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CHINA DAILY

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Xi Jinping unanimously elected president

Xi Jinping was unanimously elected president of the People's Republic of China and chairman of the Central Military Commission of the PRC on Friday morning at the first session of the 14th National People's Congress.



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After being elected, Xi made a public pledge of allegiance to the Constitution at the Great Hall of the People, with all people standing to witness the historic moment.

"(I pledge to) be loyal to the country and the people, be committed and honest in my duty, accept the people's supervision and work for a great modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious and beautiful," he said.

The ceremony was broadcast live via state television and the internet.

The country's top legislature also elected Han Zheng as vice-president of the PRC.

At the ongoing session, Zhao Leji was elected chairman of the 14th National People's Congress Standing Committee.

A total of 14 people were elected vice-chairpersons of the Standing Committee of the 14th National People's Congress.

They are Li Hongzhong, Wang Dongming, Xiao Jie, Zheng Jianbang, Ding Zhongli, Hao Mingjin, Cai Dafeng, He Wei, Wu Weihua, Tie Ning, Peng Qinghua, Zhang Qingwei, Losang Jamcan, and Shohrat Zakir.

Liu Qi was elected secretary-general of the NPC Standing Committee.

All of them also took an oath of allegiance to the country's fundamental law.

An opinion piece in the People's Daily said Xi's election as Chinese president fully reflects the common aspirations of the whole of the Communist Party of China, the entire armed forces and the people of all ethnic groups of the country; fully reflects the strong unity of the wills of the Party, the people and the State; and will greatly inspire and encourage all the Chinese people to be in stronger unity centering around the CPC Central Committee with Xi at the core to strive to forge ahead for realizing the goals and tasks laid out at the 20th CPC National Congress.

Hassane Rabehi, Algeria's ambassador to China, who witnessed the elections, said he could see how democracy has been practiced in the process of the elections and how the different groups of the Chinese people have been represented.

"We have full confidence in the future of China," he added.

Ambassador Edwin Afande of Kenya said the rule of law is important. And the rules that are set by the people, as "we have seen here in China, and it has been manifest through the congress, which has elected President Xi Jinping, who will now continue with his mandate for greater possibility for the people of China, and also for the people of Africa".

Liu Qing, a deputy to the National People's Congress and president of the Jiangsu Industrial Technology Research Institute, said "with President Xi steering the country, we are full of confidence for realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation".

CHINA DAILY—XINHUA



Xi Jinping is unanimously elected president of the People's Republic of China and the chairman of the Central Military Commission during the third plenary meeting of the first session of the 14th National People's Congress in Beijing on Friday. LI XUENEN / XINHUA

Nation's aid spurs global development

By ZHANG YUNBI zhangyunbi@chinadaily.com.cn

From COVID-19 vaccines and railways to hybrid rice technology, China's aid to the rest of the world and its evolving approach of development cooperation to spur local growth have won more friendship and support from a vast number of developing countries.

"Presidents or prime ministers of over 30 countries have gone to local airports to welcome COVID-19 vaccines provided by China and took the lead in getting vaccinated, calling the vaccines a 'timely rain,'" said Luo Zhaohui, chairman of the China International Development Cooperation Agency and a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

In an exclusive interview with China Daily, Luo elaborated on the evolving areas covered by China's international development cooperation, including COVID-19 response, humanitarian assistance and the sharing of experience in governance.

For example, following the opening of the China-Laos Railway in late 2021, an elementary school student wrote to President Xi Jinping to thank China for helping him see a train for the first time in his life.

Furthermore, as part of China's assistance, Madagascar has mastered the technology of planting hybrid rice, and rice plants are now featured on the country's bank notes.

"China's aid bears defining features, such as having no intervention in other nations' domestic affairs and attaching no political strings, which help win plenty of friendship and support from a wide spectrum of developing countries," Luo said.

A number of highways, railways, ports and telecommunication facilities that were built with China's aid have also increased those countries' trade with China as well as the global reach of Chinese enterprises, brands, products and technologies, he added.

"This is exactly mutually beneficial cooperation and common development," Luo said.

In February, Nepali Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal attended a ceremony inaugurating one of the 10 schools that China helped build in a northern mountainous region of Nepal.

He expressed his gratitude "to the Chinese government and people for their help" and commended China for its contribution in supporting his country's reconstruction following a major earthquake years ago.

In the same month, the Chinese government provided food assistance in Togo through the United Nations World Food Programme to support vulnerable populations in the West African country's northern region.

See Aid, page 3

Experts: Reform will boost sci-tech self-reliance

By ZHANG ZHIHAO zhangzhihao@chinadaily.com.cn

China's revamp of its Ministry of Science and Technology would allow the country's sci-tech administrations to be more efficient in supporting basic sciences and using innovation to promote socioeconomic growth, and achieve quality self-reliance in science and technology at a faster rate, experts said.

According to a proposed government restructuring plan released Tuesday by the State Council, China's Cabinet, the science ministry will undergo a massive revamp that would delegate many of its existing functions to other government bodies. The country will also establish a central commission on science and technology, whose responsibilities would be borne by the restructured science ministry.

Organizing and formulating plans

for promoting scientific and technological development in agriculture and rural areas will be transferred from the science ministry to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs. The agricultural ministry will also operate the China Rural Technology Development Center.

The science ministry's responsibilities for crafting plans and policies to promote social progress using science and technology will be allocated to other ministry-level bodies, such as the National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Ecology and Environment and the National Health Commission.

The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology will take on the role of formulating policies for the growth and industrialization of high-tech industries. It will also guide the construction of science and technology parks, such as the national high-tech industrial development zones, and

also guide the development of technology service industries and technology markets.

The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security will adopt the duty of managing foreign experts. The science ministry's China National Center for Biotechnology Development will operate under the National Health Commission, while the Administrative Center for China's Agenda 21 and the High-tech Research and Development Center will be under the National Natural Science Foundation of China.

After the restructuring, the Ministry of Science and Technology will retain many critical duties such as administering the nation's basic research, State laboratories, and major scientific projects; building systems for technology transfer, commercialization of scientific findings, supervision and evaluation of science and technology; promoting academic integrity, international cooperation, and the quality of

China's science workforce.

"This kind of restructuring makes sense, and it is in line with China's greater emphasis on basic research in recent years," said Sui Jigang, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Institutes of Science and Development, adding that the revamp would optimize the management of scientific and technological undertakings across the board.

Xue Lan, dean of Tsinghua University's Schwarzman College, said that after the restructuring, the new Ministry of Science and Technology will be more streamlined and can play a more prominent and effective role in macro-managing the country's science and technology sector.

"The future priority of the Ministry of Science and Technology should be pooling resources nationwide and focus on tackling key bottleneck issues in technology," he said.

Cui Jia contributed to this story.

At two sessions, a whole-process democracy displayed

WORLD WATCH By Mehmood Ul Hassan Khan

China's two sessions — the annual meetings of the nation's top legislative and political

advisory bodies — have become an icon of a modern model of good governance that contributes to human progress.

Over about nine days, more than 5,000 deputies to the 14th National People's Congress and members of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Committee will have thoroughly reviewed last year's government performances and discussed all major policies of the world's second-largest economy. They also will have discussed strategic priorities of national politics, allocation of social development funds and structural reforms, among other things, and approved plans and projects for the next fiscal year.

As a huge political event that is open, transparent, inclusive, holistic and comprehensive, with major live broadcasts and news briefings, the sessions provide essential input from leaders and policymakers to steer the country on its unique path of modernization for 1.4 billion people, one of the most immense human projects in recent history.

China has been a pioneer of good governance and superior human values. It is interesting to remember that the nation has long pursued socioeconomic development, human respect and nature-friendly policies to maintain qualitative life.

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INSIDE Policy helps private sector in accelerating recovery Comment, page 12

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TWO SESSIONS

Movie industry roars back with robust recovery

Record revenues in the wake of the Spring Festival holiday signal a turnaround for the sector. **Xu Fan** reports.

Matt William Knowles, an actor from the United States who has played in many Chinese movies and TV series, is increasingly busy, thanks to China's revitalized film industry.

Opening with a record-breaking Spring Festival box-office bonanza in January, the domestic movie market is seeing a strong recovery after a slowdown that resulted from the COVID-19 outbreak.

As of March 1, the country's total box-office receipts had reached 14 billion yuan (\$2 billion), almost half last year's 29.9 billion yuan, according to Beacon, a film information aggregator.

The month following the Spring Festival holiday is traditionally considered a slow time because of the lack of major movie releases. However, the period from Jan 28 to Feb 26 grossed 5.96 billion yuan, the highest for the month since the pandemic started, Beacon said.

That means Knowles is receiving more job offers. Currently juggling two projects, the veteran actor has been traveling between Shanghai and Baishan, a small city in the northeastern province of Jilin, spending a few days at each location while shooting the two different tales.

One is director Yao Xiaofeng's spy series *Chang Feng Po Lang* (Braving the Wind and Waves), in which Knowles portrays a German military consultant. The other is *Winter and Lion*, a drama set during the War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea (1950-53), in which he plays an American officer.

"The acting opportunities are definitely increasing since the market has awoken," he said, adding that he received many calls about new roles a few months ago while he was filming for director Xu Zhanxiong's *Xing Chen Da Hai* (The Ocean of Stars), a movie about a group of patriotic students at Shanghai University.

"China's film industry is back in full force. It is not opening slowly at all — it is booming again," Knowles said.

For most industry insiders, the Year of the Rabbit has hopped off to a promising start. Statistics from the China Film Administration, the top industry regulator, show that the domestic market raked in 10 billion yuan in the first month of the year, making it the highest-grossing January of all time.

With China optimizing its pandemic policies toward the end of last year, the late-January Spring Festival holiday became the first opportunity for a raft of big movies to vie for the attention of ready-to-return film enthusiasts.

Almost 68 percent of the January takings came during the weeklong Spring Festival holiday, which saw the release of several movies, most featuring big budgets and stellar casts.

Propelled by the popularity gained during the holiday, iconic director Zhang Yimou's historical suspense *Full River Red* has earned 4.47 billion yuan so far, putting it at the top of this year's box-office charts. Director Guo Fan's sci-fi *The Wandering Earth II*, a prequel to the original movie, has taken second spot, followed by the animated feature *Boonie Bears: Guardian Code* in third, while spy thriller *Hidden Blade* is fourth.

The two other festival movies are *Deep Sea*, an experimental animated feature that explores the inner world of a girl with depression, and *Five Hundred Miles*, a comedy about a young man who accidentally exchanges his soul with a notorious lawyer.

Diverse offerings

Major Hollywood movies are also making a comeback. The first Marvel movie to be released on the Chinese mainland after a three-year hiatus is *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*, followed by *Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania*.

Meanwhile, *A Guilty Conscience*, a Hong Kong satirical comedy that examines societal problems, is one of the latest movies to make waves and recently topped the all-time box-office charts in the city.

Industry analysts said the range of movies is richer and more diverse this year, and filmmakers have done a good job of catering to the interests of different groups.



Clockwise from top left: Merchandise from the movie *Kung Fu Panda* is seen at a cultural and creative shop in Shanghai last year. XING YUN / FOR CHINA DAILY. Monkey King toys are displayed at an event in 2020. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY. A model space elevator themed on a Chinese cartoon TV program *The Three-Body Animation* is built at a shopping mall in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, in January. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY. An exhibition about *The Wandering Earth* is held at the Sichuan Science and Technology Museum in Chengdu, Sichuan province, in 2020. YUAN KEJIA / FOR CHINA DAILY. A staff member lays out a toy at a *Boonie Bears*-themed hotel that opened in Tianjin in 2021. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY.

Huo Jianqi, an award-winning director and a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, said the recovery of the Chinese film industry is heartening.

"With China optimizing its pandemic prevention measures, many cinemas have reopened and some high-quality movies have been released, resulting in the return of large audiences. Additionally, the film industry's artistic creativity is thriving once again," he said.

He added that China has more than 80,000 movie screens, the largest number in any country, signaling that the domestic market still has enormous potential. That could encourage Chinese filmmakers — who once struggled during slow periods — to regain confidence and produce excellent work.

Huo said the genres of major films during the Spring Festival season have been more diverse — including suspense, historical, romance, sci-fi, comedy and animation — indicating that the domestic industry has matured and directors have paid more attention to respecting the market.

Huangfu Yichuan, also a member of the 14th CPPCC National Committee and editor-in-chief of the monthly magazine *Contemporary Cinema*, said the Spring Festival period is usually seen as a barometer

of annual box-office takings, and predicted that total movie ticket revenues this year may reach 50 billion yuan, based on previous figures.

Zhi Feina, a professor at the Chinese National Academy of Arts, said the domestic market is undergoing a revitalization, which indicates that people who are passionate about the cinematic industry have chosen to stay in China and the sector has maintained its strength, despite the challenges that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Longer running times

Most industry insiders contacted by China Daily said some of the holiday blockbusters spent one or two years in postproduction, far longer than regular movies in pre-pandemic times.

This was partly due to the comparatively bleak market at the time, but also because it allowed more time to polish and refine each project.

As a testament to those efforts, the average length of holiday movies is 130 minutes, a far longer duration than almost any other films released during previous Lunar New Year holidays.

Considered a trailblazer in promoting homegrown sci-fi movies, *The Wandering Earth II* runs for a whopping 173 minutes — significantly longer than the first movie,

which lasted 125 minutes during its premiere in 2019, and 137 minutes in a rescreened version in 2020.

According to some domestic media outlets, the movie's 3,000-plus special-effects scenes persuaded Xuzhou Construction Machinery Group, a heavyweight manufacturing giant, to sponsor 42 sets of 61 types of heavy machinery to be used as props, and more than 400 sets of components and workshop props. It also assigned 319 staff members to participate in the production.

Chen Maolin, a veteran director, praised the success of *The Wandering Earth* franchise — its first installment grossed 4.7 billion yuan in 2019, while the second has so far raked in 3.9 billion yuan — as an indication that China's movie industry has achieved remarkable development in cinematic technologies.

"As a genre, science fiction movies represent the level of a country's film production. From Louis Koo's *Warriors of Future* to *The Wandering Earth II*, the emergence of these hardcore domestic sci-fi films has given Chinese filmmakers the confidence to catch up with the world's leading level," he said.

The first *Wandering Earth* movie had 75 percent of its visual effects made by Chinese artists, but the proportion rose to 90 percent for the second movie. Other hardcore sci-fi works, such as the popular Chinese

live-action TV series *Three-Body*, adapted from Liu Cixin's Hugo Award-winning novel, also relied heavily on Chinese teams to create props and digitize special-effects footage, industry insiders said.

Yao Dianna, a postproduction supervisor who was educated and employed in New Zealand, said China's visual effects industry has made rapid progress in recent years as a result of market expansion and an increase in talent.

"A number of young film professionals who were educated abroad have returned to China since the early 2010s, as evidenced by the fact that most major Chinese studios have 20 percent or more of their staff with such backgrounds," she said.

Yao added that the returnees' fluency in English makes it easier for them to absorb advanced experience from foreign filmmakers.

New opportunities

Despite China's huge movie market, many experts believe that the domestic film industry has not yet developed a fully mature business model. They said profits should not only come from ticket sales, but also from related sectors, such as merchandising, to maximize revenue and create a sustainable model.

Chen said a probable positive signal for change in the industry was that *The Wandering Earth II* set a

record in its merchandising fundraising, a regular market strategy which sells yet-to-be-produced products to reduce the risk of uncertainty.

For instance, if a film is not popular or the design of the products is not appealing, this strategy can help mitigate potential losses.

The Wandering Earth II started its fundraising presale on Jan 22 with a goal of 100,000 yuan. However, the response from enthusiastic fans was overwhelming, and the presale surpassed 100 million yuan within one week, generating the highest revenue for a Chinese movie's merchandise in history.

Moreover, due to the high demand, the companies making the merchandise had to stop the presale, as they had already reached their annual production capacities.

Deemed a breakthrough in film merchandise, which typically consists of small, low-cost items such as keychains, stickers and stuffed toys, the sci-fi blockbuster's best presold item was a replica of a dog-shaped robot that features in the movie. The robot has more than 1,800 parts and is controlled by a smartphone app.

In addition to *The Wandering Earth II*, the merchandise of other popular movies such as *Boonie Bears: Guardian Code* and *Deep Sea* has also sold well, indicating the huge potential of the once-niche market.

Zhi, from the Chinese National Academy of Arts, said the merchandise sales for Spring Festival blockbusters this year far exceeded expectations, but also showed that the domestic merchandise business is still in the primary phase.

Noting that Hollywood relies on long-running franchises such as *Star Wars* to earn more profits than box-office revenue from merchandise and create an enduring influence among fans, Zhi said Chinese filmmakers should plan ahead and start designing merchandise when a movie project is launched.

"With a greater range of cultural products associated with a movie franchise, the development of intellectual property will become more sustainable, resulting in a more mature industry," she said.

Two years ago, China unveiled a 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) for the domestic film sector, with the aim of becoming a major force in the global movie industry and deepening the impact of Chinese films on the global cinema landscape.

With the recovery of international tourism, those efforts are being revived. At the recent 73rd Berlin International Film Festival, 15 Chinese films were nominated in various categories, including two titles — the animated feature *Art College 1984* and *The Shadowless Tower*, based in Beijing — that were nominated in the main competition category.

As a successful example of Chinese movies going abroad, *The Wandering Earth II* has been released in many countries, including the US, the United Kingdom and New Zealand, and is scheduled to reach more overseas markets, such as Russia and South Africa.

Speaking about the resurgence of Chinese movies on the international stage, Huo said it is inspiring to see both commercial blockbusters and art house films gaining attention overseas, indicating a significant leap forward in Chinese cinema's decadeslong efforts to expand abroad.

Emphasizing the importance of China's goal to become a strong film power by 2035, Huangfu said that it will require an increase in the number of annual productions and the quality of domestic movies, which will necessitate various improvements, including the cultivation of more talent and the development of cinematic technology.

He said Chinese filmmakers should root their creations in real life and portray the authentic emotions of the Chinese people, thus gaining empathy from the majority of audiences and forming a sustainable, healthy film ecosystem.

Knowles, the US actor, said: "The film industry has always been like surfing in the ocean. Sometimes you catch a big wave and sometimes you are waiting for the next one to come in ... what China is offering now is bigger and bigger waves, so you had better be ready!"

Contact the writer at xufan@chinadaily.com.cn

TOP NEWS

Family's diversity
a reflection of ethnic
harmony in Ningxia

By HU DONGMEI
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Like most families, Ma Hailun and her loved ones gather around the table for major celebrations such as Lantern Festival in the first month of the traditional Chinese calendar.

They always prepare a feast of boiled dumplings filled with meat and vegetables that are taken piping hot from the pot.

The plump dumplings, stuffed with each family member's individual preferences and enjoyed together, are a good reminder not only of the family's closeness but also the ethnic harmony enjoyed in Northwest China's Ningxia Hui autonomous region.

Ma, 45, is a member of the Kirgiz ethnic group. She left her home more than 2,000 kilometers away in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region two decades ago to join the family of her husband, Liu Hao, 46, in Ningxia's capital Yinchuan.

Ma's extended family presents a snapshot of the country's ethnic diversity and the way people of different ethnicities in China live harmoniously together.

Her husband is ethnic Hui, while her mother-in-law, Zhai Shuhui, 74, is ethnic Han.

When she was a young woman, Ma studied in Yinchuan, where she met her future husband. She graduated in 2000 and returned home, leaving him behind.

"My life and work were smooth after returning to Xinjiang's regional capital Urumqi, but I missed him and my heart always seemed empty," she said. "After a long conversation with my mother, I decided to return to Yinchuan."

After going back to Yinchuan, Ma was assigned to work for a local organization assisting people with disabilities. Work colleagues and other members of the community helped her settle into her new home and circumstances.

