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CHINA DAILY

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Xi sends condolences to Nepal over plane crash

By **MO JINGXI**
mojingxi@chinadaily.com.cn

President Xi Jinping sent a message of condolence on Monday to Nepal's President Bidya Devi Bhandari over the crash of a passenger plane, with 72 people onboard, in Pokhara on Sunday.

In his message, Xi said he was shocked to learn about the plane crash, which caused heavy casualties. He expressed deep condolences over the deaths and extended his sincere sympathies to the bereaved families on behalf of the Chinese government and the Chinese people.

Premier Li Keqiang also sent a message of condolence to Nepal's Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, also known as Prachanda.

On Sunday, Yeti Airlines Flight 691, from Kathmandu to Pokhara, plunged into a deep gorge and burst into flames shortly before it was to land in Pokhara, central Nepal. It was the country's worst aviation disaster in three decades.

Slow going



People cross a flooded street on Monday after checking out of a hotel in San Diego, California, in the United States. Another storm lashed California on Monday, bringing more rain, flooding and snow. A series of winter storms have battered the state recently, with at least 19 deaths reported in the past two weeks, many from drowning. MIKE BLAKE / REUTERS

Vice-premier vows further opening-up at Davos forum

By **WANG MINGJIE**
in Davos, Switzerland
wangmingjie@mail.chinadailyuk.com

Vice-Premier Liu He said on Tuesday that China is confident growth will likely return to its normal trend this year and the country's economy will "see a significant improvement".

Delivering a speech to the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland, Liu called for international cooperation, a global response to climate change and making economic development the "primary and central task".

"In 2023, we will strive to maintain reasonable economic growth, and keep prices and jobs stable," Liu said.

"More focus will be placed on expanding domestic demand, keeping supply chains stable, supporting the private sector, reforming the State-owned enterprises, attracting foreign investment and preventing economic and financial risks."

The vice-premier stressed that China will continue to promote all-around opening-up.

"Opening-up, as a basic State policy, is a catalyst for reform and development, and a key driver of economic progress in China. China's door to the world will only open wider."

Liu also addressed issues relating to China's real estate sector, which he said is still a pillar for the nation's economy and accounts for nearly 40 percent of bank lending, 50 percent of overall local government fiscal resources and 60 percent of urban household assets.

Starting in the second half of 2021, China experienced a rapid decline in property prices and home sales. Since then, Liu said with a "blood transfusion" to the property industry, supply and demand in the market have seen noticeable improvements.

In regard to climate change, Liu reiterated that "China will honor its commitments to the international community, push for global cooperation on climate change, work with other countries to tackle the serious challenges posed by climate change and build a community with a shared future for mankind".

Liu also mentioned Beijing's recent optimization of its COVID-19 policy, saying that the overall situation in China was steady. He added that 5 billion trips are expected to be made during the Chinese New Year holiday starting on Saturday.

Jeremy Jurgens, managing director of World Economic Forum, who listened to Liu's speech, said: "If you look back to when the vice-premier was last here in 2018, what you see is, despite the crisis, there is a continuation of the important underlying policies.

"Liu also stated that mutual understanding is the prerequisite for cooperation. This is more easily done in person than done digitally. I think that is an important signal that he personally came and met with other world leaders, and that helps build the foundations for enhancing cooperation we need today," Jurgens added.

John Beirne, vice-chair of research at think tank Asian Development Bank Institute, said, "As well as providing a much-welcomed upbeat assessment of the economic outlook for China, Liu explained how financial stability risks in the property sector are being managed.

"In addition, Liu's comments on the importance of international cooperation and policy coordination are to be commended, notably in respect of China's commitment to global action on tackling climate change."

West's false COVID narratives hold no water

WORLD WATCH
By Qi Sheng

In recent weeks, the Western media's coverage of China has been dominated by news of its adjusting of COVID-19 policies. Expectedly, it turned into a China-bashing carnival.

Some said the country has lost its fight against the pandemic, and others said the adjustment is a failure of China's political system, while boasting of the superiority of "democracy". How do we make sense of China's efforts and sacrifices over the past three years? Let us investigate some of the prevailing false narratives.

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First, some say that China's COVID-19 death toll does not include those who died as a result of delayed or denied medical treatment because of strict COVID-19 control measures. A plausible way to test the validity of such speculation is to compare the country's total deaths during the pandemic and estimated deaths had there been no pandemic. The difference between the two would be the country's excess mortality.

According to the World Health Organization, between Jan 1, 2020, and Dec 31, 2021, excess mortality in the United States and India was 930,000 and 4.74 million, respectively. However, China's excess mortality during the pandemic was a negative number, which means China's COVID-19 policy didn't result in excess deaths.

On the contrary, fewer Chinese people died because strict disease prevention and control measures slowed the spread of the novel coronavirus and also reduced deaths from such things as traffic accidents.

Because of China's large and aging population, it is inevitable that the virus will lead to more deaths. However, the prevailing Omicron variant is significantly less lethal than the original virus and the Delta variant. More than 90 percent of the Chinese population has been vaccinated, thus putting in place an immunity barrier against the virus.

The variety of drugs and rich therapeutic experience now available have significantly reduced the risk of death from COVID-19. Therefore, the fact that China is

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Innovation key for nation to realize high-quality growth
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China's economy expected to see robust rebound

Experts, officials express confidence as growth results for last year beat market expectations

By **ZHOU LANXU, OUYANG SHIJIA** and **JIANG XUEQING**

China's economy is likely to see a robust rebound this year as better-than-expected growth results for 2022 have demonstrated its resilience in coping with multiple challenges, officials and experts said on Tuesday.

The nation's economic growth in 2023 is expected to rebound to above 5 percent as consumer activity revives amid waning COVID disruptions while concerted policy steps are set to prop up infrastructure investment and stabilize the property sector, they said.

Beating market expectations and outrunning many major economies such as Germany, China's GDP expanded 3 percent year-on-year in 2022 to 121.02 trillion yuan ($17.94 trillion), the National Bureau of Statistics said on Tuesday.

Fourth-quarter GDP growth came in at 2.9 percent, which experts partly attributed to the nation passing the recent COVID-19 peak faster than expected.

Kang Yi, head of the NBS, said economic performance remained overall stable last year despite the challenges of intensified geopolitical tensions, rising global downside risks and repeated COVID-19 outbreaks, pointing to the strong resilience and great potential of China's economy.

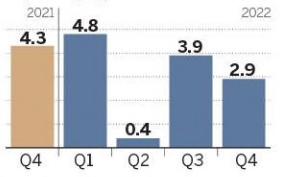
"China's economy is bound to see an overall improvement this year," Kang said, adding that economic activity is gradually normalizing and domestic flights have recovered to more than 80 percent of the level seen in 2019.

As the peak of recent COVID-19 infections appears to be over, experts said the Chinese economy is poised to rebound soon, with the majority of provincial-level regions having set their growth targets for this year at between 5 and 6.5 percent.

Kang Yong, chief economist at KPMG China, said he expects the nation's economic growth to accelerate to about 5.2 percent this year as the increase in household savings over recent years may partially translate into a rebound in consumer spending upon the resumption of offline consumption.

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China's GDP growth
Unit: percent (y-o-y)



Source: National Bureau of Statistics
CHINA DAILY

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Powerful endeavor



A worker removes snow and ice from a power transmission tower in a mountainous area of Hefeng county, Hubei province, on Tuesday. The local emergency department mobilized a special team to ensure uninterrupted power supply after a cold wave hit the area. YANG SHUNPI / XINHUA

LEGACIES OF WINTER OLYMPICS DRIVE SPORTS BOOM

Organizers capitalize on strong appeal of Beijing 2022

By **SUN XIAOCHEN**
sunxiaochen@chinadaily.com.cn

in-depth

Last year's Beijing Winter Olympic Games are fueling a seasonal sports boom in China.

Since the Games opened on Feb 4 to international acclaim, Chinese organizers have fully realized their ambitions to capitalize on the strong appeal of the events — evidenced by busy scenes at winter sports venues nationwide ahead of Spring Festival.

Most of the official Beijing 2022 competition venues, which impressed top Olympians with their sleek designs and facilities, reopened to the public at the end of last year. The venues have become popular destinations for the first-class services and events they offer.

Genting Snow Park, located in Olympic co-host Zhangjiakou, Hebei province, has stood out this winter as one of the busiest Beijing 2022 venues in the post-Games era.

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Olympics: Ski venues in hot demand



Snow is being enjoyed in many areas of China this winter. WANG JIANG AND CAI ZENGLE / FOR CHINA DAILY

From page 1

Only midway into the 2022-23 snow season, some 30 events, including professional and amateur competitions, junior training programs and skiing festivals, have been scheduled at the mountain resort. A total of 20 gold medals were up for grabs in Genting during Beijing 2022 for events ranging from freestyle skiing to snowboarding.

Wang Shitong, the resort's general manager for mountain operations, said the Olympic facilities and upgraded services at the venue have been a game-changer for its recovery from the pandemic.

"Having served the world's best as an Olympic venue definitely gives us a huge advantage, both from marketing and operational perspectives," Wang said.

"Our whole team, from snowmaking and course building to emergency response, has improved greatly thanks to the hands-on involvement in operations during the Olympics, so that technically, the experiences we now offer to our customers are on the next level."

Since the beginning of the winter season in mid-November, Genting has opened to the public 41 snow courses, including three that hosted parallel giant slalom, skiing and snowboarding cross and slopestyle competitions at Beijing 2022.

According to the venue's marketing department, the resort receives about 4,000 visitors a day during weekends and 2,000 on weekdays. Business has returned to the pre-pandemic level.

As a common practice at Olympic venues, Genting's mountain operations team has remodeled some of the courses built for highly technical Olympic events to accommodate skill levels among amateur participants.

Wang said, "In this way, ordinary skiers and snowboarders can enjoy the Olympic experience in a fun and safe way. The Games venues should be for everyone."

Winter sports enthusiasts in China have also turned frozen ponds, ice and snow carnivals, and mountain resorts nationwide into popular tourism spots.

These participants have been inspired by the host delegation's victorious campaign at Beijing 2022, where Team China bagged a record haul of 15 medals, including an unprecedented nine golds.

Ski resorts at Changbai Mountain, Jilin province, are witnessing one of their hottest business seasons in the coldest period of the year, with large numbers of skiers and snowboarders gathering on the courses, at cable lift stations and in resort hotel lobbies.

Wang Hongli, operations manager at a resort in Fusong county, Baishan, Jilin, said, "Even though we have not fully recovered yet from the impact of the pandemic, we are still receiving at least 3,000 skiers a day, which is quite impressive, and the numbers will continue to rise."

Han Xue, a staff member overseeing ski rental services at the resort, said the winter sports boom has increased demand for more advanced, higher-end and diverse equipment.

"Eight years ago, we had 2,800 snowboards in stock, too many at a time when people were all starting out by skiing. Now, we have 4,000 snowboards for rent each day, but this is not enough."

Citing Beijing 2022's legacy in promoting winter sports in the world's most populous nation, the International Olympic Committee, or IOC, and major international governing bodies for winter sports have said the Games will go down in history for permanently changing the landscape of ice and snow sports.

According to a report by the General Administration of Sport of China, more than 346 million Chinese took part in winter sports and related activities at least once before the Games began, opening a huge untapped market.

IOC President Thomas Bach said in a video address at the opening of China's ninth annual public ice and snow festival last month, "China wrote a new chapter in Olympic history by hosting the truly exceptional Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games Beijing 2022."

The Games opened a new era for winter sports globally, driven by the enthusiasm of more than 300 million Chinese people who are now engaged in snow and ice sports, Bach added.

Kim Jae-youl, president of the International Skating Union, or ISU, citing skating's popularity in China, and the nation's prowess in the sport at Beijing 2022, said he expects China to play a more prominent role in promoting ice sports at grassroots and elite levels.

In a congratulatory message to the festival, Kim, who was elected ISU head in June, said, "The growth of the national public ice and snow festival in the past eight years reflects the growing interest in winter sports in China, and the investment involved.

"China has become one of the largest and strongest nations in skating, and this is only going to continue," he said.

In a final review, the IOC's Coordination Commission for Beijing 2022 said the Chinese capital's smooth and safe organization of arguably the most sophisticated sporting event in the world, despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, was acknowledged with high regard.

Presenting the review report to an IOC executive board meeting early last month, Juan Antonio Samaranch, chair of the coordination commission and IOC vice-president, said, "The Olympic Winter Games Beijing 2022 were a showcase for incredible sporting performances.

"In addition to delivering a safe and successful Games, the organizing committee's ambitious vision and promises were achieved and exceeded."

Based on data analysis and debriefings with organizers and stakeholders, the report summarizes the key achievements of Beijing 2022, including athletes' performances, media exposure, legacy and sustainability. It also furthers efforts by the IOC to optimize future Games' delivery and experiences by drawing up seven recommendations based on practices at the Games last year.

To address challenges posed by the highly contagious Omicron variant of COVID-19, Beijing's decision to stage the Games under a closed loop management system proved a feasible and flexible way to guarantee safe delivery of the event on time. The decision was taken after thorough discussions with the IOC, the World Health Organization and all other stakeholders.

All key Games' participants, including athletes, coaches and organizers, stayed and traveled inside the closed loop, were separated from local communities, and subject to daily COVID-19 testing. They only used designated transportation services.

Thanks to the strict operation of this system, imported COVID-19 cases were kept under control throughout the Games, with no infections leaking from the loop.

Although ticket sales to the public were canceled, the Beijing 2022 organizing committee went to great lengths to ensure the presence of a total of 260,000 spectators at competition venues to generate a friendly and familiar atmosphere for athletes.

With the use of safe and high-quality venues, two world and 17 Olympic records were broken during the 16 days of competition, which produced a record total of 109 gold medals. More than 2,800 athletes from 91 countries and regions took part in the Games.

With women accounting for 45 percent of the competitors, Beijing 2022 was the most gender-balanced Winter Olympics to date. There were 46 events for women out of a total of 109, the review report said.

Sustainability and legacy were the other key contributors to the success of Beijing 2022, the report said, adding that all the Games venues were powered by renewable energy for the first time in Olympic history.

The outstanding example set by Beijing 2022 in reusing existing facilities — mostly those for the 2008 Summer Games — by incorporating preparations into urban renewal plans, and minimizing environmental impact while promoting clean energy, have pointed the way forward for the Olympics, the report said.

The Games enjoyed huge public support in China, with 5.2 million replicas of the official mascot Bing Dwen Dwen, a panda wearing an ice suit, sold by the end of May.

The Winter Games in Beijing were watched by more than 2.1 billion viewers on traditional and digital channels, with more broadcast hours and media coverage than any previous editions of the Winter Olympics, according to the review report.

"Even with the challenges of the COVID-19 countermeasures, operations and quality of service met expectations," the report added.

"Any issues were promptly addressed. With athletes and sport at the center of considerations, the infrastructure, venues and fields of play were outstanding.

"The people of China were exceptional hosts who offered immense hospitality, warmth and kindness."



Residents take to the ice in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia autonomous region. DING GENHOU / FOR CHINA DAILY

2022 year in Review

Event organizer warms to experience gained at resort



Above and below: Ice hockey enthusiasts put their skills to the test. DING GENHOU / FOR CHINA DAILY AND WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY



By SUN XIAOCHEN

In 2014, Huang Jing decided to take a bold leap into the world of winter sports, despite having no previous experience in this market.

Holding a postgraduate degree in telecommunications from the University of New South Wales in Australia, Huang joined China's fledgling skiing industry after accepting a job as a business manager at Genting Resort Secret Garden, Hebei province.

Eight years later, her decision has proved a game-changer for Huang, who worked as an organizer at the mountain resort in Zhangjiakou, where most of the Beijing Winter Olympics' freestyle skiing and snowboarding events were staged in February.

"I started working in Genting at a time when winter sports were still underdeveloped in China, and our Winter Olympic bid was still a fantasy. Look how far we've come since then," Huang said of the rapid development of winter sports in China after Beijing won the bid for the 2022 Games in July 2015.

"For me, the experience of working from the bidding process to becoming a member of the organizing team at Genting was definitely a huge asset that will benefit my career and life," Huang said.

She is now an ecosystem general manager at the resort responsible for marketing, event planning and operations, business expansion and international cooperation.

Boasting fluent English and experience in the hospitality business and international networking, Huang served as deputy protocol manager at Genting Snow Park during Beijing 2022. She supervised services at the venue's Olympic Family lounge, receptions for VIPs, training for volunteers, and made arrangements for guests to attend ceremonies.

Supported by well-trained volunteers, Huang's team welcomed and took care of more than 2,000 International Olympic Committee officials, representatives from winter sports' governing bodies and National Olympic Committee leaders at the Olympic Family lounge. The visitors watched competitions, cheered for their teams, and attended business meetings.

Although not directly involved in competition operations, Huang took pride from her work, earning high regard from Olympic organizers.

"I believe our work helped build the positive image of a warm and professional host. It also convinced leaders of the international winter sports community that China, despite being a late starter in this respect, has what it takes to master challenges such as hosting major winter sports events," Huang said.

Working on the frontline has its advantages, and Huang witnessed legendary snowboarder Shaun White from the United States in action at Genting Snow Park during the Winter Olympics.

White, 35, a three-time Olympic champion in the sport, failed to win a medal at his fifth and final Winter Games in Beijing. He finished fourth in the men's halfpipe final at Genting on Feb 11, before announcing his retirement from competitive snowboarding.

"To meet him in person, watch his last Games appearance up close, and work with my team to provide him with the service that he spoke so highly of was a lifetime's experience," said Huang, a snow sports fan.

She attributed White's easy-going personality and his interest in local culture to his growing popularity in China.

"An indicator (of his interest in China) is that he really enjoyed the food we provided," Huang said of White's favorite dishes from Sichuan province, which were served at the athletes' restaurant in Genting.

A video of White's snowboarding successes, including footage of him introducing Chinese cuisine such as kung pao chicken and Dan Dan noodles at Genting, went viral on TikTok during the Winter Olympics, prompting a group of international athletes to follow suit.

Thanks to the efforts made by Huang's team, White's connections with China are expected to grow. The Genting resort is working with him to continue promoting snowboarding by jointly hosting a training camp and competitions.

Huang said, "Following the Olympics, we are committed to building Genting into a world-famous snow sports destination, especially for snowboarders from around the world.

"We have the advantages of Olympic-standard slopes, professional operations and huge market potential. We believe that with the input from Shaun White's team, and his proven reputation as the sport's master, we can make this a perfect combination for developing snowboarding and his brand in China."

With public demand growing for fun and affordable experiences on the slopes, the Genting venue will continue working with neighboring resorts and business partners, including Bank of China, to provide more choices for ski passes, with discounts being offered, along with access to more slopes, Huang added.

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TOP NEWS

US business study shows negative impact of tariffs on China

By ZHAO HUANXIN
in Washington
huanxinzhao@chinadailyusa.com

A joint US study has called out the "detrimental economic impacts" of the massive tariffs imposed on consumer goods from China, saying that the trade war has led to higher costs and prices for American companies and families.

The report, "Impacts of Section 301 Tariffs on Imports from China: Case Studies of Apparel, Footwear, Travel Goods and Furniture," was released by industry groups on Tuesday, a day before US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Chinese Vice-Premier Liu He are scheduled to meet in Zurich, Switzerland.

The study was published by the American Apparel & Footwear Association, the Footwear Retailers & Distributors of America, the National Retail Federation, the Retail Industry Leaders Association, and the United States Fashion Industry Association.

Former US president Donald Trump launched a trade war with China in 2018, slapping three rounds of steep tariffs on more than $300 billion worth of Chinese imports, citing Section 301 of the US Trade Act of 1974.

During testimony to the House Ways and Means Committee in June 2022, Yellen said the set of Section 301 tariffs that the Biden administration inherited "really weren't designed to serve our strategic interests". However, there has been no substantial change to the tariffs.

It was not immediately clear what would be on the agenda for Yellen's talks with Vice-Premier Liu.

On Monday, China's Ministry of Commerce, which has been calling on the US side to remove the additional tariffs, said that economic and trade teams from China and the US have maintained "smooth communication".

The joint report provided an in-depth assessment of the impact of the Section 301 tariffs over the last four years on US imports of four categories of goods — apparel, footwear, travel goods and furniture — imported from China.

The report also said that shifting away from China as a source of goods was costly and "not always successful".

Based on US government data amplified by responses to a December 2022 survey of American companies sourcing those goods from China, the study found that the negative impact of the tariffs — higher costs and higher prices — fell on US companies and American families.

The tariffs have led to a host of significant indirect costs, including those associated with attempts to establish bifurcated supply chains, according to the report.

In addition, increased prices on consumer goods have had a greater negative impact on American households for which those goods represent greater shares of household income, which include households in the lowest 20 percent of income groups, according to the report.

It said that US companies importing apparel, footwear, travel goods and furniture in the aggregate filed thousands of tariff-exclusion requests, at significant internal and external cost to the companies, but most such requests were not successful.

The report did not calculate total costs to the US importers of the four types of consumer goods over the past four years, but it said that for footwear alone, the tariffs imposed an annual direct cost of at least $250 million, escalating every year to exceed $450 million in 2022.

"No footwear tariff exclusions were granted to mitigate the negative impacts of the tariffs on footwear sourcing companies," noted the report, adding that every one of the 442 footwear product exclusion requests filed was denied.

The same is true for the travel goods, such as backpacks, luggage and handbags imported from China.

The tariffs on these imports increased to 25 percent on May 10, 2019, and resulted in growing a direct cost to importers, reaching nearly $800 million in 2022, according to the report.

