial markets. The prosperity of the global financial market and the high price of financial assets have long been built on the basis of zero or even negative interest rates in major developed economies. Since 2022, with the shrinking of assets under negative interest rates globally, the environment for negative interest rates and zero interest rates has gradually shifted to a high interest rate. This, coupled with fears of an economic downturn and recessions, has triggered large fluctuations in the global financial market. Last year the US stock market lost $15 trillion in value compared with the beginning of 2022. Most other developed and emerging economies were also hit by declines of varying degrees.

The most distinct feature of the forex market in 2022 is the sharp rise of the dollar, and the sharp depreciation of other currencies.

As of mid-December, the dollar index had risen by 9.3 percent compared with the beginning of the year. That was due to the consecutive interest rate hikes by the Fed to increase the yield of dollar assets, which led to capital inflows to the US, and because other countries are facing more serious inflation than the US, leading to the weakening of other currencies. The Argentine peso depreciated by 40.5 percent against the dollar, and the Turkish lira by 30.3 percent. Such sharp depreciation has further heightened the pressure for imported inflation on these emerging economies, leading to hyperinflation. It would also make it more difficult to repay international debts denominated in US dollar, bringing about a foreign debt crisis such as that of Sri Lanka.

In 2023, the governance of inflation remains the most important challenge for the world economy. If not reduced significantly soon, it would become even more difficult to tame inflation. A more sustained high interest rate level would be required to effectively curb inflation. The world economy will then see a deeper decline in growth rate or even a recession at a higher level of interest rate, and further turbulence could emerge in the financial and foreign exchange markets. The world may not be too far away from a new economic crisis.

The author is a research fellow of the Institute of World Economics and Politics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and a research fellow of the National Institute for Global Strategy at the CASS. 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.

WOLFGANG RÖHR

Meaningful convergence

China and Germany should work together to promote an early end to the hostilities in Europe on the basis of the principles upheld by both countries

SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

For China and Germany, the year 2022, which marked the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, stood out once more for their fruitful economic ties. China was already Germany's most important trade partner from 2016 to 2021, and Germany had for many years been the largest European investor in China. In the first half of 2022 these trends continued unabated. The bilateral trade was larger than in any previous six-month period, and German investment in China also reached a record high for any half-year period, although the figures for the second half of 2022 may be lower due to the pandemic situation.

A survey published by the German Chamber of Commerce in China at the end of 2022 boded well for the years to come. More than half of the participating German companies stated that they will expand investment in China over the next two years. For 2023, half of the German companies in China expect an increased business turnover, and more than one-third anticipate higher profits. Small wonder therefore that only 1 percent of the companies said they plan to leave China within the next two years.

A decade ago, this state of affairs would have been praised by politicians both in China and Germany. Indeed, in the Joint Declaration adopted at the intergovernmental consultations in 2011, both governments expressed their desire to increase bilateral trade by about 50 percent until 2015.

But particularly in 2022, a different narrative has emerged in Germany and Europe. Bilateral trade with and investment in and from China are now often viewed in terms of dependency to be avoided. In Germany, both the Foreign Ministry and Economic Affairs and Energy Ministry adhere to this position, whereas the Chancellor's Office takes a more positive stance.

The major reason for this about-face is the crisis in Ukraine and the ensuing decoupling of the Russian and European economies. Suddenly, Europe has had to make do without Russian gas and oil, and a large number of European companies have had to give up their investment in Russia.

The intergovernmental consultations due to be held by China and Germany in early 2023 are an appropriate forum to further coordinate both countries' policies. They should join forces to make China-EU relations an anchor of stability and prosperity for the Eurasian continent.

As this view is liable to cast a shadow on future relations it merits closer inspection.

In 2021, 7.5 percent of Germany's exports went to China, and 11.9 percent of its imports came from China. In comparison, the US sent 8.6 percent of its exports to China and received 17.9 percent of its imports from there. German investment in the state of Texas is higher than its investment in China. No wonder therefore that the influential German ifo institute concluded that China plays an important but by no means dominant role for Germany as a supplier or destination.