They gave her daily necessities such as a quilt and cooking oil. To ease Ma's initial homesickness, Liu and his mother would invite her for dinner on weekends, when there were always freshly cooked dumplings on the table.

Ma eventually married Liu, who works in the public sector, and they had a daughter, Liu Jintian, who is now 15.

Her steady integration into her new home and community is not an unusual story. Across the country there have been growing efforts by local communities to build and

strengthen harmony among the nation's 56 ethnic groups.

President Xi Jinping has stressed that ethnic unity is the lifeline of all ethnic groups in the country and a strong sense of community is key to ethnic unity. Efforts must be made to strengthen such a sense by furthering education on ethnic unity, he has said.

In March 2022, at the fifth session of the 13th National People's Congress, the country's top legislature, Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, underscored the need for all ethnic groups in the "big Chinese family" to remain closely together like "the seeds of a pomegranate". He also called on them to work together to build a great country and strive for better lives.

Measures to forge ethnic unity in Ningxia include youth and tourism exchanges, and community projects in cities and counties that provide different ethnicities with mixed residential areas for educational and social activities.

Regional authorities said they are accelerating the construction of a demonstration area for "forging the consciousness of the Chinese nation" by building a common home for all people and "promoting all ethnic groups to jointly move toward socialist modernization".

Ma Hancheng, a member of the standing committee of the Party committee of Ningxia, said the region has a strong tradition of unity, with integration of various ethnic groups a major part of its history.

"Ningxia has always attached great importance to ethnic harmony, carrying out major projects in previous decades to that effect," he said. "We strive to promote the exchanges and integration of various ethnic groups, such as improving policies and guidelines and long-term mechanisms for cultural inclusiveness, and economic prosperity."

Ma Hailun was born into a family of Party members. She said her father, a former soldier, often told his children, "Without the CPC, the Kirgiz herders deep in the mountains would not have been able to make the transition from nomadic practices to settlement."

In 2022, Ma's work required her to transfer to the Ningxia rehabilitation center for the disabled as a result of policies to help ethnic group members with disabilities regain confidence and also aid the development of their communities.

"As a family, we share weal and woe," Ma said. "We share a common destiny together."

Fiery
derailment

Smoke fills the sky after an empty CSX coal train hit a rockslide along tracks causing a fiery derailment on Wednesday near Sandstone, West Virginia, the United States. Four locomotives and 22 empty cars derailed near the New River, CSX said. The lead locomotive, which carried a conductor, an engineer and an engineer trainee, caught fire and the crew members were being evaluated and treated for non-life-threatening injuries, the company said.

JENNY HARNISH /
THE REGISTER-HERALD VIA AP

Legal measures fortified
to protect environment

Judiciary boosts efforts to help nation achieve green targets, strategy

By CAO YIN
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China will step up judicial protection to provide stronger legal support for maintaining harmony between people and nature, a senior official from the country's top court said.

"Courts nationwide will continue the strictest rule of law in environmental protection and ecological conservation in order to firmly safeguard ecological security in the new era," Yang Liping, vice-president of the Supreme People's Court, told China Daily in an exclusive interview on the sidelines of the ongoing annual two sessions in Beijing.

She said that greater efforts will be made to serve the national strategy for regional and river basin

development, accelerate the implementation of major projects for ecological conservation and promote the construction of nature reserves with national parks as the focus.

Yang highlighted the significance of improving judicial rules to handle new types of environmental cases, including those concerning emissions trading and green finance. Courts at all levels will severely punish criminals who privately discharge wastewater or engage in cross-regional dumping of hazardous material.

She added that legal protection for biodiversity and low-carbon growth will also be intensified to help achieve the country's goals of peaking carbon emissions before 2030 and achieving carbon neutrality before 2060 as more measures

are taken to respond to climate change.

The steps have been taken to implement the requirements of pursuing green development and promoting harmony between humanity and nature, which were stressed in the report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in October, she said.

Data from the top court showed that more than 1.29 million cases relating to the environment and ecology were concluded from 2018 to 2022. Of those, 167,000 were environmental offenses, 79,000 more than the previous five-year period.

New environmental and resource-related crimes have also been seen in China in recent years, with the methods becoming more diverse. For example, illegal mining

crimes have become more organized and the illegal wildlife trade has moved online, Yang said.

To efficiently address the new cases, the top court has issued nine judicial interpretations since 2018, Yang said. Some of the interpretations on ban orders and punitive damages played a big role in stopping pollution in a timely way and reducing damage to the environment.

Over the past five years the top court has also been involved in several major items of legislation, such as the Yangtze River Protection Law and the Yellow River Protection Law, to help the country uphold green development and optimize compensation for environmental damage, she added.

Professionalism in handling environmental cases has also been improved in the past five years, thanks to education efforts and building trial teams.

So far, China has provided 2,426 specialized teams to handle environmental cases, who have been encouraged to explore cross-regional jurisdiction over ecosystems such as river basins, forests, wetlands and national parks to boost integrated environmental protection.

Growth: Experience valuable to world

From page 1

Today, the sessions vividly reflect the Chinese way of rule of law coupled with whole-process people's democracy, and the effective roles of government tied to multiculturalism and promotion of balanced economic growth in China and beyond.

Politically, both the NPC and the CPPCC National Committee are taking practical steps for further consensus on and projection of the guidelines put forth at the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in October.

While over 2,100 political advisers from all sectors of society bring their proposals, about 2,950 NPC deputies bring ideas from the grassroots and medium and upper levels of decision-makers, converging into a sound process of decision-making.

The Government Work Report delivered by Premier Li Keqiang on Sunday provided a window into the country's proactive development with Chinese characteristics, with productive and participatory policies and plans that inject hope into global economic recovery.

Due to rapidly changing and conflicting socioeconomic realities, contradictory and preferential geopolitical treatment and geostrategic compulsions, China's two sessions have become an iconic political event.

Moreover, global economic woes, the imposition by some countries of unilateral sanctions, economic and financial constraints and diplomatic tensions have further enhanced the strategic importance of China's two sessions.

By championing China's advancement of modernization with Chinese characteristics, green and high-quality development, a national capacity-building mechanism to fight COVID-19, and further opening up, the two sessions have become a role model of human survival and progress, immense socioeconomic and industrial development, and gradual but peaceful globalization and contribute to global peace, stability and harmony.

The GDP growth goal of around 5 percent this year, as revealed in the Government Work Report, indicates that the Chinese econo-

my is on a fast recovery track with increased consumption and expanded manufacturing activity.

The importance of stability that Li emphasized in delivering the report is in line with the Central Economic Work Conference in December, which prioritized pursuing steady progress while ensuring economic stability this year, eyeing overall recovery and improvement that focus on people's well-being.

The stable development of China's economy is expected across the world, and people are counting on more momentum from China. The further boosting of domestic demand, enhancing of technological self-reliance and strength and prevention of major risks can boost confidence across borders.

The policies of green transformation in production and consumption do well for achieving the nation's low-carbon and net-zero emissions goals in the common pursuit of harmony with nature.

Another priority for China's economic development this year is expanding foreign trade and foreign investment. China's role

in global economic organizations and multilateral agreements like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement, and its steps to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership all point to a growing connection of continents.

In this regard, the announcement of the continuation of structural reforms would further stimulate economic recovery and market consolidation.

Moreover, Premier Li emphasized that China will continue working to safeguard world peace, contribute to global development and uphold the international order, which stands out among major countries today.

The China-proposed Global Development Initiative and Global Security Initiative, the nation's promotion of shared values of humanity, its constant emphasis on peaceful coexistence, and its specific steps in building a human community with a shared future provide valuable bliss for everyone in the world.

The author is executive director of the Center for South Asia & International Studies in Islamabad. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

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Aid: Deeper engagement in global governance seen

From page 1

Aboubacar Koisha, the food agency's representative in Togo, said the emergency food assistance program has helped to restore a sense of hope and stability in the region. "Our combined efforts will make a real difference in the lives of those affected by food and nutrition crises," he said.

Luo, the China International Development Cooperation Agency chairman, said, "The past 10 years have seen China's greater-than-ever participation, outcomes and contribution made in navigating and shaping international development cooperation, as well as the country's deeper engagement in global governance."

The agency was established in 2019, a key move among China's efforts in what Luo called "putting forward fresh thoughts and staying action-oriented in international development cooperation".

Over the past three years, China has provided a large quantity of COVID-19 response supplies to more than 160 countries and international organizations.

More than 2.2 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been provided so far to over 110 countries and international organizations.

Following earthquakes that hit Türkiye and Syria last month, China was among the first nations offering search and rescue assistance to the

two countries.

In a meeting with Chinese Ambassador to Vanuatu Li Minggang earlier this month, Jotham Napat, Vanuatu's minister of foreign affairs, international cooperation and external trade, hailed China's selfless assistance as much needed, after his country suffered heavy losses in a recent deadly tropical cyclone.

Luo said that as the world faces rising geopolitical conflicts, challenges to globalization and a loss of focus on development, "there is a stronger desire among developing countries for refocusing on development and reinforcing collaboration, and expectations on China

have been rising".

President Xi has provided China's fresh wisdom and dedication, proposing groundbreaking new visions, ideas and blueprints such as building a community with a shared future for mankind, the Belt and Road Initiative and the Global Development Initiative, Luo said.

As China works to fully realize the GDI and promote global prosperity, over 100 countries and international organizations have voiced their support for the initiative. To help implement the initiative, a promotion center, a network for global development and a foundation have been established, and nearly 1,000 cooperative projects and training

programs have been rolled out.

"We have seen a bumper early harvest involving joint participation of a number of countries and departments in many areas," Luo said.

The landmark report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in October said the country is dedicated to narrowing gaps between developing countries and developed countries.

In January, Moussa Faki Mahamat, chairman of the African Union Commission, stood beside visiting Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang at the completion ceremony of a major project aided by China — the headquarters of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

Faki said the headquarters is the visible face of health cooperation that has its roots in the deep Sino-African relations, and "the objective

is to achieve self-sufficiency of public health systems in Africa and remedy the current global imbalances".

In addition, China set up the Institute for South-South Cooperation and Development, offered assistance in building the Mwalimu Julius Nyerere Leadership School in Tanzania, and rolled out various human resources training programs.

"China shares its experience in governance with other countries, and the Chinese path to modernization offers a new choice for various developing countries to achieve modernization," said Luo.

China has also cooperated with over 10 international organizations, including the UN, to expand third-party collaboration in areas such as public health and climate change, benefiting over 50 countries and a total of over 20 million people.

TWO SESSIONS

Attracting foreign funds a common call



Zhong Nan
Reporter's log

With China expanding programs to boost foreign trade and attract foreign capital to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, slowing global demand, geoeconomic shocks and fierce competition from the likes of Vietnam and India over the past three years, the idea of widening and making opening-up more effective has gathered steam during the two sessions this year.

As China's economy recovers, many national legislators and political advisers — especially those who are economists, mayors, executives at multinationals and members of private and State-owned enterprises — believe that higher levels of overseas investment are likely, and Chinese exporters are working to shore up the growth of foreign trade while optimizing and improving their product offerings.

Delegates have spent more time discussing topics related to the subject this year, impressing business reporters like myself.

Representing the voices of people and businesses across the country, delegates have pointed out that without orders, export-oriented companies will lose revenue. As a result, they will not be able to invest in research and development, and this could lead their businesses to dead ends.

Consequently, many experts — including Gu Xueming, a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and president of the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation in Beijing, and Li Kuiwen, a deputy to the National People's Congress and head of the Guangdong Office of the General Administration of Customs — have repeatedly said that strengthening efforts to expand high-level opening-up will create a more enabling environment for trade and investment.

They have stressed that optimized COVID-19 controls will help curb surging global inflation, as the normalization of economic activities will stabilize supply chains and allow them to function more effectively.

In the course of interviews and conversations, I have found that many deputies acknowledge that China's labor cost advantage is shrinking, but that this doesn't necessarily mean it has become more expensive to innovate and manufacture here.

The cost of labor is determined by a country's endowment of resources, but this is only one component of overall costs. The supply of raw materials, the abundance of capital resources and the proportion of skilled labor also determine production costs.

Apart from resources, a number of factors such as technological progress, economic scale and industrial agglomeration are also able to drive production costs down. Compared with other emerging market countries, China still has clear advantages in these aspects. This means that if Chinese companies are excluded from the supply chain, there is no space for substantial reduction in the overall cost of manufacturing for businesses around the world.

Pushed by the accelerated restructuring of the global value chain, China may lose its comparative advantage in terms of certain products or industries, but as a whole, its production capacity and consumption potential are still hugely attractive to multinational companies. After all, it is hard to ignore the fast-growing Chinese market and its huge consumer base.

Moreover, I believe that at a time when multinational corporations are suffering from low cash flows as the global economy recovers, raising more money to rebuild supply chains outside China is both unwise and costly, because China's infrastructure for foreign trade is mature and has been tested by time.

According to the Government Work Report submitted to the National People's Congress for deliberation on Sunday, China will further efforts to attract more foreign investment this year.

The report recommended several measures to achieve this goal, including expanding market access, opening up the modern services sector, ensuring that foreign companies enjoy the same treatment as domestic, improving services for foreign-funded companies and facilitating the launch of landmark foreign-funded projects.

Based on my observation of the comments made by national legislators and political advisers this week, although China's high-energy consumption and carbon-intensive businesses may be affected by industrial upgrading or external challenges, its fast-growing service sector, green technology, and industrial and financial markets will help ease the pressure during transformation.

Contact the writer at zhongnan@chinadaily.com.cn

What the CPPCC National Committee members and NPC deputies say



Wu Depel, member of the CPPCC National Committee and director of the hematology department at the First Affiliated Hospital of Soochow University

An emergency blood collection mechanism must be set up as soon as possible. When the available blood supply falls below the warning level, every level of government should activate the emergency response mechanism, encourage blood donations from departments and groups, and reward personnel who participate in emergency donation drives. Civil servants and other public employees should be encouraged to donate blood when there is a shortage. Those not physically qualified to give blood can participate in related services.



Yao Jianping, NPC deputy and artistic director of the Zhenhu Institute for Embroidery in Suzhou, Jiangsu province

We should devise the overall protection of cultural resources and level up the protection of cultural heritage. Different regional cultural and environmental protection zones, each with its own distinctive characteristics, should be set up to promote the integration of regional cultures including Central Plains and Wuyue cultures, creating a culture of unity through diversity.



Wei Zhenling, member of the CPPCC National Committee and director of the seventh procuratorial department of the People's Procuratorate in Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region

Raising children and caring for the elderly should be treated as important statutory requirements when applying for early retirement. For example, if an employee wishes to apply for conditional retirement before the legal age, they should be able to prove that there are children, grandchildren or elderly relatives at home requiring their care. Under these circumstances, employees should be granted conditional retirement as long as the necessary documents are submitted.



Lyu Zhongmei, NPC deputy and vice-chairwoman of the Central Committee of Chinese Peasants and Workers Democratic Party

Eco-environmental protection remains an arduous task, and due to severe challenges, the lack of systematic, integrated, collaborative and time-effective legislation on the eco-environment is becoming increasingly prominent. China urgently needs to create a legal system for eco-environmental protection that comprehensively protects the ecosystem.

CHINA DAILY

Without reticence



NPC deputy and veteran Chinese composer Zhao Jiping (left) speaks at a panel discussion within the Shaanxi delegation during the ongoing two sessions in Beijing on Wednesday. MU JIALIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

PERSPECTIVE

Former diplomat praises BRI

He says everyone can contribute to goal of helping develop world



Erik Solheim

By **CHEN WEIHUA** in Brussels
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Erik Solheim, former under-secretary general of the United Nations, said that the Belt and Road Initiative, which was launched 10 years ago, has been a "resounding success".

The Norwegian politician said that he expects the message coming out of the ongoing two sessions, the annual sessions of the National People's Congress, and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, to continue work on the BRI and take it in a greener direction.

"President Xi (Jinping) promised that China will stop all overseas coal investment," said Solheim, referring to Xi's announcement in September 2021 at the UN General Assembly that China would not build any new coal-fired power plants abroad, and

would step up support for green and low-carbon energy in developing countries.

"He laid a foundation for the green Belt and Road — massive investments in solar, in wind, in green hydrogen and in electric mobility," said Solheim, who was also the former executive director of the UN Environmental Program.

Solheim has traveled to China frequently over the decades and said that the development of the BRI going forward reflects the trajectory of reform and opening-up.

While great effort was made in previous decades to boost economic growth and lift people out of poverty, he believes that Xi has taken China onto a people-centered high-quality development path over the past decade.

Solheim also believes that as the global leader in many green technologies, China has an edge, and that its technology should be made available through investments in developing nations.

"So let's work together to make

the Belt and Road green as we go forward in the next 10 years," he said, noting that the BRI has benefited many developing nations over the past decade, citing the Jakarta-Bandung railway, the Djibouti ports and Vietnam's first metro line in Hanoi.

"You can mention so much...the Belt and Road has been a huge success," he said, adding that the initiative has contributed to global peace, economic development and prosperity, as well as interpersonal contact.

According to the government, China has signed BRI cooperation agreements with 151 countries and 32 international organizations as of mid-February.

Solheim said that he felt most countries welcome the BRI and want close relations with China and don't want to be forced to choose between China and the United States.

"Developing nations in Africa and Latin America don't want to be a playground for competition between the United States and China. No one wants that. Everyone wants investment, positive invest-

ments from both the United States and China," he said.

Solheim said that the West can come up with similar initiatives to benefit the developing world and that all initiatives can be complementary.

"We can work together, and we should all look for win-win opportunities rather than see everything as a political competition," he said, possibly referring to the rhetoric from some Western politicians opposed to the BRI.

Solheim believes that all sides can use their advantages to help the developing world. Given its many leading universities, the US could help with training for people from developing nations, while China can help with its experience of building high-speed railways and strong solar industry.

"We need global cooperation," Solheim said, stressing that poorer developing nations will suffer the most from any potential Cold War between the US and China.



Online
See more by scanning the code.

Delegate sees new media as vital to Xinjiang

By **CHENG SI**
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Hanzat Tohti, a member of China's top advisory body, has suggested that a new media center be created in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, to encourage young people to tell China's story through short videos.

The 39-year-old, who comes from Urumqi, is currently a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and the vice-chairman of the New Social Stratum Association in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

He became interested in making videos when he was 12 and said that he liked filming his friends fooling around when they were teenagers, as well as filming Xinjiang's cuisine and scenery and stories about relations between the region's different ethnic groups.

In 2009, he started work at the advertising and new media department at Xinjiang's television station but dreamed of starting his own business, and eventually set up an e-commerce company in 2014.

He never lost his interest in making videos and put together a production team that same year. His first short web play, titled *Ripe Pomegranate*, made its debut in 2016.

"I think that ethnic groups are



"I think that ethnic groups are like pomegranate seeds, holding tightly to each other."

Hanzat Tohti, member of CPPCC National Committee

like pomegranate seeds, holding tightly to each other. I've been in close contact with a variety of ethnic groups and I believe it's good for us to get to know each other. I want to contribute to national unity," the Uygur member said.

The serial short web play, starring actors from Xinjiang, uses humor to tell the life stories of young people in the region. It has run for seven seasons so far.

Hanzat Tohti said that his videos have entertained people across China and even abroad. "Many of my followers comment that they love the region and hope to come for a visit."

In addition to humorous plays, he also produces videos and films with social meaning.

For example, the team produced a short play based on Tianjin's efforts to help poverty alleviation in Xinjiang last year, which illustrated touching moments and the huge changes the region has experienced as a result.

Hanzat Tohti said that he has benefited from the national policy on Internet Plus, and that his transformation from e-commerce to a video producer is thanks to the flourishing of culture in Xinjiang.