Again, the exclusion process did little to lighten the burden, because of 860 product-exclusion requests filed for travel goods, only 56 (7 percent) were approved, according to the Mercatus Center, a research center at George Mason University.

The tariffs have forced some US companies to attempt sourcing out of China, but, "This is a costly process that is not always successful," the report noted.

It said that for some product categories, no alternative sources could be found. For example, a medium-sized footwear wholesaler reported it had to keep its entire line in China, subject to the tariffs, because the cost of moving production lines to new suppliers would have been "excessive" and too difficult.

A survey by the US Fashion Industry Association of more than 30 leading US fashion retailers, brands, wholesalers and importers found that nearly 90 percent of respondents say the Section 301 tariffs directly increased their company's sourcing costs.

"In short, the indirect costs of the tariffs have totaled in the billions and are finding their way into consumer prices. Management of the China 301 tariffs — reporting, analysis, action plans and assessment of success, for example — has been draining on businesses," the report said.

Gary Hufbauer, a senior fellow and trade expert at the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington, has estimated the direct impact of removing the tariffs on China imports would significantly cut decades-high inflation in the United States.

"As you know, the Peterson Institute urged an end to Trump's import tariffs to slow US inflation. Biden considered that idea, which was endorsed by Yellen, but in the end decided against — mainly for domestic political reasons (China hawks in the Republican Party). I believe Biden will return to the tariff cut or elimination idea in 2023," Hufbauer told China Daily.

Musical tribute



Students from KIPP Scholar Academy prepare on Monday to participate in the Kingdom Day Parade in Los Angeles, California, United States. The parade, held annually to honor civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr, returned after a two-year hiatus due to COVID-19. RICHARD VOGEL / AP

China's population drops for first time in 6 decades

Need seen for stronger incentive policies to encourage childbirth

By WANG XIAOYU
wangxiaoyu@chinadaily.com.cn

China's population dropped last year for the first time in about six decades, heralding a period of negative growth, but experts and officials said it would not immediately affect the strength of the nation's labor force and the labor supply situation remains positive.

They also stressed the need to roll out more robust incentive policies to encourage childbirth in order to counter the growing aging trend and avert an abrupt decline in population.

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The country's overall population fell by 850,000 year-on-year to 1.41175 billion in 2022, the National Bureau of Statistics said on Tuesday.

"The decline was primarily caused by a decrease in newborns, as well as less willingness to have babies, delays in getting married and having babies, and the shrinking population of women of childbearing age," said Kang Yi, head of the bureau.

About 9.56 million babies were born last year, down from 10.62 million in 2021. The birthrate stood at 6.77 births per 1,000 people in 2022, down from 7.52 in 2021.

Both rates last year were the lowest in history, according to data from the bureau.

Meanwhile, the death rate nationwide was 7.37 per 1,000 people last year, putting the natural growth rate at negative 0.6 per 1,000 people, said the bureau.

"Negative population growth is a natural outcome of socioeconomic development, and many countries are experiencing this process," Kang said during a news conference held by the State Council Information Office.

He added that the decline is expected to persist but there is no need to overstress the situation.

"The key to the demographic issue is matching the size and structure of the population with the industrial system," he said. "Currently, our labor supply still exceeds demand, and a falling population does not necessarily mean that our demographic dividend is lost."

Kang added that the country's labor quality and education level are improving and are compatible with its industrial development. "We have a positive labor supply situation," he said.

Zhang Xuying, deputy head of the China Population and Development Research Center, said that Japan and 19 European nations have grappled with population declines since 1950.

In China, the total fertility rate — the average number of children born to each woman of reproductive age — fell below the replacement level of 2.1 in 1992, which is below the minimum threshold for keeping a stable population.

This means that the momentum for negative growth has been building in China for over 30 years, Zhang said in an article released on Monday by the China Population and Development Research Center.

Officials said earlier that the fertility rate in 2020 was 1.3.

Even if the nation manages to increase and maintain the fertility rate at 2.1, negative population growth will persist due to the accumulated impact of years of low fertility, he said.

"China has a massive population and its demographic advantage is notable," he said. "There is still great potential in tapping into demographic resources to bolster economic development."

Data released by the bureau shows that China's working age population — people age 16 to 59 — was about 875.6 million last year, or 62 percent of the total population.

Growth: GDP target sensible, expert says

From page 1

Consumption growth has shown signs of stabilization as the year-on-year decline in retail sales shrank to 1.8 percent in December from 5.9 percent in November, NBS data showed.

Kang said it is sensible to set this year's GDP growth target at above 5 percent year-on-year, which will be not only attainable but necessary for the country to reach the goal of achieving the per capita GDP of a midlevel developed country by 2035.

To achieve that target, the country's per capita GDP, which was 85,698 yuan last year, would have to more than double.

More efforts are therefore still needed to consolidate the foundation of China's economic growth, NBS head Kang said, given the stagflation risk facing the world economy and the lingering pressures facing the domestic job market and the operation of enterprises.

The official added that China's price stability has created favorable conditions to leverage macroeconomic policy tools to stabilize growth.

Louise Loo, senior economist at British think tank Oxford Economics, said she expects to see continued policy accommodation this year, with off-budget fiscal policy, including local government special bonds, likely to be the primary policy lever.

Apart from stepped-up macroeconomic policy adjustments, experts said more measures to stabilize the real estate sector and relax new energy vehicle purchase restrictions could be taken at the local levels.

Liu Linan, managing director and head of Greater China macro strategy at Deutsche Bank, said there is still room for further adjusting mortgage loan rates and first-time homebuyers' down payments.

"If further progress is made in terms of consolidation of China's real estate sector, property developers' debt restructuring and bank loans for acquisitions of quality property projects, it will be conducive to boosting recovery of the sector and restoring market confidence," Liu said.

Contact the writers at zhoulanxv@chinadaily.com.cn

Policy: Nation refines COVID response measures step by step

From page 1

adjusting its COVID-19 policy now instead of one or two years ago is what helped save millions of lives.

The second false narrative is that COVID-19 has been fought at the expense of the economy. In the short term, China's COVID prevention and control measures have had an impact on economic growth in some localities. But thanks to its committed policy, China has delivered better economic performance than those countries that were swinging between COVID-19 control and laissez-faire.

Because China brought the pandemic under control early, the country was the first major economy in the world to register positive economic growth in 2020, and it realized GDP growth of 8.4 percent year-on-year in 2021, contributing to one-fourth of global economic growth and one-fifth of the world's trade. In the first quarter of 2022, China's economy saw 4.8 percent year-on-year growth, faster than the global average. With the optimized COVID-19 measures, according to Morgan Stanley and Nomura Securities, China's economy is expected to grow by more than 5 percent in 2023, which means that China will remain a major force supporting global economic growth and the stability of the capital market.

Under the third false narrative, when talking about people's lives during the pandemic, some paint a bleak picture as if the Chinese people have been forced to stay indoors or quarantined for the entire past three years. But the truth is, the Chinese people were able to travel around the country freely most of the time — 2.88 billion domestic trips were made in 2020, 3.25 billion in 2021 and 2.09 billion in the first three quarters of 2022. In 2020 and 2021, very few COVID-19 nucleic acid tests were administered in China. It was not until 2022, when the highly infectious Omicron variant hit the country, that the Chinese government began to conduct regular testing and require negative test results for those entering public places.

These were not novel measures, as many other countries including the US also introduced compulsory measures such as curfews, quarantines, nucleic acid testing and travel restrictions when infections were peaking.

The fourth false narrative suggests that the recent policy adjustment was a result of failure. In recent years, some Western media outlets and politicians have taken to criticizing China's dynamic zero-COVID policy. However, now that China has refined some of the measures, some critics are saying that the fact that cases surged in China after the new measures were brought in indicates that there had been many unreported cases earlier, and that China lifted the restrictions because it was finding it difficult to implement its dynamic zero-COVID policy.

Over the past three years, the Chinese government put people and people's lives first, and it adjusted COVID-19 control policy in light of the evolving situation.

However, the fact remains that prior to the "10 new measures" (a major COVID policy adjustment), China had already begun to refine its COVID-19 control and prevention measures step by step. For instance, the "20 new measures" introduced in November lifted many restrictions, and the consequent rise in infection cases was within expectation.

The gradual lifting of COVID-control measures is a vivid demonstration of the fact that China's policy adjustment is planned and proactive, based on facts and science.

Some countries never made any effort to stop community transmission of COVID-19 and lifted all restrictive measures when the virus was still very lethal, resulting in the loss of millions of lives. In contrast, the Chinese government chose to lift the restrictions in an orderly manner, and with good reason. We are now fully aware of Omicron's high infection rate but low mortality rate, and protecting people's health and promoting socioeconomic development are now the government's twin priorities. In fact, the government has shifted its focus from disease control to medical treatment to respond to the new realities.

The fight against COVID-19 is now a valuable part of the Chinese people's collective memory. No one can change it. Over the past three years, the Chinese government put people and people's lives first, and it adjusted COVID-19 control policy in light of the evolving situation. By implementing strong initiatives in the fight against the virus, people's lives and health, as well as social and economic development and people's freedom, were protected to the maximum extent possible.

China's COVID-19 policy adjustment is a rational decision that is essentially and consequentially different from those of other places, where beyond a point the authorities were forced to "let it go". It is an undeniable fact that China has achieved the best result at the least cost.

The author is a Beijing-based commentator on international affairs. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

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CHINA

Master strokes



Visitors admire oil paintings by 16th century Belgian painter Joachim Beuckelaer at the *Botticelli to Van Gogh: Masterpieces from the National Gallery, London* exhibition at Shanghai Museum on Tuesday. The exhibition, which will run until May 7, features 52 paintings from 50 renowned European artists, including big names in art history such as Raphael, Titian, Rembrandt, Paul Cezanne and Claude Monet.

ZHANG HENGWEI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Overseas, domestic doctors share COVID experiences

By **CHINA DAILY**

United by a common purpose, Chinese doctors and overseas physicians are collaborating online to improve clinical treatment for COVID-19 patients.

Earlier this month, the Society of Chinese American Physicians and Entrepreneurs and the Alliance of North American Chinese Physicians launched an online lecture series to share their treatment experiences with their peers in China.

"Our lecture is for the public good," said Chen Xiongying, the host of the lectures and president of the society, known as SCAPE. "The only hope is to share our experience with our Chinese counterparts and help them avoid detours. We believe this will benefit all and help ensure quality care for Chinese patients.

Eight doctors from key hospitals in the United States, all of whom have been battling the Omicron variant since last year, were invited to participate in the lectures, Chen said. Their expertise covers infectious diseases, immunology, internal medicine, pediatric cardiology, respiratory medicine, critical care and other fields.

The program attracted many Chinese doctors, with online viewership reaching 7 million.

"The Chinese doctors we have encountered are very diligent and dedicated," said Gao Lei, president of the North American alliance, known as ANACP. "Some of them were our classmates. They kept working even after they fell sick, which earned our respect."

The first lecture was held on New Year's Day, and there have been three others since, the most recent of which occurred on Monday.

Qiao Renli, a doctor in the respiratory and critical care department at the University of Southern California Medical Center, expressed his gratitude to Chinese doctors during a lecture on Jan 8.

"In 2020, Chinese doctors donated masks and other protective equipment to my hospital. Now, they are working to protect our domestic families and friends. I want to express my sincere thanks to them," Qiao said.

Lu Xin, deputy director of the rheumatology and immunology department of China-Japan Friendship Hospital, attended the lecture on New Year's Day. She said the academic and clinical exchange was very instructive for her as she approached her patients.

"The experience and progress of domestic and foreign clinicians in the diagnosis and treatment of Omicron infections have reference value for the diagnosis and treatment of all types of COVID-19 patients," Lu said. "It is helpful as clinicians work to improve their diagnostic capabilities and treatment skills."

In mid-December, ANACP and Tsinghua University presented two lectures for Chinese people coping with the infection. Three US-based physicians — Wang Jin, an infectious disease specialist at Mercy Hospital in St Louis, Missouri; Lisa Huang from Virginia; and Huang Li from California — wrote articles on COVID-19 prevention and treatment that were viewed 3.2 million times online.

Faced with urgent demand, SCAPE and ANACP agreed to host lectures on COVID-19 for Chinese doctors. For real-time communication, they set up four WeChat groups, which were soon joined by as many as 1,800 Chinese professionals.

Chen, SCAPE's president, said there are no borders in the medical domain.

"Since COVID-19 broke out, medical workers all over the world rushed to exchange their knowledge on prevention and treatment. This not only benefits ordinary people but is also helpful in developing new vaccines and medicines," Chen said.

Gao, ANACP's president, said: "Through China-US communication, Chinese doctors can adopt mature treatment programs. They will not need to redo clinical trials on hormones and anticoagulant drugs that have been proved ineffective by their US counterparts. Meanwhile, China's experience will also help other countries redouble their fight against new variants in the future."

Chinese medical advisory company Saint Lucia Consulting also invited doctors from Singapore and the US in December and this month to present online lectures and share their experiences in fighting COVID-19 and developing treatment strategies.

Cai Qiang, chairman of the company, said he believes the key for a community with a shared future is working together.

"Chinese patients and their families have various questions about COVID-19, especially patients with existing health conditions. To answer them, we conducted a lot of investigations and coordinated with doctors overseas before the lectures began," Cai said. "US doctors are very passionate about helping Chinese people, even though they were in the middle of their Christmas holiday."

Wang Songsong contributed to this story.

Climate change eroding Arctic sea ice: report

Research via remote-sensing tech underscores fragile polar ecosystem

By **ZHANG ZHIHAO**
zhangzhihao@chinadaily.com.cn

127,000 square kilometers
Annual loss of multilayer ice in the Arctic region from 2002 to 2021

The Arctic region lost over 2 million square kilometers of sea ice from 2002 to 2021, leaving around 3.96 million sq km of sea ice as of September 2021, according to a report by the National Remote Sensing Center of China, an institution affiliated with the Ministry of Science and Technology.

The Arctic, one of Earth's key ecosystems and home to over 4 million people, is experiencing rising temperatures, accelerating ice melt and increased vegetation growth due to climate change, the report found.

From 2002 to 2021, multilayer ice — sea ice that persists in the ocean from year to year — was disappearing at a rate of 127,000 sq km per year. Although this type of ice typically reappears in the winter, the overall coverage of multilayer ice has been decreasing at a rapid rate.

The consequences of melting sea ice are complex. On one hand, sailing through Arctic shipping channels has become more convenient due to less ice blocking key waterways, but on the other hand, the habitats for many Arctic animals such as polar bears and seals are being threatened.

Zhao Jing, director of the National Remote Sensing Center of China, said the report not only showcases China's remote-sensing technologies, but also represents the country's contribution to the international scientific community on tackling climate change.

Zhou Chenghu, a noted geologist and an academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said the impact of climate change on the polar regions is closely related to human life, especially those living in coastal regions.

"Environmental changes in the Arctic region are a key indicator of climate change, and this is why the international scientific community is paying close attention to it," he said.

In November, an international report said Arctic sea ice is melting at increasing rates far faster than scientists had expected, and summertime Arctic sea ice could vanish by 2050.

Zhou said scientists are still debating when summertime Arctic sea ice would be gone, but it is clear that the international community should be galvanized to safeguard this distinct environment to prevent climate catastrophes.

Huang Huabing, a professor of remote sensing at Sun Yat-sen University, said the Arctic region has been a focus of climate research due to the effect of Arctic amplification, a complex phenomenon that saw the region warming over twice as fast as the rest of the planet.

Due to rising temperatures, from 2002 to 2021, about 77.4 percent of the Arctic's land surface saw an increase of vegetation coverage, totaling nearly 5.5 million sq km, or the entire area of the Amazon rainforest, he said.

However, the greening of the Arctic region is extremely fragile and heavily influenced by temperature, seasonal snowfall and human activities. In areas where there are many human activities, some of the newly emerged vegetation has already been damaged.

Liu Zhichun, the deputy director of the National Remote Sensing Center of China, said climate change in the Arctic region would affect the entire oceanic ecosystem.

In order to achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 13 on tackling climate change, Liu said it is vital that scientists establish a robust and systematic mechanism to monitor and preserve the Arctic region.

Intl, regional flights resume at Daxing airport

By **YANG ZEKUN**
yangzekun@chinadaily.com.cn

Beijing Daxing International Airport began resuming international and regional flights on Tuesday following the optimization of immigration, aviation and customs policies earlier this month.

China Southern Airlines Flight CZ309 left the airport at 9 am for Hong Kong, the first cross-border passenger flight to originate from Daxing in nearly three years.

"This is my first cross-border trip since the outbreak of the epidemic, and I am very excited and happy to be on the first flight," said passenger Lan Yu.

Lan said she plans to spend the coming Spring Festival with her friends in Hong Kong, and she chose to depart from Daxing airport because the services, facilities and inbound-outbound procedures are efficient.

Zhao Zhao, deputy director of customs at the airport, said that after receiving the plan to resume cross-border routes, customs officers have followed up on renovations, kept abreast of information regarding inbound and outbound flights, and conducted detailed checks on the operations of the airport's facilities and working procedures under customs supervision to ensure passengers receive the best service.



Passengers board China Southern Airlines Flight CZ309 from Beijing Daxing International Airport to Hong Kong, the first cross-border flight departing from the airport in three years. WANG ZHUANGFEI / CHINA DAILY

Passengers can make health declarations via a mini-program or fill in the entry-exit health declaration card to obtain a QR code that can be scanned to show their status. They can use that code to pass through customs more quickly.

At the inspection and quarantine station for inbound passengers, customs has installed intelligent inspection equipment, including an infrared thermometer to check passengers' temperatures. It only takes a few seconds to obtain and store the health declaration data and body temperatures of inbound passengers, according to Daxing customs.

Su Yiming, director of the aviation business department of Daxing airport, said that from Tuesday, China Southern, China Eastern, Capital and Himalaya airlines will resume international and regional passenger routes from the airport.

Initial routes include services to Hong Kong, Kathmandu in Nepal, Male in the Maldives and Bangkok in Thailand. More carriers will operate more long-distance routes later, Su said.

"Daxing airport will resume international transit services without claiming passengers' checked baggage and implement the 144-hour visa-free transit policy for foreign visitors of certain countries in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region to facilitate rapid customs clearance for transit passengers, effectively promoting tourism and economic development in the region," she said.

According to the National Immigration Administration, since the implementation of the optimized immigration policies on Jan 8, immigration authorities have resumed customs clearance at land and water ports in an orderly manner, and have resumed accepting and approving entry and exit documents for Chinese and foreign nationals.

The authorities now inspect about half a million inbound and outbound travelers each day on average, an increase of 48.2 percent before the policy took effect. They also accept and handle an average of about 341,000 entry-exit documents each day, up 129.4 percent, the NIA said.

Li Peixuan contributed to this story.

Taekwondo training



Children practice taekwondo at a training center in Handan, Hebei province, on Monday. Many kids choose to engage in the sport during the winter vacation to learn self-defense and have a more enriching holiday break. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

HK, Macao, Taiwan performers to retake mainland stages starting mid-February

By **CHEN NAN**
chennan@chinadaily.com.cn

Approvals of commercial performance applications involving people from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan will resume from Feb 16, according to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism on Monday.

New applications involving people from overseas are still suspended, except for those who are already on the Chinese mainland, according to the announcement released by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

The public notice said that organizers of shows need to implement the new epidemic prevention and control measures and continue to promote the prosperity and development of the cultural performance market.

"The market for concerts and entertainment performances is big in China, but it was heavily affected by the coronavirus pandemic and many concerts were canceled over the past three years," said a statement released by the China Association of Performing Arts on Sunday, adding that many artists from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan such as pop singer-songwriter Jay Chou and singer-actor Andy Lau had to cancel their performances in early 2020.

Due to the pandemic, many artists turned to online streaming platforms to perform, hoping to reach out to their fans on the Chinese mainland.

"Resuming registration of commercial performances from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan will allow more artists to hold concerts on the Chinese mainland, which will help the performing arts market recover," said the China Association of Performing Arts in the statement.

Theater chain CPAA Theatres said it will relaunch a series of performances and programs, including tours of the Hong Kong String Orchestra, the Hong Kong Gaudeamus Dunhuang Ensemble and violinist Yao Jue. Performing arts groups and artists from Hong Kong and Macao will also be invited to perform in cultural events on the Chinese mainland, such as the annual Meet in Beijing International Arts Festival.

"We will adjust our performance schedules based on the announcement from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism," said Chen Guangxian, head of the Suzhou Symphony Orchestra, which is based in Jiangsu province.

According to Chen, before 2020, the orchestra invited about 10 musicians from around the world to perform with the orchestra every year. Thirteen of the orchestra's concerts that featured international musicians were held in 2019.

"We have already started talking to international musicians, inviting them to China to perform with us. We want to present high-level classical music concerts to our audiences at home," said Chen, adding that the orchestra is also planning to perform abroad.

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POLICY REVIEW

Vocational education reform made major national goal

New guideline mandates closer cooperation with private sectors, increased financing, sharing of expertise and better training for teachers nationwide

By ZOU SHUO
zoushuo@chinadaily.com.cn

China plans to advance the reform and development of its vocational education sector to be able to train greater numbers of highly-skilled technicians, according to a new guideline.

Recently issued by the general offices of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council, China's Cabinet, the guideline is intended to boost the capacity of vocational schools and increase the quality, adaptability, and appeal of the education they offer.

The reform of national vocational education will focus on developing a multiform, multichannel, and sustainable education and training system, as well as a cooperation mechanism for governments, industries, businesses, and schools.