China's position on the situation in Ukraine is consistent. Director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the CPC Central Committee Wang Yi recently pointed out that China has throughout upheld the fundamental principle of objectivity and impartiality. It strives to maintain the international system with the United Nations at the core and the international order based on international law.

Germany's stance, as communicated by Chancellor of Germany Olaf Scholz during his visit to Beijing in November 2022, is compatible with this position. In an article for the US magazine Foreign Affairs, Scholz described as the central question how Europeans can remain independent actors in a multipolar world. He made clear that he does not subscribe to the view that a new Cold War between the United States and China is approaching. Repeatedly since entering office, Scholz has firmly spoken out against "decoupling". It is to be hoped that the new "China strategy" that is currently being developed by Scholz's government will follow these lines.

The intergovernmental consultations due to be held by China and Germany in early 2023 are an appropriate forum to further coordinate both countries' policies. They should join forces to make China-EU relations an anchor of stability and prosperity for the Eurasian continent. That will, however, not be feasible as long as the situation is overshadowed by military confrontation: Peace in Europe is a core concern of all Europeans, a redline that must not be transgressed. Armed attacks on a neighboring country and occupation of parts of its territory are neither a sign of mutual respect nor are they the proper way to handle differences and disagreements. Even less can they be conducive to building a community with a shared future for mankind, a concept that has been developed by President Xi Jinping.

China and Germany should therefore strive to contribute to the early termination of hostilities in Europe on the basis of the principles upheld by both countries, namely the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states as mandated by the UN Charter. Together, they should oppose the interference by external forces in the internal affairs of states, including by military operations. Both countries should use their influence to bring about an immediate end to the fighting and a withdrawal of all armed forces to internationally agreed borders. Then, peace negotiations that take into account the immediate interests of all states concerned as well as underlying root causes should be held.

Jointly pursuing this goal would be a worthy ambition for China, Germany and the EU. Success in this endeavor could also pave the way for another boost in trade and investment. Perhaps most importantly it would promote China's interest in a Europe that is truly independent from external forces and would be a valuable partner for China in global affairs for decades to come.

The author is a former member of the German Foreign Service and a researcher at the German Studies Center at Tongji University. 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.

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LIFE

From left: An internet influencer on YouTube posts a review video of the Arabic version of Chinese TV series *Minning Town*. A host introduces *Minning Town* to local viewers on a program for an Egyptian TV station. A voice actor for a major female role in the Chinese TV series. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Arab viewers tune into TV series

High-quality dubbing and translation give Middle East audience intriguing glimpse into poverty alleviation, **Deng Zhangyu** reports.

When Ma Ning introduced *Minning Town* — a hit Chinese series telling the story of poverty alleviation — to Arab television stations last year, they showed, initially, little interest.

The series is now airing in many Arab nations like Egypt and Sudan, gaining a rising popularity after being well dubbed and translated. It also got an Arabic title which means "a road to happiness" in English.

"The dubbing helps a lot and enables it to be better accepted by Arab audiences," says Ma, manager of Wisdom House International Culture Communication Group that is in charge of the dubbing and distribution of *Minning Town* in the Arab world.

Minning Town vividly narrates the shifting nature of life and the fortunes of people who once lived in a poor mountainous area in Yinchuan, Ningxia Hui autonomous region, where sandstorms, water shortages and poor transportation seemed to trap them in the 1990s. After relocation to a more inhabitable village near the Yellow River, people experienced great changes and embraced a better life in the Gobi Desert.

Characters in the Chinese drama employ the dialects used in Ningxia rather than standard Mandarin, which is regarded as one of its attractions to Chinese audiences. The Arabic version chose Syrian Arabic, a dialect widely spoken in the Gulf, to dub the series.

Ma says they did a lot of research and surveys before finally choosing to dub it in Syrian Arabic to "close the distance with Arab audiences".

The translation and dubbing took nearly five months and involved more than 35 Arab voice actors, says Ma Xuejun, head of the translation team.

The series depicts a range of characters and the dubbing team has practitioners of all ages, from children to the elderly. At least three voice actors were asked to do the recording for each major character. The one who matched the tone of the character's voice best was the one to be finally selected.

