

Major milestone

Output of Daqing Oilfield hits 2.5 billion metric tons

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Boao Forum positive on Asian prospects

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Grassroots hoops

Rural village's basketball tourney a big winner on and off the court

SPORTS, PAGE 7

CHINA DAILY

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Nashville mourns



Emily Ryan and her children pray at a memorial at the school entrance after a deadly shooting at The Covenant School in Nashville, Tennessee, on Tuesday. Three children and three adults were fatally shot Monday at the church school by a 28-year-old former student, who was shot and killed by police. AUSTIN ANTHONY / REUTERS See story, page 6

Xi: Build on Saudi-Iranian reconciliation

Beijing's mediation efforts inspire more Middle East nations to seek common ground

By ZHANG YUNBI zhangyunbi@chinadaily.com.cn

President Xi Jinping has pledged China's support for the future improvement of Saudi Arabia-Iran relations, voicing hope that the two Middle East countries could build on their recent landmark dialogue in Beijing.

Xi made the remarks while holding talks by phone on Tuesday with Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud.

After days of talks in Beijing, China, Saudi Arabia and Iran issued a joint statement on March 10 saying that the two Middle East countries agreed to resume diplomatic relations and reopen their embassies and missions within two months.

Following the dialogue, the Middle East has seen a growing trend of seeking reconciliation, with relations improving between Saudi Arabia and Syria, Israel and some Arab states, and Iran and some other Gulf region countries, observers noted.

In Tuesday's phone conversation, Xi noted that the Beijing dialogue and its major outcomes are conducive to the improvement of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran,

"had a significant exemplary effect on enhancing the unity and cooperation of countries in the region and easing tension in the region", and were broadly praised by the international community.

The recent increase in the momentum of de-escalation among the countries in the region "fully demonstrates that resolving conflicts and differences through dialogue and consultation is in line with the hearts of the people, the trend of the times and the interests of all countries", he said.

Xi voiced his hope that Saudi Arabia and Iran will "uphold the spirit of good neighborliness and continue to improve relations on the basis of the results of the Beijing dialogue", adding that China is ready to continue to support the follow-up process of the Saudi-Iranian dialogue.

The Saudi crown prince conveyed Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al

Saud's greetings to Xi and congratulations on Xi's election as president.

He said Riyadh sincerely appreciates Beijing's strong support for improving relations with Iran, which demonstrates China's role as a responsible major country.

China is playing an increasingly pivotal and constructive role in regional and international affairs, and Saudi Arabia speaks highly of this, he added.

Su Xiaohui, an associate research fellow at the China Institute of International Studies, said that key countries' critical roles in mediation and peacemaking "should not be ignored".

"Beijing's role as a key mediator has shored up hope among more Middle East countries that they could also find a way out from complicated issues through peaceful means — through negotiations," she said.

Some countries in the region are thawing the ice between them on various fronts — not just in diplomacy and politics, but also regarding security and economy, she said.

"There are some common pursuits and interests among these countries that gave rise to their more constructive engagement with each other. One common ground is that although some deep-seated problems cannot be wiped out overnight, the nations all need enabling circumstances for their own development," she said.

The recent shrinking strategic presence of the United States in the region has also improved the chances for peace, she added.

Speaking on Sino-Saudi ties, Xi said that the relationship is in the best shape of all time.

Xi said China is ready to work with Saudi Arabia to further implement the outcomes of the summits.

He said China is willing to continue to work with Saudi Arabia to "firmly support each other on issues related to core interests of one another" and expand practical cooperation and cultural exchanges.

The Saudi crown prince said China is an important partner of Saudi Arabia, and his country is willing to work with China to usher in new prospects for bilateral cooperation.

SALES OF NEW ENERGY VEHICLES POISED TO ACCELERATE

Auto executives optimistic about sector's prospects

By FU SHENG

China's new energy vehicle sector, the largest in the world, is showing signs of robust development after being weaned off government subsidies at the end of last year.

Financial stimuli introduced in 2009 to help the sector ended on Dec 31 after several rounds of gradual cuts since 2017.

in-depth

Last year, Chinese manufacturers delivered a total of 6.8 million electric cars and plug-in hybrids, a rise of 93.4 percent year-on-year, according to the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers, or CAAM.

These autos accounted for 25.6 percent of China's overall vehicle sales in 2022, surpassing a goal of 25 percent set for 2025 in a national blueprint.

However, sales of new energy vehicles, or NEVs, fell by 6.3 percent in January, with their share of the total market declining slightly to 24.7 percent, CAAM said.

Such a fall — rare in a market that has seen double-digit growth in recent years — has prompted speculation that the sector may lose steam without financial stimulus measures.

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Peace in Mideast will be a victory for all

China, Saudi Arabia and Iran issued a joint statement on March 10 in Beijing stating that Saudi Arabia and Iran had agreed to resume diplomatic relations and reopen their embassies and missions within two months.

Some Western media, with a zero-sum mentality, have interpreted the China-mediated talks as a victory for China and a loss for the United States. As a matter of fact, the talks represent new strength, new thinking and new approaches in global politics outside the box of "power politics".

It's not the first time that Saudi Arabia and Iran have restored diplomatic ties. However, it's the first time in Chinese diplomacy that the resumption of diplomatic relations has been mediated between two medium-sized powers. This might be a small step in Iranian-Saudi relations, but definitely a big step in China's diplomacy in the Middle East.

Since ancient times, the world's major countries have

WORLD WATCH

By Niu Xinchun

engaged in Middle Eastern affairs on the basis of alliance and divided governance and through military intervention, winding up with an endless flow of disastrous aftermaths.

The Middle East strategies of the United Kingdom, France, the former Soviet Union and the US share many similarities in ups and downs. Looking back, foreign intervention is one of the root causes of the tragedy of the Middle East. Learning from a bitter lesson, the Middle East should not repeat the tragedy of the 20th century. China and Middle Eastern countries are exploring new models, and the China-mediated talks represent the start of these new explorations.

Iran is situated at the "eye of the storm" of almost all conflicts in the Middle East. It is the main

force of one of the opposing sides in the four major conflicts in the region — conflicts between Israel and Islamic states, between Sunni and Shiite Muslims, between reform-minded people and conservatives, and between pro-US and anti-US forces.

Currently, Iran is facing grinding sanctions and growing isolation, US-Iran tensions are escalating, the Iran nuclear issue is back to the starting point, and Iran has locked horns with Saudi Arabia and Israel on regional hot button issues. These issues are deeply intertwined with each other, and a slight change in one part might affect the whole picture and exert an overall impact on the Middle East.

Therefore, there will be no peace in the Middle East without Iran on board. The international community should let Iran get back to the center stage of Middle Eastern politics at an early date, rather than condescendingly

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Yinxu royal grave ruins on honor list

By WANG RU and WANG KAIHAO

The Yinxu Ruins, the 3,300-year-old remains of what was once the capital of the late Shang Dynasty (c.16th century-11th century BC), have been included in China's top 10 list of archaeological finds of 2022.

The list, released by the National Cultural Heritage Administration on Tuesday, recognizes the royal mausoleum remains at the site in Anyang city, Henan province, as a new find. The Yinxu Ruins were previously made famous by the discovery of the oracle bone inscriptions, the oldest-known Chinese script.

According to the administration, the list honored 10 outstanding examples of the nearly 1,700 archaeological projects that were carried out nationwide last year.

The first archaeological honor list was released in 1990, and it has been an annual tradition since. A 21-member panel, comprised of China's top scholars, voted through ballots to select the 10 outstanding projects of 2022 from 22 finalists.

Yinxu was the first independent

excavation project carried out by Chinese academics almost a century ago and it now holds a sacred place in the annals of China's archaeological history.

Sacrificial pits and trenches surrounding the royal graves discovered at Yinxu last year have reshaped people's understanding of Shang burial customs and the grand picture of the dynasty as a whole, according to archaeologists.

Xia (c.21st century-16th century BC), Shang and Zhou (c.11th century-256 BC) — the earliest dynasties in traditional Chinese historiography with fewer historical records — have always been the focus of researchers, as they are believed to be the key to decoding the origins of Chinese civilization.

In addition to the royal mausoleum ruins at Yinxu, the top 10 list includes the crisscrossing road network at Erlitou in Luoyang, Henan province. The site is widely believed to have been the capital of the Xia Dynasty toward its end. The Xituo archaeological site in Xunyi county, Shaanxi province — with its high-level tombs and remains of an

ancient city, believed to be the native place of the Zhou people — also made the final cut.

"With their own salient features, the three sites have groundbreaking value," said Wang Wei, director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Academic Division of History.

Archaeologists were hugely surprised to find the fossil of a human skull, about 1 million years old, at the Xuetaolangzi site in Shiyan, Hubei province, last year. Labeled as "skull No 3 of the Yunxian man", it was found on May 18, 2022, exactly 33 years after "skull No 1 of the Yunxian man" was found nearby.

"Skull No 3 is the best-preserved skull fossil of its time ever found in the hinterlands of the Eurasian region," said Lu Chengqiu, leader of the archaeological team at Xuetaolangzi. The site is the one with the longest history that made it to the 2022 top 10 list.

"It (the fossil) is a world-class discovery; we have rarely ever found complete human skulls in Eurasia. ... It offers us important material to study human evolution in East Asia," said Chen Xingcan, director



Archaeologists display a fossilized human skull extracted from the Xuetaolangzi site in Shiyan, Hubei province, on Dec 2. PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

of CASS' Institute of Archaeology.

Last year, archaeologists also found a makeshift human camp, dating back 11,000 to 15,000 years, at the Zhaojiayuyao site in Zibo, Shandong province. There were remains of fireplaces, animal bones and pottery items.

"Discoveries made at the site filled the gaps in our understanding of the transition period between the Paleolithic and Neolithic ages. ... The site

is helping us study the origins of agriculture and pottery in Northern China," Chen said.

Some archaeological findings last year shed light on how various ethnic groups communicated with each other in ancient times. For example, the grave complex at Dasongshan site, Gu'an New Area, Guizhou province, which spanned more than

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PAGE TWO



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

From page 1

Officials and auto executives agree that the market is feeling the impact from the subsidies ending, but they are optimistic about prospects for the sector.

Speaking at a conference in Beijing last month, Miao Wei, minister of industry and information technology from 2010 to 2020, said the withdrawal of the subsidies last year could not have had a bigger impact than the reductions in 2019, which slashed the stimuli from the level in 2009.

The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology puts forward and revises policies concerning the automotive industry, sometimes in collaboration with other departments.

In 2018, electric cars with a range of 400 kilometers qualified for a central government subsidy of 50,000 yuan (\$7,275). One year later, the subsidy for models with this range was reduced to 18,000 yuan, while owners of those with a range of more than 400 km were entitled to an allowance of 25,000 yuan.

Last year, buyers placing orders for models with a 400-km range were eligible for a 12,600 yuan subsidy, which ended at the start of this year.

Miao said, "That amount (12,600 yuan) was much lower than the cut made in 2019, and the government announced the plan to stop the subsidy well in advance. Everybody knew the subsidy was scheduled to go by the end of 2020, but it was extended to the end of last year because of COVID-19."

Yet the 12,600 yuan subsidy — about one-third the per capita disposal income in China last year — and awareness that it would soon end, enticed many buyers to place orders for NEVs in 2022.

Cui Dongshu, secretary-general of the China Passenger Car Association, said the rush to buy, coupled with the Spring Festival holiday, which this year fell in January, dented NEV sales for that month. Cui expects the market to show an improvement from February onward.

The association estimates that sales of passenger NEVs in China will reach 8.5 million this year, up from 6.5 million in 2022. Total NEV sales this year, including those of commercial vehicles, are expected to reach 9 million.

Miao said withdrawal of the subsidy may result in reduced sales for several months, but despite this, he said NEVs could still account for 30 percent of total vehicle sales this year, up from 25.6 percent last year.

Analysts at Cinda Securities said in a research note that January would be the lowest point for vehicle sales this year, which would rise from February to April.

Paul Gong, an auto analyst at UBS, said the Chinese market is now driven primarily by customer demand instead of subsidies, which helped boost the market in the early stage of its development.

In 2012, less than 10,000 NEVs were sold, and most of these sales involved buses. Last year, 6.89 million NEVs were sold, of which 94 percent were private vehicles, according to CAAM.

The number of registered NEVs in China reached 13.1 million by the end of last year, a year-on-year rise of 67 percent, according to the Ministry of Public Security.

Last year, Chinese NEV maker BYD overtook FAW-Volkswagen as the nation's best-selling carmaker, selling 1.86 million vehicles, a year-on-year rise of 149 percent.

NEVs: Customer demand drives market

Gong said people will be increasingly attracted to NEVs as they see more of these vehicles on the roads.

Wang Lei, an information technology engineer in Beijing, said he is considering trading his Volvo S60 sedan for an electric car. In many large cities, these vehicles are exempt from the "no-drive days" that are enforced once a week.

After taking a ride in an electric model that featured remote starting, voice command, auto parking, a large touchscreen and rapid acceleration, Wang now feels that his gasoline-powered car is like "something from the Stone Age."

Some 27 percent of car owners in China next plan to buy a NEV, global auditing company Deloitte said in an annual report late last month. These owners cite better driving experiences and lower costs as the main reasons for purchasing NEVs.

Deloitte's findings were based on a survey of 1,012 respondents. In 2022, about 17 percent of car owners in China said they would next buy a NEV.

Charging infrastructure also helps persuade buyers to opt for NEVs. The National Energy Administration, or NEA, said China now boasts 5.2 million charging pillars — 1.8 million public ones and 3.4 million that are privately owned.

NEA spokesman Liang Changxin said such infrastructure is an important guarantee for development of the NEV industry.

The China Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Promotion Alliance said there is one charger for every 2.6 electric vehicles in the nation.

China now has the largest and most widely distributed charging infrastructure network in the world, with more than 3,000 companies engaged in the charging pillar business.

Statistics from Deloitte show that last year 280 electric models were available in

“It takes only a year or 18 months to develop a new electric vehicle, compared with three years for gasoline-powered models.”

Zhang Yongwei, vice-president of China EV 100, a major think tank in the electric vehicle industry

the Chinese market.

Zhang Yongwei, vice-president of China EV 100, a major think tank in the electric vehicle industry, said manufacturers will launch at least 100 such models this year.

"It takes only a year or 18 months to develop a new electric vehicle, compared with three years for gasoline-powered models," he said.

Robust competition

New models and new players in the industry have brought fierce competition. Electric vehicles are easier to manufacture than those powered by gasoline, as they do not require sophisticated engines and transmissions, and battery output enables rapid acceleration.

As a result, electric vehicles have an advantage over gasoline models, but they face a problem of how to stand out from the competition.

Nio, a major electric carmaker in China, enjoys a loyal following simply by being

customer-friendly.

This may sound simple, but such an approach requires far more than merely putting on a smile when potential buyers visit a dealership.

For example, Nio invites owners of its vehicles to make dumplings at the company's showrooms to celebrate Spring Festival. It also offers them a chance to meet the cast of a smash-hit movie.

During the Spring Festival holiday, Nio sent a rescue vehicle to help a car owner who had a flat tire on an island in Fujian province, where no mechanics were available.

Nio staff members also took care of a vehicle owner's cat during the weeklong Spring Festival holiday, when he flew to visit his parents.

Qin Lihong, Nio's president, said that during the Spring Festival travel rush, the company's 7,563-member service team handled more than 199,000 requests for assistance, ranging from a car wash and valet charging to emergency roadside services.

Jidu Auto CEO Xia Yiping said intelligent driving features are a key selling point for the manufacturer's cars, as they boast years of research and development on intelligent driving from technology giant Baidu.

Smartphone maker Xiaomi is on track to launch its first electric vehicle next year. Lei Jun, the company's CEO, said Xiaomi has advantages in electronics, user experience and network operation, which are important for electric vehicles.