Vocational education for sectors such as information technology, computer-controlled machine tools and robots, aviation and space equipment manufacturing, and biomedicine, will be prioritized, and the guideline encourages leading businesses and schools in these sectors to boost cooperation.

More effort will be placed on raising faculty standards in vocational schools devoted to manufacturing, agriculture, and the service sector. The guideline encourages the hiring of core experts from businesses in these sectors to teach at schools.

More policy support for vocational education has also been promised. The guideline encourages local governments to explore new mechanisms of cooperation with the private sector, and to attract more private and industrial investment in vocational education. Financial institutions are also welcome to offer their services and support.

A group of high-level vocational schools and majors will be created to contribute to social and economic development. The vocational college enrollment system will be improved, and colleges offering bachelor's degrees should work to expand enrollment.

The guideline also stressed the need for innovation in terms of international communication and cooperation. China must establish a number of high-level international vocational schools and create globally influential standards for vocational majors, curricula, teaching resources and teaching equipment.

Chen Ziji, director of the Ministry of Education's Department of Vocational Education, said the guideline is the first to be issued by central authorities on vocational education since the 20th Communist Party of China National Congress last October.

The Congress placed great emphasis on the importance of vocational education, which has been given unprecedented weighting in the overall education system, Chen said at a recent news conference, adding that since the Congress also stressed the importance of education, technology and talent in building a powerful country, deepening the reform of modern vocational education is an ever more challenging and important task.

Chen said that the guideline dismissed misconceptions that belittle vocational education by stressing that it promotes the fully-rounded development of students.

By promoting the integration and balanced development of vocational education with general education, students with different abilities and needs have greater choice and any anxiety parents feel about vocational schools should now be alleviated, he added.

"Vocational education is not 'low-level education' nor is it 'education for the less able'. It is a form of education with its own distinct characteristics," Chen said. "Vocational education students can choose to pursue further studies or enter employment, and we will try our best to help expand their choices for self-improvement."

The guideline also stressed the importance of public sector participation, stating that industries, businesses, governments and schools should coordinate resources to advance vocational education.

Ou Xiaoli, an official at the National Development and Reform Commission, said that vocational education is key to the development of human resources and the economy, and to protecting and improving livelihoods.

Vocational education is as important as other forms of education. In recent years, enrollment has risen sharply, with secondary and higher vocational schools turning out around 10 million technicians every year.

Responding to social demand, vocational schools have adjusted their majors and created more than 1,300 new courses that essentially cover every sector of the economy.

In order to deepen integration of industry and vocational education, 21 cities have been selected as pilot zones, and local governments have set up 4,600 businesses deeply integrated with vocational education, he said, adding that the commission has increased investment and funding for vocational education, and has encouraged local governments to issue special bonds to fund school infrastructure.

Jin Hongyang, director of the Tianjin Municipal Education Department, said that to promote international cooperation in vocational education, Tianjin has set up 21 workshops around the world, which are named after the deity Lu Ban, who is known as the "father of carpentry" in China, and who exemplified craftsmanship and creativity.

The Luban workshops not only train professionals, but also serve the development of the Belt and Road Initiative.

Tianjin will continue to open more workshops and to train more qualified technicians in countries and regions participating in the BRI, he said.



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

CRRC and Shenzhen Polytechnic focus on tomorrow's technicians

By ZOU SHUO

Businesses and vocational schools are determined to pursue integration to drive the reform of vocational education and help train more qualified professionals with vocational skills.

Wang An, Deputy Party Secretary of the CRRC, the world's largest supplier of rail transit equipment, said that the corporation will create an integrated community that brings together industry and education, and combines the strengths of vocational schools, scientific and research institutions and businesses.

The CRRC will provide platforms and resources to vocational schools in the community, encourage skilled workers to train and teach at vocational schools, and will invite well-regarded vocational schoolteachers to teach employees, Wang said at a recent news conference organized by the Ministry of Education.

More than 400 CRRC subsidiaries will participate in the community, in addition to its research institute and affiliated vocational school.

Businesses up and downstream of the industrial chain, high-level universities, other vocational schools, research institutes and organizations are also welcome to help create the community.

The CRRC will also work to improve its affiliated school, the Changzhou Railway Higher Vocational and Technical School, and make it an example of the integration of industry and education, Wang said, adding that the corporation will work with other vocational schools to nurture students who will be able to work at the CRRC after graduation.

Xu Jianling, president of Shenzhen Polytechnic said the school will closely follow the trend toward industrial upgrading and technological reform, and make sure its majors are centered around advanced manufacturing and the modern service sector.

It will strengthen cooperation with industry and companies, work with leading businesses to develop new courses and will incorporate new skills, techniques, and standards in classroom teaching, Xu said. It will also invite more master technicians and skilled workers to teach as visiting professors, and improve the abilities of its full-time teachers by making use of the national teaching training platform.

Shenzhen Polytechnic will also accelerate its digital transformation, adapt to smart education, strengthen its immersive and smart technical training system and improve the practical digital skills of its students and teachers, he added.

Policy Digest

Rest homes' ability to treat COVID emphasized

Local governments must ensure that elderly people in rest homes are promptly treated for COVID-19, said the State Council's Joint Prevention and Control Mechanism, the national task force responsible for controlling COVID-19.

Local authorities must ask community and town health centers to assess health risks to residents of rest homes, provide health management accordingly and make house calls when necessary, the department stated in a notice released online earlier this month.

The department stated that authorities should also draw up emergency treatment plans for rest homes, and make sure all homes are able to transfer critically-ill residents to tertiary hospitals for emergency care, and asked emergency medical centers to partner with rest homes to ensure there is no delay in ambulance services.

Also, tertiary hospitals and other health institutions must make full use of information technology and offer online health assessments and consultations to rest home residents.

Ministry seeks industrial economy growth in 2023

At a meeting convened in Beijing earlier this month, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology called for all-out efforts to promote the steady growth of the country's industrial economy in 2023.

Targeted plans should be made to ensure the growth of different sectors, the ministry said, encouraging major industrial provinces to play a vital role in achieving growth.

It also said that it supports central and western regions in accommodating and developing industries that have moved there from elsewhere, and voiced its support for northeastern China, the country's traditional industrial heartland, for making breakthroughs in revitalizing local manufacturing.

Among other requirements, the ministry called for efforts to stabilize the consumption of bulk items, including automobiles, upgrading the national consumer goods industry and increasing the supply of household products for the elderly.

Other tasks this year include properly implementing the 14th Five-Year Plan, making key national industrial chains more independent and controllable, and speeding up upgrades to traditional manufacturing industries.

Rail staff to be vigilant during travel rush

Railway transport companies should improve health management for their staff and advise passengers to take precautions, the National Railway Administration said, as the large number of travelers during the Spring Festival travel rush potentially pose a challenge to national pandemic response efforts.



It is estimated that more than 2 billion passenger trips will be made during the 40-day travel rush, which will last from Jan 7 to Feb 15.

In a notice released online on Friday, the administration urged employees to wear a mask and keep their hands clean at work, and to reduce socializing after work.

Railway transport companies should monitor the health of employees daily and those who have a fever or show other symptoms should inform their employers and take leave.

Employees can return to work a week after developing symptoms or if their symptoms have already passed, the administration said, urging those who have been ill to practice strict precautionary measures upon returning to work.

Railway companies should ensure that all employees not contraindicated receive COVID-19 booster shots.

While they should no longer take the temperature of passengers, companies should remind them to wear masks, wash their hands, maintain social distancing and practice cough etiquette during the journey, the administration said, calling on people with symptoms or who have tested positive to refrain from traveling.

WANG QINGYUN

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WORLD

Slowdown likely to crimp workers' choices, ILO says

By **CHEN WEIHUA** in Brussels
chenweihua@chinadaily.com.cn

The global economic slowdown is likely to force more workers to accept lower quality and poorly paid jobs that lack job security and social protection, according to the latest report by the International Labour Organization.

This new situation will contribute further to the inequalities worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, the ILO's World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2023 report said.

The report, which was released on Monday, said global employment growth will be only 1.0 percent this year, less than half of the 2022 level.

Meanwhile, global unemployment will rise slightly this year by around 3 million to 208 million. The ILO cites the moderate size of the projected increase largely to the tight labor supply in high-income countries.

It also said job quality "remains a key concern" and "decent work is fundamental to social justice".

Moreover, a decade of progress in poverty reduction faltered during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite a nascent recovery in 2021, the continuing shortage of better job opportunities is likely to worsen.

The current slowdown means that many workers will have to accept lower-quality jobs, often at very low pay and sometimes with insufficient hours. At the same time, as prices rise faster than nominal labor incomes, the cost of living crisis risks pushing more people into poverty.

"The need for more decent work and social justice is clear and urgent," ILO Director-General Gilbert Houngbo said.

"But if we are to meet these multiple challenges, we must work together to create a new global social contract. The ILO will be campaigning for a Global Coalition for Social Justice to build support, create the policies needed and prepare us for the future of work."

The report attributed the deteriorating labor market mainly to emerging geopolitical tensions and the Russia-Ukraine conflict, uneven pandemic recovery, and continuing bottlenecks in global supply chains.

"Together, these have created the conditions for stagflation, simultaneously high inflation and low growth, for the first time since the 1970s," the report said.

Gender gap

Women and young people are faring significantly worse in the labor market, with the global labor force participation rate of women standing at 47.4 percent last year, compared with 72.3 percent for men.

"This 24.9 percentage point gap means that for every economically inactive man, there are two such women," the report said.

Young people aged between 15 to 24 face severe difficulties in finding and keeping decent jobs, and their unemployment rate is three times that of adults.

Richard Samans, director of the ILO's research department and report coordinator, said the slowdown in global employment growth means that losses incurred during the pandemic might not be recovered before 2025.

"The slowdown in productivity growth is also a significant concern, as productivity is essential for addressing the interlinked crises we face in purchasing power, ecological sustainability and human well-being," he said.

The report also said Europe and Central Asia are hit particularly hard by the economic fallout from the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Dockyard blast



Smoke billows from an oil tanker after an explosion at a dockyard in Thailand's Samut Songkhram Province on Tuesday. At least eight people were missing and several injured after the *Smooth Sea 22* tanker exploded, the Marine Department said. EPA

Kishida's travels lead Japan to dead end

PM's tour of G7 nations only deepens subordination to US, analysts say

TOKYO — Just half a month into the new year, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has completed a tour of five of the Group of Seven nations, with his travels coming hot on the heels of controversial moves on security policy that have triggered concerns among the country's neighbors.

Scholars say the Japanese government should change its "subordinate" relationship with the United States and that an open diplomacy with Asian neighbors should be the foundation of Japan's national security.

During his trip to France, Italy, Britain, Canada and the US on Jan 9-15, Kishida signed a reciprocal access defense agreement for closer defense and security ties with his British counterpart Rishi Sunak, and issued a joint statement with US President Joe Biden reiterating the importance of the Japan-US alliance in the so-called "Indo-Pacific strategy".

Since Kishida's government updated its security strategy last month in contravention of its exclusively defense-oriented policy, its actions have increasingly alarmed its Asian neighbors, said Japanese scholars. They are calling on the government to change its relations with the US from "subordination" to "self-reliance".

Friday's US-Japan summit, the main focus of Kishida's weeklong tour, marked his first Washington visit as the Japanese premier, who attached the utmost importance to the debut trip and made "full preparations" beforehand.

The government also intends to secure about $313 billion in defense spending for the five years from fiscal 2023.

Analysts point out that the US in recent years has dominated the Australia-India-Japan-US Quadrilateral in the Asia-Pacific region, while peddling the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework as part of efforts to form cliques.

Expansion of hegemony

Since taking office in October 2021, Kishida's cabinet has been so willing to spearhead the expansion of US hegemony in the Asia-Pacific that it courted the US by arming itself while relying on the latter for army expansion and war preparation.

During the US-Japan meeting, the most severe and complex security environment in the "Indo-Pacific" region was repeatedly brought up. While Kishida explained to Biden the changes in Japan's security policy, the US president "commended" Japan's defense upgrade and its "historic" defense budget hike.

Atsushi Koketsu, emeritus professor at Yamaguchi University, said the Japanese government, in line with the US intentions, has turned to a "preemptive attack strategy" by abandoning the "exclusive defense" concept. This change has put the country's neighbors on alert.

As the current G7 chair, Japan will host the group's summit in May. Kishida's visit is also aimed at garnering support on a host of issues including food security, nuclear disarmament and the Russia-Ukraine conflict before the summit in Hiroshima.

Since last October, four ministers have resigned from Kishida's cabinet due to scandals, plunging the government's approval ratings to record lows.

Liu Di, a professor at Japan's Kyorin University, said Japan's economy has been stagnating for the past 30 years and it will inevitably lead to a host of domestic conflicts if the world's third-largest economy continues to hike defense spending.

Japan may use external forces to strengthen its comprehensive security capabilities, including leveraging other developed countries within the G7 framework, the scholar said.

Ukeru Magosaki, a former Japanese foreign ministry official, said that most Japanese people do not approve of increasing defense expenditure.

XINHUA

Moscow, Minsk begin joint drills

By **REN QI** in Moscow
renqi@chinadaily.com.cn

Russia and Belarus launched joint air force exercises on Monday, in a move that Ukraine sees as a "guise" for yet more airstrikes on the country.

The drills come as Russia's special military operation, now in its 11th month, grinds on with fighting in eastern Ukraine and a campaign of airstrikes on Ukraine's critical infrastructure.

The Belarusian defense ministry said the allies would carry out joint air patrols along the Belarusian border, airborne landings and support operations for ground troops, as well as train for deliveries of supplies and evacuations of wounded soldiers.

"The main purpose of the exercise is to improve interoperability in the joint execution of training and combat tasks," it said.

Pavel Muraveyko, first deputy state secretary of Belarus' Security Council, told the Belta state news agency that the exercises are "exclusively defensive", but warned that Minsk is "ready for any provocative actions from Ukraine".

The Belarusian military said on the Telegram messaging app that it has activated all of its air force and air defense sites for the drills with Russia.

Ukraine has repeatedly warned of possible attacks coming from its northern neighbor Belarus, though some analysts assess the possibility of direct involvement by Minsk as low.

Ukraine's General Staff said the joint aviation drills were a "guise" and that there is a high danger of further Russian air and missile strikes throughout Ukraine.

In a report by the state TASS news agency, an unidentified source in the military said Russia has produced the first set of Poseidon nuclear-capable super torpedoes for use by the Belgorod special-purpose nuclear submarine.

The Poseidon is described as an "intercontinental nuclear-powered nuclear-armed autonomous torpedo" with its own nuclear power supply, the development of which was announced by Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2018. He predicted at the time that it would be a fundamentally new type of nuclear weapon.

'Destructive' policies

In a phone call with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Monday, Putin slammed Kyiv's "destructive" policies and the growing Western arms supplies to Ukraine.

Kyiv was pursuing "a destructive line" and that it had "bet on the intensification of hostilities with the support of Western sponsors, who are ramping up supplies of weapons and military equipment", Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov quoted Putin as saying.

Peskov also responded to a decision by Britain to send Challenger 2 tanks to Ukraine, saying Western supplies of heavily armored vehicles to Ukraine are not likely to change the situation on the battlefield.

On Tuesday, Russia said that its armed forces would undergo "major changes" from 2023 to 2026, including changes in its composition and administrative reforms.

The defense ministry said that the changes would happen as Russia boosts the number of its military personnel to 1.5 million.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Ship encounter



The carcass of a sperm whale is examined in Clatsop County, Oregon, on Monday. The whale was found washed ashore days earlier at the beach near Fort Stevens State Park. It was determined that the marine giant had been struck by a ship. ASSOCIATED PRESS

Germany's Scholz picks new defense chief

By **CHEN WEIHUA** in Brussels

Interior Minister of Lower Saxony Boris Pistorius will become the new German Minister of Defense, replacing Christine Lambrecht, who resigned on Monday.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz has chosen a man who is rather unknown abroad, the German broadcaster DW reported on Tuesday, saying that Pistorius held the interior minister post for nine years and was seen as someone who gets things done.

"I am delighted that Boris Pistorius, an outstanding politician in our country, will become the new defense minister. With his experience, competence and assertiveness as well as his big heart, he is exactly the right person for the Bundeswehr in the #turnaround," Scholz said in a tweet in German on Tuesday.

Since 2013, Pistorius, now 62, has been dealing with internal security, cybercrime, migration, and sports in the SPD-led state government in Lower Saxony. He joined the center-left Social Democratic Party, or SPD, at the age of 16 and later completed his military service in 1980/81.

Scholz's announcement came just a day after Lambrecht formally resigned on Monday, days before a NATO defense ministers meeting on Ukraine.

The Ukraine Defense Contact Group, which coordinates arms supplies to Ukraine, will meet on Friday at the Ramstein Air Base, a US military base in southwestern Germany. The meeting will be hosted by the US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin.

Lambrecht, also from the SPD, came under attack for her multiple gaffes in the past year.

The 57-year-old was criticized over a video she posted on Instagram on New Year's Day from the streets of Berlin, where she attempted to recapitulate her experiences of the conflict in Ukraine but was almost drowned out by the noise of fireworks exploding around her.

Members of the opposition party, the Christian Democratic Union, mocked her message and called for her resignation.

She also came under fire a year ago for her announcement that Germany would send 5,000 helmets to Ukraine, when the Ukrainian government was asking for heavy weapons.

German media and politicians also criticized her in May for allowing her son to accompany her on a government helicopter on the way to a family vacation.

"I have today asked the chancellor to dismiss me from the office of the Federal Ministry of Defense," Lambrecht said in a statement on Monday.

Scholz praised Lambrecht for her work trying to usher in reforms at the defense ministry.

"I don't see a change in German policy," former Finnish prime minister Alexander Stubb told CNN of the change, adding that the German government policy was very much driven by the chancellor and also the foreign minister.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Action in EU graft investigation widens

By **EARLE GALE** in London
earle@mail.chinadailyuk.com

A corruption scandal at the heart of the European Union grew larger this week, when the bloc started a process to strip immunity from two more lawmakers suspected of involvement in a cash-for-influence racket.

The lawmakers — Italian MEP Andrea Cozzolino and Belgian MEP Marc Tarabella, who are both members of the center-left Socialists and Democrats party — will now be subjected to a monthlong parliamentary process, to see whether the usual immunity from prosecution that lawmakers enjoy should be revoked.

European Parliament President Roberta Metsola told MEPs, or members of the European Parliament, on Monday that investigators in Belgium want to speak to the pair as part of a probe that saw Eva Kaili, a Greek MEP who had been a vice-president of the European Parliament, and former MEP Pier Antonio Panzeri arrested late last year over allegations they accepted money for favors.

"The events of the last month have led to a need to rebuild the trust of the European citizens that we represent," Metsola was quoted by Reuters as saying.

The European Parliament's legal affairs committee will look into allegations against Cozzolino and Tarabella, which were made by Belgian investigators, and will present their findings to MEPs, who will then vote on whether immunity should be stripped.

Tarabella and Cozzolino have both denied any wrongdoing and said they would be willing to answer questions now.

Maxim Toller, Tarabella's lawyer, told The Associated Press: "From the beginning, Marc Tarabella has been willing to help justice if it can be useful to the investigators."

Kaili, who was arrested in the earlier phase of the probe, has also denied any wrongdoing, although her boyfriend Francesco Giorgi has admitted to taking bribes.

Reuters said Giorgi told investigators that Tarabella also took money, allegedly from Qatar.

Both Qatar and Morocco, which have also been named as potential sources of bribes, have strenuously denied any involvement or attempt to influence the EU's decision-making process.

The New York Times reported on Tuesday that the "snowballing" corruption investigation threatens to turn up more names, and could "ripple" through many more EU institutions.

Police involved in the case have launched raids on several EU-linked homes and offices, and seized 1.5 million euros ($1.6 million) in cash, reported Agence France-Presse, which said the probe started more than a year ago and involves the security services of several nations in addition to Belgium's.

Vintage effort



Erchana Murray-Bartlett, 32, celebrates after crossing the finish line at a marathon held in Melbourne, Australia, on Monday. She set a Guinness World Record for the most consecutive daily marathons run by a woman. Her efforts took place over 150 days. EPA

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WORLD US

Talk: US could do more to draw STEM talent

By **YIFAN XU** in Washington
yifanxu@chinadailyusa.com

While the US needs international talent in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and has an advantage in attracting such skilled people, the government should do more to welcome them, according to some experts.

"We have some tools in our toolbox that we haven't been using as much as we could regarding talent and encouraging ... talent to come to our country," said Amy Nice, an immigration law and policy expert, who was assistant director for the International S&T (science and technology) Workforce at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy.

She said the US needs to do "a better job of explaining to industry, to academia, and to individual scholars, students, and experts what these tools are, that they are actually at our fingertips today and that we have not been using them to attract and retain STEM talent. She called the initiative "a big goal of mine".

Nice spoke during a webinar on Jan 10 titled "The Future of the US-China Competition for Human Capital", hosted by the Brookings Institution and the Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS).

Nice stressed the importance of advanced human capital in STEM, especially international STEM talents at the graduate or PhD level. She said that 90 percent of all STEM experimental development and all STEM applied research in the US is funded by and conducted by companies today, quite different from other countries around the globe.

So, there is "a need for a lot more collaboration between industry and academia" and "a lot of critical need for advanced stem talent in the industry".

"Approximately 50 percent of all master's and PhD programs across STEM fields are international students," said Nice, suggesting that the US immigration system should "provide sufficient certainty and predictability for the very people that we want to attract and retain".