A graduate of the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts in Syria, Samer Safaf got the role of the main protagonist Ma Defu, a village official who is in charge of the relocation of the impoverished village where he was born. The official's job of persuading people to move to a new place and teaching them useful skills to make money was misunderstood at first.

The 32-year-old Arab says that, the more he dubbed, the more he understood how hard and valuable Ma Defu's job is.

"My anger was real when I became the protagonist and got refused by the villagers," says Safaf.

He fell in love with the role, and the protagonist's spirit of never giving up also inspired him. Safaf says that, with such persistent people like Ma Defu, he understands why China has thrived, growing from a poor country to an economic power.

The original series comprises 23 episodes. Its Arabic version was contracted into 15, devoted to the plot of the villagers' relocation and how they work to shake off poverty.

"Poverty is a problem facing many countries. Some rural areas in Arab nations are hit by sandstorms, lack of water and are trapped in poverty. It's possible that Arab viewers will be touched by the TV series, which demonstrates how the Chinese overcome such difficulties," says Ma Xuejun.

From top: An Arabic poster promoting the hit Chinese TV series *Minning Town*. Samer Safaf, voice actor for the protagonist Ma Defu, a village official who helps relocate people and teach them skills to make money in the Ningxia Hui autonomous region. The team from Wisdom House International Culture Communication Group signs a contract with TV stations from Egypt and Sudan to broadcast the Arabic version of the TV series in November.

The ability to learn China's secret to success is what Ma Ning stressed when he promoted the drama to Arab TV stations and finally secured their collaboration last year.

The series is now gaining popularity in the Arab market. Arab media reports pertaining to the show have increased and discussions of it by internet influencers and among local viewers have also risen. Later it will be aired in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, among other Arab countries.

"I think *Minning Town* is a landmark show for us to be able to introduce Chinese TV series to the Arab world. The time is right," says Ma Ning.

Last December, the National Radio and Television Administration held a meeting in Beijing on "TV Cooperation Between China and Arab States". The meeting announced the launch of a Chinese TV series section at the Dubai-based Middle East Broadcasting Center, which will let audiences in Arab states watch hit Chinese dramas, including *Minning Town*.

Le Yucheng, deputy head of National Radio and Television Administration, said at the meeting that China is willing to cooperate with Arab states to produce and broadcast more television programs.

The Yinchuan-based Wisdom House International Culture Communication Group, where Ma Ning works, started commercial activities in the Arab nations in 2011. At first, this involved book publication and language education.

In recent years, the company has stepped into the arenas of TV and film. However, it's not easy to get opportunities to work with Arab TV stations directly, according to Ma Ning. The usual way is to take part in film or TV related festivals in Arab nations and Chinese content can be aired for a short period.

"Many Arab people's impression of China is that of the country in the 1990s. Martial arts actors like Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan are the best known Chinese faces in the film industry," says Ma Ning.

In terms of TV series, he adds that Arab audiences who watch Chinese content favor costume dramas and documentaries aired via online platforms, according to their surveys. *Minning Town* is special, as it reaches a wide audience mainly through Arab TV stations.

Ma Ning is confident and excited about the future of exporting Chinese TV series to Arab nations. He says that China's rising economic power and the good relationship between China and Arab states both contribute to a bright future for such cultural exchanges. The further exchange of TV series is a certainty.

According to a report published by the National Radio and Television Administration in November, Arab nations are becoming an emerging and important market for Chinese dramas.

Li Fude, founder of Century UU, a Tianjin-based Chinese content distributor and producer, says that their subscribers from the Arab world has increased in the past two years. Li's company has more than 27 million subscribers and covers 13 languages on YouTube. The number of subscribers from Arab nations has passed 1 million.

On Dec 9, the first China-Arab States Summit was held in Riyadh in Saudi Arabia, attended by President Xi Jinping and leaders of 21 Arab nations.

"The recent exchanges between China and Arab nations really excite us," says Ma Ning. "The future cooperation in the TV industry is very bright, and Chinese TV dramas will enjoy rising popularity."

Hu Dongmei in Yinchuan contributed to this story.