Xiaomi has built an ecosystem incorporating smart devices and smart homes, winning a huge fan base. The company said it will use its internet of things technology for customers to experience this digital ecosystem in its vehicles.

The brand aims to achieve annual sales of 10 million vehicles and be among the

top five auto manufacturers worldwide in the next 15 to 20 years.

The sector's rapid development has resulted in a technological breakthrough.

This month, HiNa Battery, a high-tech company affiliated with the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Institute of Physics, unveiled an electric vehicle powered by a sodium-ion battery.

Sodium-ion is an emerging technology that has substantial cost, safety and sustainability advantages over conventional lithium-ion batteries.

Sodium-ion battery packs have an energy density of about 140 watt-hours per kilogram, lower than their lithium-ion counterparts, but the gap is closing as a result of innovations and breakthroughs in battery design and materials science, the company said.

The scarcity and cost of lithium have long been a challenge to the battery industry.

With companies around the world spending years seeking an alternative, sodium-ion battery technology has emerged as one of the most promising candidates.

China is home to the world's largest power battery makers, including CATL and BYD.

New players welcome

As the burgeoning NEV market gains momentum, analysts have warned of the possibility of overcapacity, suggesting that higher qualifications are needed for companies to enter the sector.

However, Miao, the former minister of industry and information technology, is not in favor of raising the threshold for new players to join the competition.

He said they are welcome as long as they use their own money, adding that competition is good for the industry and consumers.

But Miao said that local governments should avoid excessive activity in the sector — be it building plants to woo carmakers, or helping raise funds for them.

"These authorities should focus on their main responsibilities, such as creating a sound business environment and facilitating administrative procedures," he said.

"Local governments don't have much of an understanding of the auto industry," Miao added, citing bankruptcies of NEV startups, including Byton and Qiantu, in which such administrations were deeply involved.

"To err is human, but we should not make the same mistakes repeatedly," he said.

Miao said there is no systematic overcapacity in China's NEV sector, but added that to a certain extent overcapacity is conducive to the market's rapid development.

"We should curb overcapacity in the gasoline vehicle segment, and consider how to tap into their overcapacity for NEV production," he said.

China's annual production capacity for passenger vehicles, including NEVs and gasoline-powered models, stood at 40.89 million by the end of 2021, according to the China Passenger Car Association.

That year, passenger vehicle sales in the nation reached 20.15 million, including 2.99 million NEVs. Passenger NEV sales more than doubled to 6.49 million last year, while total passenger vehicle deliveries stood at 20.54 million, almost the same as in 2020.

TOP NEWS

40 migrants die in fire at Mexico facility

Mattress was set on fire in detention center in Ciudad Juarez, across from El Paso, Texas

By MAYZHOU in Houston
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A fire that started as a protest led to the deaths of at least 40 people at a migrant detention center in Ciudad Juarez, a Mexican city across from El Paso, Texas.

At the time of the blaze late Monday, 68 men from Central and South America were being held at a facility of the National Immigration Institute in Mexico, the agency said. It also said that 29 people were injured and were in "delicate-serious" condition.

The institute said in a statement that the migrants lighted their mattress in protest, and the fire broke out at about 10 pm in one of its facilities in Juárez. It is near the international bridge that connects to El Paso.

According to a statement from the Mexican attorney general's office, Mexico authorities identified the dead and injured as from Central and South America, and most were from Guatemala.

Guatemala Foreign Affairs Minister Mario Búcaro said 28 of the dead were Guatemalan citizens.

"We are going to look to find those responsible for this," Búcaro said.

Mexico President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said the fire was started by the migrants in protest after they had learned they would be deported.

"They never imagined that this would cause this terrible misfortune," he said.

Katyusha Márquez, a 23-year-old Venezuelan woman, and her two young children, were detained along with 20 others, including her half-brother Orland Maldonado on Monday, The Associated Press reported.

Later that day, women and children were released, but men like her half-brother were detained. Upon learning about the fire, she went seeking Maldonado.

"We want to know if he is alive or if he's dead," AP reported her as saying. She wondered how all the guards who were inside made it out alive and only the migrants died.

"How could they not get them out?" she said.

Márquez said that they had been in Juárez waiting for an appointment from US authorities to request asylum. They were staying in a rented room where 10 people were living, paying rent with begged money.

In January, the Biden administration pushed out a new policy to deal with the massive number of illegal border crossings at the US-Mexico border. It allows up to 30,000 individuals per month from Venezuela, Nicaragua, Haiti and Cuba to come to the US provided that they have an eligible sponsor, pass background checks and arrive by plane.

Those who cross into the US illegally will be ineligible for the parole process and will be subject to expulsion to Mexico. Mexico has agreed to accept returns of 30,000 individuals per month from those four countries who fail to use these new pathways.

As a result, Mexico's immigration institute has been struggling with overcrowding in its facilities. As frustration has mounted among the migrants, a large group of them tried to barge into the US by crossing the international bridge between Ciudad Juárez and El Paso on a Sunday in mid-March this year. But they were stopped by barriers set up by the US authorities.

A February report by the Strauss Center for International Security and Law at the University of Texas at Austin said that asylum seekers face unstable living conditions and security risks in Mexican border cities.

"Many shelters are full, and along the border, a number of individuals are renting rooms, staying in hotels, or sleeping on the street," the report said. The report also said that in Matamoros, a Mexican city bordering Texas and close to the Gulf of Mexico, a tent camp has sprung up with thousands of occupants living along the Rio Grande which serves as a natural water border between the US and Mexico.



Ma Ying-jeou, former chairman of the Chinese Kuomintang party, bows to a statue of Sun Yat-sen, the founder of the KMT, at the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, on Tuesday. Ma began his 12-day visit to the Chinese mainland on Monday. His itinerary includes Nanjing, Wuhan, Hubei province, Changsha, Hunan province, and Chongqing and Shanghai. CAI YANG / XINHUA

Ma Ying-jeou visits mausoleum of Sun Yat-sen

By ZHANG YI
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People on both sides of the Taiwan Straits belong to the Chinese nation and share the same ancestors, and the two sides should work together to achieve the revitalization of the nation, a former chairman of the Chinese Kuomintang party said on Tuesday.

Ma Ying-jeou made the remarks during a visit to the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum, the final resting place of Sun Yat-sen, the forerunner of China's democratic revolution, on Tuesday in Nanjing, Jiangsu province.

Ma is leading a group of Taiwan students for communication and exchange activities on a 12-day visit to the Chinese mainland, which started on Monday. He will pay respects to his ancestors on the occasion of Qingming Festival, or Tomb Sweeping Day, which falls on April 5.

At the mausoleum, Ma and a group of visitors from Taiwan paid tribute to Sun, the founder of the KMT. Sun led the Revolution of 1911 that brought down the Qing government, ended the absolute monarchy that had ruled China for

"We feel the hospitality of our mainland friends and people welcoming us. We will convey this kindness to the people in Taiwan when we return."

Ma Ying-jeou, former chairman of the Chinese Kuomintang party

thousands of years, and paved the way for the profound social changes that have taken place in modern China.

His revolutionary spirit has inspired generations of Chinese people to strive for national independence and dignity. Sun was widely regarded as a great national hero, a great patriot and a pioneer of the country's democratic revolution.

Sun reiterated the importance

of "saving our people from misery and propping up our tottering country without delay". He fought staunchly against feudal autocracy and was the first to call for "the revitalization of China".

Sun once noted that "reunification" is the hope of all Chinese people.

In commemoration of Sun, Ma wrote an inscription at the site advocating peace and efforts for the nation's revitalization.

He told reporters after the visit that he sincerely hopes both sides of the Straits will join hands in pursuing peace, avoiding war and striving for the nation's revitalization, Xinhua News Agency reported.

"This is an unavoidable responsibility of the Chinese people on both sides of the Straits, and we will work hard to realize it," he said.

Ma also said that young people in Taiwan, a group of whom joined him at the mausoleum on Tuesday, should have an in-depth understanding of Sun's life and cross-Straits relations, and realize that only through peace and hard work can the two sides revitalize the nation.

"During our trip, we feel the

hospitality of our mainland friends and people welcoming us. We will convey this kindness to the people in Taiwan when we return," he said.

Liu Xiangping, a professor of Taiwan studies at Nanjing University, said that Sun's lifelong efforts in pursuing national reunification and revitalization are admired by all Chinese, and his aspiration of revitalizing the nation should be the common pursuit of compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Straits.

Li Zhenguang, a professor of Taiwan studies at Beijing Union University, said that although the two sides of the Straits are yet to be reunified, the fact that both the mainland and Taiwan belong to one and the same China has never changed.

China's sovereignty and territorial integrity have never been divided, and brook no division, Li said.

The mainland advocates resolving contradictions and differences between the two sides through dialogue and negotiation in the process of moving toward peaceful reunification under the one-China principle, he added.

Ties: Two countries want to grasp future with their own hands

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isolating and imposing sanctions on the country.

"Instead of looking for proxies, China promotes peace talks in the Middle East; instead of seeking any sphere of influence, China calls on all nations in the region to take part in the Belt and Road Initiative; and instead of attempting to fill any 'vacuum,' China aspires to build a network of mutually beneficial partnerships," President Xi Jinping said in a speech at the

Arab League headquarters in Cairo in 2016.

China maintains balanced diplomacy in the Middle East and friendly relations with all countries in the region, treats and respects every country on an equal footing, and never uses such terms as "failed state", "rogue state" or "authoritarian state".

President Xi visited Saudi Arabia and Iran during his first visit to the Middle East in 2016. After visiting Saudi Arabia in December of last year, Xi immediately invited

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to make a state visit to China, which Raisi did in February.

Treating Iran and Saudi Arabia on an equal footing is the key to the success of the recent talks with China, and even to peace in the Middle East in the future. For a long time, the US, European countries and Israel have been using sanctions against, isolation of and deterrence against Iran as a major means of advancing peace in the Middle East.

An array of diplomatic break-

throughs have occurred in the once conflict-plagued region since 2021, dubbed the "Diplomatic Spring". Israel signed the Abraham Accords with four Arab states, Qatar-Saudi relations were restored, Turkey and Israel agreed to restore full diplomatic relations, and Arab states are ready to reengage with Syria. And here comes another flower for the spring — resumption of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

On March 10, the new historical trend of the Middle East con-

verged with the new thinking of Chinese diplomacy in Beijing.

"The Middle East is for the people of the Middle East, and its fate should be in the hands of the people of the Middle East," said Wang Yi, a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and director of the Office of the Commission for Foreign Affairs of the CPC Central Committee.

The decision by Iran and Saudi Arabia to resume diplomatic ties highlights that both countries

want to grasp their future with their own hands. The Beijing talks represent a new look in Middle Eastern politics, a new signal on major country politics and even a new direction for global politics.

This is not a victory for China and a loss for the US, but a win-win outcome. It doesn't matter whether it is the American way or the Chinese way, as long as it promotes peace in the Middle East.

The author is director of the Institute of Middle East Studies at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Protests choke France



A masked protester is engulfed by tear gas during a demonstration in Nantes, France, on Tuesday, the tenth day of nationwide unrest against the pension reform of Emmanuel Macron's government. STEPHANE MAHE / REUTERS

Relics: Funerary items show unity among ethnic groups

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1,400 years — from the Western Jin Dynasty (265-316) to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

"The funerary objects unearthed include porcelain and bronze mirrors, with characteristics of the Central China Plain, or Zhongyuan, and also cultural relics with the styles of other ethnic groups," said Huo Wei, a professor at Sichuan University in Chengdu.

"The relics offer insights into how different ethnic groups lived in harmony for 1,400 years, and how they communicated culturally," he added. Similar communication extended to farther places through the ancient trade route of the Maritime Silk Road.

The Shuomen port ruins in Wenzhou, Zhejiang province, is a classic example. Archaeologists have found architectural remains, shipwrecks and a large quantity of pottery and porcelain items at the site that was a port during the Song (960-1279) and Yuan (1271-1368) dynasties. "It is the most important discovery made in

Top 10 new archaeological discoveries

1. Xuetangliangzi site, Shiyan, Hubei province, dating back 1 million years
2. Zhaojiayuyao site, Zibo, Shandong province, dating back 11,000 to 15,000 years
3. Bicun site, Xingxian county, Shanxi province, from 2200 BC to 1700 BC
4. The crisscrossing road network of Erlitou site, Luoyang, Henan province, from 18th to 16th century BC
5. The royal mausoleum site of Yinxu Ruins, Anyang, Henan province, from the late period of Shang Dynasty (c.16th to 11th century BC)
6. Xitou site, Xunyi county, Shaanxi province, from Western Zhou Dynas-
7. The grave complex of Dasongshan site, Gui'an New Area, Guizhou province, from Western Jin Dynasty (265-316) to Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)
8. The temple ruins of Guchengcun, Hunchun, Jilin province, from 5th century
9. Zhouqiao bridge site and Bianhe canal ruins, Kaifeng, Henan province, from Northern Song period (960-1127)
10. Shuomen ancient port ruins site, Wenzhou, Zhejiang province, from Song (960-1279) to Yuan (1271-1368) dynasties

the country that is linked to the Maritime Silk Road," Huo said.

"Last year witnessed fruitful results in archaeological studies in China," said Guan Qiang, deputy director of the National Cultural Heritage Administration. "Active excava-

tions made a better proportion of the archaeological projects, and scientific and technological measures played a key role in them," he added.

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CHINA

Consistent efforts on air quality pay off

Decade of action sees nation's average density of PM2.5 decrease by 57 percent

By HOU LIQIANG
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Despite its GDP increasing by 69 percent over the past 10 years, China saw its average density of PM2.5 particulate matter decrease by 57 percent during that time, according to the Ministry of Ecology and Environment.

The proportion of days with heavy air pollution dropped by 92 percent during the period, Liu Bingjiang, head of air quality management at the ministry, said at a news conference on Tuesday.

In particular, Liu highlighted the significant improvement of air quality in Beijing.

In 2013, the annual average PM2.5 concentration in the capital stood at 89.5 micrograms per cubic meter, he said. Last year, the density fell to 30 mcg per cubic meter.

The average number of days with heavy air pollution fell during the 10-year period from 58 a year to only three, he added.

Liu credited the achievements to the country's consistent efforts to optimize the energy, industrial and transportation sectors.

In the past 10 years, the number of coal-fired boilers in China decreased from 520,000 to no more than 100,000, he said. Instead of consuming coal, about 35 million rural households across the country have turned to clean energy to warm their homes.

A large batch of other coal-fired facilities, including furnaces, have switched to natural gas and electricity, he continued. In total, these efforts have helped reduce coal consumption by almost 500 million metric tons and avoid emissions of 1 billion tons of carbon dioxide.

He said the country has made great efforts to shut down outdated production facilities and curb excess production in the steel, coal, cement and glass sectors.

The official, however, noted a downbeat air pollution control situation so far this year, with various indexes showing poor air quality.

Aside from unfavorable meteorological conditions, Liu noted an

obvious increase in air pollutant emissions connected to the ongoing economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic as a factor.

"Many economic activities that were suspended or reduced because of the pandemic are experiencing full recovery," he said, citing oil consumption as an example.

Compared with 2019, at the end of which the pandemic broke out in Wuhan, Hubei province, gasoline consumption in China dropped by 9.2 percent in 2022 and diesel consumption fell by 3.2 percent, he said. So far this year, their consumption has risen to normal levels.

To boost economic growth, some regions have blindly introduced smokestack industries with high emissions and energy consumption. In the course of gaining more profits, some enterprises have emitted air pollutants illegally, he said.

A sharp temperature rise in the first half of March resulted in unfavorable meteorological conditions for the dispersal of air pollutants, he said. Though it was still spring, the highest temperature in Zhengzhou, capital of Henan province, and Jinan, capital of Shandong province, went beyond 30 C, resulting in ozone pollution.