"We have to do a lot better job of providing that certainty and predictability," she said.

Nice also mentioned that a weakness in the US efforts in human capital is not looking to underserved and underrepresented communities in the education system.

Another panelist, Yasheng Huang, the faculty director of Action Learning at the MIT Sloan School of Management, singled out the China Initiative as detrimental to retaining talent.

The China Initiative was a controversial program launched by the US Department of Justice (DOJ) in 2018 is to probe trade-secret theft and economic espionage activities considered threats to US national security.

According to an investigation published in December 2021 by the MIT Technology Review, the program "appears to be an umbrella term for cases with almost any connection to China".

The China Initiative was ended by the DOJ in February 2022, amid widespread criticism for creating a climate of fear among Asian Americans.

Huang said that although the China Initiative was terminated, some investigations were still there, and their impact remained. He relayed a story about when a delegation of American scientists who attended an overseas conference returned to the US.

"Every single one of the Chinese American scientists was stopped at the customs for long periods of time, whereas other members of the delegation went through the customs without problems," he recalled.

Huang also mentioned the case of Professor Charles Lieber, a leading American chemist at Harvard University, who was found guilty of "disclosure issues" under the China Initiative.

"You know, there are technical issues, there are legal issues. But one of the FBI agents who would testify at his trial said without apology that they began to pay attention to him because every single one of his postdocs was Chinese. So, that was the information on which they base their decision," said Huang, "and there are other notorious cases going after Chinese American scientists."

As the founding president of an organization called the Asian American Scholar Forum, Huang and his team has been doing more research on the topic.

"We did a large-scale survey on fear factor and the finding there is really, really shocking. You know, even though 89 percent of the people that we surveyed want to contribute to America and to contribute to scientific activities in the US, something like 68 or 70 percent of them fear for their career and fear for their life. Some 40-plus percent of the researchers do not want to apply for federal grants," Huang said.

"And this is after the China Initiative has been terminated. We have got to address this issue. We are killing ourselves if we do something like this," he said.

"Science is collaborative. Innovations are collaborative," Huang concluded.

Returning after tragedy



School staff cheer as students return to in-person classes at Central Visual and Performing Arts High School in St. Louis on Tuesday. The Oct 24 shooting was among the deadliest school shootings in the US last year. Tenth-grader Alexzandria Bell and 61-year-old physical education teacher Jean Kuczka died before police killed the gunman, former student Orlando Harris, in an exchange of gunfire. JIM SALTER / AP

Biden to tour California storm areas

By **LIU YINMENG** in Los Angeles
teresaliu@chinadailyusa.com

When US President Joe Biden visits California on Thursday, he will get a firsthand view of how recent rainstorms have exposed the state's vulnerabilities in preparing for extreme weather events and controlling flood risks.

Accompanied by first responders, state and local officials, Biden will tour storm-devastated communities to "survey recovery efforts, and assess what additional federal support is needed", the White House said in a statement late Monday.

Biden's visit comes as successive thunderstorms pummeled California and some western regions in a three-week period, causing at least 20 deaths in the state. A preliminary estimate by AccuWeather.com puts the total damage and economic loss from the storms between $31 billion and $34 billion.

The train of atmospheric rivers that dumped record rainfall onto California began to fizzle out Monday.

Biden approved a disaster declaration for California on Jan 14 to provide federal assistance. The declaration makes federal funding available for affected individuals in the counties of Merced, Sacramento and Santa Cruz.

As of Tuesday afternoon, 15,850 residents in the Golden State were still without power, according to the utility tracker poweroutage.us.

The storms have raised questions about the state's preparedness to handle extreme weather events, such as flooding.

There is an overdependence on the state's levees and dams. This creates "an exaggerated sense of security" that allows communities to be built closer and closer to bodies of water, according to The New York Times. State officials have a financial incentive to allow such construction, because state laws cap increases in property taxes, so permitting new building of houses is the best way to come up with new tax revenue.

Relying on levees also has another disadvantage. It prevents more rainwater from reaching underground aquifers, which reserve water for use during periods of drought.

"We've cut off the very mechanism by which groundwater recharge used to happen," Joshua Viers, a watershed scientist at the University of California, Merced, told the Times.

In a 2016 blog, researchers at the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) said that a large and growing gap exists between flood infrastructure needs and the rates of investment in the state.

"Population growth and new development are increasing the threats to public safety and the economic risk from flooding," researchers said.

Every county has been declared a state or federal flood disaster area multiple times over the past 60 years, PPIC said. In addition, Central Valley levees have failed on more than 70 occasions since the early 1980s. More than 7 million residents and hundreds of billions of dollars in assets are vulnerable to damaging floods.

One in 5 Californians lives in a flood-prone area, according to PPIC. Worsening climate change in recent years has increased the occurrence and intensity of atmospheric rivers, which cause flooding.

"California needs to make infrastructure investments to strengthen flood protection and to take nonstructural measures, such as better land use planning and stronger building codes, to keep people and buildings out of harm's way. The state must also invest in communicating flood risk to improve local decision making," researchers said.

A report released Tuesday by researchers at Pathways Climate Institute LLC in collaboration with the San Francisco Estuary Institute noted that groundwater elevation could corrode foundations, flood basements and increase infiltrations into sewers.

The significance of rising groundwater creates the need for some communities to reevaluate their risks to sea-level rise-driven flooding and to develop effective flood-risk reduction strategies.

"Failing to account for groundwater rise on the landward side of some flood risk reduction structures (e.g., levees and seawalls) could result in maladaptation if the community continues to flood from below," the researchers said.

US seizes record number of guns at airports

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

The US Transportation Security Administration (TSA) confiscated more than 6,542 firearms from airport passengers in 2022 — the most intercepted since the agency was formed — and most were loaded.

It marked a 10 percent increase over the 5,972 weapons seized in 2021. Approximately 88 percent of the guns found by agents in 2022 were loaded.

The record number of guns seized at airports comes amid growing concern over turbulence in the skies among unruly passengers.

The Federal Aviation Administration said that up to Dec 15, there were 2,359 reports of unruly passengers, 823 investigations initiated, and 553 enforcement action cases initiated.

Travel volumes returned to pre-pandemic levels in 2022, according to the TSA. Officers screened 736 million passengers, an average of more than 2 million passengers per day.

The TSA was formed in 2001 and has more than 50,000 officers. TSA Administrator David Pekoske said last month in a statement: "I applaud the work of our security officers who do an excellent job of preventing firearms from getting into the secure area of the airport and onboard aircraft."

The US has stringent laws for those who want to legally carry a firearm while traveling on an aircraft. Guns aren't allowed in carry-on bags.

But passengers are permitted to travel with firearms in checked baggage if they are unloaded and packed in a locked hard-sided case. The case with the firearm must be brought to the airline check-in counter and declared to the airline.

Ammunition must be in its original box and can be packed inside the hard-sided case, next to the firearm, TSA advises. "Even if the box of ammunition is not full, the bullets must be in their original case."

Passengers who are found with guns in their carry-on bags can be fined from $3,000 up to $14,950 by the TSA. The agency recently raised the cost of the fines to deter travelers from bringing guns to the airport.

Anyone found with a loaded or unloaded firearm can face criminal referral to the police. If the person has a history of carrying loaded weapons into security checkpoints, the fine could be higher.

Those who violate rules also may have their Trusted Traveler status and TSA PreCheck expedited screening benefits revoked, the agency said.

Last year, at least 262 firearms were caught at checkpoints nationwide, figures show.

The airports with the most guns confiscated were Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (448), Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport (385), George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston (298) and Nashville International Airport (213).

At New York City airport checkpoints, TSA officers found 39 handguns illegally held by passengers, an increase from 26 in 2021. The firearms were discovered during routine screening of carry-on bags.

LaGuardia Airport had the biggest jump in the number of firearms after TSA officers detected 11 handguns last year, up from four caught in 2021.

Newark Liberty International Airport in New Jersey recorded a slight increase from 12 to 14 guns.

John F. Kennedy International Airport was the only airport in the New York City region that noted a decrease in the number of firearms brought to checkpoints, from nine stopped in 2021 down to seven last year.

Laws on firearm possession vary by state and locality. Passengers must have gun permits for the states that they are traveling to and from.

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

Subscription: 212-537-8899

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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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Experts call for US-China teamwork to fight cancer

By **LIA ZHU** in San Francisco
liazhu@chinadailyusa.com

Despite the differences and tensions between the United States and China, the fight against cancer remains a bright spot where the two countries can collaborate to benefit not only the two peoples but also the whole world, said health experts.

It's "a no brainer" for the US and China, top two countries in terms of cancer burden, to work together against a common enemy, said Dr Bob Li, an oncologist and drug development scientist at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York, at a recent conference held by Asia Society Northern California to examine US-China relations.

His institution has been partnering with academic institutions and biopharmaceutical companies in China to accelerate international clinical trials to cure cancer.

"It makes a real difference to collaborate with China, especially for R&D investment and technological advances in the field of cancer biology, in this international fight against cancer," said Li, also a senior fellow on global public health at the Asia Society Policy Institute's Center for China Analysis.

For example, precision medicine is a highly effective medicine that can improve survival and outcomes beyond the traditional chemotherapies, but the research needs a lot of testing and investment, he said.

> "It makes a real difference to collaborate with China, especially for R&D investment and technological advances."
>
> **Dr Bob Li**, oncologist at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York

"China provides that scale," said Li. A clinical trial traditionally takes 10 to 15 years on average to get approval, and most drug development would fail that process, but when collaborating with China, that process can be "incredibly" accelerated, he said, using the example of a drug developed by AstraZeneca.

The drug is targeting EGFR (epidermal growth factor receptor) mutation that causes about 15-20 percent of lung cancers, and this mutation is more common among Asians, especially Asian women who never smoke.

By collaborating with China, the pharmaceutical company set a world record in cancer drug development, said Li.

In the field of drug development and clinical trials, Dr Alex Ng, vice-president of Tencent Healthcare, said technology plays an important role, and the company's experience in tackling local problems in China can have a global impact.

As a tech company, Tencent also has been investing in healthcare to explore the application of AI technology in healthcare and frontier scientific discovery, said Ng.

"To understand the underlying cause of diseases and identify mutations, you need a lot of genomic sequencing analytics. Our lab is moving into single-cell sequencing," said Ng, adding that the database being generated is enormous, and they are working on how to develop AI algorithms to better harness the data.

One example of AI helping solve healthcare issues is addressing "the supply and demand mismatch", said Ng, because China has one of the largest populations of cancer patients but there are not enough capable oncologists to serve them.

The company has developed a matching algorithm to help patients find the right doctors, which can increase efficiency by up to 70 percent, said Ng.

Another example of applying AI to clinical trials is to help tackle the cervical cancer burden in rural China, which is affecting many women of childbearing age, Ng said.

With the help of the AI algorithm, the women can take a camera and look at the cervix, and the AI technology will inform them whether it is normal or they need to do a biopsy. If they need a biopsy, the AI will tell them where they can be biopsied.

"We actually developed a sort of appropriate diagnosis and treatment on the spot to augment the experience at the level of rural villages," said Ng.

"We solve these problems, and we are publishing this knowledge, because we see the issues — the mismatch of patients to doctors, or the lack of experienced hospitalists in rural areas — in other countries as well," he said.

Li agreed that technology and collaboration are the answer to the challenges of fighting cancer globally.

There are no IP concerns, because the data is all presented publicly, so it's an open collaboration, said Li, calling for the US to collaborate with China.

"The cure-for-cancer movement has been built upon decades of goodwill between the two nations, with collaboration between scientists, physicians and patients," he said. "This is a fight that really unites and brings the world together, and we're hoping to achieve some policy innovations in this."

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BUSINESS

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2022 economic data

Industrial output rises 3.6% in 2022

Sector expected to maintain relatively stable growth this year amid rebound

By **CHENG YU**
chengyu@chinadaily.com.cn

China's industrial output, a key economic indicator, rose 3.6 percent year-on-year in 2022 as the country's rebounding industrial production continued to play its "cornerstone" role in enhancing economic growth, said officials and industry experts on Tuesday.

They added that the country's industrial sector is expected to maintain relatively stable growth this year with better market expectations.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics on Tuesday, the output from mining and manufacturing rose 7.3 percent and 3 percent, respectively, last year compared with the previous year.

Notably, high-tech manufacturing and equipment manufacturing output soared by 7.4 percent and 5.6 percent, respectively, which was 3.8 percentage points and 2 percentage points faster than overall industrial output growth.

"Last year, the industrial sector played an effective role as a cornerstone and contributed to 36 percent of GDP growth," said Kang Yi, head of the NBS, at a news briefing, adding that both China's overall industrial output and manufacturing output topped the world in 2022.

"In addition, the country has built the world's largest internet infrastructure with leading technologies. The industrial internet has also been widely applied in 45 major categories of the national economy," he said.

Specifically, the production of new energy vehicles, telecommunications base stations and industrial computers all witnessed year-on-year growth, registering increases of 97.5 percent, 16.3 percent and 15 percent, respectively, last year.

Last year, about 11.77 million domestic branded passenger vehicles were sold, said the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers. Data from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology showed that more than 2.3 million 5G base stations had been built by the end of 2022.

Cui Dongshu, secretary-general of the China Passenger Car Association, expects the penetration rate of NEVs will continue to grow rapidly this year, as the cost of NEVs has fallen faster than that of internal combustion vehicles in the country, and NEV sales have led the overall passenger car market.

In terms of the overall industrial economy in 2023, Wei Qijia, head of industry economy research at the State Information Center, said: "With gradual recovery of market confidence, the industrial economy in 2023 is expected to remain stable. Overall growth will see a steady recovery."

However, Wei also pointed out that more efforts should be made to boost domestic and overseas demand, especially for major manufacturing and foreign trade-dependent provinces.

"Big projects planned in the early stage are expected to be implemented as soon as possible to stabilize bulk consumption such as NEVs and smart home appliances. Some new industrial consumption should also be encouraged to boost market confidence," Wei added.

Wang Wenyuan, an official with the MIIT, said in an earlier interview that this year the ministry will vigorously develop key industries with high-tech, strong market competitiveness and great driving effects, like NEVs, this year.

Accelerated steps will also be made to expand effective investment in manufacturing, stabilize bulk consumption of automobiles and construction materials, and support industrial product exports to enhance economic growth, Wang said.



Employees work on an energy storage equipment production line in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province.
XU JUNYONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Briefly

CGN generates 310b kWh of grid power

China General Nuclear Power Corp, a major nuclear power operator in China, generated 310.4 billion kilowatt-hours (kWh) of grid power in 2022, the energy group said. The figure represented an increase of 12.4 billion kWh compared to that in 2021, the company said, adding that its number of nuclear power units in operation reached 26 in 2022. In terms of new energy, CGN added 7.21 million kilowatts of installed capacity in operation in 2022 and the installed capacity in operation of its domestic new energy projects exceeded 35 million kilowatts.

NEV tax exemptions nearly double

China's tax exemptions for purchases of new energy vehicles soared 92.6 percent year-on-year in 2022 amid the country's efforts to promote environmentally friendly automobile consumption, official data showed. A total of 87.9 billion yuan ($13.06 billion) in such taxes was waived last year, according to the State Taxation Administration. To shore up development of the NEV sector, China has been implementing the purchase tax exemption policy since 2014. In September 2022, it extended the preferential tax policy to the end of 2023.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY



Local residents shop at a supermarket in Lianyungang, Jiangsu province. SI WEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

NBS: Recovery to spur consumption

By **ZHU WENQIAN**
zhuwenqian@chinadaily.com.cn

Growth potential of consumer goods will be unleashed and new consumption formats will evolve faster this year in China on the back of the economic recovery brought about by optimized COVID-19 control measures, the National Bureau of Statistics said on Tuesday.

With the easing of pandemic control restrictions, production and daily life are returning to normal and offline consumption scenarios have accelerated the process, the NBS said.

In 2022, China's retail sales totaled 43.97 trillion yuan ($6.51 trillion), just 0.2 percent lower year-on-year. Retail sales in urban areas stood at 38.04 trillion yuan, down 0.3 percent, with the corresponding figure for rural areas staying flat at 5.93 trillion yuan, NBS data showed.

"Expanding demand in the domestic consumer market is one of the priorities this year. Last year, the consumer market was disturbed by the pandemic, and residents' willingness to spend had also declined," said Kang Yi, director of the NBS.

"In such a context, the government announced some policies to boost consumption, and they have helped stabilize the domestic consumer market, which began to see some improvements in December."

Last month, total retail sales in China fell 1.8 percent year-on-year, and the decline was 4.1 percentage points narrower than the decrease recorded in November.

In 2022, merchandise retail sales edged up 0.5 percent to 39.58 trillion yuan. Retail sales of the catering sector declined 6.3 percent to 4.39 trillion yuan. Retail sales of basic daily consumer goods grew steadily. Edible oils and food, and beverages from enterprises above a designated size jumped 8.7 percent and 5.3 percent, respectively.

Some new types of consumption formats have developed relatively faster. Last year, online retail sales nationwide rose 4 percent to 13.79 trillion yuan. Tangible merchandise retail sales reached 11.96 trillion yuan, up 6.2 percent, accounting for 27.2 percent of the total retail sales, the NBS said.

China's huge consumption potential will be supported by more than 1.4 billion population. The upgrade of the country's consumption structure continues. Besides, new consumption hot spots have been emerging, and new consumption formats that are integrated with the internet and digital technologies are growing rapidly, Kang said.

Meanwhile, a guideline jointly released by the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council, China's Cabinet, in December specified the long-term goals for implementing a strategy for growing domestic demand from 2022 to 2035.

According to the document, a series of arrangements will be made to help expand the domestic market. Expanding employment, increasing income, improving income distribution patterns and providing convenient consumption scenarios for consumers are among the goals.

The implementation of policies to boost consumption will help continuously improve the spending capacity of households, and the scale of the consumer market is expected to be not only restored but improved, Kang said.

Wang Wei, head of the Market Economy Research Institute at the Development Research Center of the State Council, said that consumption of services in areas like cultural tourism, elder care, child care, medical education, sports and leisure will become a key driver of consumption growth in China.

More reforms to enhance SOEs' effectiveness, grow new pioneers

By **ZHONG NAN**
zhongnan@chinadaily.com.cn

A new round of reform will enhance the effectiveness of China's State-owned enterprises and accelerate the growth of pioneers in modern industrial chains this year, the country's top State-owned assets regulator said on Tuesday.

The State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council, or the SASAC, said China's three-year action plan for the reform of SOEs (2020-22) has produced encouraging results.

The government plans to further optimize the distribution and restructuring of State capital, and focus on strategic security, industrial advantages, national economy, people's livelihoods and public service, in order to grow pioneers in modern industrial chains and strengthen the growth of strategic emerging industries this year, said Peng Huagang, secretary-general of the SASAC.

Apart from advancing the integration of SOEs' resources and enhancing their cooperation with small and medium-sized enterprises, the government will promote the integration and joint development of SOEs and private companies through mixed-ownership reforms, Peng said.

Addressing a news conference in Beijing, he said the government will create more innovative SOEs to serve the national strategies and to meet the demand for industrial upgrade, thus further stimulating innovation and creativity so as to tackle technological bottlenecks.

39.4 trillion yuan
total operating revenue of China's centrally administered State-owned enterprises

Despite COVID-19 and downward economic pressure affecting both Chinese and global economies last year, the total operating revenue of China's centrally administered State-owned enterprises rose 8.3 percent on a yearly basis to 39.4 trillion yuan ($5.82 trillion) in 2022, generating a combined net profit of 1.9 trillion yuan, up 5 percent year-on-year, SASAC data showed.

The commission said that seven of China's 98 central SOEs registered over 100 billion yuan in profit each last year.

"We will improve SOEs' ability to ensure adequate supplies of energy and important resources to the national economy, and contribute to the growth of China's dual-circulation development paradigm," said Peng.

Recent actions of State-owned CNOOC Ltd, the exploration and production arm of China National Offshore Oil Corp, the country's top offshore oil and gas producer by production volume, show the critical role SOEs play in this context. Earlier this month, CNOOC Ltd said it would raise its production target and capital expenditure budget for this year. Nine new projects are expected to start operations this year.

CNOOC Ltd said its net production target for this year is between 650 million and 660 million barrels of oil equivalent (BOE), of which production from China accounts for about 70 percent. Its net production is expected to reach 690 million to 700 million BOE in 2024.

Despite high-energy prices and supply gaps worldwide, China's central SOEs in the power generation sector provided 63.1 percent of power to the country with 54.7 percent unit capacity of the total last year, according to the SASAC.

Zhou Lisha, a researcher with the Institute for State-owned Enterprises at Tsinghua University, said that advancing supply-side structural reforms and professional integration of SOEs will lead to a marked improvement in the innovation capacity, competitiveness and capability to resist risks in the State-owned economy this year.

Investment seen critical to economy in 2023

By **OUYANG SHIJIA**
ouyangshijia@chinadaily.com.cn

China is expected to see stable investment growth in 2023, which will serve as a key driver of economic recovery, officials and experts said.

Their comments came after the National Bureau of Statistics said the country's fixed-asset investment rose 5.1 percent year-on-year to reach 57.21 trillion yuan ($8.43 trillion) in 2022, compared with a 4.9 percent increase the previous year.

"Fixed-asset investment has played an important role in stabilizing the economy, as capital formation, or investment, accounted for 50.1 percent of China's 2022 GDP growth," Kang Yi, head of the NBS, said at a news conference in Beijing on Tuesday.