Contact the writer at dengzhangyu@chinadaily.com.cn

Health center protects people in rural areas

TIANJIN — Recently, the health center in Chuanfangyu township has seen villagers trickling in daily, about one-third of whom are suffering from respiratory illnesses.

The health center, located in the Jizhou district of North China's Tianjin municipality, is one of the vital grassroots medical institutions that provide tiered, timely, and convenient medical services to patients in the country's vast rural areas.

Guo Yanli had COVID-19 for about 12 days.

"I had a cough and a little pain in my chest when I breathed. I bought some cough remedies here, and it took effect in about three days," the villager says.

"I'm almost good now."

Guo says that she also checked her lungs at the health center. The results showed them to be clear.

Villager Lyu Shuangshuang visited the health center recently for cough medication.

Lyu says her family have all been infected with COVID-19, but recovered after taking antipyretics, cold medicine, and antiviral medicine.

"Our drug reserves are sufficient to ensure the needs of patients in the area," says Sun Hongsheng, a physician at the health center.

Sun adds that the center also provides traditional Chinese medicines for patients and infected medical staff.

Liu Hongliang, head of the health center, says that there was a small increase in the number of COVID-19 patients in mid-to-late December, but the figure began to fall at the end of December. Most of them were mild cases.

Chuanfangyu township has a population of more than 12,000. Besides the town's health center, village clinics also protect rural residents' health.

"The medication supply was tight at the beginning," Liu says.

"Thanks to the help of the local health commission and pharmaceutical companies, we have increased our stockpile," Liu adds.

Unlike the rapid rise in the number of people infected in big cities, the infection rate among villagers in the town was significantly lower, Liu says.

He adds that rural residents are scattered, and their awareness of self-protection has improved.

Apart from outpatient services, doctors in the health center also make house calls.

During a recent home visit, Liu found that Li Zeng, an 81-year-old villager, was not in good spirits, with a severe cough and respiratory symptoms. He was later admitted to the health center.

"My father is old, and big hospitals are far away. Therefore, we chose the small health center since we are familiar with the doctors," says Li Zeng's daughter Li Haiyan.

"It is convenient and near our home, and the medical facilities are good here."

The village clinic of Daxin, under the jurisdiction of Chuanfangyu township, provides medical services for two nearby villages with more than 2,000 residents.

"The number of COVID-19 patients is declining, and the medicine we have has, so far, been sufficient," says Liu Huaichen, a doctor at the clinic.

"Our country has made a great effort and done a good job in COVID-19 prevention over the past few years.

"Rural residents also attach great importance to protection measures," he adds.

XINHUA

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Stage photos from *The Phantom of the Opera*, one of the most successful musicals in the world. Its Chinese production, in Mandarin, will premiere at the Shanghai Grand Theater on May 3. It will be the 18th language the musical will be performed in. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

STAGING A CLASSIC TALE

The first Chinese production of *The Phantom of the Opera* will begin its national tour in May, **Zhang Kun** reports.

The Phantom of the Opera, one of the most successful musicals in the world, will have its first Chinese production this year.

The live-entertainment branch of Shanghai Media Group announced that the production will premiere at the Shanghai Grand Theater on May 3.

The upcoming production in Mandarin will be the 18th language the musical will be performed in.

After 39 performances in Shanghai, the production will embark on an unprecedented national tour, with the first round of 200 shows taking place until the beginning of 2024.

The three Chinese actors, who will play the title character of the musical, are Ayunga, Liu Lingfei and He Liangchen.

The three actors who will play the title character of *The Phantom of the Opera* — from left He Liangchen, Ayunga and Liu Lingfei.

Created by British composer Andrew Lloyd Webber — based on the book by French author Gaston Leroux — the musical *The Phantom of the Opera* has been performed in more than 65,000 shows in 183 cities around the world and watched by 145 million people.

The box-office revenues of the shows add up to about $6 billion. Since its debut in 1986 in London, it has been the longest-running show on Broadway.

In September, the show announced that it would be closing in February, but the plan was later changed because of the high box-office demand. Its Broadway run has since been extended another eight weeks until April 2.

The original production of the musical was first presented in China in 2004, when 100 shows were held.

The reception was overwhelming, with the average attendance rate hitting 99 percent.