Ozone pollution usually happens in summer instead of spring, as sunlight and high temperatures can trigger chemical reactions between volatile organic compounds and nitrogen oxides that lead to the formation of the hazardous gas.

Even relatively low amounts of ozone can cause lung damage and result in shortness of breath.

The increase of sandy and dusty weather events further worsened the air quality so far this year, he added.

Liu vowed consistent efforts to stamp out violations related to air pollution control.

"We will resolutely curb the blind development of industries with high emissions and energy consumption, and maintain zero tolerance as we strive to crack down on environmental violations," he said.

N. China set for more sandy, dusty weather

By HOU LIQIANG
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China is expected to experience more sandy and dusty weather this spring, despite no big change in average density, the national observatory said.

Forecasts show that more such weather events will hit northern China from April to May compared with the average in the past 10 years, according to the China Meteorological Administration.

However, the intensity of these events will be similar to the average of the past decade, it added.

China has suffered four sandy and dusty weather events since March, which is more than the same period in normal years.

From March 19 to Wednesday, for example, strong sandy and dusty weather hit more than 20 provincial-level regions, covering 4.85 million square kilometers, roughly half of the country's land mass, the center added.

Zhang Bihui, an expert with the center, said March is a high-incidence season for sandy and dusty weather, and the natural and meteorological conditions this year are even more favorable for the occurrence of such weather.

In March, with higher tempera-

tures and more gales, both northern China and neighboring Mongolia received less precipitation than normal, he said.

He said these meteorological conditions are expected to continue into April and May, resulting in more airborne sand and dust.

With a new round of cold air set to hit the country from Friday to Sunday, northwestern, northern and northeastern China will be enveloped by sandy and dusty weather, he noted.

Ding Ting, an expert with the National Climate Center, said the lower level of precipitation in the southern part of Mongolia in last year's growing season — less than the average in the past 20 years — has played a role in the situation this year due to a decline in vegetation coverage.

Ding also noted a rare temperature rise in early March as a factor favorable for sandy and dusty weather because frozen soil and sand thawed rapidly.

However, she stressed there was a general declining trend in the frequency of sandy and dusty weather in China, with the annual average in the first 10 years after the new millennium obviously higher than those in the past 10 years.



A passenger dances with an attendant on March 17 aboard a high-speed train from Urumqi, the capital of the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, to Turpan in central Xinjiang. More than 560 tourists took the train for a sightseeing journey through the region. HAO ZHAO / XINHUA

Xinjiang adds rail services so tourists can experience region's grand scenery

By CUI JIA
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To enable people to explore the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region's grand and diverse scenery more conveniently, regional authorities plan to launch some 100 special rail services for tourists this year.

To accommodate the needs of tourists, three regular direct trains between the regional capital of Urumqi and three other cities — Karamay, Yining and Korla — will be launched starting on April 1, reducing the travel time by 39 minutes to 59 minutes compared with regular services, according to the region's railway authorities.

Last year, a 2,712-kilometer railway loop was completed in southern Xinjiang around the vast Taklimakan Desert, becoming the world's first railway loop around a desert.

Many tourists have expressed great interest in taking the train around the world's second-largest shifting-sand desert, which covers an area slightly smaller than Germany.

A total of 18 special train services for tourists will be launched this year around the desert and throughout southern Xinjiang, according to Xin-

“During the journey, tourists can see different scenery each day while having the unique experience of traveling around the desert in comfort.”

Li Hui, a manager at Xinjiang Aiwanke International Travel Service

jiang Railway Tourism Development Group.

The new train service around the desert will enable travelers to enjoy its outstanding natural scenery and gain a deeper understanding of the rich ethnic culture and diverse traditions in all four prefectures of southern Xinjiang, said Li Hui, a manager at Xinjiang Aiwanke International Travel Service.

“During the journey, tourists can see different scenery each day while having the unique experience of traveling around the desert

in comfort,” Li said.

The number of trains operating on the popular New Oriental Express route, which takes tourists on a journey around Xinjiang in 14 days while staying in luxury carriages, will be increased to 16, according to the group.

Travelers can enjoy a range of new services, including having a drink at a bar while onboard the new Tian-shan train, which takes people to popular tourist destinations in the region, the group said.

The number of special passenger train services launched this year for tourists will be about three times the number last year, and more routes will be available, said Huang Tingfen, deputy manager of Xinjiang Railway Tourism Development Group.

According to the regional government, the total length of the rail network in Xinjiang reached 9,092 km in 2022, an increase of around 85 percent from 2013. Currently, more than 80 percent of the region's counties are covered by the network.

The improved connectivity in the region — which plans to attract 200 million visits from tourists this year — has helped to boost the region's overall socioeconomic development, according to railway authorities.



Saving sturgeons

A staff member cleans the pool where Chinese sturgeon live at the Yangtze River Fisheries Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Fishery Sciences in Jingzhou, Hubei province, on Monday. China issued a guideline on building Zhejiang into a demonstration zone for achieving common prosperity, and the assistance for low-income families or individuals through the digital application helps to bridge the gap between urban and rural areas in the province.

DENG JIA / FOR CHINA DAILY

HK actor Leung wins lifetime achievement award

By WILLIAM XU in Hong Kong
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Hong Kong star Tony Leung Chiu-wai has become the first Chinese actor to win the lifetime achievement award at the Venice Film Festival.

The news came just two weeks after Malaysian actress Michelle Yeoh Choo-kehng, who has deep ties with the Hong Kong film industry, became the first Asian woman to win an Academy Award for best actress.

On Monday, the Venice Film Festival announced it had selected Leung and Italian director Lilianna Cavani for Golden Lion awards for their lifetime achievements in the movie industry. They will receive their awards at the 80th Venice Film Festival, which will be held from Aug 30 to Sept. 9.

Leung, who is a household name



Tony Leung Chiu-wai

in Hong Kong, said he was honored to have been recognized for the award. He added that he hopes to celebrate with all the filmmakers he has worked with, as it is also a tribute to them.

Alberto Barbera, director of the Venice Film Festival, said Leung is a charismatic performer and one of the finest actors of his generation.

His roles have not only spanned a great variety of genres, but also have bridged television, popular culture and art-cinema, Barbera said.

Carina Lau Kar-ling, a renowned Hong Kong actress and Leung's wife, sent her wishes to her husband.

Hong Kong Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism Kevin Yeung

Yun-hung said on Monday that Leung's constant pursuit of achieving a higher level of artistic performance over the past few decades is the embodiment of Hong Kong's cultural richness.

Yeung added that Hong Kong movies and filmmakers have gained recognition worldwide and have received a number of international awards in recent years, and the special administrative region government and the Hong Kong Film Development Council will continue to provide support and push for sustainable development of the industry.

During his over-40-year career, Leung has pocketed awards at many regional and global film festivals, including the Cannes Film Festival, the Hong Kong Film Awards and the Golden Horse Awards.

Earlier this month, Leung was crowned best actor at the Asian

Hangzhou upgrades social welfare system

By MA ZHENHUAN
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The government of Hangzhou, capital of Zhejiang province, has recently upgraded the province's social assistance system to guarantee the livelihoods of people with low incomes.

It pledges to bolster necessary assistance for potential low-income families and individuals through improved monitoring, delivering updates to local community staff and then providing assistance, according to the city's civil affairs bureau.

In addition to those who have previously registered, the new application process attempts to identify minors at risk of poverty. It also focuses on individuals who have withdrawn from social assistance in the past three years, failed to apply for assistance in the past two years, or received temporary assistance in the past year.

Real-time monitoring can recognize potential dangers in people's daily lives in time to provide them with enough assistance.

“When people need treatment for major illnesses, or experience incidents involving family members, the application will notify local staff,” said Chen Ze with the social assistance department of Hangzhou's civil affairs bureau.

“We will handle their needs within three to seven days through telephone inquiries or home visits,” said Chen.

“The data can also be visualized through a map, making us integrate and allocate various assistance resources,” Chen added.

Huang Yang, director of the Assistance and Relief Service Center of the Xihu district civil affairs bureau, said, “In the past, if we wanted to know the family economic status of these relatively disadvantaged people, we had to visit their households in person, or wait for them to register with the local community.”

Huang said that monitoring the applications means they can receive an early warning based on the data, then immediate measures can be taken.

It is estimated that the number of households in need has increased from more than 80,000 to nearly 150,000 in Hangzhou since last year.

The city has compiled assistance policies from 17 departments, involving basic life assistance, special social assistance, emergency social assistance and other assistance.

In June 2021, China issued a guideline on building Zhejiang into a demonstration zone for achieving common prosperity, and the assistance for low-income families or individuals through the digital application helps to bridge the gap between urban and rural areas in the province.

Film Awards for his performance in the crime thriller *Where the Wind Blows*. He also received an honorary prize — the Asian Film Contribution Award — at the awards ceremony.

The veteran actor has starred in three films that won the Golden Lion awards at the Venice Film Festival: *A City of Sadness* in 1989, *Cyclo* in 1995 and *Lust, Caution* in 2007.

On March 13, Yeoh won the best actress award at the Academy Awards, also known as the Oscars, for her performance in the quirky film *Everything Everywhere All at Once*.

The Malaysian-born actress started her career in Hong Kong. Her performances in many popular Chinese-language movies, such as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* in 2000, captivated audiences across the globe.

CHINA

Charitable barbers give free cuts and care

Liu Jianjun and his team of 3,700 volunteers do their part to make life more pleasant for seniors, deliverymen and others

By LIU MINGTAI in Changchun and ZHOU HUIYING

For the past 28 years, barber Liu Jianjun and his team have been volunteering in Changchun, capital of Jilin province.

In that time, he and his team, which has 3,700 volunteers, have given free haircuts to around 80,000 people.

They also volunteer to help those in need, such as seniors who live alone, and send them daily necessities during festivals.

The 53-year-old has been helping others since he opened his barber shop in 1994.

"I lost my mother when I was 6, and my father left home soon after," he said. "I was raised by my grandmother and was cared for by my neighbors."

So when he opened his barber shop, he decided to repay some of the kindness he had been shown.

Every day, he arrives at his shop an hour before opening to give free haircuts to people in their 70s. He also spends his spare time providing door-to-door service for those who have difficulty walking.

His team members visit seniors to help them buy daily needs, move heavy objects and make repairs. They also offer free haircuts to deliverymen and sanitation workers.

At a time when most people were canceling traditional celebrations to stay home and prevent the spread of COVID-19 during Spring Festival in 2020, Liu worked hard to collect protective gear such as masks and disinfectant for those in need, funding the purchases using donations from his team members.

"Fortunately, I got a lot of support from my team, friends and relatives," he said. "Several drug companies also helped out when



A member of Liu Jianjun's team of volunteers takes care of a senior at a nursing home in Changchun, Jilin province. Liu Jianjun gives a free haircut to a senior at the man's home in Changchun. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



“The team is like a big family and its members, especially the elderly, care for and help each other.”

Liu Jianjun, founder of a team of volunteers in Changchun, Jilin province

they learned about my plan.”

Liu spent about 5,000 yuan (\$730) on 2,000 face masks, 200 thermometers, 1,200 pairs of disposable gloves and 33 bottles of disinfectant.

He even picked up the donations himself to minimize the need for people to leave home.

Despite the cold, he'd stand at bus stops giving masks to anyone not wearing one.

Liu's charity goes beyond haircuts for seniors, home visits and handing out anti-epidemic supplies. In June 2018, he launched an initiative with a local media com-

pany to help children with cancer who have lost their hair from chemotherapy.

He offers free haircuts for donors and also collects hair donated by other means.

"It is then made into wigs by a company in Shanghai free of charge," he said. "Over 100 children have been given free wigs, which gives them back their self-esteem and self-confidence during treatment."

The youngest member of his team of volunteers is 7.

"Several students have joined, and they volunteer with their par-

ents," he said. "When we visit nursing homes, they sing and dance, bringing the elderly residents a lot of pleasure."

Many of the volunteers are elderly people who have been the recipients of the team's services in the past, including their oldest member, 87-year-old Zhu Yaokun.

"He joined our team after getting a free haircut four years ago," Liu said. "Despite his age, he is still in good health and is able to cut hair for other people."

Inspired by the enthusiasm of the volunteers, the seniors are determined to do what they can to

give back. "The team is like a big family and its members, especially the elderly, care for and help each other," he said.

In 2014, Liu joined the Communist Party of China at the recommendation of his community.

"Being a Party member is not only about status, but is also a heavy responsibility and a lifelong commitment," he said.

"I am determined to progress further along the road of voluntary service."

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Shandong looks to boost tourism

By XIE CHUANJIAO in Qingdao and ZHAO RUIXUE in Jinan

Shandong province, the home of ancient philosophers Confucius and Mencius, is making a great effort to leverage its many natural and cultural resources to boost the development of tourism and turn itself into an international tourism destination, according to officials at a high-profile conference recently.

"The tourism sector, which is a critical contributor to socioeconomic development, will play a major role in bolstering market consumption and accelerating economic growth," said Lin Wu, Party chief of the province, during the 2023 Shandong Tourism Development Conference, which concluded on Monday in Qingdao.

Lin said that Shandong has an abundance of cultural and tourist resources and that it's the right time to roll out favorable policies to stimulate the sector, as the implementation of new COVID-19 controls at the beginning of the year has laid a solid foundation for economic recovery.

According to the province's department of culture and tourism, 10 measures have been taken to promote tourism in Shandong.

Given the fact that travel was difficult, if not impossible for much of last year, the number of visitors to State-owned scenic areas in the province in January and February of this year alone increased by nearly 200 percent.

Shandong is considered a key region in Chinese civilization, having nurtured many preeminent philosophers, writers and inventors during the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC) and the Warring States Period (475-221 BC).

It is home to four UNESCO World Natural and Cultural Heritage sites, including Mount Tai, and has 244 4A and 5A tourist scenic spots and 45 tourist resorts at the provincial level or above, as well as famous annual events such as the Qingdao International Beer Festival.

Lin stressed that more effort should be made to develop a number of leading tourism projects, and companies should be encouraged to become conglomerates.

He said these are two examples that could improve tourism in the province.

During the conference, Shandong launched 18 key projects with a planned investment of 44.96 billion yuan (\$6.53 billion). They cov-

er sectors such as leisure and vacations, nighttime sightseeing, ecotourism and cultural creativity.

Wang Lei, head of the province's department of culture and tourism, said that Shandong will deepen cooperation with other provinces to develop tourist brands, share resources, create new products and hold special events to showcase the scenery and customs of the nine provincial-level areas along the Yellow River and work together to boost the development of the cultural tourism industry.

Since March 15, a series of performances and exhibitions have been held in streets, museums and squares in Qingdao's old town to celebrate the conference.

Some 160 performances are scheduled through mid-May, as part of efforts to revitalize Qingdao's historic areas.

Zhao Haozhi, the city's mayor, said that Qingdao is continuing efforts to protect historical areas.

"The city has also established a smart platform, 'Cloud Tour in Qingdao,' to make tourism and leisure more convenient for residents and tourists," he added.

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Musicians stage a flash mob performance in the old town of Qingdao in Shandong province. WANG XIAOLI / FOR CHINA DAILY



WORLD

Survey: Americans now less patriotic, tolerant of others

By AI HEPING in New York
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Americans are placing far less importance on patriotism, tolerance for others, religion and other values that have long defined the country's national character, according to a new survey.

The Wall Street Journal, with NORC at the University of Chicago, a nonpartisan research organization, released the survey Monday that found money was the only priority that has grown in importance since the Journal did a similar survey in 1998.

Money was cited as very important by 43 percent in the new survey, up from 31 percent in 1998.