In a recent interview with Beijing Weekly, he said that Xinjiang has advantages in developing new media and that he hopes a new media center will be set up to attract

more young people to the region to produce video content.

"People in Xinjiang enjoy singing, dancing and performing. The emergence and development of short-video platforms give ethnic groups the opportunity to show who they are, and maybe become internet celebrities with millions of followers in the process," he told Beijing Weekly.

Hanzat Tohti added that the region's scenery and cuisine are sources of inspiration and tranquility. "People can experience the different cultures and lifestyles of Xinjiang's ethnic groups, which makes productions more inclusive."

However, he said that the region still faces some shortcomings in terms of new media, technology, finance and the shortage of talented individuals to help develop new media.

His hope is that a new media center will encourage big internet companies to open offices in the region, which will help professionalize video making, livestreaming and e-commerce.

As new media development creates opportunities, he hopes that more young people will get involved to create good, positive content. "With spring on its way, I invite you to come to Xinjiang. You can make friends and record your experiences," he told a press meeting in Beijing on Tuesday.

TWO SESSIONS

Undivided attention

Political advisers listen to a speech during a meeting of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in Beijing on Thursday. Thirteen advisers shared their thoughts on contributing to the nation's development.

JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY



'Strong' consumption, investment recovery to boost growth in 2023

Adviser: With more favorable policies expected, real estate sector will rebound

By ZHANG YUE

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China's economy is likely to see a forceful rebound in 2023 on the back of a strong recovery in consumption and investment, while more favorable policies can be expected for the real estate sector, a political adviser said.

Zhang Bin, a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and also deputy director of the Institute of World Economics and Politics at Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, made the remarks amid the ongoing two sessions.

The Government Work Report, which was made public on March 5, aims for an economic expansion of around 5 percent for 2023. It also said that China is ready to expand market access for foreign investors, prop up consumption, and curb risks in the real estate sector.

"I think 2023 will be a good year for the Chinese economy, with a very strong recovery expected in consumption and investment," said Zhang.

He said that this year consump-



Zhang Bin

tion will be the major contributor to recovery.

"With China's optimization of pandemic control measures, consumption growth is likely to see a robust rebound. While the overall annual growth target is set at around 5 percent, I think consumption alone will generate some 4 percentage points of GDP growth this year," he said.

Figures from the National Bureau of Statistics show that consumption has already picked up in the past two months. The consumer price index in January came in at 2.1 percent higher than a year earlier, up from the 1.8 percent annual gain seen in December, with airfares, movie tickets and travel prices all rising notably.

The index gained year-on-year in February by 1 percent, figures from the National Bureau of Statistics showed on Thursday.

Noting that the recovery of the real estate sector, which remained largely in the doldrums in the past year with declining investment, is a key variable, Zhang is confident in the sector's recovery and believes that more supportive policies will be in the pipeline.

Both the optimization of COVID-19 containment measures since December and the recent favorable policies toward real estate developers bode well for the sector's recovery this year, he said.

On Jan 13, a draft plan was released by the government to boost financing for quality property developers, including adjusting borrowing curbs on them. Efforts are expected to guide quality developers' balance sheets back into a safe range, particularly for relatively large property firms that are systematically important.

"We expect to see more supportive policies for the real estate sector this year, for example, toward mortgage rates and lending rates to developers," Zhang said.

Another key factor to notice, Zhang said, is the investment in the real estate sector is likely to pick up.

"There was a lot of unfinished housing in the last year. In addition, this year, with more favorable financial conditions, there will be enough cash

flow for housing projects. This will be a very big contribution to investment in the real estate sector," he said.

On Tuesday, China's Minister of Housing and Urban-Rural Development Ni Hong said that he has full confidence in the recovery of the nation's housing market, given a fast rise in transactions.

Commercial housing sales in China ended 13 months of decline in January, Ni said.

"The overall demand for new housing is actually in decline mainly because of the country's economic structural and demographic changes," Zhang said. "I think China may need certain kinds of policy-oriented institutions to help the market, because the recovery of the real estate sector is very important for the economy."

This year is Zhang's first year of participation in the two sessions as a member of the National Committee of the CPPCC. His proposal this year is about establishing policy-oriented financial institutions to help migrant workers and low-income families finance their housing.



Online
See more by scanning the code.

Experts propose ideas for reversing declining births

By WANG XIAOYU

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Offering equal subsidies for first-child and multiple-child families and expanding free public education and access to fertility treatment have become hotly discussed topics during this year's two sessions, as political advisers and legislators gather to discuss innovative approaches to lifting the birthrate in the country.

Last year, China's total population dropped for the first time in over six decades. Officials said the primary reasons include a falling number of newborns and low willingness to have babies, and called for stronger and more creative measures to encourage births.

He Dan, director of the China Population and Development Research Center and a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, said during a recent interview that some regions have solely focused on providing allowances for couples with two or three children while overlooking the needs of families with only one child.

"The experience of raising the first child is very important for young adults and will affect their decision on whether to have more children," she said.

She said that delays in having the first child and the shrinking number of people choosing to have children are the primary reasons for declining births in recent years.

China's total fertility rate fell from 1.52 in 2019 to 1.07 in 2022. The fertility rate for the first child dropped from 0.7 to 0.5 during the period and the average age for having a first child rose from 26.4 to 27.4 years old, according to He.

She added that one survey showed that many mothers with a single child complain about anxiety around conception, pregnancy and child-rearing. They said they were already under a lot of pressure to provide quality education and had little time to spare to raise another child.

"Some local supportive policies only cover families with two or three children and exclude those with one child," she said. "Such policies hardly increase willingness for childbearing and could result in fragmented enforcement and unfairness."

The government in Hangzhou, capital of Zhejiang province, last month said that parents who have a third child will receive a lump-sum payment of 20,000 yuan (\$2,900) and those who have a second child will get 5,000 yuan. No subsidy was announced for

families having a first child.

She suggested scrapping differences in the eligible amount of subsidies linked to the number of children, and improving the experiences of families having their first child so as to increase their sense of gain and nurture their longing for more babies.

To further reduce financial burdens, Zhao Dongling, a well-known playwright and a deputy to the National People's Congress, said she proposes waiving tuition fees for children born after 2024 through to college education.

Gan Huatian, a professor in elderly digestive diseases at Sichuan University's West China Hospital in Chengdu, Sichuan province, said that he proposes offering education subsidies and free education from kindergarten to senior high school for the third child in a family.

"Education and medical problems are two of the most prominent factors contributing to low willingness to have babies, and providing free education for the third child could be a good solution," he said during an interview with Chengdu.cn, a media outlet.

A number of political advisers and legislators focused their proposals this year on assisted reproductive technologies, such as egg-freezing services that are currently banned for use among unmarried women.

Xu Congjian, a national political adviser and president of the Obstetrics and Gynecology Hospital of Fudan University, said that the rule discriminates against unmarried women.

He suggested evaluating the conditions of older unmarried women. If their fertility is found to start declining and they have a strong desire to have a baby in later years, they can be allowed to preserve their fertility while receiving continuous guidance from medical professionals.

Qiao Jie, a national political adviser and president of Peking University Third Hospital, said during an interview with Beijing News that China has established a rigorous system of regulating assisted fertility therapies.

She said that current egg-freezing technologies cannot guarantee 100 percent success in preserving the quality of eggs and could potentially result in biosafety risks.

"It would be a regret for women who have their eggs frozen and then miss the golden window for getting pregnant naturally," she said, adding that expanding access to egg-freezing technologies can be piloted in some regions first and should be promoted in a responsible manner.

Easing indexes indicate stable inflation ahead

By OUYANG SHIJIA

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China's consumer inflation eased in February to a one-year low, providing more room for the government to step up macroeconomic policy support amid multiple domestic and external pressures, analysts said on Thursday.

China's consumer price index, a main gauge of inflation, climbed 1 percent from a year earlier in February, down from a three-month high of 2.1 percent in January, data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed on Thursday.

The slower CPI increase in February was mainly affected by a pull-back in consumer demand after the Spring Festival holiday in January and ample market supplies, said Dong Lijuan, an NBS statistician.

Meanwhile, the producer price

index, which gauges factory-gate prices, showed an annual fall for a fifth month in a row in February, declining by 1.4 percent from a year earlier, after a 0.8 percent annual contraction in January, the NBS said.

Zhou Maohua, an analyst at China Everbright Bank, said the PPI dropped deeper in February mainly due to a high comparison base in the previous year, while the slower growth in CPI is mainly affected by the different timings of the Chinese New Year holiday, which took place in February last year but January this year.

Zhou said he believes consumer prices may gradually rebound with a recovery in consumer demand. For the full year of 2023, China's consumer inflation is set to remain mild and controllable while PPI may continue to decline, leaving room for further

policy easing and adjustment.

He added that many domestic mid-stream and downstream manufacturing still face the pressures of high costs, and efforts should be made to consolidate economic recovery.

"Inflation is unlikely to become a policy constraint in China, giving plenty of room for the government to step up policy support in terms of boosting domestic demand and spurring consumption," said Wen Bin, chief economist at China Minsheng Bank.

For the full year of 2023, China will target an inflation rate of around 3 percent, which will ensure consistency in policies and goals, stabilize market expectations and give itself room to maneuver, according to the Government Work Report delivered at the two sessions on Sunday.

"The CPI inflation may increase moderately to 2.6 percent in 2023, well

within the official inflation target," said Lu Ting, chief China economist at financial services firm Nomura.

According to him, the CPI target of around 3 percent should not generate any material obstacles for Beijing to implement pro-growth policies, and his team expects monetary policy to remain accommodative in China this year, which stands in sharp contrast to other major economies in the world where interest rates are already at decade-high levels.

"We view the space for the People's Bank of China, China's central bank, to cut benchmark medium-term lending facility rates as still quite limited, as regulators need to protect bank profit margins. However, the inflation downside surprise could slightly raise the probability of a moderate rate cut in the next couple of months," Lu said.

Unmanned strike aircraft demonstrates its mettle

By ZHAO LEI

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China Aerospace Science and Industry Corp, a leading defense contractor, has conducted dozens of test flights of what it calls one of the country's best unmanned strike aircraft, according to a project manager.

"Since its maiden test flight in January 2021, WJ-700 prototypes have carried out dozens of flights to test capabilities and performance in terms of high-altitude, high-speed or long-duration operations, as well as reconnaissance and strike tasks," said Wang Changqing, president of the



A WJ-700 drone. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Wang Changqing

ities, and the results have been recognized by clients, he said.

He made the remarks on the sidelines of the ongoing first plenary session of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in Beijing. Wang is a member of the top political advisory body.

According to Wang, the WJ-700 has achieved "satisfactory advan-

ces" in the international market.

"Our designers and engineers have now built a modified variant of the WJ-700 based on client requirements. In the future, we will deliver drones to users and will provide continuous technical support and other services to boost their defense capability and arms industry," he said.

As China's first high-altitude, high-speed, long-endurance combat/reconnaissance drone, the WJ-700 is easy to operate and maintain — controllers need only press a button and the drone can check its equipment, take off or land on its own.

With a modular design, the craft

can have as many as 11 configurations, enabling it to undertake missions such as battlefield reconnaissance, intelligence collection and precision strikes, Wang said, adding that it is capable of carrying radars, guided glide bombs, and anti-radiation and anti-ship missiles.

Development of the WJ-700 started in March 2018 at the CASIC Third Academy in Beijing. Designers intended to create an advanced model for beyond-visual-range precision strikes against land targets, ships and air-defense weapons, and also for long-range surveillance and reconnaissance. In addition, the drone is capable of fulfilling early-warning or electronic jamming tasks when mounted with appropriate devices, according to the academy.

It is made of composite materials and is equipped with advanced instruments such as a fly-by-wire control system, integrated avionics and a high-bypass-ratio turbofan engine.

The WJ-700 has a maximum take-off weight of 3.5 metric tons and is able to stay airborne for up to 15 hours. The drone's operational speeds range from 500 to 600 kilometers per hour, with a maximum speed of 700 km/h.

Aviation industry observers have said that the WJ-700 is suited to time-sensitive missions, and its aerial capabilities will make it almost unbeatable against short-range air defense weapons like the shoulder-launched missiles widely used in developing countries and areas of conflict.



Nurses look after newborns at the Gansu Province Maternity and Child Health Hospital in Lanzhou, Gansu province, in January.

FEI QIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

WORLD

Green move exhibited at two sessions

GDP target for 2023 a positive sign of high-quality development, experts say

By REN QI in Moscow, and XU WEIWEI and PRIME SARMIENTO in Hong Kong

The two sessions have exhibited that China is dedicated to promoting green development and global health security, experts said, adding that the GDP target set for 2023 sends a positive signal for high-quality growth.

Dicky Budiman, an epidemiologist at Griffith University in Australia, said he sees the Chinese government's work agenda in 2023 in a positive light, especially in the aspect of international diplomacy, as it shows that Beijing will actively support global health security, among other things.

"This is very important because China has a strategic position in (regard to) the world's security, not only due to its huge population, but also due to the economic status and political role that it has enjoyed at the global level," Budiman said.

Khalid Taimur Akram, executive director of the Pakistan Research Center for a Community with Shared Future, Islamabad, said that as the world is facing "horrendous challenges in the shape of climate change and pandemic," China is keen on adopting clean energies.

"For this purpose, China is improving carbon reduction and energy conservation," he said.

He cited facts from the annual work report from the Chinese government that showed that in cities at and above the prefectural level, the air quality was good or excellent on 86.5 percent of the days over the past five years, a 4-percentage-point improvement over the previous five-year period.

Yersultan Zhanseitov, a senior expert at the Institute of World Economics and Politics in Kazakhstan, said the two sessions and the Government Work Report are important windows for observers to gain a deeper understanding of the Chinese path to modernization and keep pace with China's future development. The report delivered by Premier Li Keqiang on March 5 emphasized high-quality and green development.

Agshin Aliyev, an Azerbaijani Sinologist, said the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is the expectation of ordinary people. The Chinese government is made up of experienced politicians and administrators who understand the feelings of the people and work for the benefit of the people.

Bart Edes, distinguished fellow at the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, said the Chinese government is trying to strike a balance between its commitment to achieving net-zero emissions by 2060 and its need for stable and secure energy supplies.

Edes said the optimization of COVID-19 policies has stimulated a surge in consumption and business activity in China that makes the government's growth target of around 5 percent for 2023 "look achievable — and perhaps even conservative."

"Last month, the purchasing

China has a strategic position in (regard to) the world's security, not only due to its huge population, but also due to the economic status and political role that it has enjoyed at the global level."

Dicky Budiman, epidemiologist at Griffith University in Australia

managers index for the manufacturing industry reached its highest level in more than 10 years," he said.

Budiman from Australia added that China's success in dealing with COVID-19 prevents new suffering that could threaten the global health situation, and provides optimism for people worldwide that the pandemic may near its end this year.

"We will enter a new phase of COVID-19 which is either endemic or small outbreaks, (but) under control," he said.

'Pragmatic approach'

Fu Xiaolan, fellow of the British Academy of Social Sciences and director of the Technology and Management Center for Development at the University of Oxford, said China's GDP growth target was "slightly lower" than what she had expected.

"I think it's an honest, pragmatic approach toward China's growth," she said at a panel discussion during the 10th Oxford China Forum held at Oxford University on Sunday. The target suggests that authorities are aiming for high-quality development rather than pursuing pure high growth, she added.

Tianchen Xu, an economist at the Economist Intelligence Unit, said achieving the 5 percent GDP growth target should not be difficult, "given the low base of comparison last year and the robust recovery we're seeing now."

He said that he would not regard the relatively conservative GDP target as being an indication of government "pessimism", and suggested that the actual growth could come in far higher.

Such growth of China will be conducive to global rebound with increasing international cooperation, not only in economic and trade fields, but also educational and cultural exchanges which bring tangible benefits to the people, Aliyev from Azerbaijan added.

He Xiating in London contributed to this story.

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In solidarity



South Koreans march during a rally in Seoul on Thursday before the 12th anniversary of Japan's Fukushima nuclear disaster, caused by an earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011. They denounced Japan's plan to release nuclear-contaminated water into the sea. AHN YOUNG-JOON / AP

Brunei seeks sustainable growth path

By PRIME SARMIENTO in Hong Kong
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Rising oil prices have allowed oil-rich Brunei to enjoy a budget surplus this year, but such good news also raises the question about its sustainability, analysts said.

Mohd Amin Liew Abdullah, Brunei's second minister of finance and economy, has proposed a budget of 5.96 billion Brunei dollars (\$4.4 billion) for the financial year 2023-24 at the 19th session of the Legislative Council on Monday. Brunei will be closing the fiscal year on March 31 with a budget surplus of roughly B\$100 million as revenue is forecast to hit B\$6 billion while government expenditure is estimated to be at B\$5.9 billion.

James Chin, professor of Asian Studies at the Australia-based University of Tasmania, noted how the Russia-Ukraine conflict has boosted global oil prices, bolstering Brunei's oil and gas revenues. But he said this is also the time for Brunei to continue its efforts to wean away from its dependency on oil and gas revenues.

The Centre for Strategic and Pol-

icy Studies has forecast Brunei's GDP to grow by 2.6 percent this year, while the current account surplus will remain high at 8.3 percent of GDP in 2023 on the back of oil, gas and chemical product exports.

"Oil and gas revenue is forecast to be still high, with crude oil prices averaging \$90 per barrel and LNG prices at \$17 per million British thermal units. Government expenditure as a share of GDP is expected to continue to trend lower as fiscal consolidation efforts resume," the CSPS said.

Economic diversification

But oil and gas prices are volatile and it won't spare even a country like Brunei that has a healthy fiscal position. In 2016, Brunei's GDP contracted by 2.6 percent as oil prices fell to record lows.

Nawazish Mirza, professor of finance at Exelia Business School in France, said: "In the short to medium term, rising oil prices are likely to support the Brunei economy."

The Bruneian government has been pursuing economic diversification in the past few years and has managed to get investments outside of the oil and gas industry. One of

the biggest investors is China's Zhejiang Hengyi Group, which built a \$3.4 billion refinery and petrochemical complex on Muara Besar island.

Turkish oil and fats manufacturing company Marsa Yag Sanayi Ve Ticaret opened a \$30 million margarine plant in the northeastern district of Serasa. The state-owned Brunei Fertilizer Industries, which started urea production in 2022, is also expected to bring in more export revenues this year.

Mohd Amin Liew said at the LegCo session that Brunei's positive economic growth forecast this year takes into account recovery and economic diversification efforts, according to a report filed by the Brunei-based daily Borneo Bulletin. But Brunei is also facing challenges such as the spread of a new COVID-19 variant, the continued geopolitical situation, high inflation rate, global economic recession and volatile commodity prices.

Mirza at Exelia Business School said reliance on oil and gas "may not be sustainable in the long term due to climate concerns and the global demand is likely to shift to alternative renewable energy sources".

Briefly

JAPAN

Growth nearly flat, showing fragile recovery

Japan's economy grew at an annual pace of 0.1 percent in October-December, in a downgrade from an earlier 0.6 percent increase, showing how the world's third-largest economy was barely eking out growth. The Cabinet Office's revised figure for the seasonally adjusted GDP for the last three months of 2022 showed growth on quarter was flat, down from an earlier estimate given in February at 0.2 percent growth. Capital spending, also a key driver of the economy, remained unchanged from its initial reading, dropping 0.5 percent in the October-December period, as rising import costs have seen firms rein in their investment outlays.

UNITED STATES

Republicans' stance on Jan 6 attack shamed

US President Joe Biden said on Wednesday that Republicans should be ashamed of supporting an effort by Fox News to play down the seriousness of the assault on Congress by a mob of Donald Trump supporters on Jan 6, 2021. "More than 140 officers were injured on Jan 6. I've said before: How dare anyone diminish or deny the hell they went through?" Biden tweeted. Biden expressed support for Capitol Hill police, whose chief has accused Fox News presenter Tucker Carlson of manipulating video footage of the unprecedented assault after Trump's election defeat.