From 2013 to 2015, the production again toured Shanghai; Guangzhou, Guangdong province; and Beijing and generated record box-office sales. For many people in China, it marked their maiden experience of musical theater.

In 2018, SMG Live and Webber's Really Useful Group jointly announced the Phantom China project, which would include a "grand tour" of the country in 2020, a reality show to identify musical talent in China, as well as production of the musical in Chinese.

Although the plan was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the tour of the musical has had three China tours. During that period, SMG Live took three big steps — first the introduction of original productions in China; second, the production of Chinese editions of established shows; and now we are making original Chinese productions."

Chinese productions of Broadway musicals such as *Cats* and *Mamma Mia* helped to nurture the first generation of professional musical performers, creative and production teams, and more importantly, the booming market cultivated more than 40 cities in the United States, the concert was held at Hall of the People in Beijing and the Shanghai Grand Theater in 2001. That was the first formal introduction of Western musicals to audiences in China, he says.

From left: Mezzo Phoebe Haines thanking the audience; American composer Evan Mack; Spanish composer Fernando Buide; and American composer Nicholas Bentz. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Though the plan was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the tour of the musical started casting actors and actresses and soon received more than 1,000 applicants.

More than 100 people also applied for the role of translating the script. This reflects that the Chinese production would be a success.

Serin Kasif, a representative of RUG, says in a video clip that some 200 applicants made it to the final audition because the creative team was simply "blown away by the caliber of talent".

Kristen Blodgette, the musical supervisor of the Chinese production, also praises local talent, noting that it is unusual for so many people to meet the requirements.

"The musical is an extremely challenging score to sing," she says. "Andrew version, as it says China's musical industry is more mature.

"We now feel we have the capability and confidence to create a top-notch show in Chinese," says Ma Chencheng, president of SMG Live.

"Over the past two decades, the musical has had three China tours. During that period, SMG Live took three big steps — first the introduction of original productions in China; second, the production of Chinese editions of established shows; and now we are making original Chinese productions."

Chinese productions of Broadway musicals such as *Cats* and *Mamma Mia* helped to nurture the first generation of professional musical performers, creative and production teams, and more importantly, the booming market cultivated more than 40 cities in the United States, the concert was held at Hall of the People in Beijing and the Shanghai Grand Theater in 2001. That was the first formal introduction of Western musicals to audiences in China, he says.

unique all at the same time.

One of the three actors for the title role is Ayunga, an ethnic Mongolian musician in China, who has starred in major productions such as the Chinese version of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Monte Cristo*. Ayunga has in recent years been working as a producer of Chinese musicals, too.

Liu, the second actor for the role, started his musical career with the Chinese production of *Cats* more than 10 years ago, and has since become a veteran musical actor in the country.

"The Phantom is the dream role of every musical actor," he says. "I am greatly honored and overwhelmed to be given this opportunity."

The third actor, He, the youngest of the three, is an opera singer who graduated from Italy's Nicola Paganini Conservatory of Music in Genoa and trained at the Academia Verdiana's program for promising young opera singers.

Fei Xiang, or Kris Philips, an American Chinese singer and actor, who was the first to introduce the legendary musical to China, shares his experience of working with Webber and singing Webber's works in Chinese in a video message.

Fei joined Webber's concert production *The Music of the Night*, which starred international singing superstar Sarah Brightman, in 1995.

Contact the writer at zhangkun@chinadaily.com.cn

Toulouse-Lautrec paints an intriguing picture

By **ZHANG KUN** in Shanghai

The largest exhibition in China about the life and art of French artist Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864-1901) is ongoing at the Aurora Museum in Shanghai.

Titled *Ethereal Life in Paris: A World Tour Exhibition With Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec*, the exhibition features the most comprehensive collection of artifacts related to the artist, including nearly 120 sets of artworks and more than 230 precious objects, from lithographs to poster designs and sketch drawings.

Though he lived for just 37 years, Toulouse-Lautrec created about 737 oil paintings, 275 watercolors, 368 prints and posters, and 5,084 sketch manuscripts.