The survey of 1,019 adults conducted March 1-13, found 38 percent of respondents said patriotism was very important to them, and 39 percent said religion was very important. That was down from the 1998 survey when 70 percent felt patriotism to be very important, and 62 percent said religion was.

Aside from money, all age groups, including seniors, attached far less importance to the priorities and values than when pollsters asked about them in 1998 and 2019. But younger Americans in particular placed low importance on those values.

Some 23 percent of adults under age 30 said in the survey that patriotism was very important to them personally, compared with 59 percent of seniors age 65 or older. Some 31 percent of younger respondents said that religion was very important to them, compared with 55 percent among seniors.

Only 23 percent of adults under age 30 said that having children was very important.

Bill McInturf, a pollster who worked on a previous Journal survey that measured attitudes, along with NBC News, said that "these differences are so dramatic, it paints a new and surprising portrait of a changing America."

He said that "perhaps the toll of our political division, COVID and

the lowest economic confidence in decades is having a startling effect on our core values."

Jennifer Benz, vice-president of public affairs and media research at NORC, said that views in the survey might have been colored by the downbeat economic outlook that the poll also found.

"People are just sort of down on everything about the country," she said.

Since the Journal first asked about unifying values, it said major events in the US have "shaken and, in some ways, fractured the nation", among them the terrorist attacks on Sept 11, 2001, the financial crisis of 2008 and subsequent economic downturn, and the rise of former president Donald Trump.

The survey found the country sharply divided by political party over social trends such as the push for racial diversity in businesses and the use of gender-neutral pronouns.

The share of Americans who say that having children, involvement in their community and hard work are very important values also has fallen.

Some 21 percent in the survey said that America stands above all other countries in the world. Half said that America is one of the greatest countries, along with some others. The share who said other countries are better than the US rose to 27 percent, up from 19 percent when the same question was asked in 2016.

The survey found sharp differences by political party on social issues that have gained prominence.

It asked whether society had gone far enough — or had gone too far — when it comes to businesses taking steps to promote racial and ethnic diversity. Just over half of Republicans said society had gone too far, compared with 7 percent of Democrats.

Some 61 percent of Democrats said diversity efforts hadn't gone far enough, compared with 14 percent of Republicans.

Frantic search



A soldier carries a dog found among the rubble of buildings destroyed by a deadly landslide on Monday that buried dozens of homes in Alausi, Ecuador. Earlier in the day, officials had reported 16 deaths, but officials later confirmed the toll at seven. They also raised the number of people reported missing to 62. DOLORES OCHOA / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Envoy says Pakistan shares China's vision

Beijing-proposed initiatives seen as essential in addressing urgent needs

By XU WEIWEI in Hong Kong
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The Global Development Initiative and the Global Security Initiative, both proposed by President Xi Jinping, carry significance for human progress, according to Moin ul Haque, Pakistan's ambassador to China.

A staunch advocate of common development, security and prosperity, China has put forward the GDI and the GSI, which are essential in addressing the urgent needs and difficulties of a divided and unstable world. Pakistan has supported both initiatives.

The GDI is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations, which are about poverty reduction and socioeconomic development, Haque said.

Haque said that the GDI, proposed by President Xi back in September 2021 in his speech to the United Nations General Assembly, "has been a very important initiative after the BRI," or the Belt and Road Initiative, "which has been about the development of infrastructure and connectivity."

When Pakistan's prime minister visited Beijing in November last year, the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding, with Pakistan becoming one of the first partner countries under the GDI, according to the diplomat.

"So, under this MoU, we will be cooperating in the areas of education, health, agriculture, and of course, climate change, which has become a very important subject not only for Pakistan but also for the entire world community," Haque said.



Moin ul Haque

Citing the recent floods in Pakistan, the envoy said climate change under the GDI framework will become a very important topic of cooperation between China and Pakistan. The Pakistan flooding "is a clarion call for everybody", he continued.

The GDI has won international recognition as a blueprint for more inclusive development globally. To date, more than 100 countries and international organizations, including the United Nations, have committed support to the GDI, and close to 70 countries have joined the Group of Friends of the GDI.

The group, officially launched at the UN headquarters in New York in January 2022, aims to support UN's work in development.

Green efforts

"We need to promote green development through biodiversity protection, speed up the green transition of development modes and lifestyle, and leverage the Global Development Initiative to deliver greater benefits to people of all countries," said President Xi Jinping in December when addressing, via video link, the opening ceremony of the high-level segment of the second part of COP15, or the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, held in Montreal, Canada.

Separately, over 70 countries to date have endorsed and expressed

support for the GSI. Proposed by China last April at the Boao Forum for Asia 2022, it calls on the international community to uphold a vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable global security.

Haque said Pakistan has fully supported the GSI because Pakistan and China are important members of the international community. He added: "Both are very responsible members of the United Nations, and the GSI is aligned with the purposes and principles of the UN."

The diplomat pointed out that security remains an important issue for both China and Pakistan. Pakistan has suffered over the years due to an adverse security environment around it. It has been in the eye of the storm, he said.

Not only physical security about borders, but security for people, food security, energy security, these are all important aspects of security for both countries, Haque said. "So, in this respect we feel very proud that Pakistan and China have similar visions and similar positions on global peace and security."

China stands ready to work with the international community to put into action the Global Development Initiative and the Global Security Initiative and promote the shared values of humanity, according to the Government Work Report adopted by the first session of the 14th National People's Congress which concluded on March 13.

"We will remain firm in pursuing a strategy of opening up for the mutual benefit. We will continue working to safeguard world peace, contribute to global development, and uphold the international order," the report said.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

Hungary endorses Finnish bid for NATO

By CHEN WEIHUA in Brussels
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Finland is a step closer to gaining NATO membership after Hungary's parliament ratified its accession on Monday, as the fate of Sweden's accession remains unknown due to its troubled relations with Hungary and Turkey.

In a vote that has been delayed for months, Hungary's parliament approved Finland's accession with 182 in favor and six against.

Turkiye is now the only NATO member that has not ratified Finland's membership, but Turkiye's parliamentary committee on foreign affairs endorsed Finland's membership last week. A full parliament vote on the accession is expected before the country's presidential and parliamentary elections on May 14.

During Finnish President Sauli Niinisto's visit to Turkiye a week ago, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan pledged to move forward with Finland's ratification ahead of the elections.

Finland's 200-seat parliament, or Eduskunta, approved the country's NATO bid with a 184-7 majority earlier this month.

The unanimous agreement of all 30 NATO members is required before any country can be admitted into NATO, whose rapid eastward expansion in the past decades has been viewed as a national security threat by Russia.

Finland and Sweden, which had long held a policy of military non-alignment, jointly applied for NATO membership in May last year, three months after the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Longer wait for Sweden

While Finland, which shares a 1,300-kilometer border with Russia, is expected to become a NATO member in the coming months, Sweden may have to wait longer.

Hungary's ruling Fidesz party has claimed that it will wait for Sweden to sort out lingering disagreements before there would be a vote on its membership. Some Hungarian legislators are unhappy with Sweden pointing fingers at the state of Hungarian democracy.

Hungary's Parliament Speaker Laszlo Kover said Hungary supports Sweden's application and ratification is expected "in the near future".

Sweden's 349-seat parliament, or Riksdag, overwhelmingly voted 269 in favor, 37 against and 43 abstentions last week of the country joining NATO.

Turkiye, which joined NATO as early as 1952, has accused Sweden of harboring terror organizations, in particular Kurdish rebel groups, and is demanding Stockholm extradite some now residing in Sweden.

Balazs Orban, political director to Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, said the Swedish government's "constantly questioning the state of Hungarian democracy" is "insulting our voters, MPs and the country as a whole".

It is "up to the Swedes to make sure that Hungarian MPs' concerns are addressed", he said on social media on Sunday.

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Nashville shooter was being treated for 'emotional disorder'

By MINLUZHANG in New York
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The 28-year-old shooter who killed three children and three adults at a private Christian school in Nashville, Tennessee, was being treated for an emotional disorder and had legally bought seven firearms that were hidden at home, police said Tuesday.

Audrey Elizabeth Hale "was under care — doctor's care — for an emotional disorder," said Chief John Drake of the Nashville Metro Police Department at a news briefing.

"The parents felt (Hale) should not own weapons," Drake said.

Police said Hale's parents knew that Hale had bought and sold one weapon but were unaware that Hale had been hiding additional

weapons at home. Drake said Hale had purchased seven firearms at five different local gun stores all legally.

Three of the weapons were used by Hale, a former student at The Covenant School, in Monday's school shooting. The motive is still unclear, said police.

Averianna Patton told News-Channel 5 in Nashville that she was talking on the phone Monday morning when she saw an unusual message from Hale, her middle school basketball teammate. It was 9:57 a.m.

"I'm planning to die today ... You'll probably hear about me on the news," Hale wrote.

Patton said she tried to comfort Hale while sending screenshots of the Instagram messages to Hale's father. Patton said she called the



"I'm planning to die today ... You'll probably hear about me on the news."

Audrey Hale, who killed six people Monday at The Covenant School in Nashville, Tennessee, in text message to friend minutes before going on mass shooting rampage

Suicide Prevention Helpline as Hale's father suggested at 10:08 a.m.

Three minutes later, Hale shattered the glass doors of the Covenant School and walked down the hall armed with two AR-style

rifles and a handgun.

It is the deadliest school shooting since the attack in Uvalde, Texas, last May, and marked the 13th school shooting this year in the US, according to Education Week.

The organization has recorded 157 school shootings since 2018. There were 51 shootings with injuries or deaths in 2022, the highest than in any year since 2018. There were 35 in 2021, 10 in 2020, and 24 each in 2019 and 2018.

Education Week said the shooting in Nashville had the highest number of victims of any school shooting this year.

Some studies have maintained that focusing on mental illness as the cause of mass shootings can detract from the larger issue of gun violence in the US.

A 2014 study published on

Annals of Epidemiology shows that if serious mental illnesses suddenly disappeared, violence would decrease by only about 4 percent. More than 90 percent of violent incidents, including homicides, will still occur.

A 2018 study by the FBI found that about 25 percent of active shooters had a diagnosed mental illness, while about 20 percent of US adults live with a mental illness in 2021, according to the US National Institutes of Health.

The Nashville incident occurred less than a week after a school shooting in Denver and is the sixth school shooting in March alone.

A Washington Post analysis found that across the country, more than 348,000 students have experienced gun violence at school since the 1999 Columbine High

School massacre in Colorado in which 12 students and one teacher were killed. At least 199 children, educators and other people have been killed in school shootings, and another 424 have been injured.

The Gun Violence Archive, which defines mass shooting as incidents that have four or more people killed or injured, excluding the gunman, has recorded 130 mass shooting incidents in the US this year alone.

This number is higher than in previous years. The Gun Violence Archive publicly tracks gun-related deaths and injuries in the US and has reported that the years 2020, 2021, and 2022 were all more deadly than the years before.

Agencies contributed to this story.

SPORTS

BASKETBALL



An aerial photo shows the court just prior to tip-off at Monday's Village BA final between Team Zunyi and Team Qiangdongnan in Taipan, Taijiang county, Southwest China's Guizhou province. The so-called "Village Basketball Association" is a grassroots tournament that showcases the passion for basketball in rural areas. XINHUA

IN A LEAGUE OF ITS OWN

Rural village's unique grassroots hoops tourney proves a winner on and off the court



Ethnic dance performances entertain the crowds in the stands. XINHUA

By SHI FUTIAN
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Just how big can the "Village Basketball Association" become? Even hoops legend Yao Ming says he is unsure if he can get a seat in the stands.

The popularity of this year's "Village BA" was evidenced by the sold-out crowds that packed into the 30,000-capacity stands over the weekend at Taipan village in Southwest China's Guizhou province.

The two-day grassroots event attracted fans from across the nation to the tiny village, which has a population of about 1,200. Media also descended on Taipan, with national broadcaster CCTV even providing a live broadcast of the action. The finals captured the imagination of netizens on Chinese social media too, with the hashtags "Guizhou Village BA finals" and "People in the stands at Village BA are not photoshopped" viewed over 65 million and 14 million times respectively on Weibo by Monday afternoon.

Four teams contested this year's finals, which tipped off on Saturday. A torrential downpour forced the championship game to be rescheduled to Monday afternoon when Team Qiangdongnan prevailed 68-65 against Team Zunyi. On Sunday, Team Tongren overcame Team Bijie 57-50 to finish third.

With the teams comprised of amateur players mostly hailing from local villages and nearby cities, spectators flocked from all over the country to soak up the unique festival-like atmosphere. Apart from the hoops action, fans enjoyed pre- and post-match parties, local markets serving food and snacks, and music and dance performances that showcased local ethnic culture.

Chinanews.com reported that — based on search statistics from multiple online platforms — demand for hotels, restaurants and markets in Taipan was 11 times higher than a week before the tournament.

Over the weekend, tourist bookings at Qiangdongnan Miao and Dong autonomous prefecture, where Taipan village is located, rocketed by over 140 percent compared with the same time last year.

"Our hotels are fully booked. On the day the match schedule was revealed, all the rooms were instantly snapped up," said Zhang Shouwu, who runs a hotel with about 30 rooms in Taipan.



Sturgeons are awarded as prizes to the players of Team Zunyi at the 2023 Village BA. Local specialties such as duck, rice and pig feet are also used as gifts for players and spectators during the event. XINHUA



For late arrivals who can't find a seat, the next best option is to watch the action on ladders, with local retailers reporting a brisk trade in the items. XINHUA

"Hotel rooms are highly sought-after for match days. Every year our rooms are fully booked during the tournament, but I keep the price at the same level. I can't just raise prices because of the Village BA. It would damage

the reputation of Taipan people." But the most-coveted spaces in Taipan are courtside. Hours before matches tip off, spectators pour into the stands to enjoy performances by local ethnic dancers



The grassroots basketball event is inspiring more kids to pick up the sport. XINHUA

and various cultural activities. If you dare to leave your spot for just for a minute, you're unlikely to get it back. As a result, spectators go to great lengths to hang onto their vantage points.

"Many people even wear adult diapers so they can sit for hours in the stands. If you go to use the bathroom, your spot will for sure be taken by others," said Xie Lingchu, who runs a shop in the village.

"Items like small portable chairs and portable chargers are all hot commodities during matches. To ensure the best view from the stands, some even buy herringbone ladders in my shop. And of course, snacks and beverages are the most popular items."

The Village BA is about as grassroots as sports can get, with the matches originating from the local Chi Xin Festival, which celebrates harvest on June 6 of the lunar calendar. As part of the festival fun, locals would spontaneously shoot hoops among themselves, and gradually the games assumed a more formal tournament structure.

Since 2016, local government has added its support to the area's grassroots basketball development. In 2021, Guizhou province launched the "Gorgeous Countryside" campaign, which promotes development in rural China via culture, tourism and sports. A rural basketball league was also included in the campaign, with Taipan chosen as a host for matches.

Last year, videos of the basketball action in Taipan went viral on social media, leading netizens to dub the tournament the "Village Basketball Association". This year, the first edition of the Village BA finals was staged in Taipan, which is now considered something of a shrine to grassroots Chinese hoops.

"It's not an easy job to organize such an event. All the hard work paid off, and the deafening sound of people's cheers is the best reward," said Liu Shangbo, a local sports bureau official who has been stationed in Taipan for the Village BA for over a week.

"We now attract more and more tourists, and the facilities here are improving all the time. Everything is on the up here," he added.

"The event is helping the development of the village and it really motivates more people to embrace sports."

BUSINESS

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THE BOAO FORUM FOR ASIA

Boao Forum sanguine on Asia prospects

Key report expects region to lead world to economic recovery this year

By OUYANG SHIJIA and CHENG YU in Boao, Hainan

The Asian economy is on track for recovery with strong resilience and vitality despite pressure from weakening global demand and mounting uncertainties, according to a key report issued on Tuesday.