SYRIA

Govt vows to hold US officials accountable

Syria said on Wednesday that US officials seeking to destabilize Syria must be held accountable, in response to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's vow to hold the Syrian government accountable for "human rights violations and abuses". "The American officials who used unlimited funds to destroy Syria and shed the blood of its people must be held accountable," the Syrian Foreign Ministry said in a statement. The ministry stressed that lasting peace in Syria could not be achieved amid the presence of United States forces on Syrian soil. The statement came in response to a statement issued by Blinken on Monday.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

French upper house votes to raise retirement age to 64

By JONATHAN POWELL in London
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France moved a step closer to approving controversial pensions reform law after senators in the upper house of Parliament voted on Thursday to increase the retirement age from 62 to 64.

The flagship article in President Emmanuel Macron's plan was approved with 201 votes for and 115 against, while the remaining articles of the bill are expected to be ratified later this week, Agence France Presse reported.

A committee of lawmakers from the Senate and the lower house of parliament, known as the National Assembly, will then debate the main article next week, with the government aiming to have the changes adopted by the end of the month.

Macron's pensions reform plans, first proposed in 2017 and then delayed by the pandemic, are deeply unpopular and have sparked waves of protests and strikes across the

country. The new plan would require 43 years of work to earn a full pension.

More than a million demonstrators marched in cities and towns across France on Tuesday in what workers' unions described as the biggest show of force so far against the planned changes.

Strikes this week paralyzed transport systems across the country. Public transport authorities announced that trains and suburban metro services would continue to be severely disrupted on Thursday, and French airports were expected to cancel one-third of flights. Garbage collectors and others have said they would continue strikes. The Le Monde newspaper reported that key ports were also blocked, as dockworkers joined the industrial action.

The CGT general union said fuel deliveries were blocked on Wednesday for the second consecutive day amid strikes at the refineries of TotalEnergies and Esso ExxonMobil.



Garbage cans are seen in the streets of Paris due to the strike against the pensions reform in France on Wednesday. TOMAS STEVENS / NEWS.COM

Macron needs a majority in Parliament in order to push the bill through, and faces a battle to win over many conservative lawmakers. He may need to resort to using controversial constitutional powers to bypass Parliament, which would surely provoke wider discontent.

Opponents of the bill expressed anger following the Senate vote and unions have pledged to maintain pressure on the government by holding further protests and strikes. "Your name will forever be attached to a reform that will set the clock back

almost 40 years," socialist senator Monique Lubin told Labor Minister Olivier Dussopt in the upper house.

The government has watered down its original plan with concessions to appease opponents, but it has always vowed the reform will not be scrapped altogether.

Unions hope maintaining pressure will bring more concessions as the bill weaves its way through the complex legislative process.

Macron has always maintained pensions reform was essential to ensure the system does not go bust.

AGENCIES—XINHUA



People check a damaged car where three Palestinians were killed during an Israeli raid in West Bank on Thursday. RANEEN SAWAFTA / REUTERS

Outrage, grief grip Palestinians after deadly incident

RAMALLAH/GAZA/JERUSALEM — Outrage and grief prevailed in the Palestinian territories this week after deadly clashes emerged.

At least three Palestinians were killed in a shootout with Israeli troops on Thursday, the latest incident of near-daily bloodshed in the occupied West Bank, The Associated Press reported.

Six Palestinians were killed and 26 others injured during an Israeli raid near the West Bank city of Jenin on Tuesday. Streets were almost empty and most stores were closed in West Bank cities, as a general strike was staged in response to the call from Palestinian factions to

mourn the six Palestinians killed in the Jenin Palestinian refugee camp.

Thousands of Palestinian mourners attended the funeral on Wednesday held for five of the victims in the Jenin refugee camp amid anger and grief. The sixth victim was buried in a cemetery in Nablus city.

Earlier on Wednesday, the Israeli military bombed a military facility that belongs to Hamas militants in the southern Gaza Strip after a roadside bomb was detonated against an Israeli armored vehicle in the area, according to Palestinian and Israeli sources.

The tensions between Israel and the Palestinians have been escalat-

ing in the West Bank and East Jerusalem since the beginning of this year. Official Palestinian and Israeli figures showed that more than 70 Palestinians have been killed this year so far, while at least 14 Israelis have been killed in attacks carried out by Palestinians.

Meanwhile, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin was forced to change the schedule of a planned visit to Israel due to anti-government protests that are expected to paralyze traffic across the country, US and Israeli officials said on Wednesday.

Austin arrived on Thursday from Egypt for a one-day visit to Israel. But instead of meeting Israeli offi-

cialists in Jerusalem or at the Defense Ministry in central Tel Aviv, his meetings were expected to be held at a factory near Israel's international airport.

Tens of thousands of Israelis have taken to the streets in recent weeks to protest plans by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's new government to overhaul the country's judiciary.

Pentagon spokesman Air Force Brigadier General Patrick Ryder said the change in location had come at the request of the Israeli Defense Ministry and referred further questions to Israel.

WORLD

Political manipulation of virus origins opposed

By MO JINGXI
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Beijing on Thursday strongly opposed Washington's latest attempt to politicize the COVID-19 origins-tracing issue, saying that the United States should stop pointing fingers at others and respond to international concerns about its bio-military bases at Fort Detrick and around the world.

"China always supports and participates in the global origins-tracing work based on science. Meanwhile, we strongly oppose political manipulation on this issue in any form," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said at a regular news briefing in Beijing.

On Wednesday evening, the US Senate passed a bill requiring the declassification of information related to COVID-19 origins, a move that came after the media reported that US intelligence officials had provided the White House with classified intelligence showing the virus most likely came from a lab leak in China.

However, US Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines said on Wednesday that there has been no agreement yet across the intelligence community on the virus' origins.

Mao said that for some time, the US has been politicizing, weaponizing and instrumentalizing the origins-tracing issue and playing up the so-called intelligence-led and senators-driven origins-tracing.

"The US has been discrediting and attacking China by spreading the 'lab leak' theory without any supporting evidence, which as a result has seriously poisoned the atmosphere for science-based global origins-tracing," she said, noting that Washington's political manipulation was a major obstacle to global science-based cooperation on the issue.

So far, the US has never invited the World Health Organization to send experts to the US for joint studies on origins-tracing, or shared any early data. It also turned a blind eye to the world's concerns about its bio-military bases at Fort Detrick and elsewhere in the world, Mao said.

"What the US did is making irresponsible remarks and groundless accusations of the WHO's origins-tracing work, oppressing scientists of good conscience for political purposes, and fabricating irrational lies to smear other countries," she added.



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (right) and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres walk in the hall during their meeting in Kyiv on Wednesday. PHOTO VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

Guterres seeks extension of Black Sea grain deal

By REN QI in Moscow
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United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called on Wednesday for an extension of a deal with Moscow that has allowed Kyiv to export grain through Black Sea ports.

After talks with Guterres in Kyiv, Zelensky said the Black Sea Grain Initiative was "critically necessary" for the world, while the UN chief underlined its importance to global food security and food prices.

The 120-day deal, initially brokered by the UN and Türkiye in July and extended in November, will be renewed on March 18 if no party objects.

"I want to underscore the critical importance of rolling over the Black Sea Grain Initiative on March 18, and working to create the conditions to enable the greatest possible use of export infrastructure through the Black Sea in line with the objectives of the initiative," Guterres told reporters in Kyiv.

Top UN trade official Rebeca Grynspan, who traveled with Guterres to the Ukrainian capital, will meet senior Russian officials in Geneva next week to discuss extending the deal, a UN spokesperson said.

Russia's demands, however, have not yet been met, said a Turkish diplomatic source, adding that Ankara was "working very hard" to ensure the deal continues.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said last Thursday that the deal was not working, as the West sabotaged Russia-related clauses of the agreements.

The ministry pointed to 262,000 metric tons of fertilizers that Russia planned to donate to the poorest countries, but ended up having them blocked in the ports of Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and the Netherlands.

US State Department spokes-

man Ned Price said during a regular news briefing that the US administration supports UN efforts aimed at ensuring deliveries of Russian and Ukrainian grain to international markets.

"The Black Sea Grain Initiative is a vital tool to combat global food insecurity and stabilize food prices," said Price, calling for the initiative to be "extended and expanded".

Fresh airstrikes

Separately, Russia unleashed a new wave of airstrikes across Ukraine on Thursday, killing at least six people and knocking out power at the Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhia nuclear power station.

Ukraine's military said Russia fired 81 missiles and eight drones in attacks mainly targeting energy infrastructure, and that the weapons used included six hypersonic Kinzhal missiles that Ukraine could not intercept.

It also said air defenses knocked out at least 34 missiles and four Shahed suicide drones, but regional officials said five people were killed in the western region of Lviv and one in southeastern Dnipropetrovsk.

In Kyiv, about 15 percent of the capital was without electricity following the strikes, Mayor Vitali Klitschko said earlier on Telegram.

Klitschko said that due to emergency power outages after the missile attack, 40 percent of the capital's residents were without heating.

In Moscow, President Vladimir Putin said Russia is facing direct threats to its security and sovereignty. "We see many examples of bravery and determination, courage and willingness to stand up for the truth, to protect people and the very future of our state," Putin said at a ceremony in the Kremlin to present state awards to women on International Women's Day.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Peak illumination



The full moon rises behind the towers of the Duomo in Molifetta, Italy, on Wednesday. March's full moon is also known as the worm moon because it coincides with the time of year when earthworms begin to emerge from thawed soils. NURPHOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES

College enrollment in US continues to decline

Pandemic, costs cited as 1.1m fewer students sought higher education from 2019 to 2022

By MINLU ZHANG in New York
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America's college enrollment has fallen since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and the downward trend since 2018 persists, with millions of fewer students in classrooms, the most ever, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and economists say the impact could worsen labor shortages.

"It's quite a dangerous proposition for the strength of our national economy," said Zack Mabel, a Georgetown University researcher.

Despite in-person classes resuming, postsecondary institutions experienced a decline in enrollment between fall 2019 and fall 2022, with approximately 1.1 million fewer students, representing a decrease of about 6 percent of total enrollment, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

Undergraduate student enrollment saw a decrease of more than 1.2 million students, almost 8 percent of total enrollment.

Increasing college tuition, declining birth rates and the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have contributed to the decrease, according to Best Colleges, a website that provides information on US colleges and universities. A decline in international and transfer enrollment during the pandemic may also be a factor.

In many states, blacks, Hispanic and low-income students saw the largest decline in college enrollment. In Tennessee's class of 2021, 35 percent of Hispanic graduates and 44 percent of black graduates



If I would have gone to college after (high) school, I would be dead broke."

Daniel Moody of Memphis, Tennessee, who found a good job as a plumber

enrolled in college, compared with 58 percent of whites.

The cost of running into debt to pay for college is a major factor as President Joe Biden seeks to cancel a large swath of it, but the constitutionality of his plan is now before the Supreme Court.

Student debt has soared over the past several decades. Inflation-adjusted data from the National Center for Education Statistics shows that going to college cost \$1,545 in the 1968-69 academic year, compared to \$29,033 in the 2020-21 school year.

In a study conducted by the US Census Bureau, most adults who had family members enrolled in college for the fall 2021 term reported that their educational plans had been affected. Nearly half of those who canceled their plans said that they couldn't afford educational expenses due to the pandemic.

Daniel Moody, a recent high school graduate from Memphis, Tennessee, was hired to work as a plumber at a plant and is now earning \$24 an hour. He believes he made the right decision in not going to college.

"If I would have gone to college

after school, I would be dead broke," he said. "The type of money we're making out here, you're not going to be making that while you're trying to go to college," Moody told The Associated Press.

Tennessee made community college free in 2014, resulting in a significant increase in college enrollment rates. But only 53 percent of public high school graduates enrolled in college in 2021, significantly lower than the national average and the rate has now fallen to its lowest point since at least 2009, AP said.

Despite the high cost of tuition, college graduates tend to earn more than those without a degree, according to data from the Labor Statistics Bureau. In 2021, full-time workers 25 and older with a bachelor's degree earned a median salary that was about \$27,000 higher than those with only a high school diploma and no degree, according to the bureau.

People who don't attend college typically earn 75 percent less over their lifetimes than those who obtain bachelor's degrees, according to Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce. And when the economy sours, people without degrees are more likely to become unemployed, AP reported.

During the pandemic, Arkansas saw a decrease in the number of new high school graduates attending college from 49 percent to 42 percent. Kentucky also experienced a similar decline to 54 percent. In Indiana, the latest data showed a 12-point decrease from 2015 to 2020, prompting the state's higher education leader to warn that "the future of our state is at risk", AP reported.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Latest theory on pipeline explosions questioned

COPENHAGEN — A Danish military analyst on Wednesday questioned the claim made by the United States and German media that a nonstate actor was responsible for last September's Nord Stream gas pipeline explosions.

"It is a demanding operation to get down and dive at that depth and place so much explosive, so it would be a bit ridiculous to me if someone did it from a rented yacht," Danish news agency Ritzau quoted Anders Puck Nielsen from the Defense Academy as saying.

According to Nielsen, the latest theory is a timely and "reasonable solution" for NATO.

"If you look at it politically, it suits the US, NATO and Ukraine very well if you can point to a non-state actor as some kind of terrorist organization or saboteurs," Nielsen told Ritzau.

The New York Times has cited new intelligence suggesting that a pro-Ukrainian group carried out the attack on the pipelines that run under the Baltic Sea from Russia to Germany.

However, the newspaper failed to identify a source for the claim that a rented yacht was used to perpetrate the act.

'Diverting attention'

"Obviously, the authors of the attack want to divert attention," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told the state RIA news agency, adding that the information had been planted.

"How can American officials assume anything without an investigation?"

"The very least that the Nord Stream shareholder countries and the United Nations must demand is an urgent, transparent investigation with the participation of everyone who can shed light," Peskov said.

Russia has repeatedly complained about being excluded from European investigations into the explosions.

Western countries warned against reaching premature conclusions on who was responsible for blowing up the Nord Stream pipelines.

"There are ongoing national investigations and I think it's right to wait until those are finalized before we say anything more about who was behind it," said NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg.

German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius called for "a clear distinction", adding that he is warning against jumping to conclusions.

Pistorius said earlier the likelihood was "equally high" that it could have been a "false flag operation staged to blame Ukraine".

European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell Fontelles told reporters: "As long as investigations into Nord Stream blasts are ongoing, we cannot draw conclusions."

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov said the media reports were a "little bit strange" and had "nothing to do" with the Ukrainian government.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

UN: Two-thirds of Afghans need humanitarian aid

UNITED NATIONS — The United Nations' top envoy for Afghanistan warned on Wednesday that 28 million Afghan people, accounting for two-thirds of the country's population, will need lifesaving humanitarian assistance this year.

The humanitarian need will cost \$4.62 billion, the single-largest country appeal ever, Roza Otunbayeva, the UN secretary-general's special representative for Afghanistan, told a Security Council meeting.

Almost half of the Afghan population — 20 million people — are experiencing crisis levels of food insecurity, she said, adding that 6 million people are one step away from famine-like conditions.

"Our humanitarian action is challenged by an increasingly complex access and security environment," she said.

The Taliban retook the Afghan capital, Kabul, in August 2021, far more rapidly than Washington had

foreseen, as its forces pulled out. Kabul's fall turned the West's withdrawal into a rout, with Kabul's airport becoming the center of a desperate air evacuation.

In Washington, active service members and veterans provided testimony to Congress on Wednesday about the chaotic withdrawal.

"The withdrawal was a catastrophe in my opinion. And there was an inexcusable lack of accountability," said former Marine sergeant Tyler Vargas-Andrews, who wore a prosthetic arm and scars of his own grave wounds from a bombing.

It was the first of what is expected to be a series of Republican-led hearings examining the handling of the withdrawal by US President Joe Biden's administration.

The majority of witnesses argued before Congress that the fall of Kabul was a US failure with blame touching every presidential administration from George W. Bush to Biden.



Afghan women weave wools for making carpets at a traditional carpet factory in Kabul on Monday. EBRAHIM NOROOZI / AP

However, the US froze nearly \$9.5 billion in assets belonging to the Afghan central bank after the Taliban took over Afghanistan, a move some consider "pure looting".

Addressing a Security Council meeting on Wednesday, Geng Shu-

ang, China's deputy permanent representative to the UN, said those assets "belong to the Afghan people and should be used for the Afghan people".

XINHUA—AGENCIES

BUSINESS

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Two Sessions

Deputies stress strength in manufacturing

Industry leaders underline high-end sectors, innovation, homegrown tech

By FAN FEIFEI
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China's stress on high-end manufacturing will help create a modern industrial system, safeguard industrial and supply chains, and foster new competitive strengths, said national legislators and political advisers.

They called for concerted efforts to make breakthroughs in core technologies, given that upgrading the manufacturing sector has been high on China's development agenda as a requirement for bolstering the real economy.

Their comments came after President Xi Jinping said manufacturing is an indispensable sector to China at all times. He made the remark during a deliberation with a delegation of fellow deputies from Jiangsu province on Sunday during the first session of the 14th National People's Congress.

Currently, China's manufacturing sector boasts a complete range of categories, Xi said, adding the country will strive to develop high-end manufacturing to realize all-round improvement, and provide full support for its development.

Miao Wei, deputy director of the Committee on Economic Affairs of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative

Conference, the nation's top political advisory body, highlighted the importance of achieving breakthroughs in core technologies in key fields and resolving bottlenecks, so as to improve the resilience and safety of industrial and supply chains.

Miao, the former minister of industry and information technology, said efforts should be made to give full play to the role of leading enterprises, step up support for small and medium-sized enterprises and foster more "little giant" companies that specialize in niche industries with cutting-edge technologies and great growth potential.

Manufacturing is the foundation of a country, and the high-quality development of China's manufacturing sector has entered the fast lane buoyed by digital technologies like cloud computing, big data, internet of things and blockchain, said Zhou Yunjie, a deputy to the 14th NPC, and chairman and CEO of Chinese home appliance giant Haier Group.

"As the country is making efforts to build itself into a manufacturing powerhouse, more push is needed to promote innovative application of industrial internet and fully unleash the value of massive data resources, which is also key to advancing new industrialization," Zhou said.

Zhou suggested establishing a



Technicians check washing machines at a manufacturer in Chongqing. WANG QUANCHAO / XINHUA

quality standard system in the context of new industrialization, and cultivating a batch of industrial big data service providers, who will participate in the formulation of standards and rules related to industrial data ownership confirmation, circulation and transactions.

Data from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology showed that China accounted for nearly 30 percent of global manufacturing output in 2021, up from 22.5 percent in 2012, and maintained its title as the world's largest manufacturing country.

Noting technological innovation is the prerequisite to improving the resilience of industrial chains, Jia Shaoqian, a deputy to the 14th NPC and chairman of

Chinese home appliance manufacturer Hisense Group, said leading enterprises should play a significant role in achieving breakthroughs in some core technologies in key fields.

He suggested the country should increase support in R&D of the frontier laser display technology, basic materials and basic techniques to boost the core competitiveness in new-generation display technologies.

"The high-tech manufacturing sector has become an important driving force for China's high-quality economic development," said Li Dongsheng, a deputy to the 14th NPC, and founder and chairman of consumer electronics maker TCL Technology Group Corp.

China's manufacturers should

transition from exporting products to exporting industrial capacities, ramp up localized operations abroad and avoid trade barriers to enhance their global competitiveness, he said.

Dong Mingzhu, chairwoman of Chinese home appliance maker Gree Electric Appliances, said Chinese enterprises should stick to independent innovation, and master core technologies so as to promote the upgrade and transformation of the country's manufacturing sector.