Looking ahead, Kang said investment will likely keep growing given the country's huge potential, its strong investment momentum in innovative development and accelerated construction of "new infrastructure" in fields including 5G and big data centers.

Even though weak performance in the real estate sector weighed on the economy in 2022, Kang said there are favorable conditions for the property sector to gradually stabilize, and it will not become a major drag on the economy as seen in the previous year.

Citing China's 2022 urbanization rate of 65.22 percent, Kang said that is lower than the 80 percent level typically seen in advanced countries, which means that there is enough demand to underpin growth of the property sector.

The NBS said investment in real estate development dipped 10 percent year-on-year in 2022, while investment in manufacturing and infrastructure climbed 9.1 percent and 9.4 percent, respectively.

Notably, investment in high-tech industries climbed 18.9 percent in 2022. Investment in high-tech manufacturing and high-tech services jumped 22.2 percent and 12.1 percent, respectively.

Guo Liyan, director of the Comprehensive Situation Research Office of the Academy of Macroeconomic Research, which is part of the National Development and Reform Commission, highlighted the accelerated growth of investment in high-tech manufacturing and high-tech services, saying it serves as a key driver supporting China's economic recovery.

Citing a package of stimulus policy measures on stabilizing growth and the government's targeted measures boosting confidence among market entities, Guo said domestic demand and investment will help drive a strong rebound this year.

Guo added that China is speeding up the implementation of key infrastructure projects in fields like water conservancy and energy bases, as well as projects aimed at strengthening weak links in areas related to people's livelihoods, which will help stabilize the economic situation.

China will focus on expanding domestic demand this year, including effectively spurring social capital through government investment and policy incentives, and encouraging and attracting private capital to participate in major projects, according to the tone-setting Central Economic Work Conference, which was held in mid-December.

Given pressures and challenges from a potential recession in advanced economies and slowing external demand, Zhou Maohua, an analyst at China Everbright Bank, said boosting domestic demand is key to a robust 2023.

Zhou highlighted the importance of expanding effective investment, saying the country needs to make a big push to increase support for the manufacturing sector, innovative companies and small and micro businesses.

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BUSINESS



Nation books for growth amid headwinds

Former IMF official underlines confidence in recovering COVID-battered economy

A technician supervises the installation of a wind turbine in Liuzhou, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, on Jan 10. LONG TAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

By **OUYANG SHIJIA**
ouyangshijia@chinadaily.com.cn

While multiple pressures and headwinds may weigh on China's short-term outlook, the optimized COVID-19 control measures and stronger policy support will lead to a notable rebound in 2023, according to Lin Jianhai, former secretary of the International Monetary Fund.

"China's growth potential remains strong but the country continues to encounter headwinds that must be overcome. The good news is that China has the ability to counteract growth headwinds within its policy space. Macroeconomic policy support can boost near-term growth," said Lin, who is also vice-president of the International Finance Forum.

"The economy will likely remain difficult in the first few months of the year. But growth, particularly in consumption, is expected to pick up from the second quarter onwards as COVID waves subside," Lin added.

China's economy had a challenging year in 2022, mainly due to COVID outbreaks that affected mobility and economic activity, as well as business and consumer confidence, and weak performances in real estate and other sectors also weighed on the economy.

China's economy expanded by 2.9 percent year-on-year in the fourth quarter, compared with 3.9 percent in the third quarter, data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed.

To revive the COVID-battered economy, Lin said it is critical to restore the confidence of firms and households in the short term.

"This includes, among other priorities, continued policy actions to address the ongoing real estate difficulties and minimize the potential for spillovers to other sectors and adverse macro-financial feedback loops," he said. "It also includes actions to spur private sector activity and make it an engine of growth in the long run."

> "China has been a key beneficiary of and contributor to globalization in the past four decades, and it will likely play an increasingly important role going forward."
>
> **Lin Jianhai,** vice-president of the International Finance Forum



Looking into the future, he said structural reforms must be accelerated to lift growth potential.

"Pro-growth reforms, such as a further opening-up of domestic markets and ensuring market neutrality between private sector firms and State-owned enterprises, will help shore up low productivity growth at a time of shrinking labor supply."

When it comes to China's intensified efforts to pursue high-quality development and foster sustainable, inclusive and green economic growth, Lin said the country must make the right policies in several aspects, including maintaining a stable macroeconomic environment as well as continuing and further strengthening opening-up policies and efforts.

"China has been a key beneficiary of and contributor to globalization in the past four decades, and it will likely play an increasingly important role going forward," he said.

Lin also highlighted the importance of accelerating productivity growth in the medium and long term, saying sustained productivity growth will enable China to escape the "middle-income trap" and enter into the "high-income country" category.

He said that can be done through technological development and application, cultivation of more talent, strengthening of research and development capabilities, more transparent and reliable rules and regulations, and better allocation and use of resources.

"In this context, leveling the playing field between State-owned and private-sector firms can go a long way to enhancing productivity growth," he said.

Looking ahead, Lin said more efforts should also be made to further develop the financial sector and effectively address the impact of demographic shifts.

"By international comparisons, China's financial sector remains relatively less developed with ample potential for further growth," he said. "A well-developed financial sector requires market-based, transparent rules and regulations, strong institutional frameworks and oversight, and well-functioning markets with a variety of financial instruments and investment vehicles. An open, transparent and market-based financial sector will serve the economy well for the long term."

Meanwhile, Lin warned that China's working-age population has already been declining, saying it is advisable for the country to gradually raise the retirement age to 65 for both male and female workers, continue improving the quality of the labor force through education and on-the-job training and address vocational training.

Survey: MNCs bullish on China market

By **ZHONG NAN**
zhongnan@chinadaily.com.cn

China will remain a strategic priority market for multinational corporations as its steady progress in opening-up, dynamic domestic market and innovation strength are able to create long-term financial returns, said the country's top foreign trade and investment promotion agency on Tuesday.

Over 90 percent of foreign companies are reported to be satisfied with their access to business premises and taxation in the Chinese market in the fourth quarter of 2022, while 9.78 percent of them expanded investment in the country, according to a business environment survey released by the Beijing-based China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, or the CCPIT.

About 51.59 percent of foreign companies indicated that the source of funding for their additional investment in China was profit reinvestment, the study found.

In addition to continuously removing market barriers for foreign-funded enterprises, China has taken multiple measures to help ease the pressures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and other external factors, said Yang Fan, a spokeswoman for the CCPIT.

Addressing a news conference in Beijing, she said that these actions have boosted the confidence of foreign companies operating in the country.

Many multinationals said that China's latest move to further open its market to foreign investment in the manufacturing sector will contribute to high-quality growth, and ensure the stability and security of global industrial and supply chains, according to the survey.

Under this policy, China will encourage foreign investment in research and development, design and modern logistics in the services industry, as well as in innovation and applications related to new energy, green and low-carbon technologies.

Yan Jinping, chief operating officer for the China unit of Air Liquide SA, a French industrial and medical gas supplier with 120 plants across China, said the company will look at opportunities in the field of hydrogen energy in China in 2023.



An employee works at a Volkswagen production facility in Qingdao, Shandong province, in December. LIANG XIAOPENG / XINHUA

$171.56 billion
actual use of foreign direct investment on Chinese mainland during January-November period of 2022

"For the local hydrogen energy industry, we will further promote the development of the entire industrial chain, actively share our expertise in hydrogen production, transportation and storage technologies, and support new local forces in clean mobility," said Yan.

Air Liquide will also deeply engage in the local supply chain of the electronics industry this year, especially in the Yangtze River Delta region and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, to assist advanced semiconductor manufacturers with required precursors, he said.

DHL Express, a German express service provider, said China's optimized COVID-19 control policies will help facilitate the orderly resumption of China's entry and exit for both foreigners and Chinese citizens. The move will further benefit economic exchanges and trade between China and the rest of the world, injecting new impetus into China's economic recovery.

"Looking ahead, China will serve as a key driver of global economic growth and the Chinese economy will greatly benefit global trade," said Rick Zhang, senior vice-president of commercial at DHL Express China.

After launching a new air route connecting Wuxi, Jiangsu province and Leipzig, Germany in November, DHL Express' latest China gateway went into operation in Wuxi late last month.

Attracted by opportunities in areas such as carbon neutrality, high-end manufacturing and innovation-driven development, the actual use of foreign direct investment on the Chinese mainland expanded 9.9 percent year-on-year to 1.16 trillion yuan ($171.56 billion) during the January-November period of 2022, data from the Ministry of Commerce showed.

Against the backdrop of overall shrinking external demand and the accelerated restructuring of global industrial and supply chains this year, Yang, from the CCPIT, said the council will provide practical services and make greater efforts to assist China's export-oriented companies to seize more orders and expand sales channels globally.

Apart from organizing domestic exporters to take part in key domestic business exhibitions this year, such as China's first edition of a supply chain-themed expo, Yang said China's facilitation of its companies' participation in overseas exhibitions will quicken, encouraging them to enlarge their presence in developing and emerging markets.

The CCPIT will be prompt in giving the green light for follow-up overseas economic and trade exhibition projects this year, she added.

AIIB vows efforts to tackle global challenges, expand cooperation

By **JIANG XUEQING**
jiangxueqing@chinadaily.com.cn

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank will deepen international cooperation to tackle global challenges and promote sustainable development, said the multilateral development bank as Monday marked its seventh anniversary.

The AIIB announced on Jan 9 its board of governors had approved Mauritania's application, raising its approved membership to 106. Mauritania is the AIIB's 55th non-regional member, 21 of which are from Africa.

The bank began operations in Beijing in January 2016 with 57 founding members. It has now become the world's second-largest multilateral development institution, which is behind the World Bank in terms of members. Its approved members represent 81 percent of the global population and 65 percent of the world's GDP.

The AIIB has been firmly practicing multilateralism and always keeps its doors open to countries and regions dedicated to promoting economic and social development in Asia.

The bank set up an operational partnership department in 2022. It has also signed memorandums on cooperation with financial institutions, such as the OPEC Fund for International Development and the Development Bank of Latin America, to jointly promote global development problem-solving.

In addition to supporting the sustainable development of its regional members in Asia, the bank also stepped up efforts to provide financing to non-regional members in 2022, having approved its first project in Brazil and its first project in Cote d'Ivoire.

It has developed a portfolio of 202 projects in 33 countries with a total value of $38.8 billion in sectors such as energy, transportation, water, communications, education and public health.

The rapid business growth is the catalyst for AIIB's global presence expansion. Last year, the bank started preparing for the establishment of its first overseas office in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates, to expand its investment business in regions like the Middle East, Central Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Apart from supporting the infrastructure of its members, the AIIB has been promoting interconnectivity and green development through the innovation of financing tools.

Last year, the bank's climate financing accounted for 55 percent of its total approved financing for the year.

In June, the bank issued 1.5 billion yuan ($221.6 million) in panda bonds on China's interbank bond market. They are the first sustainable development bonds to have been issued by an international institution in China.

"The AIIB will continue to shoulder the expectations from the international community, particularly developing countries, of promoting mutual development and improving global economic governance," said Jin Liqun, president of the AIIB.

"The bank will uphold multilateralism, stick to internationalization, standardization and high-standard operations, proactively promote multilateral dialogues, deepen international cooperation, and make greater contributions to tackling global challenges and promoting sustainable development," Jin said.



The headquarters of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in Beijing. The bank has developed a portfolio of 202 projects in 33 countries with a total value of $38.8 billion in sectors such as energy, transportation, water, communications, education and public health. CHEN XIAOGEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

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BUSINESSFOCUS

Charging piles enhance ease for NEV drivers

Policy support, greater demand lead to additional, better stations nationwide

By LIU YUKUN
liuyukun@chinadaily.com.cn

Xiao Qing, a 36-year-old Beijing resident, was excited to see a new power charging station for electric vehicles set up near his community.

"Finding a charger that is safer, faster and cheaper is important to an EV owner like me. I felt insecure driving my car when the remaining power dropped below 20 percent. I was afraid of not finding a place to charge, because there had been a few cases of power suddenly dropping from 20 percent to zero, especially in winter," Xiao said.

"Luckily, there's more charging infrastructure with improved services across the country, which really helps us feel like we can continue to use EVs for commuting," he said.

The country saw about 2.33 million chargers added to the market in the first 11 months of 2022, a development encouraged by the burgeoning EV market and policy support. The number of public chargers was up 105.4 percent year-on-year and private chargers increased 316.5 percent, said the China Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Promotion Alliance.

By the end of November 2022, the country had about 4.95 million EV charging facilities, up 107.5 percent from a year earlier, the alliance said.

Experts said that as key infrastructure to support EV development, charging piles are ushering in a new development phase.

Builders and operators of such facilities are moving away from installing large amounts of low-end equipment as a preemptive investment to claim markets. Instead, they are employing high-quality development plans, leading to new technologies and business models emerging in the market.

China's market for chargers is expected to reach nearly 250 billion yuan ($37.2 billion) in 2025, with an annual compound growth rate of over 33 percent during 2021-25, according to a forecast by Beijing-based Huaon Industrial Research Institute, based on policy support and growing demand spurred by the EV industry.

The market for chargers reached 78.51 billion yuan in 2021, up 55.68 percent year-on-year.

Promotion of the construction of public charging stations, while also encouraging private charging facilities, has proven effective in helping solve the insufficient charging infrastructure that had hindered EV development, according to Wang Lining, director of the oil market department of the Economics and Technology Research Institute of China National Petroleum Corp.

The charging infrastructure promotion alliance said that the growth of charging facilities is generally in line with the country's booming EV sector. The growth of chargers basically meets the demand of the rapidly growing number of EVs with a ratio of one charger for every 2.6 EVs. New energy vehicle sales hit 6.067 million from January to November.

In recent years, the development of private charging facilities has outpaced that of public stations, which has turned it into a strong force supporting the rapid development of EVs, according to Jiang Yunzhe, an NEV researcher at the Center for Automotive Strategy and Policy Research of China Automotive Technology and Research Center.

"Despite rapid development of EV charging, the sector still faces some major challenges such as uneven deployment, difficulties attaining profitability and insufficient technical innovation and application," Jiang said.

"It can be hard sometimes to find a charger outside the city," said Xiao, the Beijing-based EV user. "As a result, we seldom drive long distances though our family is eager to go on road trips during the holidays.

"In addition, the maintenance of chargers at certain stations is not timely, and compatibility between different vehicles and chargers can still be a problem," he said.

Jiang said charging infrastructure coverage currently is highly correlated with regional economic development and city size. The average coverage rate of public charging infrastructure in megacities' central areas exceeds 90 percent, but charging infrastructure coverage in counties and townships, highway service centers and national and provincial trunk roads is still insufficient.

"In addition, the charging infrastructure sector requires large initial investments and comes with high operating costs. The average utilization rate is only about 10 percent, which makes it difficult for the industry to make a profit," he said.

Jiang said there are three major business models on the market — slow charging, fast charging and battery swapping.

The first two are cheaper and easier to promote in a wide range of scenarios. The third provides a variety of services to EV owners, such as battery swapping, maintenance and often, a place for drivers to rest. Stations using the third are able to provide users with a good service experience, but it entails relatively high operating costs, he said.

"However, high-watt charging, which allows fast charging, and battery swapping, have not been applied in a wider range of scenarios yet due to factors like a lack of supporting policies and unified industrial standards. Under such circumstances, many companies are eager to use low-end products as a preemptive investment to claim markets, which brings adverse effects to the high-quality development of the industry," he added.

Also, those building charging facilities are often faced with such problems as a scarcity of land, insufficient power capacity and a lengthy construction approval process, which increases costs and affects operations, Jiang said.

"Innovation in business models also requires the continuous advancement of technology, including the improvement of batteries to allow more charge-and-discharge cycles. Further efforts are also needed to optimize the policy system, such as the power pricing mechanism and electricity market reform," said Wang of the CNPC research institute.

Jiang said that since the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-20) period, the Chinese government has been rolling out supportive policies such as subsidies for charging infrastructure builders and operators, which has promoted the rapid expansion of charging infrastructure. During the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) period, the focus of support has been changed from numerical growth to infrastructure quality.

Last January, the National Development and Reform Commission and nine other departments released advice on improving EV charging infrastructure services. It cited the need to accelerate the construction of charging infrastructure in residential areas, cities and rural areas, strengthen research and development on new technologies and better supervise security.

In August, China issued an action plan that vowed to provide basic charging services at service centers along highways by the end of 2022, except in areas affected by cold weather and high altitudes. The plan was released by the Ministry of Transport, the National Energy Administration, State Grid Corp of China and China Southern Power Grid.

In answering the nation's call, local governments have stepped up efforts to promote the development of charging facilities.

Shanghai announced in October a plan to build 760,000 chargers and 300 battery swapping stations by 2025, and to build and put into operation over 70 hydrogen refueling stations. Beijing also plans to build more chargers, aiming for a total of 700,000 by 2025.



Drivers charge electric taxis in Tongren, Guizhou province, in October. HU PANXUE / FOR CHINA DAILY



Technicians inspect facilities at a charging station in Yantai, Shandong province, in September. TANG KE / FOR CHINA DAILY

> "Despite rapid development of EV charging, the sector still faces some major challenges such as uneven deployment, difficulties attaining profitability and insufficient technical innovation and application."
>
> **Jiang Yunzhe,** NEV researcher at the Center for Automotive Strategy and Policy Research of China Automotive Technology and Research Center

Battery swapping key for heavy-duty trucks

By LIU YUKUN

Heavy-duty electric trucks that rely on battery swapping as a power source are on a fast track thanks to supportive policies and growing market demand, experts said.

The owners of these electric trucks can exchange discharged batteries for charged ones at swapping stations, an arrangement that reduces drivers' concerns about the range of their electric vehicles and helps reduce carbon dioxide emissions compared with such trucks that burn fossil fuels.

The adoption of battery swapping electric trucks is seen as very important. The transportation industry is energy intensive and highly polluting and its green transition is essential to achieving China's carbon goals, said Wang Lining, director of the oil market department at the Economics and Technology Research Institute at China National Petroleum Corp.

"Although heavy-duty trucks take up a small part of all vehicles, they produce a large amount of greenhouse gases, which makes them a major source of air pollutants," Wang said.

A recent report by Science and Technology Daily said that HDTs produce a large quantity of emissions, use low-quality diesel, and many are operated almost continuously. One HDT produces the same amount of emissions as 300 family cars, the report said.

"Compared with the power-charging mode of HDTs, the battery swapping arrangement has advantages, as charging time is shorter and they are more efficient in mileage coverage. That is very important in some scenarios in which shorter charging time is needed to raise transportation and production efficiency, such as for urban waste delivery and mine shuttles," said Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University.

For the first three quarters of 2022, the sales of battery swapping electric HDTs grew 404 percent year-on-year to 7,157 trucks, according to China Energy News.



A SAIC Hongyan heavy-duty electric truck is displayed during a vehicle expo in Beijing in September. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The surging growth outpaced that of all HDTs, which was a negative 58 percent year-on-year, with the sales volume falling to 523,000 units for the same period, according to the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers.

"Battery swapping electric HDTs are still at the early stage of development, compared with the annual sales of hundreds of thousands of HDTs and stock of millions of HDTs. In the future, with the progress of the low-carbon transition of the transportation industry, the improvement of battery swapping infrastructure, the unification of standards and the advancement of technology, battery swapping electric HDTs will usher in a period of rapid development," Wang said.

A report by CITIC Securities shows that the development of electric HDTs that use battery swapping has entered a year of high growth, and the industry is expected to achieve tenfold growth in the next five years starting from 2022.

It estimates that in 2025, the sales of battery swapping electric trucks are expected to reach 160,000 units, accounting for about 33 percent of the total sales of new energy-powered commercial vehicles, with the market size exceeding 100 billion yuan ($14.9 billion).

The broad market prospects of battery swapping HDTs have attracted many enterprises. Automobile companies like Foton Motor Group, SAIC Hongyan Co and Xuzhou Construction Machinery Group have launched various types of battery swapping electric HDTs to tap the growing market.

The central authorities have also stepped up efforts to improve infrastructure to support the industry's development. The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology released a notice in October 2021 to promote battery swapping electric vehicles in trial cities. Yibin in Sichuan province, Tangshan in Hebei province, and Baotou in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region were selected.

Two months later, Yibin launched the city's first battery swapping station for HDTs. It also vowed to set up about 60 stations by 2025.

Local governments have also rolled out supportive policies. Hainan province, for example, said it would offer great incentives to projects that operate over 50 medium-sized and heavy-duty battery swapping electric trucks.

Although the industry is on a rapid development path, it still faces many challenges, such as inconsistency of standards and insufficient battery changing infrastructure, Wang said.

More efforts are expected from the government to build an alliance or association that can unite vehicle and battery companies and infrastructure builders and operators, as well create platforms to tackle the problems, Wang said.

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COMMENT

Editorials

Profound changes to the economy set path for high-quality development

China's gross domestic product grew 3 percent year-on-year last year, the National Bureau of Statistics announced on Tuesday. This is a hard-earned result given the downward pressure the country has had to overcome.

Due to the inherent resilience of the Chinese economy, as well as the implementation of a series of support policies, the country's grain output increased 0.5 percent last year, the value added of industries above designated scale rose by 3.6 percent and the service sector grew by 2.3 percent.

This guaranteed the country's food security, while the world has been enduring the worst food shortage in decades, enabled the creation of 12.06 million jobs, above the targeted 11 million, at a time when unemployment-fueled social unrest has roiled many countries, and maintained the health and dynamism of the economy, as indicated by the investment in fixed assets increasing by 5.1 percent and the consumer price index growing mildly at 2 percent.