While sluggish global growth may weigh heavily on external demand for Asian exporters, China's notable economic rebound is sending out a positive signal to the rest of Asia and the world, according to the flagship report from the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2023. Themed "An Uncertain World: Solidarity and Cooperation for Development amid Challenges", the forum opened on Sunday in Boao, a coastal town in South China's Hainan province.

Asia will remain a key driving force for supporting global growth, upholding multilateralism and advocating global economic governance amid a cloudy global economic outlook and mounting uncertainties, said Li Baodong, secretary-general of the Boao Forum for Asia.

According to the report, the weighted real GDP growth rate of Asia in 2023 is expected to be 4.5 percent, making the region a standout performer amid the global economic slowdown.

"Asia is expected to accelerate its pace of overall economic growth, continue to advance regional production, trade, investment and financial integration and cohesion, and seize the 'Asian moment' for global economic governance," it said.

In the bleak global economic landscape, Asia is expected to be a bright spot in 2023. Despite weakened global demand, Asia as a whole is showing signs of recovery thanks to its strong economic resilience and vitality, the report said.

But the report also warned of the relatively weak growth momentum of emerging markets and developing economies, primarily due to weakened external demand, tightened financing conditions as well as insufficient investment.

Despite mounting uncertainties and challenges ahead,

Zhang Yuyan, director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of World Economics and Politics, voiced strong optimism for a robust 2023 for Asia's economy, saying that it is mainly aided by China's rapid economic recovery.

He said the world's second-largest economy has become the "stabilizer" of Asia's economic growth as well as global economic growth.

Citing IMF analysis, the report said that China and India together would contribute to half of the world's growth this year, with every 1 percentage point increase in China's economic growth leading to a 0.3 percent increase in output for the rest of Asia.

Notably, East Asia will see the most obvious growth rate rise in 2023 compared with the prior year, mainly aided by China's economic growth. And East Asia's growth rate is expected to rise from 3.2 percent in 2022 to 4.5 percent in 2023, according to the report.

Xu Xiujun, researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of World Economics and Politics, said China's economy is picking up in the current quarter, and many international organizations have upgraded their forecasts for China's growth prospects.

"As an open economy, China's high-level opening up will closely link the Chinese economy to the rest of the world. And China's economic growth will play a key role in boosting global economic recovery," he said.

Samson Khaou, executive vice-president of Dassault Systemes Asia-Pacific, which joined the forum, said the French industrial software company is confident about the growth of China, as China remains a strong manufacturing powerhouse and the country is playing a leading role in the supply chain of the global market.

"We believe that the growth of China will be sourced by domestic demand as well as global demand. We truly believe that the growth will be rooted in China," he said.

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Participants at a sub-forum discuss global industrial and supply chains during the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2023 in Boao, Hainan province, on Tuesday. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

Experts: China to stay world's most important manufacturing hub

By CHENG YU in Boao, Hainan chengyu@chinadaily.com.cn

Global trade dependence on Asia, including China, remains stable, and the country will never lose its status as the world's most important manufacturing hub, despite certain US moves that have been disrupting global industrial and supply chains, said senior industry experts and company executives at the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2023 on Tuesday.

Their comments emerged after a report published at the forum on Tuesday said global dependence on Asian trade in goods remained stable, and the trade dependence among Asian economies, including China, remained at a relatively high level.

The highest level of dependence — 21 percent — was found among ASEAN countries. Japan and South Korea's dependence on China was over 20 percent, and the dependence of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and CPTPP countries on China was close to 20 percent, the report said, based on data till 2021.

The CPTPP refers to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, a free trade agreement among Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam.

Among the G20 economies, most saw their trade dependence on China rise between 2017 and 2021, with only the United States and France seeing a decline in

their trade dependence on China, the report said.

"It is actually good for China that some labor-intensive industries would move away, as it would help the country's industries to upgrade to a higher level," said Yao Yang, dean of the National School of Development at Peking University.

Yao said China will not likely lose its status as the world's largest manufacturing hub for at least 10 to 20 years. "With some labor-intensive industries shifting to some ASEAN economies and developing countries, it is geopolitically beneficial for China as a whole, as these economies are more integrated into China's manufacturing ecosystem."

The Boao report also said Asia has a significant advantage in producing competitive products in global value chains.

Of the top 22 intermediate products from Asian factories in terms of export value, 21 have shown a significant rise in exports, with electronic component products, such as integrated circuits, growing the fastest, at a growth rate of up to 28.8 percent in 2021, the report said.

China was still a dominant player in the trade of intermediate goods in Asia. Among the 22 most traded intermediates, China led in 20 of them, it said.

Fabrizio Ferri, head of APAC Region of Fincantieri, one of the world's largest shipbuilding groups, said that China indeed faces some difficulties like disruptions in industrial and supply chains.

"But China would still be a major

production center," he said. "If we have to move to Southeast Asia, it is more because we want to get close to the market and our consumers there."

However, Zhu Shihui, chairman of Green Thin Film Technology, an advanced material firm with its products widely applied in semiconductors, said many US-based clients (manufacturers) asked Green Thin to prepare a "plan B" due to geopolitical reasons.

"We are expected to establish a wholly owned enterprise in the coming three years. If the situation turns bad, we may move production facilities overseas but still remain a research and development center in China," he said.

Zhu said some provincial-level governments in China have already helped small and medium-sized enterprises to establish industrial parks in Vietnam and Mexico to help them lower costs and avoid impact from potential political events.

Zhang Yuyan, director of the Institute of World Economics and Politics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said in an interview with China Daily on Tuesday that a significant change over the past three years has been that Western countries like the US have begun to pursue so-called "friend shoring", or manufacturing in, and sourcing from, countries with shared values.

"Leveraging political power to intervene in the free functioning of industrial and supply chains is a very big threat to the long-term and stable growth of the entire global economy," Zhang said.

BCG sees foreign, local firms thriving in nation

By MASI masi@chinadaily.com.cn

China's vast market and high-quality development will continue to provide ample growth opportunities for foreign and domestic companies alike, said Hans-Paul Burkner, managing director and global chair emeritus of Boston Consulting Group.

As China's economy becomes more innovative, talent-intensive, consumption-driven and green, the country will help boost the recovery of the world economy amid challenges such as geopolitical tensions and weakened global demand.

"I see that there are concerted efforts here to really revive the economy to achieve the 5 percent growth target and to re-boost people's confidence," Burkner said in an exclusive interview with China Daily on the sidelines of the China Development Forum that concluded in Beijing on Monday.

He said encouraging signs are already evident, as the demand is up both in consumption and housing, and companies and governments continue to invest in production and infrastructure.

"China has displayed remarkable resilience and has shown the world what can be achieved through determination, innovation and collaboration. China will remain a key growth driver of the global economy," Burkner said.

Burkner said four powerful forces have emerged that are profoundly shaping the path forward. The first is sustainability, which entails pursuit of a high-quality development model and a green-

er, more balanced and more resilient economy. The second is digitalization. The third is talent development. The fourth is supply chain optimization.

Amid the accelerated digital transformation, Burkner said companies in every industry will have to act like tech companies to succeed in the coming decade.

"There are huge opportunities for using data analytics and technology in each company in each industry. For example, steel mills can use data to optimize the process and reduce energy consumption ... and to really push the boundaries of their existing business model," Burkner said.

As China moves up the value chain, it will continuously play an important part in global industrial and supply chains, despite challenges such as geopolitical tensions and talk of reshoring production back to developed countries such as the United States, Burkner said.

The remarks coincided with the UN forecast that India is projected to surpass China as the most populous country this year, which has triggered worries about China's advantages in manufacturing.

But Burkner said: "Chinese companies have become very competitive, not just because of cost, but also because of quality and innovation. We see quite a lot of Chinese companies being top producers of patents and really good products, and we see them all over the world."

He said it is exactly such competitiveness and high-quality development that make the difference.

Burkner said this is an era of re-globalization as companies diversify their supply chains, and the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the importance of not putting all one's eggs in one basket, to prevent natural disasters or other accidents from causing disruption to global industrial chains.

Minister of Industry and Information Technology Jin Zhuanglong said on Monday that China will encourage domestic enterprises to integrate more deeply into global industrial and supply chains, and strengthen the coordination and allocation of resources in key industries, such as semiconductors.



Hans-Paul Burkner



Li Baodong (right), secretary-general of the Boao Forum for Asia, at the first news conference of the event on Tuesday. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

Briefly

Software, IT services' financials up in Jan-Feb

China's software and information technology services industry reported steady growth in revenue and profits in the first two months of this year, data from the Ministry of Industry and Information Tech-

nology showed. Profits expanded more than 12 percent year-on-year to almost 177 billion yuan (\$25.74 billion) in the January-February period, while revenue grew by 11 percent to 1.45 trillion yuan. Revenue from software products increased by 9.5 percent year-on-year to nearly 338 billion yuan,

while that for IT services expanded to 943.4 billion yuan, up 11.6 percent.

ABC's outstanding inclusive loans rise

Agricultural Bank of China, one of the country's four big State-owned

lenders, said its outstanding inclusive loans exceeded 3 trillion yuan (\$436.6 billion) as of Monday. They were issued to groups including small and micro enterprises, self-employed businesses and farmers. Such loans rose by 443.3 billion yuan from the beginning of the year, the bank said. The lender has

been stepping up its efforts to provide inclusive financial support for small businesses, focusing on enterprises in areas such as rural revitalization, scientific and technological innovation, and green development.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

BUSINESS

Consumption of oil, gas to rise on back of recovery

Ensuring energy security remains key task for country this year, experts say

By ZHENG XIN
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China's oil and gas consumption is expected to continue rising in 2023, driven by the overall recovery of the economy in the country, according to a recent report.

Domestic oil consumption in China is expected to rise 5.1 percent year-on-year to 756 million metric tons in 2023, with refined oil product consumption increasing 9.1 percent to 398 million tons, as the domestic economic recovery will promote the rapid growth of energy consumption, according to a report released by the Economics and Technology Research Institute in Beijing on Monday.

It is expected that demand for natural gas in the country will also recover rapidly from last year, with annual consumption expected to reach 386.5 billion cubic meters and the growth rate to rebound to 5.2 percent, said the institute, which is affiliated with China National Petroleum Corp.

Zhou Xiwei, an economist with the institute's energy strategy research department, said that China's oil and gas industry managed to ensure energy supply and stabilize prices last year despite the severe and complex changes in the international energy situation, which has provided strong support for domestic economic growth.

Zhou said that ensuring energy security will remain the primary

task this year and she expects crude oil and natural gas production in 2023 will maintain growth.

According to the institute, China's new energy industry developed rapidly last year with the proportion of non-fossil energy consumption reaching about 17.4 percent, an increase of 0.8 percentage points compared to the previous year. The installed capacity of renewable energy power generation exceeded 1.2 billion kilowatts.

Crude oil production has been increasing for four consecutive years, with the total annual production reaching 205 million tons in 2022, surpassing 200 million tons for the first time in six years. Domestic natural gas production and pipeline gas imports have also grown rapidly, it said.

Newly discovered geological reserves of oil were approximately 1.46 billion tons and newly discovered geological reserves of natural gas were over 1.2 trillion cubic meters, maintaining a high growth rate.

While domestic refining capacity growth slowed down last year, with a total refining capacity of 924 million tons per year, China still maintains its position as the world's largest refining country. Ethylene production capacity has grown rapidly for the fourth consecutive year, with a total production capacity of 49.53 million tons per year, surpassing the United States and rising to the first place globally, it said.



Employees work on a drilling platform in Daqing Oilfield, Heilongjiang province, in December. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Daqing Oilfield hits major milestone

By ZHOU HUIYING
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Daqing Oilfield in Northeast China's Heilongjiang province said it had produced 2.5 billion metric tons of crude oil in total as of Sunday, accounting for 36 percent of the total onshore crude oil production in China.

"It marked a significant milestone in China's industrial history and the nation's efforts of ensuring energy security," said Zhu Guowen, executive director of Daqing Oilfield Co, a subsidiary of China National Petroleum Corp.

Over the past 64 years, the largest onshore oilfield in China has paid over 3 trillion yuan (\$435.6 billion) in terms of taxes and fees, Zhu added.

It has innovated and developed world-leading technologies for the development of onshore sandstone

oil fields, leading the nation among its peers in high-quality development, he added.

The company said the oilfield produced 30.03 million tons of crude oil and 5.54 billion cubic meters of natural gas last year, with the gas production achieving an annual increase for 12 consecutive years.

"We will spare no effort in maintaining a high-quality annual crude output of over 30 million tons, further increasing the output of natural gas and new energy production, enhancing our scientific and technological innovation capacity, and continuing to improve quality and efficiency," Zhu said.

The oilfield secured an annual crude output of more than 50 million tons from 1976 to 2002 and was hailed by many as a miracle in the history of oilfield development.

Since 2003, despite shrinking oil reserves — a common problem among older oilfields — Daqing has

2.5 billion tons
total crude oil production of Daqing Oilfield as of Sunday

managed to strengthen on-site management and improve production control with the help of new technologies.

Since the 1960s, Daqing Oilfield began to develop, reserve and apply tertiary oil recovery technologies independently. It has shaped a series of increasingly mature technologies of oil extraction after 40 years of hard work and laborious exploration by its researchers.

Its annual tertiary oil recovery exceeded 10 million tons over the past 21 years and a total production of 300 million tons so far, making it the largest center globally for research in tertiary oil recovery

and the largest site in the world using the technology.

"The company has achieved more than 11,000 technical innovations and inventions, including over 120 national-level science and technology awards, one first prize and three grand prizes of the National Natural Science Award," Zhu said.

To boost productivity in an all-around way and better participate in the Belt and Road Initiative, the company has also taken part in numerous energy projects overseas, including oil and gas fields, pipelines and power stations.

Its oil exploration teams have visited over 50 countries and regions, including Venezuela, Egypt and Sudan.

"We will continue to strive to build a world-class modernized oilfield and contribute our strength to ensuring national energy security," Zhu said.



Employees of a food company work at a canned peach production facility in Lianyungang, Jiangsu province, in August. ZHANG ZHENGYOU / FOR CHINA DAILY

Market entities to get regulator's backing

By ZHENG YIRAN
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China has made progress in stabilizing the development of market entities and optimizing its business environment. In the future, more efforts will be made for the innovative development of market entities, said the State Administration for Market Regulation on Tuesday.

Yu Jun, spokesman for the SAMR and head of its publicity department, said during a news conference on Tuesday that March 1 marked the first anniversary since the launch of the Administrative Regulation of the People's Republic of China on the Registration of Market Entities, which serves as a legal foundation for addressing issues related to market entity registration, protecting market players' legal interests, promoting entrepreneurship and innovation and securing healthy market order.

According to the administration, by the end of last year, there were

169 million registered market entities in China, surging 10.03 percent on a yearly basis.

Among the market entities, there are 52.83 million enterprises, 110 million self-employed businesses and 2.24 million rural cooperatives. Newly established market entities grew 0.71 percent year-on-year to 29.08 million.

This year, the administration will continue to deepen reform, improve market access approval rules, create a better market environment for the innovative development of market entities, further stimulate corporate vitality and competitiveness, and make greater contributions to the building of the new development paradigm and high-quality development, Yu said.

Support to micro and small enterprises has also been increasing, the SAMR said. The administration has launched 545 incentive policies targeting "little giant" companies — those specialized in niche industries with cutting-edge technologies and

great growth potential — and guided 352 certification institutions to optimize related processes and reduce certification costs for smaller companies.

In addition, to help enterprises out of difficulties and reduce burdens, the administration guided testing agencies to optimize technical methods, provide more remote solutions and shorten approval times.

So far, a total of 144,000 manufacturing enterprises have received such assistance, saving corporate costs of over 1 billion yuan (\$145.3 million), the SAMR said.