Dong, also a deputy to the 14th NPC, said it is important to push the manufacturing sector toward higher-end, smarter and greener production, adding talent is key to promoting the high-quality development of manufacturing.

PBOC: New plan will protect consumers

By ZHOU LANXU
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The reform plan to reorganize the country's financial regulatory regime can help better protect consumers' rights and should be well implemented, said Yi Gang, governor of the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank.

The plan proposes that financial regulatory bodies set up by local governments should specialize in supervision, which will be conducive to strengthening regulation, improving efficiency and better protecting consumers, Financial News reported Yi as saying on Thursday.

Yi, who is also a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, made the remarks on Wednesday during a group discussion on the reform plan, which was submitted to the National People's Congress, the country's top legislature, on Tuesday for deliberation.

The reform plan seeks to establish a local financial supervision model that is dominated by local agencies of central financial regulators, while financial regulatory bodies set up by local governments should specialize in supervision and no longer function in the name of "financial work bureaus" or "financial offices".



This will be helpful in solving conflicts brought by the dual roles of local governments' financial regulatory bodies — they are now responsible for both supervision and development."

Dong Ximiao, chief researcher at Merchants Union Consumer Finance Co

Such arrangements are aimed at solving problems wherein some local financial regulatory administrations lack the necessary regulatory tools and professional talent, and the measures will help ensure those involved assume full responsibilities of local financial supervision, according to the plan.

Dong Ximiao, chief researcher at Merchants Union Consumer Finance Co, said the financial regulatory bodies set up by local governments will no longer shoulder the responsibility of promoting financial development and introducing more investment, but focus on supervision if the plan is implemented.

"This will be helpful in solving conflicts brought by the dual roles of local governments' financial regulatory bodies — they are now responsible for both supervision and development," Dong said.

Yi also said during the discussion that the essential feature of the socialist market economy is to adhere to the leadership of the Communist Party of China, which provides a strong guarantee for defusing risks, Financial News reported.

He added that the reform plan's requirements for improving the management of State-owned financial capital should be steadily and properly implemented, while feasible schemes should be made to achieve unified management of staff at financial regulatory bodies.

The reform plan has required that staff at the PBOC, the proposed national financial regulatory administration, the China Securities Regulatory Commission and the State Administration of Foreign Exchange, as well as their branches and agencies, should all be managed and paid as civil servants.

Nuclear to play more significant role within renewable power mix

By ZHENG XIN
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Nuclear power should play a more prominent role in achieving the nation's carbon neutrality goals by more applications in energy-intensive sectors, while also serving as a fundamental power source in the large-scale development of clean energy, said a political adviser on the sidelines of this year's two sessions.

Lu Tiezong, assistant general manager of China National Nuclear Corp and a member of 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, called for boosting the utilization of nuclear power in more energy-intensive sectors, from petrochemicals to steel, as well as heating, seawater desalination and isotope production, as China goes full throttle into its green energy transition.



Steam generated from a reactor in Dalian, Liaoning province, is used as a source of heat. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

High-temperature gas-cooled reactors, for example — with high inherent safety levels and steam parameters — can provide integrat-

ed energy solutions for industrial steam, hydrogen and electricity used in multiple industries, Lu said. One high-temperature gas-

cooled reactor can provide 3,600 metric tons of high-temperature steam per hour. When matched with thermal-chemical hydrogen production plants, it can help reduce emissions of 3.42 million tons of carbon dioxide compared with a traditional thermal power unit. It can also be equipped with petrochemical as well as other industrial processes for higher-quality development, he added.

An analyst said the application of nuclear energy for heating, steam and power supply is the preferred solution to allow the petrochemical industry to face the dual challenges of ensuring stable supply as well as carrying out clean and low-carbon transformation.

Nuclear power is a more stable and reliable type of clean energy compared with solar and wind power, which can be intermittent due to changing weather conditions, said Lin Boqiang, head of the

China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University.

The application of nuclear power will be an important means of boosting China's green development. However, safety should always come first and further efforts are still needed to advance technologies in both construction and operation, he said.

In addition to nuclear power's role of accelerating the decarbonization of energy-intensive industries, Lu suggested the application of nuclear power in provinces that are developing solar and wind power on a large scale as a base load power supply to support steady power output and as utilization of a renewable energy base.

The development of China's nuclear power sector should be gauged not only in terms of the number of units and scale, but also the advances of nuclear technology and green transition, he said.

Nation's reactor technology making headway in overseas market

By ZHENG XIN

China should further expand investment and financing channels to promote the export of nuclear power projects and technology and devise more preferential policies to facilitate a larger role for its nuclear power technology on the global stage, said a political adviser on the sidelines of the two sessions in Beijing.

The government should further increase fiscal, financial and insurance policy support for the country's nuclear projects, as the emissions-free energy resource has been developing by leaps and bounds in recent years, said Han Yongjiang, president of Tsinghua Tongfang Co Ltd, a subsidiary of China National Nuclear Corp.

Products and services related to research and development, design and construction, equipment manufacturing, operational management and technical practices are all

now ready to be exported, covering the whole industrial chain, said Han, who is also a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

Han said China has exported 15 nuclear power units and research facilities worldwide so far. The K2 unit at the Karachi Nuclear Power Plant in Pakistan, the first overseas nuclear power unit to use a Hualong One reactor — China's third-generation nuclear power technology with full proprietary intellectual property rights — started operating in the South Asian nation in May 2021, while CNNC also signed an agreement with a company in Argentina to establish a nuclear power station using Hualong One technology in 2022.

In December 2021, the world's first industrial-scale demonstration plant for a high-temperature gas-cooled facility with a pebble bed modular reactor — the No 1

reactor of the Shidaowan nuclear power plant in Shandong province — was connected to the grid and put into operation, making China one of the few countries to master the fourth generation nuclear power technology, he added.

The report on the implementation of the 2022 plan for national economic and social development and also the 2023 draft plan for national economic and social development both vow to proactively develop nuclear power in a safe and orderly way.

As China has been developing nuclear power, together with other green energies, it is quite likely that its nuclear technology will further benefit more countries worldwide, said Luo Zuoxian, head of intelligence and research at the Sinopec Economics and Development Research Institute.

Small modular reactors for example, which are capable of producing electricity of up to 300

megawatts per module and can meet demand for flexible power generation for a wider range of users and applications, are likely to benefit countries and regions participating in the Belt and Road Initiative, as well as nations in the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, he said.

Linglong One, the world's first commercial onshore small modular reactor demonstration project, began installation of its nuclear unit at Changjiang nuclear power plant in South China's Hainan province on Nov 30, according to its developer China National Nuclear Corp.

Han said international cooperation in nuclear energy is also an important tool to enhance global influence. As the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement came into force in January 2022 and the Belt and Road Initiative has been making steady progress, China's nuclear power

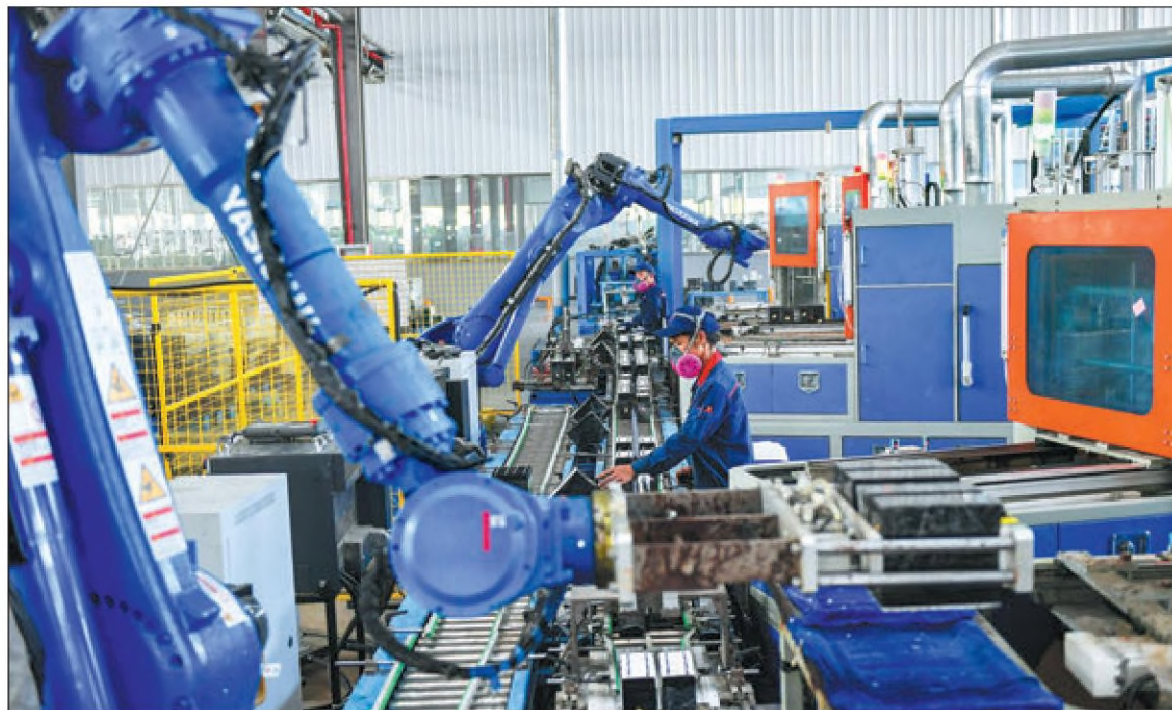
technology will further benefit more countries and regions worldwide.

China urgently needs to strengthen top-level coordination to promote nuclear energy's "going global" as a national strategy, he added.

Xin Feng, chairman of China Nuclear Energy Industry Corp, who is also a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, said the government should also step up efforts in geological work related to uranium, the primary fuel for nuclear reactors, to ensure sufficient steady development of nuclear power in the country.

China should improve domestic exploration and development of uranium resources and resource reserves as soon as possible, while making efforts to increase financial support for domestic uranium exploration and boost investment in basic geological work related to uranium ore, he said.

BUSINESS



A Tianneng employee works at a battery production facility in Huzhou, Zhejiang province. TAN YUNFENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Deputy calls for more efforts in green energy storage

By LIU YUKUN
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Stronger efforts are needed in promoting the development of the energy storage sector, with an emphasis on developing new battery types, as China demands more flexible power adjustment capacity, said a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress.

Zhang Tianren, also chairman of Chinese battery maker Tianneng Group, suggested the national legislative body encourage the development of safer and more cost-effective lead-carbon batteries and power storage stations.

He also called for encouraging technical innovation in areas of compressed air energy storage, flow batteries and sodium-ion batteries.

Zhang said: "Energy storage is a critical component of building a new energy system as China moves toward a more sustainable energy

mix with renewables taking up an increasing share.

"By storing power generated from new energies for later use, the system can help solve the intermittency issue that has been a major challenge in the widespread adoption of renewables, help increase their consumption rate and reduce waste of such energies.

"The energy storage system can also enhance the power grid's peak-shaving capacity and ensure the grids' safe and stable operation when a large amount of power generated from renewables connects to the grid."

This year's Government Work Report, delivered on Sunday during the ongoing two sessions, said efforts should be made to move faster to develop a new energy system, promote the efficient and intensive use of resources, and advance energy conservation and carbon reduction in key areas.

Zhang said that the report reiterated the importance of developing a new energy system, in which energy storage plays an essential role. The report posed high requirements for battery makers like Tianneng and the company will step up efforts in research and development of lead batteries, lithium-ion batteries, hydrogen fuel cells and sodium-ion batteries, and build an industrial chain that covers the entire process from battery R&D to recycling.

Liu Yafang, an official with the National Energy Administration, said at a recent news conference that in the past year, the administration and the National Development and Reform Commission have launched a series of policies to promote the development of new types of power storage.

Liu said: "The characteristics of new energy storage complement traditional energy storage technologies, providing more options for the construction of new power systems.

"Compared with traditional pumped hydro storage, new energy storage has the advantages of flexible site selection, short construction periods, rapid and flexible responses and diverse application scenarios. It can complement pumped hydro storage and address the randomness and high volatility issues brought by the integration of new energy sources into the power system."

According to the NEA, the total installed capacity of new types of energy storage projects — other than pumped storage hydropower — reached 8.7 million kilowatts with an average power storage period of 2.1 hours last year, an increase of over 110 percent from the end of 2021.

Among those, lithium-ion battery energy storage took up 94.5 percent, compressed air energy storage was 2 percent and flow batteries accounted for 1.6 percent, the NEA said.

Dutch gov't's ban may 'severely' disrupt global chip market

Experts: New restrictions on related exports to harm companies' interests

By MA SI and CHENG YU

The Dutch government's plan to exert new restrictions on exports of semiconductor technology will further disrupt the global chip industry and harm Dutch companies' interests, experts said.

The comments came after Dutch Foreign Trade Minister Liesje Schreinemacher announced the decision in a letter to the Dutch parliament, saying that the restrictions will be introduced before summer.

The Netherlands is home to ASML, a maker of cutting-edge chipmaking equipment. ASML dominates the market for lithography systems, which are multimillion-dollar machines that use powerful lasers to create the minute circuitry of computer chips, a crucial process in making chips.

ASML has been a focus of the US government's attempts to limit China's access to state-of-the-art semiconductor technology, and Washington has been pressuring the Dutch government to adopt stricter chip restrictions on China, said Gu Wenjun, chief analyst of ICwise, a Shanghai-based semiconductor market research company.

ASML said in a statement to China Daily that due to these upcoming regulations, ASML will need to apply for export licenses for shipments of the most advanced immersion deep ultraviolet, or DUV, systems.

"It will take time for these controls to be translated into legislation and take effect," ASML said, adding that the new measures would not

impact its 2023 financial guidance.

ASML said it is important to consider that the additional export controls do not pertain to all immersion lithography tools but only to what is called the "most advanced".

The bulk of ASML's DUV sales in China go to relatively less advanced chipmakers and the company has not sold its most advanced extra ultraviolet, or EUV, machines to Chinese customers since 2019 under government restrictions, experts said.

ASML said earlier that it expects sales in China to remain flat at 2.2 billion euros (\$2.3 billion) in 2023, implying relative shrinkage as the company expects overall sales to grow by 25 percent.

The investor relations department of Chinese chipmaker Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corp said on Thursday that it has not received any notices on the Dutch government's planned new restrictions.

"Stricter chip restrictions are severely disrupting the development cycle of the global semiconductor industry and systematically fragmenting the global semiconductor industrial chains," said Wei Shaojun, president of the integrated circuit design branch of the China Semiconductor Industry Association.

ASML told China Daily earlier that looking into the future, China will continue to play an integral role in driving the development of a highly collaborative global semiconductor industry.

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Duty-free biz seen as key to building Hainan FTP

By ZHU WENQIAN
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Continued efforts to promote the building of the Hainan Free Trade Port as an international tourism consumption center, with a focus on improving the international competitiveness of its offshore duty-free sales, will help the tropical island attract more tourists, experts said.

After China optimized its COVID-19 response measures and resumed cross-border travel in January after nearly three years of suspension, Chinese consumers have shown a growing demand for traveling abroad.

"With China optimizing its entry measures, Chinese passengers' travel confidence is reshaping rapidly and many overseas destinations have introduced favorable measures to attract Chinese tourists," said Chen Yin, president of China Tourism Group and a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

"In this context, the building of Hainan as an international tourism consumption center may face some challenges in the future. We suggest that Hainan continue to strengthen its attractiveness of offshore duty-

free shopping by expanding the scale, launching more brands, expanding online sales channels and upgrading services," Chen said.

Since the opening of the first duty-free shopping store in Sanya, Hainan in 2011, the total sales revenue of duty-free products in the province exceeded 100 billion yuan (\$14.3 billion), and the average annual growth rate reached 44.6 percent, according to the local government.

After the implementation of offshore duty-free shopping policies in Hainan, a top vacation resort and shopping paradise, detailed rules have been adjusted eight times,

making duty-free shopping a golden ticket for Hainan.

Meanwhile, Chen proposed that to support further development of offshore duty-free shopping, more domestic brands should be encouraged to establish a presence at offshore duty-free stores and further consolidate the leading position of China's duty-free enterprises globally, which will help further strengthen Hainan's attractiveness to its consumer market.

Chen also suggested that to further drive inbound travel and leisure consumption to Hainan, the government may accelerate the

implementation of the trial opening of the Seventh Freedom of the Air for passenger and freight transportation in the province. By then, Hainan will have the highest level of such traffic rights in the country.

The Freedoms of the Air are a set of commercial aviation rights that grant a country's airline privileges to enter and land in another country's airspace.

Major duty-free operators have continued to increase their investments in Hainan. Late last year, China Duty Free Group, a sub-affiliate of China Tourism Group, opened a new shopping complex in Haikou, the provincial capital of Hainan.

Chen suggested the launch of more high-end hotels in the island province and further improving the construc-

tion of urban rail transit systems. He proposed to give full play to the gathering effect of the Haikou International Duty Free Shopping Complex and create a new growth model that combines tourism, art performances, sporting events, duty-free shopping and leisure consumption.

At the same time, the Hainan FTP is set to continue to play a crucial role on the map of China's luxury goods market, with sizable sales in offshore duty-free luxury products.

"We are optimistic that China's luxury market will continue to grow, driven by an increasing consumer base and a further digitalized environment. Hainan will serve as a key enabler to drive consumption," said Xing Weiwei, partner of consultancy Bain & Co.

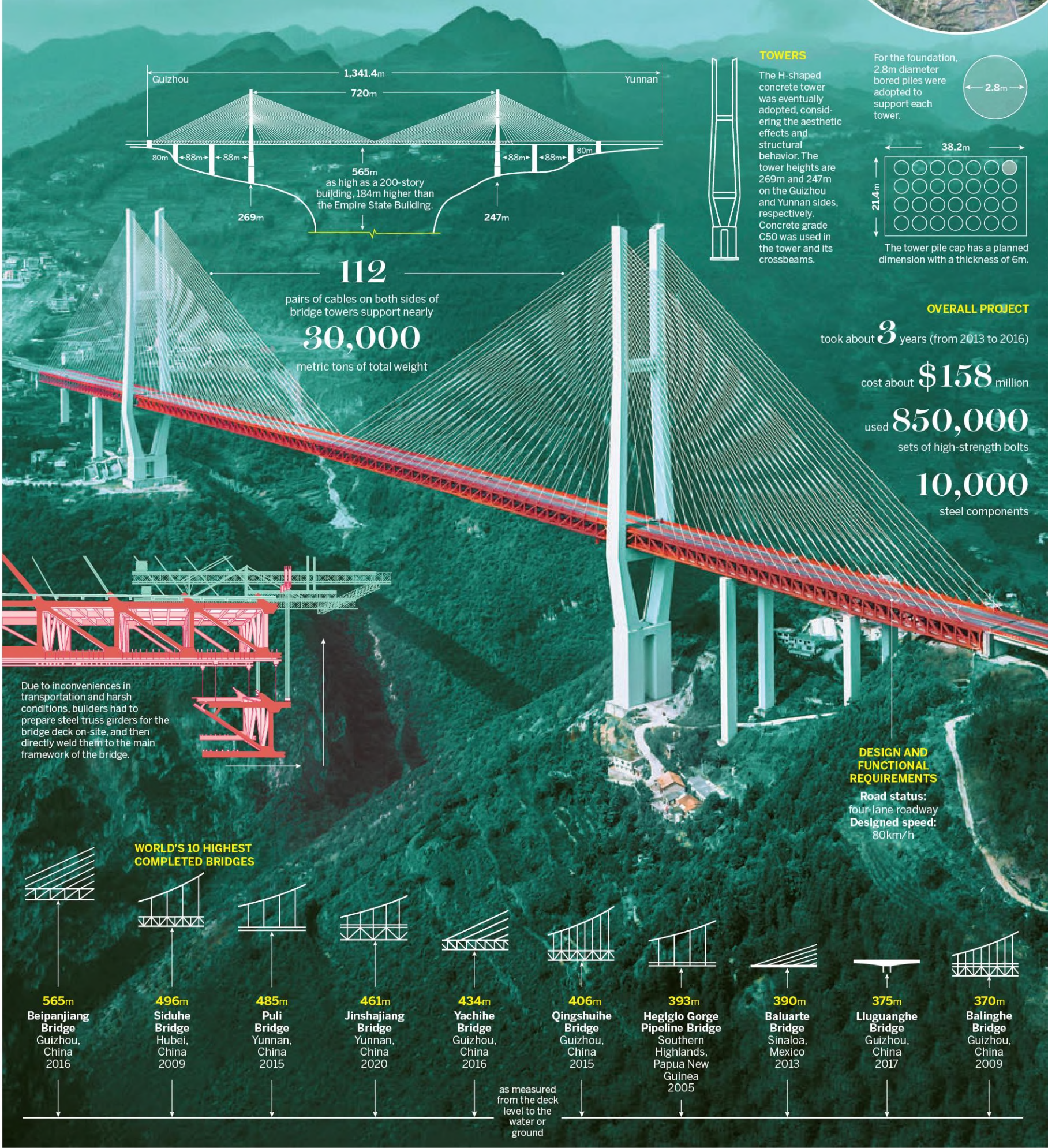


CHINA MARVELS

Editor's Note: This new series in China Daily celebrates the technologies, industries, infrastructure and capital goods projects for being the world's most impressive in their class. They are also a testament to the tremendous progress China has made in recent decades on the back of its reform and opening-up policy, as well as the nation's drive for high-quality development and a modern industrial system.