True, the growth in the net profit of the major enterprises, the total retail sales of consumer goods and the production index of service industries were all negative. But the margins of decrease are narrowing fast with the optimization of the COVID-19 protocol from last month, and all of them are showing strong rebound momentum.

Global confidence in the Chinese economy and market remains high, as it is well known that the fundamentals of the world's second-largest economy remain stable, its comparative strengths in scale and efficiency are still remarkable and its status as a major source and destination of foreign investment and as a logistics hub have only been consolidated by its renewed commitment to opening-up. While the 7.7 percent increase in its foreign trade last year, despite the decoupling attempts of the United States, has reinforced its position as the largest goods trader.

The challenges China has faced over the past year from the epidemic and geopolitics have only served to spur the country to double down on its efforts to accelerate the upgrading of its industries and promote innovation-driven growth. The added value of high-tech manufacturing and equipment manufacturing grew by 7.4 percent and 5.6 percent last year, and investment in high-tech industries grew by 18.9 percent, outpacing total fixed-asset investment by 13.8 percentage points. Investment in high-tech manufacturing and services grew by 22.2 percent and 12.1 percent, respectively.

That infrastructure investment grew by 9.4 percent, manufacturing by 9.1 percent, while that in the real estate industry, a major guzzler of investment for a long time, was down by 10 percent shows that the economy is restructuring in favor of sustainable growth and innovation.

Last but not least, although the country's population was 850,000 less last year than the year before, the first time it has shrunk in 61 years, that does not merit much ado, as the easing of the pandemic situation, the improvement in the quality of the labor force, people's livelihoods and public services can help prolong the plateau period to avoid a sharp decline of the population and its consequential shocks on the economy.

In a nutshell, the Chinese economy is undoubtedly undergoing profound changes. But the country still grips the initiative of its development in its own hands. It can, and will, continue to make the most of what it has to pursue high-quality development.

US the real loser in documents dogfight

The House of Representatives Judiciary Committee has set a Jan 27 deadline for all relevant documents and communications related to its formal investigation into the president's "mishandling" of classified records and the Justice Department's investigation into the matter.

With the Department of Justice, the White House, the FBI and President Joe Biden's attorneys having all been informed that their "complete cooperation" with the inquiry is expected, the tit-for-tat document-gate, the first "gate" in US politics of the year, is gathering momentum.

House Republicans are keeping their promise to investigate the Biden administration and the Biden family's domestic and international business dealings in retaliation for the investigations the House Democrats launched targeting previous president Donald Trump.

Thanks to the shifting balance of power in US politics and the antipathy between the two parties, two successive presidents of the US are now being probed for the same wrongdoing: mishandling classified documents.

And thanks to the dogfight between the two parties that antipathy is sure to worsen. There is no way to assert which side, the Republicans or the Democrats, is cleaner than the other. Both are fighting for their own partisan interests, trying to gain an upper hand in the coming 2024 presidential election.

By launching the "document offensive" against the Democrats, the Republicans are also trying to promote inner-party unity. Despite the Republican majority in the House, it took 15 rounds over four days, with various deals being struck, for Republican Congress leader Kevin McCarthy to win a simple majority to secure the position of House Speaker.

With a chance for them all to point their fingers in the same direction, Republicans can rally to the same cause in preparation for the coming election. Of course, the Democrats will be planning their own battle plan.

The feuding of the two parties has become so fierce that US democracy is being brought into ever greater disrepute. All of these cases will take a long time and complicated procedures to probe, wasting large quantities of political and judicial resources.

But neither the Republicans nor the Democrats care about the waste of resources or the image — or proper functioning of US democracy — so intent are they on landing knockout blows on each other. It is the US as a nation that is the loser in their fight.

EU needs courage to deter Washington's coercion

Cooperation and consultation should always triumph over confrontation and division, and that explicit message, jointly sent by China and France this week, will help inject more certainty into today's world.

In a telephone conversation on Monday, Wang Yi, director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, and Emmanuel Bonne, diplomatic counselor to French President Emmanuel Macron, shored up the two countries' shared commitment to promoting China-France ties, China's ties with the European Union and the spirit of multilateralism.

Thanks to their mutual efforts, China-France ties have withstood the test of the times, setting a good example for countries with different social and political backgrounds to maintain stable and healthy cooperation on both the bilateral and multilateral fronts.

Beijing and Paris have continually deepened their strategic mutual trust and consolidated their comprehensive strategic partnership through frequent high-level exchanges, and there are bright prospects for them to tap into new fields of cooperation and further expand their mutual interests.

France, as a leading member of the European Union, can also play an important role in injecting new impetus into the pragmatic cooperation between the EU and China. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the China-EU comprehensive strategic partnership. But their relations have taken a turn for the worse as a result of Washington manipulating the heightened security concerns of European countries, triggered by the conflict in Ukraine.

Since it successfully instigated hostilities between Russia and Ukraine, the US administration has sought to use the EU's closer security alignment with the US as an opportunity to get the EU's support for its efforts to contain China. But with Washington having shown its disregard for the EU's economic interests, it should be crystal clear to the US' European allies that in Washington's eyes they are there to be used and abused.

The EU members should accept the hard, albeit unwelcome truth that the US is determined to pursue its global supremacy and consolidate its global leadership at any cost, including at the expense of its allies. Under the US pressure and coercion, the EU is already seeing a downturn in its ties with China, which will only exacerbate the bloc's economic woes.

China and France are both permanent members of the UN Security Council, and their upholding of multilateralism and opposition to the Cold War mentality and bloc politics can also help promote the concerted actions that are necessary to address the many pressing challenges facing humanity.

The world has more than enough troubles to deal with, and forging greater trust, strengthening cooperation and deepening international consensus, as China and France are doing, will help prevent the sowing of differences and the stoking of confrontation that lead to their proliferation.

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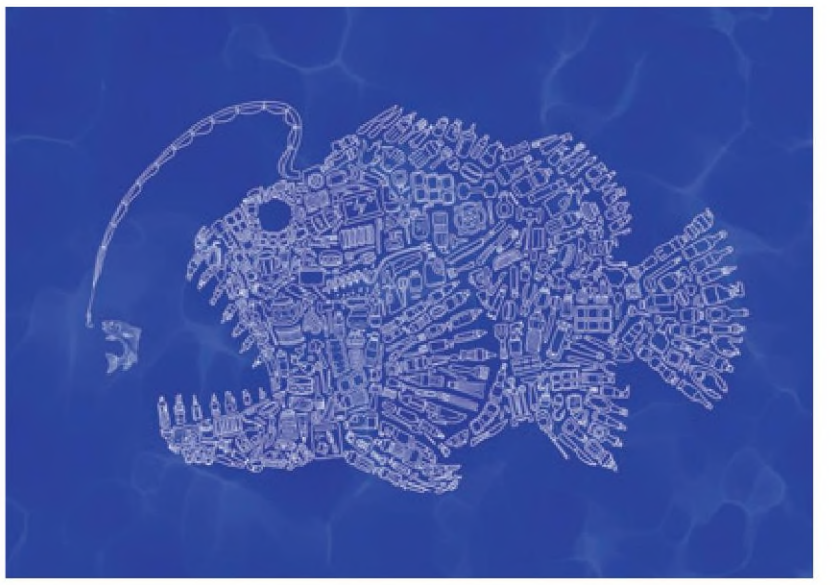
China Daily UK
90 Cannon St, London EC4N 6HA, UK
+44 (0) 207 398 8270
editor@chinadailyuk.com

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

Yang Duoyi



Opinion Line

Politicizing pandemic control will harm economic recovery

Ever since China optimized its pandemic prevention and control measures, many countries have welcomed Chinese tourists. Thai Deputy Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul and other senior officials greeted the first arrival of Chinese tourists with flowers at the Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok.

China has been adjusting its pandemic prevention and control measures in accordance with the changing situation.

China has briefed relevant countries on its optimized measures and its current pandemic situation. However, some countries have stubbornly imposed discriminatory restrictions against Chinese tourists in disregard of the actual pandemic situation, which amounts to politicizing of the pandemic.

Several international organizations and health experts have pointed out that no new variant or significant mutation of the virus has been found in China, and it is neither scientific nor necessary to tighten entry measures for Chinese travelers.

Stephane Dujarric, spokesman for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, said UN member states should follow World Health Organization guidelines and that all decisions on passenger screening must be based on science.

Singapore's health minister said the number of confirmed cases from China in the last four weeks of 2022 accounted for less than 5 percent of Singapore's total imported cases, and there is no need to tighten quarantine measures against Chinese travelers.

Countries adopting discriminatory measures against China should listen to such voices instead of engaging in political manipulation and discriminatory practices.

China's pandemic prevention and control policies have not only protected its people's lives and health, but also minimized the impact of the pandemic on economic and social development. Against the backdrop of increasing downward pressure on the world economy, China's optimized pandemic prevention measures will facilitate international personnel exchanges and boost confidence in global economic growth. That is why many international organizations have expressed optimism at China's economic prospects and believe China's refined pandemic protocol will help support world economic recovery and development.

It is hoped that relevant countries change their discriminatory approach against Chinese citizens to create favorable conditions for normal personnel exchanges and cooperation.

— PEOPLE'S DAILY

Secessionists see fear in a pack of noodles

Li Chong-lim, a local "legislator" in Tainan city, Taiwan, saw fear in a pack of snail rice noodles.

Li reportedly asked local authorities to withdraw the noodles from their shelves because its package bore the words. "Both you and I are Chinese, let's stay together." Li claimed that it implied reunification. More absurdity followed the same day when the "mainland affairs council", the island's agency on cross-Straits affairs, asked the importer to either withdraw the product or to cover those words with paint.

The local "economic affairs authorities" said they were investigating the matter and might ban the importer from importing for two months to a year.

Those words were written with a lot of love and warmth, stressing that people on both sides of the Taiwan Straits are Chinese; but the secessionists are oversensitive and cannot even tolerate a phrase of love.

Even if the phrase implies the reunification of China, there is nothing illegal about it. After all it is in accordance with the local laws and regulations in Taiwan. In fact, the laws there do not allow anyone to seek Taiwan "independence", but instead recognize the island as a part of China. So what's the problem if a pack of snail rice noodles advocates the same?

To quote someone who commented on news of the incident on a website, the "legislator" and the agencies involved have "reunificationphobia". They are so afraid of national reunification that they get jittery at any mention of it.

However, no matter how they react to talk of national reunification, they cannot stop it. It is one nation, and the status of Taiwan is abnormal and must be corrected. That's the consensus among China's more than 1.4 billion people; a few secessionists' objections count for nothing.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Door shut to those who have shut their door

Editor's Note: *At a think tank forum held in Beijing on Monday, Vice-Foreign Minister Xie Feng delivered a keynote speech on promoting opening-up and deepening win-win cooperation for the purpose of building a community with a shared future for humanity. Excerpts:*

Opening-up brings win-win results. That's true for China and the rest of the world. From 2013 to 2021, China's average contribution to world economic growth was 38.6 percent, more than that of the G7 countries combined during that period.

Opening-up is a two-way process. Countries should not ask others to open their door while closing their own. Competition should be fair and reasonable, rather than a zero-sum game.

Yet in order to gain competitive advantages, some countries are unfairly seizing financial and scientific resources, violating market and economic rules and waging tariff wars, trade wars, science and technology wars, chip wars and rulemaking wars in an attempt to suppress and deprive other countries of their right to development.

Science and technology are the common wealth of mankind, not tools for geopolitical games. Politicizing science and technology, weaponizing them ideologically and blocking scientific and technological exchanges and cooperation will only lead to the stagnation of scientific and technological progress, self-isolation and backwardness.

Closing the door to others will also block one's own way. People of insight in the Western strategic, business and academic circles are increasingly aware of this, and their opposition to decoupling and protectionism is gathering momentum.

Recently, China has adjusted its pandemic prevention and control policy and opened its door wider to the outside world. This has not only paved the way for the stabilization and recovery of the Chinese economy, but also injected new impetus into the recovery of the world economy, which has been widely welcomed by the international community.

When the epidemic was severe, China tightened its virus control and some countries clamored for China to open its door. After China adjusted its pandemic protocol to encourage personnel exchanges, it is also this same group of countries that have placed unreasonable restrictions on China. The Chinese people do not understand and have strong opinions about this. What are these countries trying to do? It is natural for us to take reciprocal countermeasures against those countries that engage in political manipulation and take discriminatory measures against China regardless of scientific facts.

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COMMENT

Impact of negative population growth

Editor's Note: *On Tuesday, China announced its first population decline in decades. What kind of far-reaching impact will it have on China's economic and social development? Demographers share their views with China Daily's Liu Jianna and Zhang Xi:*



That China's population decreased by 850,000 in 2022 is not surprising given that China's fertility rate has remained lower than the replacement level since 1992. Replacement level fertility is the level of fertility at which a population exactly replaces itself from one generation to the next. In developed countries, replacement level fertility can be taken as requiring an average of 2.1 children per woman. Partly because of longer period of education in China, people are getting married late and having children even later.

It is believed that the negative growth of China's population is a natural outcome of long-term low fertility rate for decades. But contrary to popular opinion, I believe China is still seeing zero population growth, rather than negative growth. This is also because the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly suppressed childbirth in the past three years. For instance, people planning a baby were advised against getting vaccinated and those who had got infected were advised against planning a baby till six months after their nucleic acid test turned negative.

Besides, the effect of the three-child policy introduced in June 2021 remains to be seen. Furthermore, a pro-fertility policy system was written into the 20th CPC National Congress report, which indicates the government will do more to encourage childbirths in the coming years. More observation is needed before we can conclude that China has indeed entered a stage of negative population growth.

A dipping population will mainly affect the economy, through the size of the labor force and the consumer market. If Chinese couples give birth to just one child, China would still have a 1.2 billion population by 2050, making it a market with a huge potential. Besides, China will still have 600-650 million people in the age group of 16-59 years by the middle of this century, larger than all the labor force in developed countries combined. So, China can still enjoy demographic dividends.

Yuan Xin, director and a professor of the Research Center for Strategic Studies on Aging and Development at Nankai University



That China's population has declined by 850,000 has sounded the alarm for the country's socioeconomic development. Compared with 2010, China's labor force has fallen by more than 10 percent in 2020. China's demographic dividend is likely to shrink or even disappear in the next 5 to 6 years.

Yet it is extremely difficult to reverse the declining trend. The negative population growth is likely to become the new norm, requiring us to make full preparations and change our mindset and development model for a relatively young society. The negative population growth will definitely impose a huge challenge to economic growth, especially to those heavily dependent on demographic dividends.

To promote childbirths, China should build a pro-childbirth system covering not just childbirth policies, but also love marriages, employment, housing, medical care and elderly care. Only by building an all-around pro-humanity system and environment, can we help boost willingness among couples to have babies.

Lu Jiehua, a professor of demography at the Institute of Sociology and Anthropology, Peking University



China's overall population declined by 850,000 people year-on-year to 1.4118 billion in 2022, declining for the first time in the nearly past 61 years, the National Bureau of Statistics said on Tuesday. However, there is no need to be overly pessimistic.

First, the negative population growth can be attributed more to a shrinking fertility rate, rather than a slightly increasing mortality rate, both caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in the past three years. The pandemic, which led to stressful working and living conditions for people, dented many people's willingness to get into a relationship or marry. Since most Chinese people prefer having babies after tying the knot, fewer marriages mean a lower fertility rate. In addition, although China had a relatively low COVID-19 mortality rate, the lingering pandemic affected elderly people with underlying conditions. But it doesn't mean China has a high excess mortality rate.

Second, the negative population growth in 2022 does not mean the situation will last. From a global perspective, a country has to first enter a period of zero-population growth before it moves toward a negative population growth. So China's population declined last year more because of the pandemic, and the fertility and mortality rates will return to normal in the post-pandemic era.

Third, the country may see birth rates peaking in the coming years, which will be significant to the aging society, because the intertwined tensions and problems faced by couples will be solved when social life goes back to normal.

Li Jia, deputy head of the Aging Society Research Center at the Pangoal Institution

The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

Maya Majueran

Africa a natural partner of BRI



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

It has been a 33-year-old tradition of China's foreign ministers making their first overseas trip to Africa at the beginning of every new year. Accordingly, this year, too, China upheld the tradition, with newly appointed Foreign Minister Qin Gang paying an eight-day visit to Africa.

From Jan 9 to 16, Qin visited Ethiopia, Gabon, Angola, Benin and Egypt, including the African Union Headquarters in Addis Ababa and the League of Arab States Headquarters in Cairo.

In the modern era, China's relationship with Africa goes back to the early 1950s. At the first Asian-African Conference, also known as the Bandung Conference, China and Asian and African countries adopted the 10 core principles of the Bandung Conference, which brought the developing countries closer, consolidating their unity and leading to many important developments including the establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement, and later the Group of 77, and the South Commission and South Centre.

The Bandung Conference held in Indonesia in April 1955 and termed "Strengthening South-South Cooperation to Promote World Peace and Prosperity" was attended by 29 developing countries. It is a milestone in the history of developing countries' struggles against colonialism and South-South solidarity. In fact, in their struggles for national liberation, China and African countries supported each other, expanding mutual political trust in the process.

China's investments in Africa also date back to the 1949-1976 period when several African countries were still fighting for independence from European colonial powers.

Although China was relatively underdeveloped at the time, it provided extensive assistance to emerging African countries. A well-known example is the Tanzania-Zambia Railway built between 1970 and 1975, which connects the copper belt in Zambia with the port of Dar es Salaam for which China provided a zero-interest loan of 980 million yuan. And by the mid-1980s, China's generous assistance had reached 44 African countries.

After decades of diplomatic engagements, China has emerged as one of Africa's most important partners in socioeconomic development. China now has diplomatic relations with 53 African countries.

More important, in 2000, China established the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation with 53 African countries as a multilateral platform for collective consultation and dialogue, and a cooperation mechanism among developing countries. Needless to say the founding of the FOCAC is an important event in China's diplomatic history and international politics.

Also, the magnificent new AU Conference and Office Complex, which opened in January 2012 and built by the Chinese government free of charge, is testimony to the real value the Sino-African partnership brings to Africa.

China is also Africa's biggest trading partner and biggest lender, as well as one of the biggest foreign investors in the continent. Given the history of the Maritime Silk Road, Africa is a natural partner of the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative.

African countries have been participating in and praising the Belt and Road Initiative since its inception. In fact, at the 2018 FOCAC Summit in Beijing, China and Africa agreed to strengthen China-Africa cooperation under the Belt and Road framework. The AU Commission, too, signed the Cooperation Plan on Jointly Promoting the BRI between China and the African Union, the first agreement of its kind between China and a regional organization.

To date, almost all African countries with diplomatic ties with China have signed cooperation agreements with Beijing under the initiative's framework, and achieved remarkable results in their pragmatic cooperation — for example, roads, railways, bridges, hospitals, schools, airports and other infrastructure facilities have been built in many African countries over the past decade, boosting trade, creating more jobs, and improving the transportation, education and healthcare sectors.

Some of the Belt and Road projects in Africa include the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway, the Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway in Kenya, No 1 National Highway of the Republic of the Congo, the Thies-Touba highway in Senegal, the Port Gentil-Omboue coastal road and Booué Bridge in Gabon, the Maputo-Katembe bridge in Mozambique, the Cherchell Ring Expressway in Algeria, the first and second phases of the Nigeria Railway Modernization Project, the Doraleh Multi-Purpose Port in Djibouti and Lome Container Terminal in Togo, the New Administrative Capital and electric train system in Egypt, Eastern Industrial Zone in Ethiopia, and the Karuma Hydropower Project and Isimba Hydroelectric Power Station in Uganda.

The African Development Bank estimates that Africa needs between $130 billion and $170 billion per year to improve infrastructure facilities so it can sustain economic development. But the investment in Africa's infrastructure projects falls short by $68-$108 billion per year. Yet without the Belt and Road projects, the investment shortfall could have been much higher.

The 10 years of China-Africa cooperation under the Belt and Road framework has shown that it is important to strengthen that cooperation to boost Africa's infrastructure development, transfer technology to the African countries, create jobs in Africa, and expand trading opportunities.

The author is director of Belt and Road Initiative Sri Lanka, an independent and pioneering Sri Lankan-led think tank.
The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Tian Feilong

HK set to write new chapter of development in 2023

Hong Kong's adherence to "one country, two systems" helped it achieve healthy economic growth last year. In 2023 "one country, two systems" not only helps maintain the prosperity and stability of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, but also ensures the city continues to play its role as a global financial and logistics hub and a bridge connecting the Chinese mainland and the world.

Based on "one country, two systems", the central government's support for Hong Kong is in line with the rule of law and will promote economic growth in the SAR. As a result, the city will better integrate into the motherland's development plan while engaging with the outside world.

First, Hong Kong now has a complete system of democracy and rule of law, and it is making progress in institutionalizing "patriots administer Hong Kong". In the third year of its implementation, the National Security Law has gained the understanding and recognition of Hong Kong residents, a fact that was clearly reflected in media tycoon Jimmy Lai Chee-ying's national security case.

Also, thanks to the interpretation of the National Security Law by the National People's Congress, judges and counsels in Hong Kong, too, have a better understanding of the law and become better at putting it into practice. Upholding the rule of law, human rights and procedural justice, the National Security Law has become an important part of Hong Kong's laws and legal system. Still, the Hong Kong SAR government should rigorously promote the judicial practice of the National Security Law.

The central government has laid a solid foundation and provided policy support for Hong Kong to strengthen the rule of law.