To further promote the innovative development of market entities, Ren Duanping, head of the registration department of the SAMR, said, "Next, we will further pay attention to enhancing the quality of market entities, constantly optimize the business environment and strive to create a better situation for the development of individual businesses."

China, Saudi Arabia strengthen ties

By SHI JING in Shanghai
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Business ties between China and Saudi Arabia have been further consolidated with industry leaders from both economies entering a number of new cooperation agreements over the past few months.

Saudi Aramco, an integrated energy and chemicals company from Saudi Arabia, is an active investment player in China. On Monday, it signed agreements with Hangzhou-based Rongsheng Petrochemical Co Ltd to acquire a 10 percent interest in Rongsheng Petrochemical of 24.6 billion yuan (\$3.6 billion).

Upon this cooperation, Shenzhen-listed Rongsheng saw its price surge by the daily limit of 10 percent on Tuesday, while the benchmark Shenzhen Component Index slid 0.72 percent.

On Sunday, Saudi Aramco announced to team up with China's largest land armaments developer NORINCO Group and Panjin Xincheng Industrial Group to build an integrated refinery and petrochemical complex in Northeast China's Liaoning province.

The complex will be developed by the joint venture set up by the three companies, with NORINCO taking the majority at 51 percent and Saudi Aramco taking 30 percent.

Mohammed Y. Al Qahtani, executive vice-president of Saudi Aramco's downstream operations, said that the above cooperation marks major progress in the company's ongoing downstream expansion in China and the wider region, "which is an increasingly significant driver of global petrochemical demand".

Saudi Aramco also signed a memorandum of understanding with the government of Guangdong province in Beijing on Sunday to enter into cooperation in energy, research and development, industrial projects, finance and talent exchange, among others, according to information on Guangdong province's official website.

In early March, Saudi Aramco signed a letter of intent to become a potential minority stakeholder in a new lower-emission technology-focused powertrain company, which is to be jointly established by Chinese automaker Geely and French multinational car manufacturer Renault Group.

The Public Investment Fund, Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund, has been investing more extensively in China in sectors other than petrochemicals.

On Feb 16, the PIF first tapped into the Chinese gaming industry by investing \$265 million via its subsidiary Savy Games Group in VSP, the Tencent-backed esports company. Savy Games Group has thus become the largest external investor of VSP.

The PIF applied for a qualified foreign institutional investor license in late 2021, which indicates that the sovereign wealth fund will directly invest in China.

Innovation-driven technology companies with better growth prospects may be one major investment target for the PIF in China based on its current holdings, according to a report from Orient Securities released on March 3.

Compared to their peers in

Europe and the United States, Chinese technology companies are more competitive in terms of user base and cost control. The PIF could inject more capital into these companies, enhancing their global competitiveness, according to Cao Jingnan, strategy analyst at Orient Securities.

Energy, infrastructure and manufacturing could be the three major areas churning out more opportunities regarding the cooperation between China and Saudi Arabia, with photovoltaics as one key target sector of investment, said analysts from Orient Securities.

According to the Saudi Press Agency, Saudi Arabia inked 34 investment agreements with Chinese companies during a summit in early December, with the total investment value projected to be \$50 billion. The investment will cover areas of green energy, photovoltaics, information technology, cloud services and logistics, among others.

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China has remained Saudi Arabia's biggest trade partner for years. The bilateral trade between the two countries surged 32.9 percent year-on-year to exceed \$116 billion in 2022.



The Saudi Aramco booth is seen during an event in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in October. BLOOMBERG

BUSINESSFOCUS



Visitors enjoy the iconic view of clouds near Huangshan Mountain, Anhui province, during this year's Spring Festival.
PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Huangshan tourism aims to diversify revenue

On back of policies, subsidies, local governments broaden ways to woo visitors

By CHENG YU in Huangshan, Anhui province and ZHU LIXIN in Hefei

For Huizhou Ancient Town, one of China's four best-preserved ancient towns and a tourist spot of Shexian county, Huangshan, East China's Anhui province, ticket revenue had been the main source of income for decades.

Tourists used to pay to enjoy the charms of the ancient Huizhou-style architecture dating back to the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, such as theatrical stages, stone archways or teahouses, as well as white walls and black tiles with exquisite carvings.

Faced with challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ancient town saw a significant drop in revenue. A total of 300,000 tourists flew to visit the town and revenue hit 21 million yuan (\$3 million) in 2019 but soon dropped to 160,000 tourists with revenue of 11.2 million yuan at the end of 2021.

The sudden pandemic made the local government realize that developing tourism could not simply rely on ticket revenue. After long discussions, the local county government canceled ticket fees at the beginning of last year and opened doors to allow tourists to enter the town freely.

"It was not easy to make this decision," said a government official, recalling the decision process.

Behind the bold attempt is part of broader efforts by the Huangshan government to reduce dependency on ticket income and diversify tourism attractions and businesses, so as to transform the local tourism industry and promote high-quality economic development.

Huizhou Ancient Town, for instance, has introduced a series of cultural and creative shops like paper-cutting halls, ancient skills activities like sculling boats, as well as modern coffee stands and shops, to the town to attract tourists and diversify businesses.

Huangshan government has also launched a series of policies to encourage local-style homestays and invited tourists to spend their holidays in a different way, to drive consumption.

When Feng Jiapeng, a 36-year-old robotics engineer from Foshan, Guangdong province, stepped into a bed-and-breakfast called Alina's Garden in

Tachuan village, Yixian county, he felt secluded from the outside world and everything slowed down.

The homestay was renovated from a Huizhou-style building from the Qing Dynasty and was named after the owner's daughter Alina.

Inside the bed-and-breakfast, Armin Schober, the Austrian owner of the house who used to run a logistics company in the United Kingdom, was busy baking pizza while his wife Huang Qiong fried stewed pork with brown sauce, a traditional Chinese dish. Their four-year-old daughter Alina quickly ran to Feng and greeted him.

"We instantly fell in love with it, including the traditional architecture and family-run atmosphere. There is a personal connection that a hotel cannot offer," said Feng, who brought his family of four, including two kids, to spend four nights.

Feng was one of the families who chose to spend this year's Spring Festival holiday at Alina's Garden in Huangshan. The 12-room homestay was fully booked for seven days.

According to Schober, it was the busiest Spring Festival for them over the past three years. Some of the rooms were even reserved a month prior.

"No one would refuse to live in a house with a long history but at the same time possessing all the amenities that a hotel has," said Schober, adding that he took over the homestay without hesitation when they took a family break in Huangshan.

Born in the countryside, Schober said that the idea for him to build such a homestay is to create a fusion experience between the East and the West and bring the best of both worlds. "I am pretty confident we will receive more visitors here in Huangshan, especially foreign friends, in the future," he said.

To attract more tourists, the Huangshan government has launched a package of policies. For instance, consumption vouchers totaling 2 million yuan were launched for tourists from around the world to use, deducting some consumption fees when choosing to spend their Spring Festival at the homestays.

"Huangshan's homestays, embedded with traditional Huizhou culture, have become a trendy way for urban people to get off the beaten path and enjoy some peace and tranquility," said Ling Yun, Party secretary of Huangshan, at a conference promoting local homestays.

"The city is ready to operate at full capacity and embrace tourists from all over the world to spend a unique holiday here this year," she said.

Huangshan, which is known as a tourist city with dozens of national-level tourist spots, saw a significant rise in revenue in January. Huangshan Mountain, known worldwide for its imposing scenery and massive boulders, saw over 350,000 tourists in January, which hit the highest January number since 2018.

During the seven-day Spring Festival this year, more than 1 million tourists flocked into Huizhou Ancient Town, up 460 percent year-on-year, and brought tourism revenue of nearly 1 billion yuan, up 320.8 percent.

Liyang in Alley, a modern district of Tunxi that is remodeled from ancient Huizhou-style streets into a modern fashion and cultural spot, registered 434,000 tourists in January, with total turnover of 16.59 million yuan, an increase of 34.8 percent compared with the previous year.

Letting go of the dependence on ticket revenue has become a trend in the tourism industry in recent years. The State Council, China's Cabinet,

said in a plan that the country encourages the formulation and implementation of subsidy policies such as ticket reductions and exemptions for tourist attractions, free opening in off-seasons and discounts for performance tickets.

The country has also vowed to make more efforts to accelerate the supply-side structural reform to prosper innovative tourism to promote the high-quality development of the tourism industry.

During this year's Spring Festival, many provinces and cities canceled ticket fees. A total of 49 tourist spots from Jiangsu province made their entrance fees free over the period, while Hangzhou, capital of Zhejiang province, made tickets to its national-level tourist attractions free until the end of March.

"The ticket economy was born under specific historical conditions during the development of the country's tourism industry. For a considerable time, it has been an important source of scenic resource protection, heritage protection, operation management, and even fiscal revenue and foreign exchange," said Zhang Dehui, chairman of Huangshan Tourism Development Co Ltd.

Thus, it depends on the different situations of scenic spots whether to reduce the proportion of ticket revenue in their total revenue.

"For scenic spots with natural or cultural heritage, diversifying businesses also has restrictions. It is also important for scenic spot tourism authorities to ensure a stable and important cash flow, and ticket income is relatively stable support," he said.

Dai Bin, president of the China Tourism Academy, said that free travel, price reductions and discounts in tourist attractions have indeed boosted the confidence of provinces and cities in tourism development and expanded tourism demand.

"But full consideration should be given to consider whether free tickets, price reductions and discounts have affected the company's ability of continuous operations. Policymakers are expected to launch relevant relief measures and subsidies to help them to transform," Dai said.

Contact the writers at chengyu@chinadaily.com.cn

By CHENG YU in Huangshan, Anhui province and ZHU LIXIN in Hefei

When Lyu Xiangming, a 49-year-old entrepreneur, took a tour of Tunxi, the central area of Huangshan in East China's Anhui province in June 2022, he was impressed by the gorgeous view blended with a clean environment and traditional Huizhou-style architecture.

But he never expected that the tour would sprout the idea of settling a business in the district, as the businessman — who owns a high-tech company that mainly produces intelligent environmental protection solutions — decided to invest in a production base in Tunxi.

"It is usually not an easy decision when making investments, but it was indeed a quick decision here in Tunxi," Lyu said, adding that it only took two months for all the details to be settled.

Behind the speed is the broader plan of the Tunxi government in gearing up efforts in attracting businesses and investments through developing high-tech, low-carbon businesses and industries.

Lyu recalled that when he first met with Wu Xuguang, Party secretary of Tunxi district, he felt "warm and welcome".

"From project initiation and construction to operation, the local authorities made everything detailed and proposed a series of supporting policies," he said. "It made me feel that Tunxi is an ideal business marketplace that I have spent many years looking for."

The place where Lyu's company is settled is the Huangshan Jiulong Low-Carbon Economic Industrial Park, which focuses on the next-generation low-carbon sectors including electronic information, intelligent equipment, big data and industrial designing.

Tunxi attracts high-tech business, diplomatic activities



Left: The elderly exercise on a street in Tunxi, Huangshan, Anhui province.
PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Right: Visitors enjoy the night life in Tunxi, Huangshan, Anhui province.
PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Such efforts are also in line with the Chinese top leadership's call during this year's two sessions — China's annual top legislative and political advisory meetings — to promote the transformation and upgrade of industries, coordinate urban-rural and regional development, make further efforts to build a green and low-carbon economy and society, and effectively upgrade quality and appropriately expand the output of the economy.

The latest Government Work Report, revealed during the two sessions, also stated that key priorities this year include pooling quality resources and concerted efforts to achieve breakthroughs in core technologies in key fields.

In February this year, a total of 12 major business projects kicked off in Tunxi, covering industries including manufacturing, cultural tourism and rural revitalization. Data from local authorities showed that the total investment of these 12 projects hit 5.19 billion yuan (\$753.64 million).

In addition, Tunxi is striving to build itself into a city with more international influence by building a meeting room for diplomatic activities and global forums. The local government is also gearing up efforts in leveraging its clean and sound natural environment to build several conference rooms for international businesses.

Huangshan has been holding a series of diplomatic activities, such as the third Foreign Ministers' Meeting among the Neighboring Countries of Afghanistan, which brought together foreign ministers and senior representatives of seven economies — China, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

An array of international conferences have also been attracted to the city, such as the International Cultural & Creative Economy Forum and Huangshan Dialogue on UNESCO Sites and Sustainable Development.

COMMENT

Editorials

US' governance failures leave it with no leg to stand on as 'champion' of human rights, democracy

That six people, including three schoolchildren aged 9 and under, have been killed in a shooting by an ex-student, who was later shot dead by the police, at Covenant School in Nashville, Tennessee, on Monday is just the latest heartbreaking reminder of the intractability of gun violence in the United States.

Calling it a "family's worst nightmare", US President Joe Biden said: "We have to do more to stop gun violence," urging Congress to pass gun control laws — a show he has become accustomed to as he has staged it every time such a tragedy happens.

As of Sunday, more than 9,800 people had lost their lives to gun violence in the US this year, including nearly 400 children and teenagers, according to Gun Violence Archive.

The question is for how long the Biden administration will continue to pay lip service to the US people while allowing gun violence to rip their communities apart; ripping "the very soul of this nation", as Biden put it.

Yet as the Report on Human Rights Violations in the United States in 2022, issued by the State Council Information Office of China on Tuesday, notes, gun violence constitutes just one of the symptoms of the major "chronic diseases" that plague the US. Money politics, police violence, wealth polarization and racial discrimination are also signs that something is not right in the self-proclaimed champion of human rights and democracy.

The Biden administration should address the US' own serious human rights problems rather

than pointing accusing fingers at others.

Washington's paranoia to weaponize democracy is another symptom of its institutional malady that is attributable to its human rights violations.

In spite of its many shortcomings, the US once again created ideological divisions in the world, and trampled on the spirit of democracy with its second so-called democracy summit.

As Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said, what the world needs today is not to interfere in other countries' internal affairs under the guise of democracy, but to practice true democracy, reject pseudo democracy and promote democracy in international relations.

And what the world needs today is not the 2nd Summit for Democracy that Washington is hosting on Wednesday and Thursday, but true solidarity and cooperation that can actually solve the problems facing the international community.

The advancement of the human rights cause needs dialogue and mutual understanding, not interference in other countries' internal affairs under the banner of democracy.

The US' wanton use of human rights as a weapon to attack other countries in order to hold back their development and create confrontation, division and chaos has become a spoiler and obstructor of the global human rights cause.

The US' politicizing, weaponizing and instrumentalizing of human rights issues should be opposed by all countries.

TikTok neither a loaded gun nor a Kraken

Robert Joyce, director of Cybersecurity at the United States National Security Agency, compared it to a "loaded gun".

Christopher Wray, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation claimed it could use it to "suppress information".

Kevin McCarthy, speaker of the House of Representatives, vowed to "protect Americans from the technological tentacles".

Although their remarks sound like Hollywood clichés, what has fired up Washington is neither an alien force invading the Earth nor some Kraken unleashed from the depths of the ocean, but simply a smartphone app.

Although, to be more accurate, it is not the app that has got them in a tizz and all riled up. It is the twin facts that it is immensely popular — having 150 million users in the US and 1 billion around the world — and not a US product. Compounding those "sins" is the fact that its parent company is Chinese.

Despite the app's US operations being totally run by a US company with a US team in accordance with US regulations, and the company's only relationship with the parent company being the latter gets its deserved profits according to the shares it holds, many US lawmakers and security top brass have a knee-jerk reaction to its origins.

The app is TikTok. It is the app's Chinese DNA that prompted the grilling of Shou Zi Chew, the Singaporean CEO of the American company, with silly ques-

tions such as whether TikTok can be connected to a family Wi-Fi and whether it could be used to control other family devices via that Wi-Fi.