"Art was the career he devoted himself to, and an important source of the meaning and value of his life. Thanks to painting, he changed from a depressed and disabled nobleman to a mirror of the times, an observer and recorder of life, and an innovator of art and design," says Wang Jia, an art historian and honorary curator of the Liechtenstein National Museum, who provided academic support for the exhibition in Shanghai.

Ethereal Life in Paris: A World Tour Exhibition With Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec is the largest exhibition in China about the life and art of the French artist. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The French artist was born in an aristocratic family and had as a teenager suffered from two accidents that resulted in his legs being atrophied. He later devoted much of his time and efforts to art. He frequented entertainment venues featuring the pop culture of Paris and recorded the nontraditional aspects of rapidly changing urban life, from bars and opera houses to horse and bicycle races to singers, actors, prostitutes and even clowns.

The artist presented such a vivid picture of the splendid nightlife in Montmartre, a Paris district, that he was eventually dubbed its "soul".

When he was alive, lithography became the medium of choice for printing larger and more colorful and exquisite works. The artist adopted the new art form to create posters for fashion and entertainment in Paris and rose to fame with a poster designed for the Moulin Rouge, a legendary entertainment venue.

Through a limestone plate, video projection, as well as a hands-on experience at the exhibition, visitors can learn more about lithography, which is the process of printing from the plain surface of a limestone or metal plate on which the image to be printed is ink-receptive and the blank area ink-repellent.

Inspired by the Japanese Ukiyo-e prints, he went on to create his own unique style that was defined by bright and bold color contrasts, unconventional composition, fast and expressive contour lines, dark silhouettes and simple figure shapes that highlighted the essential features.

During his career, he created a large number of commercial commissions, including posters, book covers and illustrations, stage decor design, and music album covers.

But whatever the subject, the main character of the work was always either a friend he knew well or his favorite singer and actor, says Liu Dejiang, a member of the curatorial team.

For example, some of the portrayed figures were renowned artists such as Aristide Bruant and Yvette Guilbert, both of whom were close friends of Toulouse-Lautrec.

"The human being was always the theme of his fascination," Liu says.

The exhibition runs through April 7.

If you go

Ethereal Life in Paris: A World Tour Exhibition With Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec
Dec 24-April 7
Aurora Museum, No 99 Fucheng Road, Lujiazui, Pudong district, Shanghai.
021-58408899.

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LIFE

Li Haoran conducts *An Homage to Classics* at Beijing's Forbidden City Concert Hall, marking the beginning of the theater's New Year concert series. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

A conductor of cultural nuance shows his skills

Young, emerging maestro Li Haoran kicked off the New Year program of the Forbidden City Concert Hall in Beijing, **Cheng Yuezhu** reports.

Participating in the Rachmaninoff International Competition for pianists, composers and conductors in 2022 was an emotionally charged experience for conductor Li Haoran.

As it was the first edition of the competition, Li says that he found the English translation of the regulations confusing. It wasn't until the very end that he learned the pieces for the final round were predetermined rather than based on individual choices.

With only two days to cram for the final round, he felt defeated and wanted to give up the competition entirely.

"One of my good Russian friends told me a story about Paganini, who lost three strings during one performance and kept going on the one remaining string. Being a musician means facing up to all sorts of challenges, and this encouragement made me decide to carry on," Li says.

Eventually, Li won the third prize and a bronze medal in the conducting section, along with a series of invitations for him to work with Russia's preeminent singers, pianists and orchestras.

"I feel that I'm quite fortunate, to have made so many new friends and to have the opportunity of working with so many orchestras," Li says.

"Competitions for me are not about the prizes. What I care about the most is for people to see me and recognize my conducting skills."

Born in 1986, Li has dazzling experience of winning international competitions and working with international orchestras. He studied at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, majoring in conducting under the mentorship of well-known conductor Xia Xiaotang.

In 2011, he enrolled in the Hanns Eisler School of Music Berlin to study a master's degree under German conducting educators Christian Ehwald and Hans-Dieter Baum. He received the Konzertexamen degree, the highest certification of German conservatories, in 2017.