The new electoral system that ensures patriots administer Hong Kong has also made progress. But the social division, political realignment, and voters' perspective are still testing democracy in Hong Kong and the sense of responsibility of all local political parties.

Second, Hong Kong has taken measures to strengthen social justice and improve people's livelihoods. The new SAR government is paying greater attention to the economy, because boosting the economy is necessary to ensure Hong Kong remains an international financial center, while improving people's livelihoods will help plug the loopholes in social justice and resolve the deep-seated socioeconomic problems.

Sufficient improvement in people's livelihoods can not only help achieve fairer wealth distribution in the SAR, but also safeguard the credibility of the SAR government, which will strengthen the rule of law and social stability.

The SAR government also has to effectively solve the housing problem for the poor, take measures to increase employment and create opportunities for youths to launch or expand their own business.

Third, Hong Kong should integrate its development policy with that of the Chinese mainland, because it will promote innovation in the SAR and help it proactively engage in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

Also, according to the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25), the central government will continue to support the "four traditional centers" of Hong Kong — international financial center (including global offshore renminbi business center), international transportation center, international trade center, and center for international legal and dispute resolution services in the Asia-Pacific region. It will also provide more support for Hong Kong to enhance, establish and develop the "four emerging centers" for international aviation, innovation and technology, regional intellectual property trading, and arts and cultural exchanges between China and the rest of the world.

Beijing will continue to support Hong Kong to remain globally important, and engage in and benefit from the national policies such as the Belt and Road Initiative. Under the "one country, two systems" principle, the city will continue to make new and unique contributions to the country's high-level reform and opening-up and high-quality development.

With the easing of COVID-19 restrictions and reopening of border crossings, Hong Kong can make better use of its advantages as a cosmopolitan city and promote dynamism. In fact, by providing legal services for dispute resolution in the Asia-Pacific region, the International Arbitration Centre in Hong Kong will boost the city's international reputation.

Fourth, given the changing world order and increasing global conflicts, Hong Kong has no choice but to better integrate its development plan with that of the motherland to realize sustainable development.

Along with laws at the national and international levels, Hong Kong has to promulgate local laws against foreign interference, so as to improve the "one country, two systems" framework.

The central government has laid a solid foundation and provided policy support for Hong Kong to strengthen the rule of law. And the SAR government and society are working together to forge consensuses on democracy, the rule of law, and the city's development strategy. All this will help Hong Kong gain a distinct edge in development and write a new chapter of "one country, two systems".

The author is an associate professor at the School of Law, Beihang University.
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GLOBAL VIEWS

WANG YIMING

Across the threshold

China needs to spur innovation to drive faster growth and realize higher-quality development

The coming five years will be a crucial period in China's endeavor to become a modern socialist country in all respects, and to achieve breakthroughs in realizing high-quality economic development. The main goal of the coming five years is to elevate its per capita GDP to the level of moderately developed countries.

To this end, China should first cross the threshold for developed nations, which is widely considered to be $20,000 per capita GDP. In 2020, the figure of China was $10,400. Excluding price and exchange rate factors, China will reach the threshold by 2035 if its per capita GDP doubles from the 2020 level.

The demographic factor should also be taken into account. China's population is expected to peak in 2023, and plateau at the level of around 1.4 billion for a period. In this case, the country's per capita GDP could double by 2035 if the annual GDP growth rate reaches 4.73 percent from 2021 to 2035. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the country's annual GDP growth rate from 2020 to 2022 stood at 4.5 percent, and faster growth is required in the coming years to achieve the desired target.

China will still lag behind moderately developed countries by a wide margin even if its per capita GDP reaches $20,000, because the average per capita income in developed nations is around $48,000. Excluding some small-sized economies, the figure is still $35,000 to $40,000.

In addition, the factors of price and exchange rate should be considered. To have a stronger currency through improving the quality of economic development and boost the fundamentals of economy is still an important prerequisite for the country's per capita GDP to reach the level of moderately developed nations.

Since the level of per capita GDP of moderately developed nations is also rising, China can only cross the threshold by striving for faster economic growth, as well as higher-quality development.

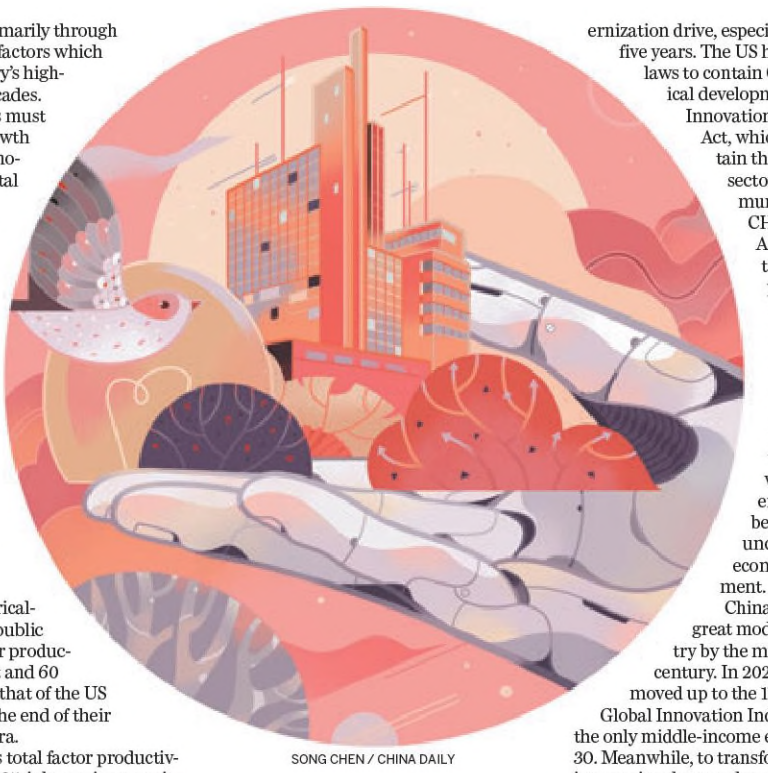
After entering the stage of high-quality development, it is no longer sustainable to maintain growth primarily through input of production factors which sustained the country's high-speed growth for decades. Instead, more efforts must be made to drive growth through spurring innovation, increasing total factor productivity and raising the contribution rate of total factor productivity to economic growth.

Globally, China still lags far behind developed nations in total factor productivity. According to data released by the University of Pennsylvania, China's total factor productivity is around 40 percent that of the United States. Historically, Japan and the Republic of Korea's total factor productivity was 80 percent and 60 percent respectively that of the US when they reached the end of their high-speed growth era.

For China to lift its total factor productivity to that level by 2035, it has to increase its total factor productivity at a much faster pace than the US during the coming years, which entails advancing the reform for the market-oriented allocation of production factors.

China's aging population is increasing rapidly, which not only means a decline in labor supply, but also poses a challenge from the demand side, as it leads to a so-called low-desire society. As China's population is set to peak in 2023, the consumption capacity of residents will enter a new normal, influencing economic growth from the demand side.

Sino-US strategic competition is another key factor that will influence China's modernization drive, especially in the coming five years. The US has rolled out some laws to contain China's technological development, such as the Innovation and Competition Act, which aims to maintain the US' lead in key sectors such as telecommunications, and the CHIPS and Science Act that is designed to hinder China's progress in the semiconductor sector.



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

China should push the development of education, science and technology, and human resources in an integrated manner to build a sci-tech powerhouse.

While China-US decoupling in the tech sector is expected to become a reality, whether or not it will extend to other fields remains to be seen, which adds uncertainty to China's economic development.

China aims to build a great modern socialist country by the middle of the 21st century. In 2022, China has moved up to the 11th place in the Global Innovation Index, and remains the only middle-income economy in the top 30. Meanwhile, to transform the country into a sci-tech powerhouse, China needs to strengthen weak links in sci-tech innovation, boost its original innovation capacity, seek breakthroughs in core technologies in key fields, and foster more top sci-tech talent.

Going forward, China should make breakthroughs on three fronts.

First, due to inadequate investment in basic research, China lacks major original innovations, which is a drag on the development of cutting-edge technologies. To enhance the capacity of original innovation, it is imperative for the country to greatly increase its input in basic research and redouble its efforts to facilitate the application of technologies of long-term importance, so as to make more breakthroughs in basic research and the application of new technologies of strategic significance, and to take the lead in more fields.

Second, China used to push technological progress mainly by introducing and absorbing foreign technologies before re-innovation, which helped the country catch up with the world's advanced levels in a relatively short period. It is in this way that China developed products with strong global competitiveness in some fields, such as the Hualong One technology, a home-made nuclear reactor design, 1,000-MW ultra-super critical thermal power units, 1,000-MW hydraulic turbine sets, high-speed railways, engineering machinery and telecommunications.

However, intermediary goods requiring core technologies such as components, basic materials, and industrial software are still the country's weak links. The market competitiveness of intermediary goods depends not only on the use of cutting-edge technologies, but also on their commercial feasibility. Therefore, China should enhance the market orientation of its innovation, and give better play to the role of market entities as innovators.

Third, although China boasts the world's largest pool of sci-tech workers, it needs to foster more top-notch talent and world-class scientists. The country should comprehensively improve the quality of talent training to foster more top-level sci-tech personnel, so as to deliver more breakthroughs in basic research and original innovation.

At the same time, it needs to lure more talent from the rest of the world by opening its door wider. China should push the development of education, science and technology, and human resources in an integrated manner to build a sci-tech powerhouse.

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

JONATHAN WOETZEL AND JEONGMIN SEONG

Global connections

The ties that bind in an interconnected world are evolving not retreating

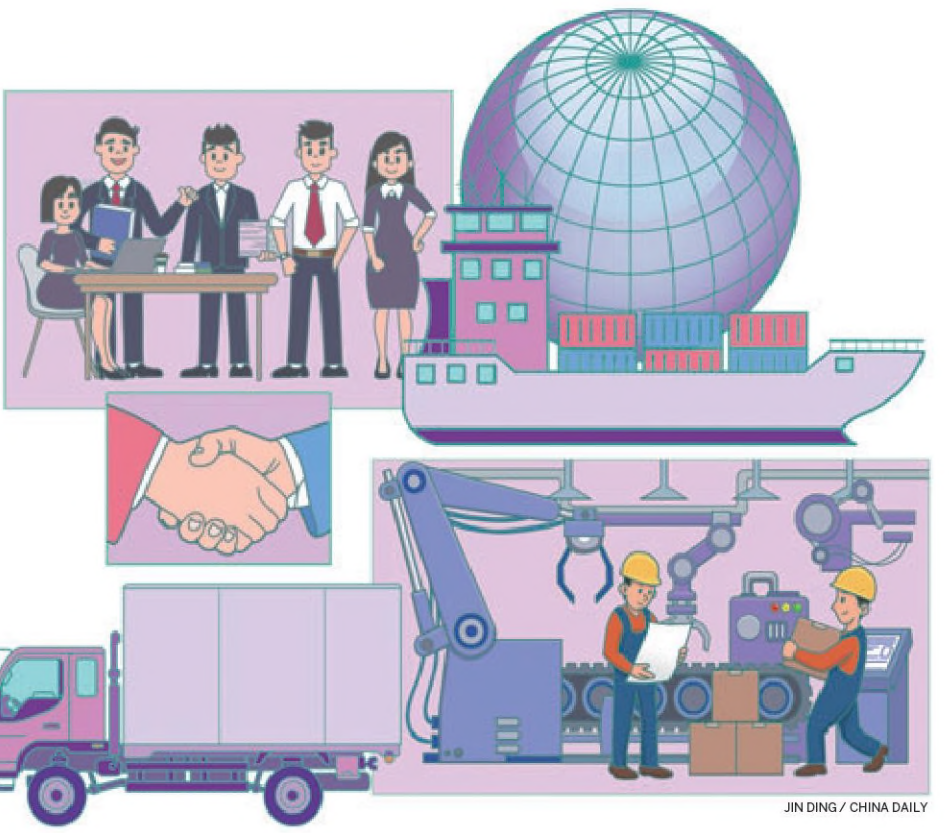
Over the past 40 years, our world has become ever more interconnected. Today, no region is close to self-sufficient and all benefit from our global connections. However, the increasing stress on the global flows of goods and services in the past two years has prompted speculation that the world is deglobalizing. The reality is more nuanced. New McKinsey Global Institute research investigating over 30 value chains and 6,000 products suggests that global integration is evolving rather than retreating.

China has been a key driver of the trajectory of global connections for the past three decades, and is likely to continue to be so. Since joining the World Trade Organization in 2001, China has become more prominent in international trade. When it joined, it accounted for 7 percent of global exports. That share has now doubled and China has been the world's largest exporter in the world since 2009. Since 1995, China has gained more share than any other economy of export value added in 15 out of 18 manufacturing value chains, including electronics, textiles, basic metals and chemicals. For these four, China today accounts for at least 25 percent of the total value added that crosses borders.

While China has increasingly localized many of its value chains over the past decade and started consuming more of what it produces, it continues to be deeply interdependent with the rest of the world. China sources around 10 percent and 25 percent of its key crop and energy needs, respectively, from outside its borders. It is also a net importer of products in high value-added sectors such as transportation equipment and pharmaceuticals.

Even in sectors where China is a net exporter, it often sources from other nations important technologies. For example, while China accounts for virtually all of the world's refining of natural graphite for use in electric vehicle batteries, it relies on technologies from Japan and the Republic of Korea for some of the critical processing steps, including coating application.

Interdependencies flow both ways. Most economies in the world rely on China for many of the goods (ranging from raw materials, important intermediaries or final products) they need. China is, for example, the leading producer of many goods in the electronics, textiles, and contract manufacturing sectors. China accounts for more than half of the global supply of products in these sectors that are only sourced from a few geographies — products which exhibit concentrated trade relationships.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

In many cases, this concentration has been the result of economic considerations, notably the search for scale or specialization. Nonetheless, given the risk of disruption to supply chains, it is likely businesses will seek to balance efficiency and resilience.

And as a result, it is likely that value chains will gradually reconfigure. Our analysis shows that, in the past 25 years, individual countries gained (or lost) no more than 2 percent of export share a year (annualized), and value chains cumulatively shifted by about 10 to 20 percent per decade.

Even when shifts occur, in highly integrated global value chains, moving one piece doesn't mean moving the whole puzzle. Consider the textiles trade and the United States and China. Since 2016, the United States has moved around 4 percentage points of import share from China to other partners in Southeast Asia. However, these partners increasingly rely on inputs and intermediates from China. The result is that, from a value-added perspective, China's share of textiles exports to the United States has actually slightly increased.

Shifts in some value chains may accelerate, particularly those considered to have strategic importance and therefore subject to more active policy influence. One example is the move by several economies, including China's, to develop more domestic production of semiconductors.

Another broad shift that is already underway is that cross-border flows of intangibles rather than physical goods are becoming ever more prominent in our digitizing world. Over the past decade, trade in goods relative to economic growth has stabilized (at a high level) and, between 2010 and 2019, flows of services, international students, and intellectual property grew about twice as fast as goods flows.

In many of these intangibles flows, China still has significant opportunities to increase its level of global participation. While China accounts for about 15 percent of global goods exports, it accounts for less than 5 percent of service exports. China is currently a larger destination than origin for IP flows, accounting for around 5 percent of all inbound flows of IP but less than 1 percent of outbound flows. Similarly, China is a far larger origin of young talent outflows than inflows, accounting for 25 percent of all outbound international students against 5 percent of inbound students.

How are international businesses likely to react to this new phase of globalization and how might this affect China? Although every region in the world is interdependent, disruptions to supply chains in recent years have prompted many multinationals to reconsider their China approach. Broadly, we see "three Ds" as possibilities — these are not mutually exclusive and corporations may pursue several in tandem. The first is to go domestic and insulate to an extent their business in China either by selling part of it to Chinese companies, by spinning off a Chinese business, or by localizing all inputs and sales. The second "D" is diversification to develop alternative flows of critical capabilities and resources to and from China, thereby building resilience. Diversifying companies may offshore some production capacity to other regions and countries. But the third "D" is doubling down on China — some leading companies in the growing electrical vehicle and chemical sectors are expanding their manufacturing footprint in China to develop local competitiveness and capitalize on local innovations even as they maintain their global connections.

Overall, global integration appears to be evolving rather than retreating. The challenge for all economies is to understand the changes that are happening, and look for new opportunities even while shoring up resilience.

Jonathan Woetzel is a senior partner in McKinsey's Shanghai office and the director of McKinsey Global Institute. Jeongmin Seong is the partner of McKinsey Global Institute at McKinsey& Co. The authors 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





Polishing the image of abandoned theme parks

Artist taps into faded memories to provide a dreamlike perspective of dilapidated and forgotten entertainment centers, **Yang Feiyue** reports.



Photographic artist Zhou Chengzhou (below, center) appeals to the audience's sense of nostalgia with his ongoing exhibition *Times Paradise* in Beijing, which features scenes of old amusement parks across the country in varying states of repair. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY







Like the towering plumes of water at the end of a log flume ride, the nostalgia crashes over you like a wave as soon as you step into the *Times Paradise* exhibition, being held at Beijing's 798 Art Zone.

Photographs featuring scenes of amusement parks located across the country, from different time periods and in varying states of repair, will send visitors whizzing down memory lane and back to the carefree days of their childhood.

Roller coasters, Ferris wheels, feats of human skill and wild animal exhibits are the major elements of the photography display.

They are the result of more than three years of painstaking effort by Zhou Chengzhou, a film director and photographic artist, originally from Central China's Hunan province.

"I'd like to consider it a chronicle of Chinese amusement parks," Zhou says.

The man, in his early 40s, has made it his mission to collect images of these cathedrals of adrenaline-fueled fun and childhood innocence in more than 30 domestic cities, from those simple and unassuming children's playgrounds of the 1980s to today's modern theme parks.

He also took the liberty of creating dreamlike scenes and tableaux, reflective of his own subconscious imaginings, through the creative selection of perspectives and camera angles.

"As I was taking photos during the process, the project shuttled between reality and the surreal," Zhou explains.

For instance, in some of the pictures, he asked his subjects to lower their heads and photographed them from behind to make it look as if their heads were missing.

"I wanted to show fear and minimize the recognition of identity," Zhou says, adding that he wants viewers to immerse themselves in the scenes and forget about the facial characteristics of their subjects.

"Just like you might when you are dreaming," he says, noting that, in dreams, many find it difficult to focus on and see facial details.

Also, Zhou hopes those dreamlike elements will enable the viewer to better form a personal connection with the work.

The pictures featuring the surreal and subconscious elements recently propelled Zhou to success in LensCulture's Summer Open Awards, where he was named as one of the prizewinners in October. LensCulture is a Netherlands-based photography website that seeks out contemporary photography talent from around the world.

The series of works will also be presented at Photo London, one of the biggest image art expos in the United Kingdom.

Zhou started working on *Times Paradise* in 2018, when he stumbled into a deserted amusement park in Beijing.

"Seeing the rides and attractions sparked my childhood memories of visiting such amusement parks," he says.

"It pained me to see them lying dormant, because they were once the epitome of life, providing thrills and fun amid lights and noise," he adds.

He decided to carefully document the amusement park, which, after exploring the reasons behind the decline of the old fun parks, kicked off his long-term *Times Paradise* project.

"One of the main reasons was that they mostly lacked long-term planning and failed to keep up with the times," he says.

"Nonetheless, they are of sentimental value to me and were an important step in the development of the amusement parks we have today."

Moreover, Zhou wants his audience to pay more attention to those amusement parks that are struggling in a fiercely competitive market, so that they might enjoy a new lease of life.

Zhou made a point of finding deserted fun parks through the recommendations of friends, online platforms, such as Xiaohongshu, or by scouring satellite maps.

When he was in the parks, he met people who had also gone to them in search of childhood memories.

"I saw their hesitation and hope as they wandered around in search of things to rekindle lost memories at those parks, so I included them in my works, as characters from the past," Zhou says.

He also tried to restore some historical elements, either by finding ways to re-create scenes or activities that were representative of the times when the parks were operational, or by sourcing old pieces of equipment, props or decorative elements, long forgotten, and returning them to the amusement parks.

"Time has faded the colors, but they are still vivid, just full of loneliness," he says.

Zhou became interested in photography when he was 7 years old.

"My father had a film camera, and he taught me how to operate it, how to focus and take clearer pictures," he recalls.

At that time, the idea of being a photographer as a career had not yet taken shape, and it was purely for fun, he says.

"But I remember I was deeply attracted to the colors and acutely aware of their changes during the photography process," he says.

Graduating from Peking University's Department of Chinese Language and Literature in 2005, Zhou's desire for a creative outlet saw him spend several years designing shoes.

It was during this time that his passion for photography was reignited, after taking more than 200,000 photos of the shoes he designed to promote them online.

"I learned how to present them in the best light, and my photography skills improved in the process," he recalls.

In 2015, Zhou shifted more of his attention away from his shoe business and more toward his photography.

He further honed his skills any way he could, looking for experiences that would help him improve, including a stint on the set of a TV show, and getting the opportunity to shoot Paris Fashion Week in 2016.

"A friend of mine thought I was up for it, and she worked for a brand that was exhibiting there, and invited me," Zhou says.

From then on, he was officially a photographer, and embarked on a career behind the lens.

He went to shoot photos of giant engineering projects for the China Railway Construction Corp in Yunnan province, as well as high-speed rail infrastructure in Guizhou province using drones.

There were new challenges to overcome. "For example, there was electromagnetic radiation around the rail, so I had to be careful to avoid magnetic interference while taking pictures of the high-speed trains," he says.

"The process was difficult, but very exciting."