Anybody with a middle school diploma knows the answer to the former is "yes" and to the latter is "no". By asking such questions the members of the US House Energy and Commerce Committee put on a performance of remarkable technological illiteracy in order to demonstrate to the US public they are working hard to protect them against a Chinese threat entirely of their own fabrication.

At the beginning of the March 24 testimony, Earl LeRoy "Buddy" Carter, US Congress representative from Georgia, said "Welcome to the most bipartisan committee in Congress". By that he meant both Democrats and Republicans are of one mind when it comes to China. The US' suppression of TikTok because it has been developed by a Chinese company is now par for the course in Washington, which keeps teeing up such cheap shots.

The only way for the US to restore the credibility it has lost with such wayward drives, is to provide an open, fair, just and nondiscriminatory environment for companies in the US, as Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said.

But having become stuck in the bunker of Washington's "anti-China" mentality for so long, the US lawmakers will no doubt keep blasting away with the same old shots, confident that having worked in the past to hit the deck they will do so again.

Friendly nudges can counter unfriendly push

Given the numerous problems and disputes between China and the United States, one push in the wrong direction could easily prove to be disastrous. Conversely, one nudge in the right direction could give bilateral relations renewed momentum.

Needless to say, given the current state of relations, push has come to shove. Contacts and exchanges are therefore imperative to make the nudge a tug. It can thus be seen as a welcome development that the US' China Coordinator Rick Waters visited China last week, the first visit to China by a senior US official since December 2022, with speculation rife that it was "working level communication" between the two countries to lay the ground for a visit by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

Some prominent US business leaders and scholars were also in China last week to attend the China Development Forum held in Beijing from Saturday to Monday. Many of the US participants, which included Apple's CEO Tim Cook, billionaire investor Ray Dalio, Cristiano Amon of US chip giant Qualcomm, Albert Bourla, CEO of Pfizer, and Jon Moeller, CEO of consumer goods giant Procter & Gamble, seized the opportunity to call for reduction of tensions and increased cooperation between the two countries.

Cook's remark that "I'm thrilled to be back in China" and his visit to an Apple store in downtown Beijing surrounded by fans made headlines and went viral on the internet. All this would not have hap-

pened without the larger background that in a little over three months China has emerged from the pandemic, returned to normal social and economic life and thrown its door open to international travelers.

It is worth noting that, as it was over the past decades, the entirety of China-US relations is defined by the many people from both sides who have participated or supported meaningful and reciprocal exchanges, not the China hawks in Washington.

China still hopes, as evidenced by State Councilor and Foreign Minister Qin Gang's meeting with US representatives and business leaders in Beijing, that China-US relations could regain healthy, stable and constructive momentum.

Of course, reviving such mutually beneficial ties is no easy task with the China hawks in Washington continually trying to push China on its core interests, including Taiwan, and science and technology development. It would serve the US' interests too if the China hawks in Washington could be made to grasp the larger picture of China-US ties and understand that their paranoia and prejudice about China stem from false perceptions.

But while it may seem that bilateral relations are worse now than they have ever been, we ought to realize that it was the accumulated nudges of people, who had the energy and optimism to see the potential of cooperation, that ensured any attempts to push relations off track failed. That hopefully will remain the case today.

Cai Meng



Opinion Line

China opening-up further to boost global economy

The three-day China Development Forum 2023 concluded in Beijing on Monday, showing that China remains committed to its fundamental national policy of opening-up to the outside world, pursuing a mutually beneficial strategy, and the country will continue to create opportunities for the world.

Over the past decade, China's average contribution to world economic growth has exceeded 30 percent, and many international institutions predict it will be even higher in 2023, providing strong impetus for the global economy.

In the face of rising global trade protectionism, China has adhered to its policy of opening-up to the outside world. Nowadays, China's economic development is reflected not only in the continuous expan-

sion of its economic size, but also in the steady improvement of its economic quality and the optimization of its economic structure. Foreign investment is not only contributing to China's high-quality development, but also providing broad space for foreign investment.

With a population of over 1.4 billion and a middle-income group of over 400 million, China is the world's second-largest consumer market, with ever-emerging new forms and models of consumption continuously releasing market potential.

In addition, China is a haven of global financial stability. Over the years, China has adhered to a prudent monetary policy and taken the autonomy of its monetary policy as an important principle, ensuring that no systemic financial risks have

taken place in China.

The stability and reliability of China's economic and financial system have provided a safe haven to avoid risks in the turbulent international financial market, which is an important factor for China to become a magnet for foreign investment.

China's opening-up has been upgraded from the initial processing trade and the introduction of foreign investment to institutional opening-up in rules, regulations, management and standards, and a pattern of high-quality opening-up has basically taken shape. This will continue to provide a broader market space and cooperation opportunities for other countries and make them share China's development opportunities.

— BEIJING NEWS

Virus-wise AI knows more than some politicians

Even though the US Department of Energy said with "low confidence" that the novel coronavirus might have leaked from a lab, and even Tim Trevan, founder of the safety consulting company Chrome Biorisk Management, wrote the same in the Wall Street Journal, some US politicians are raising the issue like they have discovered a new world again.

Trevan's WSJ opinion piece is titled "Why Scientists Got the Covid Lab Leak Wrong" and its sub-head perfectly sums up fatal loopholes in US politics when it says "We're only human, and we're as susceptible as everybody else to cognitive biases and self-interest." It also means that

politicians in the United States side with the opinion that best serves their interests, without looking at the facts even once. Be it the 90-day origin-tracing attempt in May 2021 or others, some US politicians have always presumed China had a hand in the pandemic.

By pushing for one origin-tracing study after another, some US politicians have just tried to target China when the real target should have been the virus. Is it any surprise then that over 100 million US citizens were infected with COVID-19 and at least 1.1 million lost their lives?

The number would not have been so humiliatingly high had the politicians with power at their dis-

posal focused more on protective efforts than on the politically-guided "origin-tracing" efforts.

If the US politicians insist on the possibility of a lab leak, they might need to look back at Fort Detrick, a biological lab with a notorious record of hazardous leaks.

On the official website of Open AI, to a question on whether the COVID-19 virus sprung from a lab leak, ChatGPT answered saying: "as of my knowledge cutoff date of September 2021, there is no conclusive evidence that the virus came from a laboratory leak".

US politicians could at least act as if they are as smart as the AI.

— ZHANG ZHOXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Asia major engine of the world economic recovery

Editor's Note: The Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2023 opens in Boao, Hainan province, on Tuesday, with the theme "An Uncertain World: Solidarity and Cooperation for Development amid Challenges". The four-day forum issued two reports on Tuesday, one of which is the Asian Economic Outlook and Integration Progress Annual Report 2023. The following are excerpts from the report:

Asian economies are accelerating the pace of the region's overall economic recovery in 2023. This report estimates that the weighted real GDP growth rate of Asia in 2023 will be 4.5 percent, up from 4.2 percent in 2022, making it a standout performer in view of the global economic slowdown.

In 2023, inflation pressures in Asia are expected to ease, but the factors pushing inflation up and down may coexist. The decline in commodity prices from their peak will help alleviate imported inflation pressure. But it is important to address the sustained increase in debt levels in Asian emerging markets, developing economies, and low-income countries. Developed economies such as the United States and Europe have begun an interest rate hike cycle, which has resulted in a significant outflow of short-term capital from Asia to dol-

lar-denominated assets. This is the main factor for the multiple rounds of rising interest rate by a lot of Asian economies. The strong recovery of the Chinese economy may provide Asian economies with a cushion against external impacts.

Asia should take advantage of the regionalization of global industry chains and actively promote regional economic integration to build a tighter regional common market; capitalize on the opportunities presented by the informatization, digitization, connection, and intelligentization of the global industry chains to foster innovation in digital technology and facilitate the development and cooperation of the digital economy; and address disruptions to global industry chains to effectively secure the supply of critical primary and intermediate products.

Major Asian countries such as

China, Japan, India and the Republic of Korea have all proposed timelines to achieve net zero emissions. The vast majority of Asian countries have made the green transition a key national development objective, and the green transition has become an essential part of the regional economic cooperation agenda in Asia.

At a time when the rules-based multilateral trading system is fraught with crises, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership mechanism is increasingly proving to be a valuable source of institutional and openness dividends for interregional trade and investment in Asia. The active involvement of Asian economies in the formulation of rules for the digital economy is expected to further promote openness and development in the field and thus provide a new powerhouse for economic growth in Asia.

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COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | Democracy and Civilization

Editor's note: The so-called Summit for Democracy convened by the US reflects its dangerous Cold War mentality and will instigate confrontations and political divisions within the international community. It is a preposterous show in violation of the spirit of democracy and exposes the US design to maintain its hegemony, which has been criticized and opposed by many countries. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Kin Phea

Democracy shouldn't be kidnapped

Rooted in the history, culture and traditions of a country, democracy takes diverse forms and develops along the paths chosen by the peoples of different countries based on their explorations and innovations. As such, the state ought to shoulder a unique responsibility of upholding and promoting principles that place emphasis on reforming the world order, and attendant ideas of mutual respect for countries' political sovereignty and avoidance of external conflict, which is at the center of international relations and countries' foreign policy.

Democracy does not consist of a single and unique set of institutions that are universally applicable. The specific form that democracy takes in a country is largely determined by the prevailing political, social and economic circumstances in that country.

Besides, no country has the right to use ideology and values as tools to subjugate or bully other countries and advance its geopolitical strategies, instigate divisions and confrontations in the international arena and push the world back to the dangerous Cold War era on the pretext of promoting democracy.

Triggering divisions and confrontations in the name of democracy is nothing but trampling on and betraying the democratic spirit and values. It will only bring turbulence and chaos to the world and undermine peace and development. This should be resisted and opposed by the international community.

The world needs to think from the global public's perspective and gain added strength by coming together, and all peoples, countries and regions should participate in this endeavor and focus on building multilateral consensus.

Democracy is the right of the people in every country rather than the prerogative of a few countries. Whether a country is democratic or not should be determined by its people, because democracy manifests itself in many forms. The practice of asserting a single model of political structure ignores the notion of shared human values, and is fundamentally undemocratic.

Peace, development, fairness, justice, democracy and freedom are common values of humankind. Whether a country's path succeeds or not depends on



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY



The author is the director-general of the International Relations Institute of Cambodia, Royal Academy of Cambodia.

slogans during campaigns but have no say after the election, if they are wooed during canvassing but left out in the cold after that, then it is not genuine democracy.

Democracy is not an ornament to be worn for decoration; it should be used to solve the problems that the people want to be solved. Reaching a consensus on democracy is about shared human values. However, some Western countries repeatedly claim to promote "democracy" and "human rights" while exercising their power to subvert countries that do not follow their warped model. Such Western countries' aim is to kidnap democracy in order to manipulate the rest of the world, and fabricate "anxiety about democracy" to promote the Cold War mentality.

These legacy liberal states, in an attempt to divert attention from their domestic failures and disorder, shift the blame onto other countries. Take for example Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya,

whether it meets the country's realities, follows the trend of the times, and brings about economic development, social stability and progress, and improves the lives and livelihoods of the people.

Therefore, a basic criterion of democracy should be about the people, whether they have the right to govern their country, whether their needs are met, and whether they feel a sense of fulfillment and happiness. If the people are only awakened to cast their votes and forced into hibernation after that, if they are served with sweet-sounding

Tunisia, Somalia, Syria and Yemen. These countries and their peoples have been attacked and continue to suffer in the name of democracy and human rights.

Democracy must not be viewed solely on the basis of a country's political system and by ignoring the diversity of civilizations. Asian societies display great diversity — ancient, culturally rich, colorful and diverse, like a beautiful garden deeply rooted in Asian civilizations and now blossoming due to the injections of new vitality. And the values of Asian societies cannot be understood or recognized without deeper understanding of Asia's unique civilizations.

The uniqueness of a civilization is not different from the uniqueness of democracy. The rich diversity and vibrancy of civilizations are reflected in the different forms of democracy. Democracy does not come in uniformity and singular configurations given the world's political and cultural diversity.

There are many ways that countries can practice democracy and there is no one-size-fits-all model for that. Countries with different histories, cultures, civilizations, traditions, customs and national conditions should develop a form of democracy that best suits their own characteristics and reality. No single country has the mandate to monopolize the definition of democracy, nor can it limit people's right to explore and choose a model of democracy that best suits a country.

As a Chinese saying goes, only the wearer of the shoes knows if they fit or not. Similarly, only the people of a country, not some small external circles and cliques, can tell whether the political system followed by their government is democratic or not.

Only democracy with human values at the core can foster, promote and consolidate regional and global peace and harmony, ensure people live with dignity, help people understand and respect civilizational diversity and further enhance inclusivity, which will prompt the global public to accept the differences in civilizations, so as to help build a community with a shared future for mankind that leaves no one behind on the road of development.

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

Carlos Martinez

Washington's attempt to seek hegemony

With his second so-called Summit for Democracy, US President Joe Biden is seeking to achieve two goals, one domestic and one international.

On the domestic front, he is still struggling to define a political identity that can appeal to voters in next year's presidential election. Consistently polling about 40 percent in approval ratings, Biden has delivered very little for the American people in over two years in office.

The Biden administration's handling of the novel coronavirus pandemic has been abysmal. There has been precious little action on the social justice issues that are supposed to be the hallmark of a Democratic leadership. Real GDP growth is projected to be almost zero this year. And the United States is failing in its climate action responsibilities.

Worse, it has been sending tens of billions of dollars worth of heavy weaponry to Ukraine to fight a proxy war against Russia, while its infrastructure crumbles and tens of millions are denied access to healthcare.

In the face of his administration's failure to actually improve people's lives, Biden is campaigning on the basis of liberal democratic ideology — a very specific vision of democracy based on the political and economic needs of the capitalist class. His strategists have calculated that this narrative will help create some distance between him and his likely competitor for the presidency — which could be Donald Trump, who is not known for adhering to any sort of democratic thinking, bourgeois or otherwise.

On the global front, the Biden administration's core project has been to construct a de facto military and economic alliance based on the hegemonic interests of the US ruling class. This is a Cold War alliance aimed at the "containment, encirclement and suppression of China", as President Xi Jinping put it a few days ago. It aims to further weaken and undermine Russia; escalate hostilities against Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Iran, Syria, Belarus, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and other countries; and reverse humankind's trajectory toward a multipolar future.

What Biden is promoting is, essentially, the "Project for a New American Century". The PNAC was a Republican neo-conservative concept, but its essence has been taken up by successive Democratic and Republican administrations. It is a strategy that specifically aims "to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival" to US supremacy.

The instruments of this project are: 800 foreign military bases, by far the largest military budget in the world, the proxy war against Russia, NATO's eastward expansion, AUKUS, the QUAD, a startling array of unilateral and illegal sanctions, the relentless undermining of the one-China policy, destabilization, economic coercion and bullying.

This is of course an aggressive, imperialistic project, and certainly doesn't compare very favourably with the proposal of building a community with a shared future for mankind put forward by Beijing. But ruthless imperialism rarely engages in truthful advertisement of its nature, and Biden's Summit for Democracy is part of an elaborate marketing campaign that places an equal sign between hegemonism and democracy and, conversely, between sovereign development and authoritarianism.

Even on its own terms, the summit is hypocritical in the extreme. For example, Venezuela, Russia, Iran, Nicaragua, Belarus, Syria and Zimbabwe all have multi-party electoral systems that enable the electorate to change the ruling party through their votes. However, none of these countries goes along with US foreign policy, and as such they are considered "authoritarian" rather than "democratic".

On what basis does the US afford itself the right to decide which countries are democratic and which are authoritarian? Is the US a model of democracy? Perhaps we could ask the 2 million prisoners in the US — by far the largest prison population in the world — who have lost their democratic rights due to mass incarceration policy.