After the Rachmaninoff competition, he was occupied with concerts around Europe, including those at the Copenhagen Opera House in Denmark, the Verdi Festival in Italy and the China-Germany International Cloud Music Festival that celebrated the 50th anniversary of China-Germany diplomatic relations.

He recently returned to China, with two concerts titled *An Homage to Classics* on Dec 28 and 29 at Beijing's Forbidden City Concert Hall, marking the beginning of the theater's New Year concert series.

Above: The two New Year concerts, held on Dec 28 and 29, were performed by the Beijing Symphony Orchestra. **Below:** Li won the third prize and a bronze medal at last year's Rachmaninoff International Competition for pianists, composers and conductors in 2022. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

> "When it comes to music, the cultural background and language are very important, but it's also about being natural and expressing genuine feelings."
>
> **Li Haoran,** conductor

Performed by the Beijing Symphony Orchestra, the concert included works by Russian classical composers, such as well-known pieces by Tchaikovsky, excerpts from Igor Stravinsky's orchestral work *The Firebird* and the symphonic suite *Scheherazade* by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov.

Li had never conducted most of these pieces before, other than *The Firebird* and Tchaikovsky's *Polonaise* from the opera *Eugene Onegin*, but new ideas kept emerging during the rehearsals, including the use of rubato — a change in rhythm or tempo not indicated in the score — for certain phrases.

"An idea came to me just several days before the concert. I simply thought, 'why not?' When it comes to music, the cultural background and language are very important, but it's also about being natural and expressing genuine feelings," Li says.

"When a person understands the culture and language, music comes naturally. I used to wonder why some conductors' rubato choices seem particularly effortless, and the answer lies in their understanding of the culture, language and tradition behind the music."

Therefore, when working with orchestras or on music pieces from different countries, he can grasp the nuances in styles, which correspond with the relevant cultures and languages, such as the light and airy sounds of French impressionism, or a German orchestra's emphasis on articulation.

Li also says that, although he works mainly with international orchestras, he believes Chinese orchestras are making steady progress. Sometimes, he notes, Chinese orchestras are not lacking in technique, but in the understanding and expression of culture.

The concert hall's New Year series began with two shows by Li, followed by a recurring performance of film soundtracks on Dec 30, which gained popularity following its first performance in September.

On New Year's Eve, veteran conductor Yang Li and soprano Guo Fei, along with the Beijing Symphony Orchestra, presented a range of classical works by composers from different parts of the world and from different historical periods.

The series ended with a concert on Jan 1 with conductor Xia taking the baton. Soprano Zhang Liping gave performances of works from home and abroad, including Italian composer Giacomo Puccini's arias and the Chinese song, *I Love You, China*. Harpist Sun Shimeng performed Spanish composer Joaquin Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez* arranged for harp.

"Li's two performances kicked off the 2023 New Year concert series. It is especially meaningful that we are once again gathering here and enjoying live music," says Xu Jian, director of the concert hall.

"Each concert featured a different conductor, from the young emerging Li Haoran, to the veteran conductors Fan Tao, Yang and Xia. Every conductor brought their own arrangement of pieces with different styles."

Xu says that, for the upcoming Spring Festival, the concert hall will host another series that centers on traditional and folk music, including classic excerpts of Peking Opera performances, Chinese cross-talk pieces, as well as an amalgam of regional opera styles.

Contact the writer at chengyuezhu@chinadaily.com.cn

Old newsreel footage reveals a familiar face

Ian Morrison
Second Thoughts

I recently saw my grandfather, despite the fact that he passed away more than two decades ago, and what was even more incredible was that I saw my grandfather as a young man. It happened purely by surprise as I was browsing through some videos of historical newsreels on the internet.

A video of a 1942 British newsreel had appeared in my subscriptions. It seemed like quite a typical one from the time, about a meeting calling for the opening of a "second front" in Western Europe in the war against fascist Germany.

The meeting in question was in Glasgow and was addressed by Harry Pollitt, the longtime general secretary of the Communist Party of Great Britain. My grandfather can be seen around the start of the video, among the crowds of people waiting to hear Pollitt speak.

You can imagine the amazing surprise I got when I saw that brief image of the young man standing in the line outside that Communist Party meeting in 1942, and realizing that it was my grandfather.