A BRIDGE IN THE CLOUDS

Situated on the border between Southwest China's Yunnan and Guizhou provinces, the four-lane Beipanjiang Bridge has a total length of 1,341.4 meters and a 720-meter crossing. Soaring 565 meters over the Beipan River — equivalent to a 200-story skyscraper — it's the world's highest completed bridge. The structure significantly slashes travel time from one side of the river to the other.



HIGHEST AIRPORT
Daocheng Yading Airport
Located on Haizi Mountain, Daocheng county, Sichuan province, Daocheng Yading Airport is not only the highest airport in China, but also the highest in the world. There are 1,145 small lakes in the vicinity of Haizi Mountain, which are the result of ancient glaciers gouging away at the surface of the Earth.



4,411m

HIGHEST HIGH-SPEED RAILWAY STATION
Shandan Junmachang Station
At an elevation of 3,108 meters, Shandan Junmachang Station is the highest point on the Lanxin (Lanzhou-Xinjiang) High-speed Railway and the highest high-speed railway station in the world. The annual average temperature is around -4 C, and the oxygen content of the ambient air is lower than 80 percent of that found at sea level.



3,108m

HIGHEST WIND FARM PROJECT
Zhegu Wind Farm
Located at an altitude between 4,850 and 5,500 meters in the northern foothills of the Himalayas, the world's highest wind farm — Zhegu Wind Farm in Tsolmai county, Tibet autonomous region — completed hoisting of all generator units in October 2021. With a total installed capacity of 22 megawatts, the project has set an example for global ultra-high altitude wind power scientific research.

HIGHEST BIG DATA CENTER PROJECT
Ningsuan Data Center
The first phase of the Ningsuan Data Center project in Southwest China's Tibet autonomous region was completed in 2021, designating the world's highest big data center as ready for service. Located at an elevation of 3,670 meters in Lhasa, capital city of Tibet, the project is expected to evolve into an international data distribution center and serve global digital needs.



5,500m

3,670m

Online
See more by scanning the code.

Sources: Guizhou Provincial Department of Transport and Highest Bridges.com

GRAPHICS BY TIAN CHI & LI XIAOTIAN / CHINA DAILY

COMMENT

Editorials

New York Times Nord Stream report raises more questions than it answers

According to a report published in The New York Times on Tuesday, "new intelligence reviewed by US officials suggests that a pro-Ukrainian group carried out the attack on the Nord Stream pipelines last year".

Yet the newspaper goes to great lengths in the article to apparently dissociate itself from that conclusion, perhaps concerned about where that information is coming from. As such, the report seems to have been published with the sole purpose of easing the pressure that has been mounting on the Joe Biden administration since investigative journalist Seymour Hersh published a report last month claiming that the United States carried out the sabotaging of the pipelines with the assistance of Norway. A charge the US government denied immediately, but has subsequently maintained a studied silence over. As have US media outlets, until this New York Times report.

The report comes after the United Nations Security Council held a special discussion on the necessity of a multilateral probe into the sabotaging of international civilian energy infrastructure.

Kyiv will undoubtedly feel aggrieved by the report, not just because the report claims it directly approved the sabotage or was involved in it while keeping the US in the dark, but because it highlights that Kyiv and Washington are not always on the same page, and Washington will hang Kyiv out to dry if push comes to shove.

It indicates that despite Ukraine's dependence on the US for military, intelligence and diplomatic support, Ukrainian officials are not always transparent with their US counterparts about their military

operations, "some of which have frustrated US officials", who believe that they have risked alienating European allies without improving Ukraine's position on the battlefield. One of these was a car bomb near Moscow in August that killed Daria Dugina, the daughter of a prominent Russian nationalist. Although Kyiv denied any involvement, "US intelligence agencies eventually came to believe that the killing was authorized by what officials called 'elements' of the Ukrainian government".

The report goes on to say that "After the Nord Stream operation, there was hushed speculation — and worry — in Washington that parts of the Ukrainian government might have been involved in that operation as well".

Despite this, given the extent to which Kyiv relies on the US for its military hardware and know-how, whether such elements would have the wherewithal to sabotage the pipelines by themselves is a question that remains to be answered.

It should not be forgotten that Ukraine has no coastline with the Baltic Sea. That means, if Kyiv "elements" really did it, they did so in busy international waters close to Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Germany without being spotted. Nor should it be forgotten that a marine drill of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization took place in exactly those waters a few months ahead of the blasts, offering both the means and opportunity for laying the charges. As such, the report does not let the US off the hook.

Before any evidence is forthcoming to the contrary, The New York Times' report is nothing but a poor publicity campaign by the US government that only serves to further lay the blame at its door.

TikTok becomes political football, again

FBI director Christopher Wray said in a US Senate hearing on Wednesday that TikTok "is a tool that is ultimately within the control of the Chinese government — and it, to me, it screams out with national security concerns".

In the same hearing, the director of the US Central Intelligence Agency, William Burns, claimed that the agency's future will be defined by the United States' ongoing technology race with China.

The remarks followed the release of the Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community, which pointed to alleged Chinese cyber surveillance as the biggest national security threat.

There is no evidence TikTok is collecting the personal data of users for the Chinese government. Yet on March 5, US-based Business Insider reported that data collected by online pharmacies, as well as social media posts, and message and search logs, were being provided to prosecute women seeking abortions or abortion-inducing medication, a direct result of the overturning of the ruling in the Roe versus Wade case in June 2022. Guess where their data come from — not TikTok. It is Google and Facebook that are providing the data.

And it is not just the US spook establishment that sees a red menace in the popular video-sharing app. The White House backed a bill introduced on Tuesday by a dozen senators to give President

Joe Biden's administration new powers to ban TikTok and other foreign-based technologies if they are considered to pose a national security threat.

The Restricting the Emergence of Security Threats that Risk Information and Communications Technology (RESTRICT) Act is intended to "comprehensively address the ongoing threat posed by technology from foreign adversaries, such as TikTok", claim its sponsors.

To call TikTok an adversary is ridiculous. As is Wray's claim that TikTok could drive narratives to divide US people over the Taiwan question. As if that is something that concerns the majority of the US public. US society is certainly divided but that is because of wealth gaps, racism and other domestic blights, including the bitter feuding within Congress where TikTok and other alleged Chinese security threats are merely political footballs.

On Feb 28, commenting on the US government's ban on members of federal agencies having TikTok on their devices, the Foreign Ministry replied that the US government so lacks confidence that it even fears an app that young people like.

It should fear the ire of the public. As one comment posted in response to a Reuters tweet about the proposed ban on TikTok said, it is nothing but "politically motivated prejudice and discrimination" and millions of young American voters will teach the politicians a good lesson.

US interventions invariably catastrophic

On March 20, 2003, having turned a deaf ear to the global opposition, the United States invaded Iraq claiming that the country possessed weapons of mass destruction, offering as proof what was later revealed to be a small tube of detergent. Iraq has endured endless chaos and instability ever since.

The US invasion led to the deaths of between 180,000 to 210,000 civilians, according to the Iraq Body Count project, which maintains the world's largest public database of violent civilian deaths in the country since the 2003 invasion. The instability and security vacuum caused by the toppling of the Iraqi government and the withdrawal of US forces in 2011 also led to the rise of the Islamic State terrorist group.

Hence, when US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin landed in Baghdad on Tuesday on an unannounced visit, his message that the US "will continue to strengthen and broaden our partnership in support of Iraqi security, stability, and sovereignty", was a hypocritical repudiation of US culpability.

After Iraq, the US has continued its military adventures, including in Libya and Syria. And it is not just the Middle East that has been plunged into turbulence and turmoil by the US' actions. Afghanistan is still roiling from the effects of the US invasion of the country in 2001 and subsequent military

occupation and it is also the US' invisible hand that has turned Ukraine into a butcher's block.

To consolidate its global hegemony and play its zero-sum games, the US has no qualms about meddling in the internal affairs of other countries. Although it does so upholding the banners of democracy and human rights, these are just fig leaves for exercising of its might makes right.

Thanks to the US' always calamitous interventions in other countries' affairs, passages of peace and tranquility are rare in any part of the world as they always cause radiating shock waves of turmoil and turbulence.

As the 20th anniversary of the Iraq War draws near, the world should reflect on what has happened over the past two decades as a result and denounce the US' interventionist policies that continue to wreak havoc in many parts of the world. Not least in Ukraine, where, having gamed the support of its NATO allies, the US is constantly pouring oil on the conflict by providing Kyiv with ever more military aid.

Not content with this, the Joe Biden administration and the strategists in Washington are trying to extend the Ukraine crisis to the Asia-Pacific, as a means to create a hard buffer to halt China's development. On the anniversary of the start of the Iraq War, the rest of the international community should say a resolute "no more" to the US and its chauvinist allies.

Cai Meng



Opinion Line

New regulatory body to make financial system more perfect

A new national financial regulatory administration due to be established according to the newly unveiled institutional reform of the State Council, China's Cabinet, will not only strengthen and upgrade China's current banking and insurance supervision, but also provide a wider systematic space for unified and broader financial supervision in the future.

China's financial sector was rebuilt in the 1980s, with mixed operations and unified supervision by the People's Bank of China, the central bank, in the early days. In the following decades, different regulatory departments were set up, each exercising separate regulations on respective business. With the development of financial mixed business, a kind of mixed supervision, or integrated supervision has reemerged in recent years.

In 2017, the Financial Stability and Development Committee of the

State Council was set up for the coordination of monetary policy and financial regulation, and the coordination of financial, fiscal and industrial policies.

The proposed financial regulatory administration will be responsible for the broad financial supervision exclusive of the securities sector, coordinating the protection of the rights and interests of financial consumers, strengthening risk management, prevention and disposal, and investigating and dealing with violations of laws and regulations in accordance with the law. This means that banking, insurance, trusts and other financial business are all subject to the supervision of the new body, marking a step toward the formation of a cross-industry financial regulation landscape in China.

In recent years, the Chinese government has vigorously promoted new rules on asset management,

reduced the high-risk "shadow banking" business, cracked down on the sprawling development of internet-based financial business, and promoted the rectification of the financial activities of large platform enterprises. This puts the formation of a larger, more integrated financial regulatory body in sight.

Yi Gang, governor of the People's Bank of China, said recently that "the overall plan is to make China's financial system more perfect, more efficient, safer and more open to the outside world". It can be seen that the newly unveiled reshuffling of the country's financial regulatory facility is to better serve its economic development, and the establishment of a new, stronger financial regulatory body is not to limit the development of business players, but to balance financial safety and efficiency and lubricate the sector's further development.

— BEIJING NEWS

CHIPS Act hurts allies and foes alike

Republic of Korea's Minister for Trade Dukgeun Ahn set off on a three-day visit to the United States on Wednesday to hold negotiations on the CHIPS and Science Act and other bilateral trade issues.

Long ago, ROK Minister of Trade, Industry and Energy Lee Chang-yang had warned the Act will lead to commercial or technological violation of rights by making the US artificially attractive to investors. That an ally has to send a minister to hold negotiations points to the essence of the US' CHIPS Act: It hurts all.

When then US president Donald Trump launched one move after another to curb Chinese companies

from doing research on chips, several Western media outlets called it the US' "chip war against China"; once the CHIPS and Science Act was signed into law in August 2022, people have realized it is instead a chip war against the world.

By offering a \$39 billion in subsidies to boost chips production, \$2 billion in subsidies for chips used in the automobile and defense sector, and cutting 25 percent of tax for all those building a chip plant in its territory, the US is trying to attract chip producers from all over the world, a move that will hurt both its allies as well as its imaginary enemies.

But the ROK's plan to solve the

problem might not prove so effective. Reports say ROK companies are concerned about the harsh terms a company must meet to get subsidies from the US. The ROK will discuss how to solve certain subsidy prerequisites that fail to meet "global standards". Basically, it hopes to get a share of the excessive profits that the US will make. But in doing so, the ROK is helping the US to take a bigger share of the global chip sector, thus shrinking the space for other players.

In the process, the ROK's negotiation power against this giant will shrink.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Australian newspapers squirm in their smears

Were it not for former Australian prime minister Paul Keating's lambasting of the stories carried on the front pages of the Sydney Morning Herald and The Age on Tuesday, which urge Australia to prepare for a war with China in three years, the reports would have died a death in that country.

In that sense, the publisher of the two newspapers, Nine Entertainment Company, should give credit to Keating, even though he condemned the reports for being "the most egregious and provocative news presentation of any newspaper" he has witnessed in over 50 years of active public life.

"It is way worse than the illustrated sampan shown to be coming from China in the build-up to

the war in Vietnam in the 1960s," he said.

The reports were published to hype up a "China threat" so as to foster a public opinion atmosphere in Australia conducive to advancing the country's nuclear submarine cooperation with the United States and the United Kingdom, which is expected to be a key topic during Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's visit to the US later this week, and also a hot potato to his pro-US predecessor passed to him.

That explains why the two reports are devoid of any objectivity, lacking any voices critical of Australia's blind following of the US' strategy to contain China. Although media organizations are entitled to

have their own views, quality reports are based on extensive interviews of different interest groups.

Tory Maguire, executive editor of the Sydney Morning Herald, accused Keating of indulging "in personal slurs against the journalists at the Sydney Morning Herald and The Age instead of engaging in the substance of their reporting". Yet Keating did nothing but point out the problems with the reports as well as the possible dire consequences.

If Maguire and her colleagues continue to dilute "the substance of their reporting" with such bias, they are cheating their readers and the nation.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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COMMENT

Khalid Taimur Akram

China's COVID policy a failure? No!

China has succeeded, more than any other country, in mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Scientists can better explain why China implemented the strict pandemic prevention and control measures. But one thing is certain — that the strict measures were aimed at safeguarding the lives and health of the Chinese people.

China has left no stone unturned in minimizing the effects of the pandemic, including those during the surge in infections at the end of last year and early this year. It is the success of the anti-pandemic measures that paved the way for China to "re-open" its borders to travellers in January.

That China's COVID-19 fatality rate is among the lowest in the world shows the effectiveness of the country's strict anti-pandemic measures. Accordingly, China's scientific planning for the next phase of COVID-19 vaccination continues.

But despite the success of its anti-pandemic measures, China continues to face

It has been the fastest-growing major economy for years and could overtake the United States in terms of economic scale.

Western media's criticism. Some Western media and politicians are manipulating the facts to project China as a threat to the world. Some organizations and people have even rekindled the old conspiracy theory that the novel coronavirus might have leaked during an experiment from a laboratory in Wuhan, Hubei province.

But the fact is, China is neither a threat to any country nor is there any scientific evidence to prove that the virus leaked from a Wuhan lab and spread across the world.

China is the world's second-largest economy and capable of overcoming any emergency, including the COVID-19 outbreak. It

has been the fastest-growing major economy for years and could overtake the United States in terms of economic scale. Perhaps this is why the US-led West is desperate to check China's peaceful rise.

Many Western media outlets continue their sordid attempt to paint China in a bad light. China does not fire corrupt or unproductive officials, but rather "purges" them; China does not grant advantageous loans to develop infrastructure in developing countries, but it "traps" them in debt; China uses "vaccine diplomacy" to supply COVID-19 vaccines while other countries donate them selflessly; and China "monitors and controls" close contacts of COVID-19 cases while other countries trace them. These are some examples of some Western journalists writing about China.

Moreover, some Western media outlets are deliberately distorting the facts while ignoring the real facts about China's anti-pandemic measures, including the largest vaccine drive in the world, and making unwarranted accusations against China's pandemic fight.

But these lies are untenable. More than 1.6 billion passenger trips were made during the Spring Festival holiday this year, and about 10,640 cinemas across the country opened for business. With the drastic increase in bookings for domestic flights and hotels, China's anti-pandemic measures have shifted from vaccination and other anti-pandemic measures to making efforts to resume full production.

The Communist Party of China, guided by the philosophy of always putting the people first, has protected the lives and health of the people in order to ensure the economic and social development of the country, thus exposing the Western media's double standard when it comes to dealing with emergencies, including pandemics.

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



Chen Weihua

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'Wolf warriors' needed to fight more hysterical Western 'hyenas'

Asked on Monday if his appointment as foreign minister is a signal that China is moving away from "wolf warrior diplomacy", Qin Gang's response was straightforward and yet insightful.

Qin recalled the time when the US media exclaimed "here comes a Chinese wolf warrior" after he was named China's ambassador to the United States in July of 2021. But after he returned to China to assume the position of foreign minister, the US media didn't refer to him as "wolf warrior".

"I kind of feel at a loss," Qin told journalists covering the first session of the 14th National People's Congress in Beijing.

Qin described "wolf warrior diplomacy" as a narrative spread by people who know little about China and its diplomacy, or people who have a hidden agenda. "In Chinese diplomacy, there is no shortage of goodwill and kindness. But if faced with jackals or wolves, Chinese diplomats would have no choice but to confront them head-on and protect our motherland," he said.

That is also the case in Africa where people are fed up with being lectured by the West for centuries.

I agree with Qin, because I too have been called by some in the West as a "wolf warrior" for criticizing Western politicians who indulge in China bashing.

It is true that Chinese officials, diplomats and journalists didn't return the favor of those vicious Western politicians attacking China. But after they started doing so a few years ago, it shocked many in the West who are used to lecturing the rest of the world, especially the developing countries, on diplomacy and international relations.

Many Western politicians believe that they can point the finger at will at the rest of the world, and the rest of the world should listen to them but never talk back. But in order to deserve the title of "wolf warriors" that can take on hysterical Western "hyena warriors", Chinese officials, diplomats and journalists need to become much tougher.

Chinese lawmakers are attending the annual session of the 14th National People's Congress, but no one could possibly name anyone who bashes the US nearly as viciously as some US lawmakers smear China, including Marco Rubio, Tom Cotton, Josh Hawley, Marsha Blackburn and new China hawk Mike Gallagher.

Despite the West's efforts to silence China's voice by calling Western critics "wolf warriors", the Chinese people will no longer be silent while the West recklessly smears China. That is also the case in Africa where people are fed up with being lectured by the West for centuries.