As his experience grew, he started trying to break away from the frame of traditional photography concepts and explore his own style.

He has mainly engaged in artistic creation and research in the field of spiritual consciousness. His works combine the views and themes of industry, urbanization and marginalization. At the same time, he also focuses on the alienation between people and a broader, homogenized culture.

In 2017, he created the *Shape and Color Hatching Square* photography series that highlights house color and linear shapes.

"Each house has its own unique color, which represents its unique emotions. If you stand in front of them, they each seem to give you a certain attitude and feeling toward life," Zhou says about his inspiration for the series.

"There seems to be some stories hidden in every window of a house. It fills you with imagination, of what kind of life its owners have."

Jef Van den Houte, a Belgian photographic artist, says Zhou's work conveys strong personal ideas and emotions.

"By putting his images together as a whole, they tell a bigger story than each individual image does on its own," he says.

To Zhou's relief, some of the deserted amusement parks that have come under his lens have since been repurposed for the public's benefit.

Although some have not resumed their amusement function, the encroachment of nature has found a way of ensuring a new type of visitor — animals.

"How does their relationship with the amusement parks work? And how will the relationship between people and these parks evolve? I would like to try and answer these questions next," Zhou says.

Contact the writer at yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn

Technology makes festival travel safer and convenient

JINAN — For rail travelers awaiting departure, it is common to have a meal in a restaurant at the station.

The intelligent restaurant at Jinan Railway Station in Shandong province brings a brand-new twist on this experience for travelers.

Unlike traditional restaurants, the Gaotiexia intelligent restaurant has no human servers or chefs but is operated entirely by robotic equipment.

"We have six automatic cooking devices. Each dish takes only five minutes from being ordered to being delivered at the table," says Ren Guotao, who is in charge of the restaurant.

The devices are able to cook 18 different dishes for customers, including stir-fried shrimp with cashew nuts, braised chicken with mushroom, and the traditional Sichuan dish, spicy Mapo Tofu.

The restaurant is also equipped with a smart machine serving coffee, soy milk and ice cream. Everything is ready minutes after customers scan the code and pay.

"For travelers in a rush, the cooking machine can also make a bowl of delicious beef noodles in 48 seconds," says Ren, adding that the restaurant offers a smart, faster and more sanitary choice for diners.

The Spring Festival travel rush, also known as *chunyun*, began on Jan 7 and will last until Feb 15, during which many people will travel to reunite with their families for the Chinese Lunar New Year, which falls on Sunday this year.

According to an official news conference, the number of passenger trips during this year's Spring Festival travel rush is expected to surge 99.5 percent from the same period last year to reach nearly 2.1 billion.

To ensure that travelers have a pleasant and safe journey, many technologies have been put into use in railway stations, airports, and expressway service areas across the country.

Shandong province's Jinan Yaoqiang International Airport has launched an information platform for luggage, which allows passengers to check their luggage status after checking in.

For security purposes, passengers are sometimes asked to open their luggage to be inspected. "We used to listen for the broadcast or keep watching the screen all the time, so that we would know if our luggage needed to be inspected again," says Sun Lin, a passenger. "Now we can just check the luggage information via the phone. That's very considerate, and we won't miss the deadline for boarding."

Drivers passing the Taian-Zaozhuang Section of the Beijing-Taipei Expressway may have noticed many boxes hanging on high poles en route.

"These boxes can transmit traffic information to cars and instruct drivers in real time," says Li Tao, deputy manager of the traffic engineering department of Shandong high-speed construction management group.

Li says that more than 180 high-definition video surveillance cameras and about 300 sets of radars have also been installed along the section to collect traffic information. Thanks to the technologies, accidents along the section have been reduced significantly.

"This year's Spring Festival travel rush will see an obvious increase in travelers compared to the previous two years," says Ma Minshu, an associate professor at Beijing Jiaotong University. "Therefore, transport authorities in China have been improving their services and promoting technologies, such as online ticket purchasing, electronic tickets, and facial check-in, to guarantee people's safety and make trips easier during this period."

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LIFE

New voices take the stage

A Spring Festival web gala attracts young viewers with a variety of talent, **Deng Zhangyu** reports.









Top from clockwise: Highlights of the 2023 Spring Festival Web Gala: a dance applying augmented reality to present calligraphy pieces by ancient masters; two chic performers show they are young at heart; a performance featuring various vloggers; *practitioners of martial arts; Grow in Light* involves three virtual icons; and *Let's Dance Tonight and Leave Troubles to Tomorrow* is delivered.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY





Who do young people care about, what are their favorite things and how do they embrace a new year?

The 2023 Spring Festival Web Gala broadcast online and on China Central Television on Saturday, tried to answer such questions through various performances intended to resonate with young people, the annual event's target audience. By Sunday, the web gala had received more than 900 million views. This year, the number of viewers aged 15 to 24 increased compared to last year, according to the show's producers.

"Young people are main residents of the internet. They express themselves online and live in cyberspace. We wanted to present a web gala that showed real life in a vivid and vigorous way," says Tang Xiaoyan, chief producer of the web gala produced by CCTV.

Many grassroots people were invited to perform onstage. Popular video bloggers of food, travel, fashion, fitness and lifestyle also performed at the show's opening. A young electrician who loves to dance, a village teacher who speaks English with an interesting accent and a couple of farmers who are fond of dancing while doing farmwork were invited to perform along with popular singers in the show's section, *Walk Gracefully Once*.

According to Tang, the number of ordinary people invited to perform on the show is the largest this year since the annual gala made its debut in 2011.

"These ordinary young people and vloggers are representatives of cyberspace. Viewers can get a glimpse of young people's life," Tang adds.

Elements popular among the country's youth such as "China chic" (or *guochao*, featuring fancy designs mixed with elements from traditional culture), street dance, hip-hop music and technology were weaved into different segments of the program. For example, traditional art forms such as Peking Opera mixed with pop songs and technology of augmented reality were used to present dancers mimicking the work process of master calligrapher Wang Xizhi and his son, Wang Xianzhi, from the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420).

"Young people's focus changes every year. We try our best to present them through the galas. Sometimes, we also notice their special feelings," says Yu Miao, 33, co-producer of the gala.

He adds that a singing section of the program used the words, "let's dance tonight and leave troubles to tomorrow" to encourage the youth to relax a bit.

Yu's team was also made up of young people. They spent half a year on preparations for the year-end show. To better understand young people, they often went to campuses to talk with college students, carried out surveys and brainstormed with young people.

The theme of the gala has been "happy and new beginning" since the past three years. And, this year, with the end of the optimized COVID-19 control policies, the theme seemed to match many people's moods.

"We are all eager for a new beginning, see changes and expect a good life after the pandemic. The coming year is full of hope," says Yu.

Being young is not only about age, but also mindset. The gala aims to attract as many audience members as possible to promote such an attitude.

Last year, a choir of gray-haired singers, with an average age of 75, made up of the alumni of Tsinghua University went viral after they performed a song *Adolescent* at the web gala. Viewers marveled at their passion for life.

This year's gala saw two men, 70-year-old fashion icon and actor Zhang Shuangli and 80-year-old musician Peter Chan, singing a popular song accompanied by guitar. Wearing jeans, they dressed up in a young and chic way. They also shared their stories and secrets on how to keep a young mindset.

"We can see the two grandfathers' understanding of youth. That's what we want to be in the future," says Yan Yusi, general director of the program. Many of Yan's friends told her after seeing the show that they hoped they could be "as handsome and fashionable" as the two elderly performers.

Another segment of the program that received good feedback was the performance of a rock band, comprising 11 primary students from a village in a mountainous area in Guizhou province. It was the first time that the children were playing on a show that can attract millions of viewers. Many of the children came from poor families that make a living from farming. Accompanied by drum and bass, the rock band performed the song *Live in the Sky* to demonstrate a spirit of "never giving up".

Their teacher Gu Ya says the children didn't have access to musical instruments before going to school. They keep training their skills after finishing homework and farm work. Gu says some of these children would not become musicians in the future and may live an ordinary life considering their economic condition. But the web gala gave them "an unforgettable memory for life", adds Gu.

Yan, the director, says these children often asked her after rehearsal whether they had the chance to see the sea. She told them that there would be good things waiting for them in the future.

"I want our audience to see that no matter how hard life is, there's still hope and better things are waiting for us."

The gala also employed a lot of high technology. One such highlight was a song performed along with pop singers by three virtual avatars: Ling, considered "China's first virtual idol with *guofeng* (a kind of Chinese style using elements from traditional culture)"; Angie, a virtual influencer, who has won followers with its beauty and easygoing personality; and Xiao C, CCTV's virtual employee.

This year, the use of such virtual people is popular among TV stations and online video platforms to draw the youth, a group that is regarded as the future residents of metaverse, where the physical world combines with the virtual.

The program, involving three virtual beings, posed great difficulties for Yan's team. However, in Yan's eye, they have to quickly be familiar with it because it's a future trend.

"We are always willing to embrace new technology and new things favored by the young," says she.

The web gala can be considered an online version of the Lunar New Year galas that Chinese families watch on TV at reunion dinners. Since the web gala's debut in 2011, it has been held on *xiaonian*, or "Little New Year" falling on the 23rd day of the 12th lunar month, one week before Lunar New Year. Different from the Spring Festival galas that aim to target audiences of all ages, the web gala is designed to win mostly young audiences.

Tang, the chief producer, says the whole team wanted to present a show that's different both from commercial and traditional galas.

"Always being creative and offering new things is what we pursue," she says.

Contact the writer at dengzhangyu@chinadaily.com.cn

Overseas Chinese attend holiday celebration in Iran

TEHRAN — Chinese people in Iran gathered on Tuesday at the Chinese embassy in Tehran, decorated with such festive elements as red lanterns, to welcome the upcoming Spring Festival, the biggest annual celebration for most Chinese.

Nearly 100 overseas Chinese in Iran, including students studying in Iranian universities, teachers from the Confucius Institute, and representatives from Chinese enterprises and media institutions, attended the celebration that featured songs and dances, poetry recitations, and a Taijiquan (shadow boxing) demonstration.

He Qiaoling, an overseas Chinese in Iran, says her most prominent feeling was happiness, and being together with compatriots made her "emotional".

"This event conveyed the warmth from my motherland," said Wang Danyu, a teacher at the Confucius Institute at Tehran University, adding that it was like "celebrating Spring Festival at home".

Wang Xinhua, also a Confucius Institute teacher, gave a performance of Taijiquan, a Chinese martial art, and received a warm welcome from the audience.

"It is a great honor to be able to showcase traditional culture," Wang Xinhua says, adding that though in a foreign country, the singing and dancing created a "strong hometown and festival atmosphere".

> "This event conveyed the warmth from my motherland."
>
> **Wang Danyu,** a teacher at Tehran University

China's Ambassador to Iran Chang Hua said in his speech that he hopes the Chinese compatriots in Iran will continue to love China, support the development of their motherland, and make more contributions to deepening China-Iran practical cooperation and expanding people-to-people exchanges.

During the get-together, the ambassador and his wife also distributed Spring Festival kits to the representatives of overseas Chinese groups, and presented children with panda dolls, pop-up books and other gifts. They also introduced celebration traditions to the children and led them to experience one such activity by pasting Spring Festival couplets beside the door. The children, who were born or have lived in Iran for a long time, were overjoyed. Many hugged the gifts they received with smiles on their faces, and even asked to sleep with panda dolls after returning home. Though having lived in another country, they keep learning about Chinese culture, as many volunteered to recite Chinese poems on the stage.

After the get-together, Bai Teng, a Chinese student, said that "the task of students is to learn useful knowledge and skills", expressing his determination to "contribute to China-Iran friendship and the development of our motherland".

Li Xuanxuan, another student, wished his motherland prosperity.

Meanwhile, Li Mei, the Chinese director of the Confucius Institute at Tehran University, says, "I received love from the motherland through the event, and wish the motherland prosperity and a better tomorrow."

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LIFE



Developing a pattern of prosperity

Businesswoman returns to her rural roots to help villagers boost their income by leveraging the local culture, **Xing Wen** reports.





From top: Shi Jia (left), a businesswoman, chats with a local veteran embroiderer in Huayuan county, Hunan province; middle-aged and elderly women are trained with embroidering skills and employed by Shi's company; Shi (first left in the back row) poses with entertainment stars visiting Hunan province to film a reality show that focuses on rural vitalization.
PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Five years ago, it was a faint sense of nostalgia that led young businesswoman Shi Jia to pay a visit to her hometown in Huayuan county, Xiangxi Tujia and Miao autonomous prefecture, in Central China's Hunan province.

It was a strong sense of responsibility that made her stay and commit to boosting the income of her fellow villagers, especially local women from the Miao ethnic group.

She runs a company in Huayuan county, a predominantly Miao area, to carry on the group's traditional craft of embroidery. More than 1,200 mainly middle-aged local women have been trained by the company and furnished with the pertinent handicraft skills for free. Nearly 500 of them later got a job with the company.

Born into a business family, Shi was gifted with a sharp entrepreneurial brain.

Supported by her parents, back in the university years, she started to run businesses in sectors as diverse as hydropower and architecture.

"At that time, my motivation was to make a profit and then fritter away the money. I didn't have a grander plan," she recalls.

In 2017, her family which was based in Chengdu, Sichuan province, decided to go back to their hometown, Shilan township in Huayuan county, to visit their relatives.

Ma Zhengbin, then-director of the culture station in Shilan, turned to her, hoping that she could help boost the township's Miao embroidery production.

"Initially, I felt reluctant, because I was a layman who didn't really know much about the craft or the industry," Shi says.

However, her mother persuaded her to give it a try.

She decided to launch a Miao embroidery company where local women could learn the handicraft for free.

At its inauguration, more than 400 fellow villagers came to sign up as embroidery trainees.

Faced with the unexpected crowd, Shi was surprised.

"I didn't realize that so many villagers were desperate for a job," she says.

Shi's idea soon took on a more charitable orientation. Each trainee would get a subsidy of 5,400 yuan ($802) by attending the three-month training course.

Shi Yulan, a villager in Shilan, is among the beneficiaries.

Once a migrant worker, Shi Yulan returned home and joined Shi Jia's company to make embroidery works, through which she was able to juggle her job and family commitments.

"After work, I can take good care of the family and spend time with my children, giving them a happy childhood," says the mother.

"I feel satisfied," she says.

To delve into the Miao embroidery culture, Shi Jia and her team have visited museums and browsed ancient books to collect traditional patterns. Adaptations have been made to some of the traditional designs to add an innovative shine to cultural and creative products such as clothing, ornaments, suitcases and fans.

Shi Jia has also brought the local art form to international runways, promoting the traditional ethnic cultural products at overseas fashion events and in foreign markets. However, the production capacity of the traditional handicraft is relatively limited and fails to ensure a stable, consistent income growth for locals.

Therefore, Shi Jia plans to promote local employment and the rural economy through the integrated development of primary, secondary and tertiary industries.

She has invested in the development of rice cultivation, tea plantation and lobster farming in Huayuan.

An ongoing healthcare tourism project is another highlight in Shi Jia's business plan for the following five years.

She has mobilized her friends from Zhejiang province's Wenzhou city, which is hailed as the "shoe capital" of China, to launch a shoe factory in Huayuan county. The factory has employed around 200 local women and puts its annual output at more than 20 million yuan.

"The working hours for employees in the factory are flexible, enabling local farmers who are hired by the factory to work in their spare time," Shi Jia says.

This year, the county's tea plantation and production base have received overseas presale orders with a total value of $1 million. The buyers are mainly from Southeast Asian countries, according to Shi Jia.

"We can also promote Miao embroidery abroad by using artistic elements in the designs of the tea's packaging," she adds.

Getting along with her fellow villagers, Shi Jia has gradually learned more about their lives, and the struggles they endure, and is determined to help.

"I think I've found my life's mission here," she says.

Contact the writer at xingwen@chinadaily.com.cn

Zambian locals find optimism at Shaolin Temple

LUSAKA — The first-ever Shaolin Temple in Zambia, located in Lusaka, Zambia's capital, is known for its Chinese cultural activities, which include martial arts programs.

The place is a hive of activity, particularly on weekends and holidays, as people from different walks of life come to get a taste of Chinese culture.

For residents of Ngwerere compound, an informal settlement on the outskirts of Lusaka, the Shaolin Temple is a symbol of hope for young and underprivileged people.

The Ngwerere compound, just a stone's throw from the Shaolin Temple grounds, is a low-income community that grapples with challenges, including the lack of access to education and recreational facilities for young people.

"We are very happy to have the Shaolin Temple close by. Many young people will benefit from the education and skills programs being offered at the temple," says Andrew Miti, chairman of the Ngwerere compound.

> "We are very happy to have the Shaolin Temple close by. Many young people will benefit from the education and skills programs."
>
> **Andrew Miti,** chairman of the Ngwerere compound

Miti mentions that a good number of parents in the Ngwerere compound are unable to provide food for their families or meet their children's needs because they lack resources.

He lauds Shaolin Temple management for providing education, food and shelter to indigent children, stating that the discipline and sound values embedded in the temple's programs will help improve the lives of young people from the Ngwerere compound and other poorer areas.

Shaolin Temple programs coordinator Yan Ming says his team was overwhelmed with requests from parents seeking to enroll their children in programs offered at the temple.

Yan reveals that there are currently 27 boys aged 6 to 16 from very vulnerable backgrounds receiving education support, food and shelter at the temple. The children, he says, come from different parts of Lusaka.

"We are trying to see how best we can help the vulnerable children currently in our care before taking in more," he explains.

Interactions with residents of the Ngwerere compound reveal that they are excited to have a place nearby where youngsters can be guided to become both responsible and productive citizens.

"The only recreational spaces available in this compound are bars and liquor stores. As a result, most young people have been compelled to engage in illicit activities," laments Eunice Musonda.

Musonda, at 18, hailing from Ngwerere, remains optimistic that the Shaolin Temple's youth-friendly programs will not only ensure that local youngsters have a better future, but will also help curtail juvenile delinquency in the Ngwerere compound.

Clever Malambo, 27, echoes Musonda's thoughts and says that the Shaolin Temple in Zambia is serving as a beacon of hope for many young people in the Ngwerere compound and beyond.

"I am certain that the programs offered at this temple will inspire many youths to dream big and to achieve a lot in life," Malambo says.

XINHUA

Ice-and-snow tourism makes Xinjiang a hot destination

URUMQI — As the snow-capped Nanshan Mountain in Shuixigou township glows in the morning sunlight, ski instructor Wang Gecheng picks up his equipment and sets off for work on the slopes.

This is no ordinary mountain for Wang; it is a "gold mountain".

For four consecutive snow seasons, Wang came from his hometown to the ski resort of Silkroad Resort in Urumqi, capital of Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, to "strike gold" in the form of tuition fees.

"Sometimes there are up to four tourists learning to ski from me every day. I can earn hundreds of yuan a day," he says.

The ski resort is the first resort in Xinjiang with the high "5S" grading, and has several popular pistes, attracting many ski lovers across the country each year. Looking up from the foot of the Nanshan Mountain, one sees the pistes neatly arranged on the huge slope and skiers gliding fluently down, leaving their mark in the form of beautiful curves.

As soon as the 2022-23 snow season started, Li Jinyang from Central China's Hunan province flew to Xinjiang. "I just planned to stay for a few days, but the snow here was so good that I decided to ski for another half a month," Li says. "I will also go to a snow resort in Altay in northern Xinjiang."

Located in the golden latitudes of ice and snow, Xinjiang is rich in ice-and-snow resources. In this respect, it is comparable to the European Alps and the Rocky Mountains of North America.

There are more than 18,600 large and small glaciers covering over 24,000 square kilometers, accounting for 42 percent of the glacier area in China. The region has become a preferred destination for ice-and-snow sports, due to a large amount of thick powder snow, a good climate, low wind speeds, bright sunshine and high mountains with moderate slopes.

"Since the snow season started this year, I have seen an influx of tourists from across the country. I receive a lot of consulting calls for car rentals each day," says Li Bo, who is in charge of a recreational vehicle rental company in Xinjiang. "My company has more than 50 RVs but still fails to meet the demand when the tourism peak arrives."



People ski at the Silkroad Resort in Urumqi, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, on Jan 7. The resort has seen an increasing number of visitors on its ski pistes this winter. CAI ZENGLE / FOR CHINA DAILY

To better develop ice-and-snow tourism, local authorities have introduced a series of measures in recent years, including improving the quality of ski pistes and upgrading the service facilities.

So far, multiple ice-and-snow tourism products have been launched, integrating ice-and-snow sports, ice-and-snow sightseeing, folk custom experiences and hot-spring spas.

Xinjiang has also proposed building an ice-and-snow tourism economic development core area relying on Urumqi and Altay. On Dec 28, the first ice-and-snow tourism train set off from Urumqi to Fuyun, with a stop in Altay.

"It's becoming more convenient and faster for tourists from outside Xinjiang to travel to Altay to ski. They can choose to transit via the cities of Urumqi, Xi'an and Lanzhou, or fly directly from Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen," says Dai Xingxing, deputy general manager of Xinjiang Altay Tourism Group.

The boom in ice-and-snow tourism is bringing more business opportunities to local equipment manufacturers.

Dozens of machines in the factory of Xinjiang Huatong Taike Play Equipment Co are running at full capacity to produce a range of skiing equipment.

"We sell skiing equipment, such as ski ropeways, not only to scenic spots and snow resorts in Xinjiang, but to other regions in China," says Wang Wen, head of the company. "We benefit a lot from the thriving ice-and-snow tourism industry."

XINHUA

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