The other interesting thing is the particular year that this short piece of film is from, as 1942 was also the year that my grandfather, who was a profound political influence on me in my youth, joined the Communist Party of Great Britain.

In fact, 1942 was a year in which the CPGB enjoyed a record recruitment of new members, with tens of thousands joining, many of them inspired by the Soviet army's fight against fascist Germany on the Eastern Front, eagerly responding to the CPGB's call to open a Western Front against Hitler's forces as soon as possible.

My grandfather and all my other grandparents faced many grim challenges in their youth. Their childhood was in the years immediately following the carnage of World War I, and my grandmother told me stories about how she often saw disabled war veterans when she was a little girl, men who were scarred for life both mentally and physically.

Then my grandparents, as they were heading toward their teenage years, had to cope with the consequences of the Great Depression of the 1930s, and just as they were approaching adulthood, World War II began.

So much tragedy and so many trials were packed into the first two-and-a-half decades of their lives, including the near destruction of their hometown of Clydebank in Scotland by German bombs. All of this by the time they were around 24! No wonder they were all very tough and resourceful people. These were people who could cope with literally everything life threw at them.

I was very close to all of my grandparents when I was young, and listened to stories about their own childhood and also many tales about their wartime experiences. Seeing that short piece of film footage of my grandfather from 1942 brought many of those memories back to me, stories and memories which I will eventually pass on one day to my own grandchildren.

Every family has its own amazing stories, and it is the job of the younger generations to listen, understand and learn from those stories, and pass them on to future generations. In this way, a little part of those departed generations will live on forever.

Contact the writer at ian@chinadaily.com.cn

Taking a professional approach to elderly care

CHONGQING — Chen Daming has been working with elderly people for nearly three years in Qijiang district of Southwest China's Chongqing, assessing their abilities and needs.

He is an "elderly ability assessor", a relatively new profession, but one that will potentially make a significant difference in the daily lives of a quickly growing section of society.

The job entails carrying out measurements and assessments of elderly people, recording things such as their physical health, cognitive ability and mental state.

> "It's not an easy job, as it requires not only basic knowledge of nursing and medicine, but also love and empathy."
>
> **Chen Daming,** assistant to the elderly

As an important link in the process of providing scientific and accurate care services for the elderly, the profession has become increasingly widespread in China.

Last year, "elderly ability assessor" was officially recognized as a new profession by China's human resources authority.

Chen obtained the elderly ability assessor certificate in 2020. In the past three years, he has helped more than 300 households, offering possibilities for improving the lives of elderly residents in their later years.

"We establish the assessment needs of residential communities and the elderly care institutions, and then go to the homes of the elderly people for on-site evaluation," Chen says.

He notes that the ability assessors will comprehensively evaluate and score the elderly based on four first-level indicators of physiology, psychology, spirit and social participation, and 22 second-level indicators, such as self-care ability, the risk of getting lost and falling, and mental state.

The assessment reports are filed with the community to provide a reference for individual care services.

"It's not an easy job, as it requires not only basic knowledge of nursing and medicine, but also love and empathy," Chen says.

Some elderly people have been bedridden for a long time, unable to speak and accompanied by emotional instability, and some are "unfriendly" due to mental health problems, Chen says. "We need to patiently communicate with them or their family members to learn about, and record, their health conditions."

An "elderly ability assessor" not only records data, but also makes observations.

"We need to hold frequent in-depth exchanges with these people to understand their lives, including their past and current living habits, and conduct regular return visits to adjust the service plan in a timely manner," Chen says.

"Everyone will grow old and every elderly person has the right to enjoy a good quality of life," he adds.

China has one of the fastest-growing aging populations in the world. Official data shows that by the end of 2021, the country had 267 million people aged 60 and above, or 18.9 percent of the total population, while those aged 65 and above accounted for over 14 percent of the population.

The increasing number of elderly people requires more professional assessors, says Chen, adding that official recognition of this profession provides better career prospects for those who are skilled and interested in helping elderly people.

"It's also a new occupation that requires more emotional commitment. If my effort can benefit more families and more seniors, my work will be more meaningful," Chen says.

XINHUA

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