At a joint press conference last Saturday, Felix Tshisekedi, president of the Democratic Republic of Congo, told visiting French President Emmanuel Macron to "look at us differently by respecting us, and not always with a paternalistic look". Tshisekedi asserted: "Francafricque no longer exists. We must establish a policy of equals."

In another case, Norbert Lammert, former president of German parliament Bundestag, complained to Namibian President Hage Geingob that there are four times more Chinese than Germans in Namibia.

Irritated by Lammert's complaint, Geingob replied that instead of smearing China, German and other Western leaders need to do some self-introspection. Geingob said despite Namibia rolling out the "red carpet" for Germans, Namibians, in particular, and Africans, in general, have often been victims of serious racism in Germany.

It is possible that African leaders such as Geingob and their diplomats may soon be labeled something like "wolf warriors" if they keep opposing the baseless comments of Western politicians and media. But the West should have stopped lecturing the rest of the world, especially the developing countries, a long time ago.

Zhou Xuezhi

Private sector can accelerate recovery with policy support

The Chinese economy's recovery is expected to gain pace this year, with private small and medium-sized enterprises playing an important role in the process. However, SMEs need good policy support to do that.

That the Chinese economy will grow at a healthy rate this year is also borne out by the 2023 Government Work Report, which has set the GDP growth target at around 5 percent for 2023 with intensified and more targeted macroeconomic policies to promote a stable economic growth.

First, private enterprises are a key driver of the Chinese economy. According to National Bureau of Statistics data, in the first 11 months of 2022, the cumulative operating income and cumulative operating profit of State-owned industrial enterprises were 2.93 trillion yuan (\$422.04 billion) and 158.43 billion yuan respectively. On the other hand, the operating income of private industrial enterprises was 47.67 trillion yuan and the operating profit 2.17 trillion yuan.

Second, privately-owned SMEs employ a large number of people. In 2021, while urban employment touched 467.73 million, China's micro, small and medium-sized enterprises accounted for 99.8 percent of all large-scale corporate legal entities and 79.4 percent of all corporate employment.

Third, privately-owned SMEs also inject new vitality into China's economy because they are closer to the market and more sensitive to the economy, despite being relatively small in scale. Due to their relatively simple organizational structure, they can respond to the market's demands and adjust their production and operation strategies more quickly. They are also more open to trying out new business models and adapting to advanced, untested technology.

But the private SMEs' ability to avoid or overcome risks is relatively weak. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the purchasing managers' index (PMI) of SMEs in 2022 ought to have been lower than those of large enterprises. In the first 11 months of 2022, the average monthly manufacturing PMI of large enterprises was 50.4 percent, and the average monthly manufacturing PMI of medium-sized enterprises and small enterprises was 49.3 percent and 46.9 percent respectively. The difference between large and small businesses was 3.5 percentage points.

In 2019, before the pandemic broke out, the monthly average manufacturing PMI of large industrial enterprises was 2.6 percentage points higher than that of their small counterparts. This shows small enterprises have been hit much harder by the pandemic.

But this year, the Chinese economy is showing clear signs of a strong recovery, and SMEs, in spite of being the main force behind

Therefore, local governments need to improve the local business environment at the institutional level, and refrain from taking improper actions.

the recovery, require policy support to play their due important role in that recovery — although sporadic COVID-19 infections could still disrupt the recovery.

In terms of rent reduction and tax reduction and exemption, the previous preferential policies for private SMEs, such as rent reduction for office space, and reduction and exemption of "six taxes and two fees", should continue.

In addition to direct policy support, indirect subsidies and support should also be provided for the SMEs. For example, the tourism industry which was badly hit by the pandemic, should receive both direct and indirect subsidies — perhaps in the form of coupons for tourists for accommodation and transportation, which hopefully will help increase the number of tourists, thereby boosting the business of SMEs in the tourism industry.

Due to the generally low credit level of private SMEs and insufficient collateral, it is difficult for many of them to obtain loans. So the government should expand various financing channels, improve the

financing system for private SMEs, and explore different methods to grant loans to SMEs.

Private SMEs also face problems in dealing with local governments, which harm their operations, especially because the lack of improvement in the business environment in some places has pitted private enterprises, including private SMEs, against local governments. As a result, disadvantaged private SMEs suffer the most. Therefore, local governments need to improve the local business environment at the institutional level, and refrain from taking improper actions.

In this regard, however, the Govern-

ment Work Report says China will also encourage and support the private sector and private businesses in growing and expanding, and support micro, small and medium-sized enterprises and self-employed individuals in business development.

All this suggests the Chinese economy will grow at a healthy pace this year and in the coming years.

The author is an assistant researcher at the Institute of World Economics and Politics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL VIEWS



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

WU HUAIZHONG

Westward pivot

The fear of 'being abandoned' has prompted Japan to stabilize its alliance with the US

Since the normalization of diplomatic relations between China and Japan, their bilateral relationship has been under the influence and interference from the alliance between the United States and Japan. Even though Japan is seeking greater strategic autonomy, and the connection and interaction between China, Japan and the US is increasing, the intervention from the Japan-US alliance and its role in regulating China-Japan relations have not disappeared or been weakened. The primary goal of Japan's foreign



strategy is to stabilize its alliance with the US. Under this premise, Japan has adjusted its alliance with the US to respond to the "China issue". It can be said that how Japan views its alliance with the US and the outcomes from its management of this alliance affect its relations with China to a large extent.

In the management of its alliance with the US, Japan, like many of the US "secondary allies", has been struggling to deal with the dilemma of "getting involved" or "being abandoned". On the one hand, over-reliance on the alliance means it risks getting involved or trapped in the wars waged by the US. On the other hand, in seeking greater autonomy it risks being abandoned as an ally by the US. As far as the Japan-US alliance and Sino-Japanese relations are concerned, Japan is increasingly worried about the risk of "being abandoned" rather than the risk of "getting involved".

China's development has picked up steam and attained achievements recognized by the world since 2010, and the strategic strength and competitive capabilities between China and the US have become increasingly balanced. This has led to a lingering sense of doubt and fear in Japan, which is in a weak position in the US-Japan alliance. For Japan, there is always a sense of uneasiness. Other US allies, such as the Republic of Korea, the Philippines and Thailand, have always attached great importance to avoiding the risk of "getting involved". However, the actions of Japan increasingly show that it is more focused on dealing with the plight of "being abandoned". This is in line with the theory that the fear of "being abandoned" enables allies in weaker positions to adopt various hedging strategies.

Since the normalization of diplomatic relations between China and Japan over 50 years ago, Japan has adjusted its relations with China several times, all of which have been related to the status of its alliance with the US, that is, the risk of "being abandoned". Its decision to normalize relations with China in 1972 was directly related to the "Nixon Shock". And

As the US policy toward China has shifted from unilateralism in the Trump era to Biden's united front against China, Japan has to a considerable extent restored its confidence in the policy orientation of working together with the US to contain China and it is taking a tough stance against China.

Japan's reaching of a 10-point consensus with China on building a China-Japan relationship that can meet the requirements of the new era in 2019 was related to the shock from the Donald Trump administration, as the Japan-US alliance was subjected to the most severe test since the end of the Cold War due to the Trump administration. While strengthening the alliance, Japan has also boldly carried out some attempts based on strategic autonomy. What was most notable was, due to the serious doubts and worries of "being abandoned" during the Trump presidency, it adopted a hedging strategy by taking a closer stance toward China.

After Joe Biden became president of the US in January 2021, the US-Japan alliance focused more on China. Unlike the Trump administration, one of the focal points of the Biden administration's China strategy is to unite its allies, form a united front on China issues, and carry out all-round suppression against China. After this policy pivot from the Trump era, the policy response from the US alliances was more coordinated than before. This is a period when the allies have the least disagreements on China issues and when Japan has its weakest dilemma on the alliance over the past decade. Japan and the US have moved closer on some strategic issues, and have taken new and important steps in coordinating their actions. As the US policy toward China has shifted from unilateralism in the Trump era to Biden's united front against China, Japan has to a considerable extent restored its confidence in the policy orientation of working together with the US to contain China and it is taking a tough stance against China.

What is particularly concerning recently is that Japan is actively cooperating with the US in putting in place "containment" measures against China in areas of security, diplomacy and economy and used such moves as a bargaining chip to stabilize its alliance with the US. Japan is also plotting the use of issues concerning the East China Sea, the South China

Sea and the Taiwan question to seek deeper involvement from the US and the Japan-US alliance. Japan is no longer concerned about being involved in the conflict between China and the US as it used to be. Instead, it is fanning the flames, cooperating closely with the US, and even willing to stand at the forefront of military confrontation. As a result, Japan's overall strategy is pivoting westward and closer to the US and other major allies and partners, and the triangular relations between China, the US and Japan are becoming even more unbalanced. The negative factors in Japan's China policy have become more prominent, and containing China has become the focus of Japan's China policy and even its overall diplomacy.

It can be said that Japan's level of vigilance toward China has surpassed that of any historical period since the normalization of bilateral diplomatic relations. The Fumio Kishida administration's China policy on issues such as human rights, diplomacy, military transformation, economic security, the Taiwan question and island disputes, is becoming more aggressive, which has further intensified bilateral conflicts and frictions, and exerted a great negative impact on bilateral relations. Japan has a clear tendency in its strategic pivot toward the US, and its negative moves on major and sensitive issues are frequent, and its tendency to adopt confrontational strategies toward China has increased significantly. This tough and reckless response is bringing about a historic paradigm shift in China-Japan relations and the way the two countries get along.

Under this pattern of relations, two situations and trends have attracted the attention of the world. First, in the strategic competition between China and the US and Japan's relations with China and the US, Japan is quickening its efforts to build up alliances to contain China. Its adjustment of relations with China, or leaving room for maneuver, are moves of tactical hedging instead of strategic adjustment. Such changes will not go beyond the framework of Japan-US alliance in the foreseeable future. Second, Japan has got out of its dilemma of "being abandoned" and is taking on new security roles and defense functions by strengthening and extending its alliances. These new strategic directions are quietly changing the nature and structure of the Japan-US alliance, which may lead to greater changes in China-Japan relations and even the geopolitical structure of East Asia.

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SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

ISHIDA RYUJI

Mendacious menace

Japan's economy has been stagnant for nearly 30 years, yet it still has ambitions to be a military superpower

A joint strategy document was delivered after the Japan-United States Security Consultative Committee (2+2) meeting in Washington on Jan 12, 2023. It was based on three defense documents issued by the Japanese Cabinet in December 2022, namely the National Security Strategy, the National



Defense Program Guidelines and the Mid-Term Defense Program. The Japanese government has clearly taken China as a hostile

country in these documents, indicating that its Self-Defense Forces will strengthen their cooperation with the US military to target China. To this end, Japan has hiked its military budget and improved its counterattack capability, which goes far beyond the established policy of its so-called purely defensive defense posture, since the capability to hit enemy bases is not allowed.

While claiming that the security environment is deteriorating, the Japanese government is attempting to change the status quo by force and is therefore doubling its military expenditure.

If the economic growth of countries in the "Indo-Pacific" region is regarded as a "challenge to the international order", all the developed countries in the region should be regarded as a "threat". Yet Japan's rapid economic growth in the 1960s was praised instead of being seen as a threat. The so-called free and open international order pursued by the West would be neither free nor open if it did not include India and China. Only by positioning the fast-growing developing countries as emerging partners rather than threats, can regional peace and stability be effectively guaranteed.

Japan's military build-up to counter China's rise is in essence an attempt to create enemies unilaterally by not allowing the development of a new power that might threaten the vested interests of the West.

In this regard, the US and Japanese governments have always disregarded the fact that the Japan-US alliance has overwhelming military strength in the Asia-Pacific region. The US and Japan have sought to legitimize the reinforcement of their military presence by hyping up China's "extensive and rapid military build-up". However,

While China is strictly implementing the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, Japan and the US are building up their military force so as to intervene in the Taiwan question. It is they that are the greatest challenge to peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region.

according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, China's military expenditure in 2021, which was the second highest in the world at \$293.35 billion, was only about one-third that of the total military expenditure of the US, which was the highest at \$800.67 billion, and Japan, which was ninth in the world at \$54.12 billion. It is true that China's military expenditure has been increasing since the 2000s, but it is necessary to put that in the context of the need to modernize its military and the continuous development of its economy. In fact, China's military budget increases have remained in the range of 1.3 to 1.6 percent of its GDP since 1995, far below its economic growth rate.

There is no doubt that the US' military spending is considerably greater than that of any other country in the world, with its military expenditure accounting for 3 percent to 4 percent of its GDP. Japan is now about to double its quota of 1 percent to 2 percent of its GDP, and will become the world's third-largest military power. The country's economy has been stagnant for nearly 30 years, yet it still has ambitions to be a military superpower. That is not commensurate with its economy. And the US military can take full advantage of its newest base on Okinawa, which is located at China's "throat". If there is any military threat in East Asia, it is not from China but from the Japan-US alliance.

China's policy is not hostile to the US and Japan, and it has not formed any military alliances targeting any other country. Japan and the US, by contrast, no longer disguise the nature of their military alliance. Military alliances require enemies to be fabricated if there is no real threat, which is what the US did with the Soviet Union and what

it is now doing with China. On the other hand, since the mid-1950s, China has always followed the diplomatic principle of non-alignment and pacifism and insisted on not having military alliances. In the face of containment and blockade, China did not take the initiative to identify the US and Japan as enemies and conduct a targeted military build-up. The containment and blockade of the US-Japan alliance are entirely unilateral hostility, which has never changed.

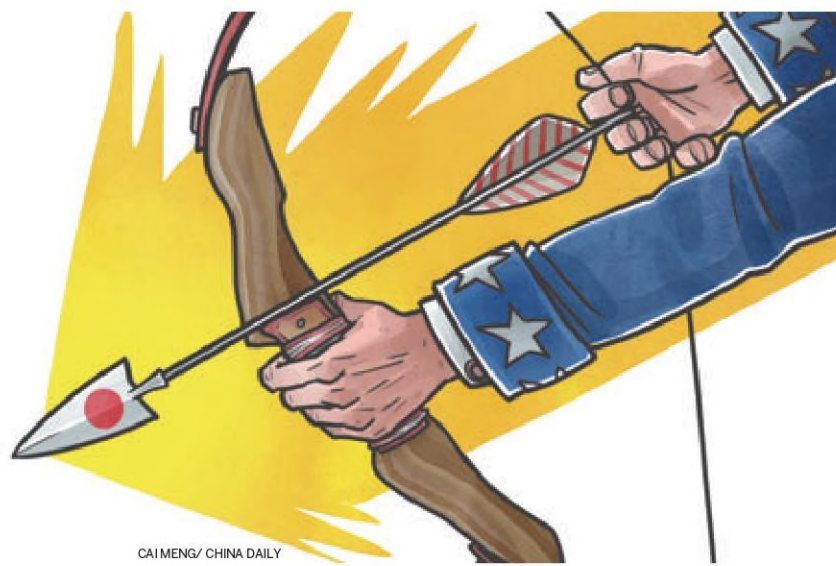
China's Foreign Ministry on Feb 22, 2023, issued the Global Security Initiative Concept Paper, a vision of peace proposed by China to the world at a critical moment given the situation in Ukraine. Compared with the "strategy document" between Japan and the US in January, China's aspirations for peace and the pursuit of global interests are evident.

In the process of promoting the implementation of the Global Security Initiative, China will adhere to mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation. In contrast to the idea of forming military alliances that are hostile to or antagonistic toward specific countries, the Global Security Initiative embodies an aspiration of pursuing peace and a community with a shared future.

China and Japan signed their Treaty of Peace and Friendship in 1978. Although that treaty remains in force, the "strategy document" of Japan and the US made no mention of it. Japan's current policy blatantly ignores the first article of the treaty: "The Contracting Parties shall develop relations of perpetual peace and friendship between the two countries on the basis of the principles of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit and peaceful co-existence".

While China is strictly implementing the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, Japan and the US are building up their military force so as to intervene in the Taiwan question. It is they that are the greatest challenge to peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region.

The author is an associate researcher at the School of Humanities at Shanghai Jiaotong University. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



CAI MENG / CHINA DAILY

LIFE

After being married for 38 years, Zhang Jianjun and Qin Shumei decided it was time to get a picture. Dressed in formal attire, they are finally ready for their wedding photos.

The photographer, lighting operator and makeup artist are from the younger generation. They communicate with the elderly couple to help them overcome nervousness to ensure good photos.

They are all students from Wuhan University of Engineering Science, in Hubei province, and they are taking wedding photos for those who had no chance to do so when they were young, as a form of community service.

"I'm grateful that I've realized my dream to wear a wedding dress," says Qin, 64, from Shijiazhuang, Hebei province. "Our love is not the intense type, but we believe it's important to keep each other company."

While young people today would likely travel to a picturesque destination to have their wedding photos taken by a professional photographer, the older generation kept their big day simple — newlyweds around the 1970s often only took a black-and-white photo as a memento.

It was not until the early 1990s that professional wedding photo studios started to spring up in the Chinese mainland, as the economy blossomed.

Based on that reality, Yu Jinwen, 35, a counselor from the university, initiated the ambitious project in 2015.

It is also because of his grandfather. When he passed away in 2010, the family searched for a decent photo of him but could not find one and had to use the photo on his ID card as a photo for the funeral. It became Yu's greatest regret in life.

"The program has pleased the elderly and helped improve the overall ability of young students," Yu says. "China is an aging society and juniors should pay more attention to seniors, many of whom are too shy to express their demands."

A program for seniors

Once an old man in his 70s contacted Yu and confessed he was embarrassed to go to a photo studio to take wedding photos with his wife.

"He told me that even his children had never taken such photos, which he believed were only for young people. He didn't want his family to know that it was him who wanted to take wedding photos. If we went to them, he could explain it to them as our idea," Yu says.

"It's a novel thing for the elderly. Some take their photos in the farm field. Some are embarrassed to walk in the community in wedding suits and want to take the photos at home. Students can easily set up a simple background for them."

Red is the traditional color for Chinese wedding outfits. He says retired soldiers prefer to wear their green army uniforms, which smartly match the red garments of the wives.

"A grandma called me, cried and said that her husband passed away and these photos were an essential memento of him. At that time, I realized that what we're doing is just a small deed, but for some elderly folks, it's very valuable," Yu adds.

More than 400 student volun-



WEDDING PHOTOS FOR THE ELDERLY

teers from the university have taken 50,000 wedding photos of about 650 elderly couples in Hubei and its neighboring provinces. They develop the films, frame the photos and deliver them via courier.

Only 15 students joined the program in the first year but now there are about 100 to 150 volunteers divided into 10 teams every year, who each spend a week on their mission.

Students are trained and arranged with tasks in accordance with their expertise. They often choose a subject of conversation that appeals to the elderly, such as asking about their previous occupation.

In recent years, they started to record the touching love stories of the elderly and post them on social media. Some volunteers continue to aid the program after graduation.

They have different themes every year. For example, in 2019 they shot wedding photos for retired soldiers while Wuhan was holding the Military World Games.

The public-spirited program recently won silver prize at the sixth Chinese Youth Volunteer Service Project Competition.

"Details of how the elderly couples get along with each other have touched the students, who get to learn about love from another perspective," Yu says.

He says the elderly were from many different walks of life. Students have learned greatly from them, and such exposure is a great boon for them, as they are about to enter society themselves.

"The older generation share their own life experiences, rather than



Older couples commemorate the big day decades after the fact thanks to a student project, **Xu Lin** and **Zhou Lihua** report in Wuhan.

Top: More than 400 student volunteers have taken 50,000 wedding photos of about 650 elderly couples, who had no chance to do so when they were young. **Above:** Retired soldier Liu Deming, 88, and his wife Shen Ailan, 81, from Shaoshan, Hunan province, have their wedding photos taken for the first time. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

talk about profound principles. When you're immersed in their stories, you gradually straighten out your thinking about many things."

Touching love stories

A pack of cigarettes, one kilogram of candy and two tables of relatives — that is how Zhao Xinguo, 74, and his wife Li Luanjiao, 75, got married in 1974. Zhao served in the navy and came home on vacation to register their marriage. They wrote letters to each other to maintain the long-distance relationship.

In 1982, Li developed rheumatism and her health began to decline. In 2016, she suffered a stroke and required a crutch to move around. Three years later, she became completely bedridden.

Zhao has been taking good care of her the whole time, making meals, feeding and massaging her. Weather permitting, he would carry her on his back downstairs and push her in a wheelchair around the community to enjoy fresh air and sunshine.

In 2019 and 2022, volunteers visited the couple to take wedding photos for them. It was summer, and Zhao bought them watermelons to assuage their thirst.

"We're very touched that these college students care about elderly people like us. My wife has a bright disposition and enjoyed chatting with the youngsters. It was the first time that she wore makeup," says Zhao, from Huangmei county, Huanggang city, Hubei province.

He wrote the university a thank-you letter.

"The activity was very meaningful.

It brought back sweet memories of when we were young. Also, it has developed the ability of these students, who endured hardships to perform these social services in rural areas."

Zhao served in the navy for 17 years while Li looked after their son and daughter. He believed he should repay her by taking care of her when she was ill.

He says the secret to a good marriage is that a couple should be tolerant with and cherish each other. It is natural to have quarrels and couples need time to get again after.

"Our love is very simple. We are just an ordinary couple, and we believe that this is how couples should be," he says.

Volunteer Zhao Chen, 21, who visited the couple last year, recalls chatting with the duo for about two hours and was greatly touched by their story.

"At my age, some young people think love is like fast food, coming and going quickly, and some have no idea what love is," Zhao Chen says. "The elderly couple's love is about being with each other, and offering mutual help and relief in times of difficulty."

He says these old couples all have wonderful life stories, which are waiting to be discovered by volunteers. The older generation's serious attitude toward love and work is worth learning.

He was also impressed by another couple that the team filmed. "They smiled happily and imbued us with their enthusiasm. But we later learned that the grandpa only had about three months left before cancer would take his life," he says.

Tackling difficulties

Yu recalls that the program encountered many difficulties early on.

The budget has always been tight, but there are good-hearted helpers to lend a hand. For example, one of Yu's friends, who happened to have closed his wedding photo studio in Wuhan, donated about 100 sets of second-hand wedding dresses.

The university pays for uniforms and insurance for students. Though some offer donations, most funds are raised by students, who sell second-hand items in a flea market on campus, do part-time jobs and pay their own expenses.

At first, when volunteers went into the community to talk to the elderly, many did not trust them, worrying that it was a fraud for money.

Now, the program's reputation has increased, and besides canvassing, they coordinate with the university's Communist Youth League of China to contact their counterparts in communities to reach elderly residents, who can also find ads for the program on newspapers and online platforms.

"No pain, no gain. It's through these difficulties that students have learned about the significance of the project, and overcoming them gives a sense of achievement," Yu says.

"The program has developed into maturity and can easily be duplicated now. I'm glad to see that other universities and institutions are also running similar projects for the elderly, benefiting the greater population."

Contact the writers at xulin@chinadaily.com.cn



Zhao Xinguo (far left and above right), 74, has been taking good care of his wife Li Luanjiao (above right), 75, since she became completely bedridden in 2019. Elderly couples, who had no chance to take wedding photos when they were young, fulfill their dreams, thanks to a program carried out by teachers and students from the Wuhan University of Engineering Science. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

LIFESHANGHAI

Phantom returns to thrill audiences again

Two productions will bring popular tale set against an opera backdrop to the stage, reflecting the buzzing entertainment scene, **Zhang Kun** reports.

Audiences in Shanghai will be in for a treat when not one but two Phantoms take to the stage. A dance theater production of *The Phantom of the Opera* will be premiered at the Shanghai International Dance Center Grand Theater on May 11. It will be performed by the Shanghai Ballet.

Meanwhile, the first Chinese production of British composer Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical *The Phantom of the Opera* will be premiered at the Shanghai Grand Theatre on May 3. "The ever-beloved story of the Phantom presented in musical theater and ballet in Shanghai reflects the prosperity and diversity of the city's performing art scene," says Zhang Songhua, president of the Shanghai Grand Theatre Arts Group, the parent institution of both the Shanghai Ballet and the Shanghai Grand Theatre.

British choreographer Derek Deane, former artistic director of the English National Ballet, says he came upon the idea of adapting the 1910s French novel by Gaston Leroux (1868-1927) to dance five years ago, as he was fascinated by the character of the Phantom.

"There is no other choice. I was absolutely determined that this production will belong to the Shanghai Ballet and no other company," Deane told China Daily on March 1.

The ballet maestro has created six productions for the Shanghai Ballet in the past 20 years. "The collaboration with the Shanghai Ballet has been very good for both of us because we both think in the same direction," he says.

The new ballet production has no reference to the renowned musical production *The Phantom of the Opera* by Webber. It will feature new music composed by Carl Davis, set and costume design by Lez Brotherston, lighting by Howard Harrison and video projection created by Nina Dunn. The creative team is so strong that Deane says "I have to come up to them instead of them coming up to me".

Deane says his ballet production is focused on storytelling, to "really let audiences understand the storyline, the action, what is happening, and the emotions to the dancers".

"It's not a classical ballet, but rather a dance theater piece with a lot of ballet in it," he adds.

Deane says he wanted to entertain audiences through this incredible story. At the same time, he wanted to "shock them". "I want them to feel as if they are going through the same emotions as the people on the stage," he adds. "I am trying to work on a ballet where the audience can really live the production, as well as the people who are performing it."

According to Xin Lili, director of the Shanghai Ballet, the ballet production will be presented in Beijing by the end of this year. Tours to other cities will also likely take place.

The company had a few contracts for international tours which was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and "we will make them up little by little", she says.

Deane had not been in Shanghai for the past three years. "I have missed them as much as they missed me," he says. He recalls the company's tour to the United States three years ago with his creation of *Swan Lake* for the Shanghai Ballet.

"We took New York by storm," he says, attributing the success to the dancers themselves, and the high standards of the company.

"The company has really been at a top level, and will certainly achieve that again with the talent they have," he says.

The Shanghai Ballet has a great mix under its belt of classical productions, modern and contemporary creations by a wide range of choreographers from home and abroad, Deane says.

"They have a whole diverse repertoire, including ballets by Chinese choreographers," he says. "That's where the Shanghai Ballet stands out (in the global art scene). It really works in different directions with its productions."

The dramatically powerful piece brought lots of challenges especially for



IF YOU GO

The Phantom of the Opera

7:30 pm, May 11-13;
2 pm, May 14;
Shanghai International Dance Center Grand Theater;
1650 Hongqiao Road, Changning district, Shanghai;
021-5299-0372.



Wu Husheng, the primo ballerino of the Shanghai Ballet.

Wu had played the prince in *Swan Lake*, the Danish prince in the ballet production of *Hamlet*, and the hero of *The Lady of the Camellias*, all created by Deane.

A choreographer works with the dancer to "invent physically the emotions you want to get across to the audience," Deane says. "Every dancer in this company I know very well, so I know their emotions, their feelings and I take all of these emotions from them, and try to put them in a choreographic language."

Wu will be portraying the Phantom in the production as a deformed ballet dancer. While it was difficult enough to present the complicated emotions of the character, he also has to overcome the obstruction for his range of visibility while dancing with the mask. The creative team is still working on the design of a mask that would minimize the impact.

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Left: British choreographer Derek Deane with dancers of the Shanghai Ballet at a rehearsal for *The Phantom of the Opera*. CHEN YUNXUAN / FOR CHINA DAILY
Top: Creative images for the costume design for the ballet. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Art center's musical program is noteworthy attraction

By **ZHANG KUN** in Shanghai

The Shanghai Oriental Art Center announced its spring and summer offerings. Starting March 3 and running through Aug 8, 91 performances will be staged, including a number of international projects.

"Orchestras, soloists and dance companies from overseas are coming back to the center for the first time in three years," Lei Wen, general manager of the theater, said at a news conference on March 2.

"Many renowned orchestras chose to make their China debut at this theater, and the return of international orchestras in the coming season is the recognition of our long commitment to professional and international standards as an essential concert hall in Shanghai, presenting symphonies from all over the world since our opening in 2005," Lei says.



A scene from *Anna Karenina* by the Chelyabinsk State Academic Opera and Ballet Theater. It will be performed in Shanghai on June 11. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

On June 25, the St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra will present *Symphony No 2* by Russian composer Sergei Rachmaninoff. One of the best orchestras in Russia, the orchestra was founded in 1802.

The upcoming concert in Shanghai will be the first international tour since maestro Nikolay Alexeev took over the chief conductor's job.

Daniel Kharitonov was third-prize winner of the 15th Tchaikovsky International Piano Competition in 2015, when he was only 16. The young pianist is a rising star in the global music scene, and will be the soloist presenting Rachmaninoff's *Piano Concerto No 2* for the first half of the concert.

French violinist Renaud Capucon, who is well-known in China as a duo with his cellist brother Gautier, will present a solo concert on May 19, playing sonatas by Debussy, Ravel and Franck. He will be one of the first international artists performing at the Shanghai Oriental Art Center after the pandemic.

Also Polish pianist Katarzyna Borek and Russian pianist Andrei Ivanovich will give recitals at the theater on June 3 and 4.

Chinese cellist Wang Jian, who has been active in the global music scene for decades, will present his first recital after returning to his home country on April 28. Violinist Lyu Siqing and pianists Yin Chengzong, Sheng Yuan and Zhang Haochen will give recitals, too.

The Chelyabinsk State Academic Opera and Ballet Theater from Russia will stage two performances of *Swan Lake* on June 9 and 10. The company has a new production of *Anna Karenina* "tailor-made for Chinese audiences", to be presented on June 11, according to Liu Aihua, the performing project manager of the art center.

A series of Chinese orchestras and soloists will perform at the center in the coming months. The China National Center for the Performing Arts Orchestra will play two concerts, featuring Chinese compositions, on Tuesday and Western classics on Wednesday, under the baton of Lyu Jia.

The Suzhou Symphony Orchestra in Jiangsu province will present Gustav Mahler's *Symphony No 3* under the baton of maestro Xu Zhong on June 30.

The Shanghai art center will hold its 13th showcase of Chinese folk operas from Saturday to April 22.



Crested Ibis will take to the stage at the Shanghai International Dance Center Grand Theater on March 21. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

By **ZHANG KUN** in Shanghai

The 38th Shanghai Spring International Musical Festival will take place from March 18 to April 2. It will consist of 32 concerts, 10 dance shows and a series of exhibitions, competitions and other events.

The longest running music festival in the country since 1949, the festival had made its primary goal to promote new talents and

Major festival tunes up to promote talent

creations, according to the Shanghai Federation of Literary and Art Circles, the event's organizer.

This year, 40 percent of the shows will be new creations by artists from all over China, says Liu Ying, executive member of the federation's council for musicians in Shanghai.

To help young musicians from other parts of China to participate in the festival in Shanghai, organizers will not only cover the lodging and travel expense, but also arrange performing companies to play with them, Liu says.

The opening concert entitled *The Land of Rejuvenation*, to be held at the Shangyin Opera House on March 20, is a choral symphony composed by Zhao Xi, dean of the composition department at the Wuhan Conservatory of Music in Hubei province; Liu Hao, professor of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music; and Xu Zhong, president of the Shanghai Opera House.

The concert will be presented by a cast of more than 250 performers, led by renowned singers, such as Fang Qiong, Shi Yijie, Shen Yang and Han Peng. "We want audiences to enjoy the music, understand the message and have the melody linger in their mind afterward," Xu said at the news

conference for the festival last week.

The closing concert *City of the People* will take place at the Shanghai Urban Music Square on April 2, featuring chorus groups from all walks of life in the city, among which are a cappella, mixed chorus and children's singing groups.

This will be a showcase of residents' music talents and the colorful music scene in the city, according to Liu.

The Shanghai Symphony Orchestra will present *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in a theatrical form on March 31 and April 1. Music director of the company Yu Long will collaborate with actress and writer Sylvia Chang to present the Mendelssohn music piece alongside with Chang's reading of the Shakespearean play.

"We experimented with this form at the Music in the Summer Air festival in 2019, when Wang Yaoqing read the Ibsen play of *Peer Gynt* during our concert of the same subject by Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg," says Zhou Ping, orchestra director.

Encouraged by the success, the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra decided to invite Chang, a veteran actress from Taiwan, to read the play this time.

"Sylvia Chang really put her heart in it.



Fang Jinlong, a master of the pipa (a four-stringed plucked lute), will perform at the Cadillac Shanghai Concert Hall on March 19. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

She alone will be portraying 14 different characters in the show."

The festival has kicked off a series of online competitions, recruiting new music composition of symphonic music featuring traditional Chinese instruments, original songs and a music critique as well. Award-winning symphonic pieces featuring Chinese instruments will be presented at the festival next year.

LIFE



More than a grain of determination

Scientist dedicates himself to developing new strains of rice to ensure food security for future generations of Chinese, **Wang Xingwei** reports.

China's No 1 Central Document, which is the first policy statement released by the country's central authorities each year, puts an emphasis on agricultural and rural development for 2023. This is also the 20th No 1 Central Document of this century to focus on agricultural and rural affairs.

Dedicating himself to agricultural development, based on his scientific research, Zhou Lei, 40, aspires to make sure that Chinese people not only get enough to eat, but also eat well, echoing one of the most important tasks in the No 1 Central Document — strengthening agriculture through science and technology.

A researcher at the Institute of Food Crops, Hubei Academy of Agricultural Sciences, Zhou, also a winner of the China Youth May Fourth Medal — the top honor for outstanding young Chinese people — has made major progress in the genetic breeding of rice and application research over the years. So far he has cultivated 16 new varieties of rice, increasing grain production by more than 1.5 billion kilograms, which ensures China has sufficient grain stocks to feed its people.

Zhou is working with a group of highly educated and skilled young people, most of whom hold doctorate degrees. According to Zhou, it usually takes people more than 10 years of academic training to become qualified for the research job. Zhou has been offered opportunities to go abroad and exchange experiences with peers overseas. An academic visit to the United States made Zhou realize that, even though China was playing a leading role in global rice research, its agricultural industry lagged behind other affluent countries.

"With a smaller population and richer resources, the US has achieved the mechanization of the agricultural sector, resulting in higher yields per acre and lower prices. We, Chinese researchers, still have a long way to go," he notes.

Upon returning to China, Zhou pledged to apply all he learned to solving the problems faced by the nation's agricultural industry. He and his team now work more than 300 days a year. They have cracked the "hardest nut" in rice-breeding technology — the cloning of cold-tolerant genes in rice — for the first time ever. Such breakthroughs effectively tackle the risks of grain reduction.

However, instead of staying in an



air-conditioned office, grain experts like Zhou spend most of their time, literally, in the field. The whole base of Zhou's academy covers an area of about 200 hectares, while his team has over 4 hectares of field.

Eight people from the team spend at least seven to eight hours every day doing related on-site experiments. In order to develop a quality rice variant that has a good look, taste and texture, Zhou and his team have collected germplasm and selected mate parents for almost 10 years.

Breeding is an arduous process, heavily affected by sunlight and temperature, and Zhou always tends his crops with round-the-

clock care. "We have to carefully protect them from being drowned in the water, or being eaten by birds and rats, just like caring for a newborn baby," Zhou says.

It is not always plain sailing, though. As Zhou has admitted, sometimes scientific research requires luck.

"In the past, some researchers might not be able to breed a new variety despite a lifetime of trying," adds Zhou, explaining that agriculture has always been sensitive to climate change throughout history. In August, southern China suffered from extremely high temperatures, which had a serious impact on the crops in Zhou's experimental field — some of them even withered. Zhou,

though, never got downhearted. Seeing things from a different perspective, Zhou believed it opened a window for him to do further study. "Sometimes we just need that sudden high temperature to give us the proper conditions, which help us select the rice," he notes.

The hard work eventually paid off. After going through tens of thousands of crossbreeding combinations, Zhou and his team have successfully created a number of variants to meet the demands of the population. Besides making a breakthrough in crop yields and rice quality, Zhou has also developed a kind of "functional rice" — low-glycemic rice — for those living with diabetes. "It has some starch that can't be degraded. Therefore, the starch won't turn into sugar even if we feel full," Zhou explains.

"We have to carefully protect them from being drowned in the water, or being eaten by birds and rats, just like caring for a newborn baby."

Zhou Lei, researcher

With the rising living standards, China's food market has also experienced a consumption upgrade. Noticing Chinese people's great appetite for crayfish, Zhou and his team have introduced the method of rice-crayfish farming after years of field research. They help farmers raise crayfish in rice paddies, which can triple the income of farmers and enrich people's dining tables at the same time.

As for Zhou, despite tough working conditions, the research work has brought him a sense of happiness and fulfillment.

"It's nice just to be able to taste your own creation and know that what you have done will benefit more people in the future," says Zhou.

After a hard day of work, Zhou loves to take a walk in the fields, enjoying the peace and tranquility while watching the beautiful sunset.

That's the best reward for him.

Contact the writer at wangxingwei@21stcentury.com.cn

Biotech expert pursues dream in Hainan

HAIKOU — Fu Yong has successfully cultivated *Haematococcus pluvialis* — a freshwater, unicellular algae — in South China's Hainan province, and now plans to increase investment to establish a factory there.

Fu, 58, is the chairman of the Hainan Furuicom Biotechnology and he is dedicated to pursuing his dream. Hainan has introduced a slew of preferential policies to attract talent like Fu, to help speed up the construction of the island's fledging free trade port.

In 2014, after living in Japan for 32 years, Fu returned to Haikou and started his own business. He served as the chief executive officer of Hainan Hai Rui Educational Investment Co.

Official figures show that Hainan has attracted more than 500,000 people since April 13, 2018. The province aims to recruit 800,000 more in the next five years, including a target of 150,000 this year.

Born and raised in Haikou, the provincial capital, Fu was among the Chinese students selected to study overseas during the country's implementation of reform and opening-up policies in the 1980s.



I chose these majors because they are closely related to the main industries in Hainan."

Fu Yong, biotech expert

In 1983, Fu's academic performance in school earned him an opportunity to study in Japan, with government funding. He majored in both fishery and marine science from Nagasaki University.

"I chose these majors because they are closely related to the main industries in Hainan. The two places both have abundant ocean resources," says Fu.

Three years after graduation, he worked for Nagasaki University and the National Research Institute of Aquaculture in Japan. Later, Fu worked for Fuyo Ocean Development and Engineering and Japan Biogenic.

In 2009, Biogenic appointed him to run its subsidiary in Kunming, capital of Southwest China's Yunnan province.

"While I was in Japan, I constantly paid attention to the development of my home. When I got a chance to go back there to work in 2009, I thought it was the right time to return," Fu recalls.

In Kunming, Fu acquired expertise in biotechnology-based *Haematococcus pluvialis* and gained a thorough understanding of the cultivation process. Haikou and Kunming share similar warm climates, so Fu thought maybe the algae could be cultivated in Haikou as well.

"I look forward to more frequent technical exchanges with other countries and expect to introduce overseas funds, cutting-edge technologies and products to Hainan," Fu says.

In 2020, China released a master plan to build the whole of Hainan Island into a globally influential and high-level FTP by the middle of the century. Since then, a series of favorable policies have been issued to support the development of the Hainan FTP.

"I believe Hainan FTP has a promising future. That's why I set up my company here in 2020, to supply quality products for my customers," Fu says.

XINHUA