African Americans, Hispanics and the Indigenous people have significantly lower life expectancy, lower income, and higher infant mortality than their white American counterparts, but they are several times more likely to find themselves victims of a profoundly racist criminal justice system. Nearly 30 million Americans lack access to healthcare. And the number of people living on the streets is increasing every year, while life expectancy is decreasing and the epidemic of child poverty increasing: one in every six children in the US lives in poverty.

What democracy do these people enjoy? Did they vote for racism, poverty and injustice? Could they change it by voting?

Joseph Stiglitz, winner of the Nobel Prize for Economics, has criticized the US system for being plutocratic rather than democratic: a system "of the 1 percent, by the 1 percent, for the 1 percent". The truth is that US democracy is money democracy. As Xi said in 2021: "If the people are awakened only for voting but enter a dormant period soon after, if they are given a song and dance during campaigning but have no say after the election, or if they are favoured during canvassing but are left out in the cold after the election, such a democracy is not a true democracy."

Friends of Socialist China and the International Manifesto Group will be organizing a Counter-Summit for Democracy on April 2, a few days after Biden's summit, to expose the US' true agenda. Speakers include Chinese academic Victor Gao Zhikai, Iranian academic Mohammad Marandi, Indian historian Vijay Prashad and the African-American journalist and peace campaigner Margaret Kimberley.

Dividing the world into opposing hostile camps is the last thing humankind needs. We face a set of enormous global challenges — from climate change and pandemics to the possibility of nuclear conflict — that demand close cooperation between the countries of the world, especially the major powers. As such, the US' new Cold War project is profoundly reckless, and has been rejected by the global public.

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

Harald Brüning

US' game of us-vs-them condemnable

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said during US President Joe Biden's visit to Canada last week that the two countries must be united against an "increasingly assertive China".

The Oxford Dictionary of English defines "assertive" as "having or showing a confident and forceful personality". Merriam-Webster, its authoritative US counterpart, defines "assertive" as "disposed to or characterized by bold or confident statements and behavior".

Isn't it normal that China, bullied by foreign countries (particularly Japan and the United Kingdom) for over a century until the late 1940s, now that it has become the world's second-largest economy and a major power politically, scientifically, technologically and culturally, is "increasingly assertive" on the international stage to defend its national interest? The United States and the United Kingdom, for instance, have been known for their political assertiveness for ages.

An example of an "increasingly assertive" US is the "Summit for Democracy" which President Joe Biden has called on Wednesday and Thursday. Its first version was held online in 2021. There is nothing untoward about holding a summit for democracy per se. It becomes problematic, however, if it adopts the perilous "us-vs-them" approach. According to the US State Department, the summit will include a conversation with Deputy US Attorney General Lisa Monaco "on defending the rule of law against hostile nation states" and "how the US Department of Justice is countering new and evolving threats to the rule of law posed by hostile



The author is the director of the Macau Post Daily.

of Asian descent were barred from becoming US citizens and, consequently, having access to the ballot box.

This may sound unreal, but Liechtenstein, a principality in Central Europe, granted women the right to vote only in 1984 (this is not a typing error).

As every political science student knows, there are different models of democracy. Apart from the West's "liberal democracy" concept there are also "socialist democracy" and other forms of democratic systems (Singapore springs to mind) based on Asian values such as placing great emphasis on community, social cohesion, filial piety, benevolence and consensus politics. Aside from Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism in Asia, Marxism continues to shape the concept of people's democracies in not only China but also, for instance, Vietnam, Laos and Cuba.

Several countries with rather different political systems have chosen to add the word "democratic" to their official names, such as the Democratic Republic of East Timor, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria. Biden has described the current state of world politics as an "inflection point", that is, a moment when people need to choose between "democratic" and "authoritarian" systems of governance.

While the West, including the United States and the European Union, will deny they are out to contain China's development and modernization, in politics, geopolitics in particular, perception is (quasi-)reality. Western politicians ought to take this into

account and accept that China's political system is different from theirs and that it would be foolhardy to attempt regime change in Beijing. They tried it in Hong Kong and failed miserably.

They should also accept the fact that the Taiwan question is China's internal affair. Taiwan is not Ukraine. Former Taiwan leader Ma Ying-jeou is on a 12-day visit to the Chinese mainland for paying his respects to his ancestors on Tomb Sweeping Day. Although he is visiting the mainland in his private capacity, it's a good sign for the positive development of cross-Straits ties.

The Chinese democratic system is people-centric and result-oriented. Under Xi Jinping's leadership, the Communist Party of China has been developing whole-process people's democracy, which the Foreign Ministry has described as "integrating process-oriented democracy with results-oriented democracy, procedural democracy with substantive democracy, direct democracy with indirect democracy, and people's democracy with the will of the state".

True, whole-process people's democracy is different from the West's election-focused "liberal democracy". But our planet which is home to 8 billion people is large enough to accommodate different forms of democracy. What is most needed to ensure world peace is mutual respect among countries in terms of their national development and security interests, non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, and cooperative competition.

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

GLOBAL VIEWS

SIMON BENNETT AND EDWARD LIU

With the wind in its sails

Incentivizing shipowners to adopt zero-carbon fuels can accelerate the shipping industry's decarbonization

China is one of the key players in the important negotiations to decarbonize the global shipping industry, which are currently taking place at the United Nations International Maritime Organization. China has proposed that shipping should achieve "net zero" carbon dioxide emissions by the middle of the century, consistent with its own commitment to achieve a similar goal for the Chinese economy before 2060.

In 2022, working hand in hand with other countries, such as Brazil and the United Arab Emirates, China also came forward with a proposal at the IMO for an International Maritime Sustainability Fund and Reward mechanism to expedite the transition to low and zero-carbon fuels.

As China has made clear, shipping is not immune to the huge challenge that a rapid transition to zero-carbon fuels and technologies represents. But there is now increasing clarity about what needs to be done. International collaboration is going to be key.

Taking forward ideas originally put forward by China, the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS), whose membership includes the China Shipowners' Association, has recently submitted a comprehensive fund and reward proposal to the IMO, affirming the shipping industry's commitment to meet a mid-century goal for phasing-out of CO2 emissions.

International shipping transports about 90 percent of the world trade in goods, including most of China's exports and imports, but it contributes about 3 percent of the global economy's CO2 emissions. As recognized by the Chinese government, shipping is the most sustainable way to transport goods, energy and raw materials, and the global fleet has reduced its carbon intensity by more than 30 percent in the past 15 years. But the shipping industry needs to catalyze a massive further reduction in its emissions.

If shipping is to decarbonize completely by the middle part of this century, the world has one of two choices: Governments can either cooperate to ensure that shipping can rapidly accelerate the uptake of low and zero-carbon fuels; or governments



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

can decide to reduce shipping's emissions by rationing the supply of maritime transport, with very serious implications for world trade and global prosperity, which — as rightly made clear by China at UN IMO meetings — is unlikely to be acceptable.

For shipping to achieve zero emissions by the mid-century, it needs to reach a "take-

off" point by 2030 and be on a pathway to complete decarbonization as soon as possible. The phase-out of emissions therefore requires the accelerated uptake of alternative marine fuels such as methanol, ammonia, hydrogen, sustainable biofuels and new synthetic fuels. But the scale of this challenge should not be underestimated;

the current availability of zero-carbon marine fuels is virtually zero, except for a few experimental projects. Moreover, the cost of these new fuels is expected to be at least two or three times the cost of the fuel oil which most ships use today, and access to these fuels will need to be prioritized over land-based uses.

Building on ideas proposed by China, the shipping industry therefore supports a global economic measure, to be agreed by the IMO, to narrow the significant "cost gap" with conventional fuels and incentivize first movers with rewards for CO2 emissions prevented by the use of alternative fuels, plus new technologies including carbon capture. Although there are different views about some of the details of how such a global mechanism might work, the latest industry proposal has benefited from informal consultations between the ICS and the Chinese government.

The ICS version of China's fund and reward proposal would be financed by a mandatory contribution by ships per tonne of CO2 emitted to a global fund.

The fund would be used to reward the uptake of alternative fuels by first movers, which will significantly reduce the cost gap while minimizing the additional cost of marine fuel to ensure that there will not be proportionately negative impacts on trade, which is a legitimate concern among many developing economies that has been clearly articulated by China.

In response to this concern, the ICS commissioned an economic impact assessment of the proposal, which concluded that contributions by ships of up to \$150 or more per tonne of fuel consumed would be unlikely to have significant trade impacts.

The industry's version of a fund and reward mechanism is intended to be as simple as possible. While China still has a number of questions about some of the details, approval of such a mechanism by the IMO is vital if the global shipping sector's commitment to phase out emissions by the middle of the century is to remain plausible, given the truly enormous challenge required to transition to a zero-carbon future.

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FENG YUJUN

Power equilibrium

China must strike a balance between participation in the global energy market and its energy independence and security

The global energy system is experiencing rapid changes in production and consumption as low-carbon energy consumption is booming. It is also affected by sharp fluctuations in the global energy market and the escalating geopolitical competitions.

China's energy consumption structure is more complicated than that of developed countries. China has rich coal reserves and inadequate oil and gas reserves, but it is shifting from the use of coals to oil and gas, exposing the limitation of traditional definitions of energy security and restricting its energy system transformation.

Many consumers are reluctant to reduce the use of coal due to its availability and affordable price. Oil and gas, viewed as scarce and expensive energy resources, are listed as key industries for national energy security reasons, restricting the participation of companies. The lack of competitions in the oil and gas market has made it hard for small- and medium-sized enterprises to play a major role in the oil and gas sector of China as their peers do in the United States, which has promoted shale revolution. Oil and gas prices have long been determined mainly by administrative means instead of market forces, which restricts oil and gas consumption and fails in substantially reducing coal consumption.

China has attached much national strategic and geopolitical consideration to oil and gas resources. There have been concerns about supply, price and transportation channels of oil and gas following an energy embargo, price extortion and channel blockade. Such thinking makes the Chinese government assume the main responsibility for ensuring national energy security, managing the energy system and addressing energy challenges, while the market and social communities are absent.

In recent years, China's increasing reliance on the oil and gas of other countries has caused further concerns about energy security. The "Malacca dilemma" often highlighted by China's energy strategy com-

munities is a typical case. The concerns are partly due to confusion between wartime and peacetime energy security, which has exaggerated the risks and threats to energy transportation and security.

The international energy strategic landscape is undergoing systematic changes. Facing the upheaval, we need to update understandings of energy security, and develop new energy security views based on China's practical demands for energy security and development of the global energy system.

First, China should adopt a dynamic view of energy and resource security, and strike a balance between fossil and clean energy, domestic energy and resources from other countries, and peacetime and wartime situations. There is no absolutely correct indicator system for energy security for it is constantly changing. Such a dynamic system should keep pace with the trend of global energy development, socio-economic environment of a certain country and the reality.

The Chinese government should be fully aware of the country's energy endowment. While recognizing the comparatively insufficiency of its oil and gas resources, it should focus on tapping into the huge potential of its non-fossil energy, especially renewable energy. Some worry that China relies too much on importing oil and gas, which causes great risks. In fact, the energy system is a complete supply and value chain. Supply disruptions will threaten the interests of energy importing countries, and exert great impacts on energy exporters, whose export and fiscal revenue will be affected. There is no general security standard for oil and gas imports in the international community and the volume of imported oil and gas doesn't necessarily relate to security issues.

We should consider in particular energy security in wartime, while also keeping an eye on risks such as an economic war and energy embargo that may emerge amid international tensions. In a peaceful era, China should not restrict oil and gas import



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

overly for fear of wars leading to supply disruption, and needs to hedge risks by diversifying energy import resources and increasing strategic energy reserves.

Second, China should balance energy supply and demand for security by meeting energy demands with high-quality and sound supplies. As the world's second-largest economy, China will continue to see contradictions between growing energy

demands and low-carbon transformation, for which it needs to improve supplies and demands. It should continue to promote the energy supply revolution, establish a modern supply system with diverse, complementary, secure, efficient and clean energy resources, and enhance the capacity of its independent energy supply. China also needs to promote energy consumption transformation and curb excessive energy

exploitation while controlling total consumption.

Third, China should develop energy security views on environmental risks and climate change, and involve the views as important parts of energy security. China should turn to the energy revolution to address climate changes and ensure sustainable environmental development. It should promote low-carbon transformation steadily, promote sustainable economic growth while improving the use of new energy to achieve both economic growth and environmental protection.

Fourth, the country should ensure energy security through technological progress. The international energy industry chain consists of resources, funds, technologies and market, with their respective weight changing. The progress of energy technology has increasingly become a key driving force for the reform of the international energy system. With the boom of energy science and technology, technology will play a greater role in the energy security system. To better uphold China's energy security, it should move toward the higher ends of the energy science and technology chains, enhance the core competitiveness of energy modernization, and guarantee energy security through sci-tech innovation.

China also needs to develop a global energy security view, improve international cooperation and uphold its energy security while opening its doors. After the Cold War, the global energy system has become more market-oriented, and energy resources such as oil and gas have increasingly gained commodity and financial attributes. The resources are less viewed as strategic reserves. Energy producers, transporters and consumers have developed a network of transnational relations involving multiple entities, which are interdependent, competitive and cooperative. In the long run, the general trend will not change. However, globalization has been temporarily disrupted in recent years, and the global energy system has seen violent fluctuations due to the suspension and reshuffling of global energy supply chains. Considering the general trend and periodic changes, China needs to strike a balance between participation in the global energy market and its energy independence.

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LIFE



International winners of WSA 2022, a competition for authors of online novels on WebNovel, an international portal of China Literature company, attend the award ceremony held in Hong Kong this month. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Online novels win top awards

Huge growth in contestants worldwide shows site is successful in nurturing talent, **Yang Yang** reports.

Three online novels created by writers from Pakistan, India and Thailand won the top prize at the WebNovel Spirity Awards 2022 held in Hong Kong this month, beating 90,000 competitors in the three language sections of English, Indonesian and Thai.

WebNovel, the international portal of China Literature company, a pioneer in the online literature market — one of the largest online literature platforms — was launched in May 2017 to promote translations of Chinese online novels. In April 2018, WebNovel started receiving original works by overseas writers.

By the end of last year, WebNovel had run translations of about 2,900 Chinese online novels, according to a report recently co-released by China Literature and Global Times Research Center. The platform also witnessed the entrance of 340,000 overseas online writers who created 500,000 works. Over four years, the number of visiting users on WebNovel increased by 8.5 times to about 170 million.

Launched in 2018 and originally aimed at English-language writers, the WebNovel Spirity Awards, or WSA, started receiving works in Indonesian and Thai last year.

The three top winners for 2022 are *Leveling Endlessly With the Strongest System* by Crimson_ink from Pakistan, *Allure of the Night* by ash_knight17 from India and *This Love Doesn't Have Long Beans* by Ninepinta from Thailand.

The main goal of the awards is to nurture new overseas writers. The report shows that since 2018, the number of overseas writers has increased at a compound rate of 130 percent, with people born after 2000 accounting for 37.5 percent and people born between 1995 and 2000 29.5 percent.

The average age of winners of the WSA 2022 was 27, and more than 40 percent of the winning

writers published their first novel on the platform. The top five countries with the largest number of writers on the platform were the United States, India, the Philippines, Indonesia and Britain.

The original works on the platform can be divided into 15 categories and over 100 subcategories according to themes such as Western or Eastern fantasy, science fiction, urban life or video games.



Book cover of *Full Marks Hidden Marriage: Pick up a Son, Get a Free Husband*, one of the nine translated Chinese online novels viewed over 100 million times on the portal.

In the original works, one can find the influence of Chinese online literature, since the tags of half the top 10 original works include the keywords of popular Chinese online literature modes, such as "reincarnation", "system", and "immortality cultivation". For example, the gold prizewinner *Leveling Endlessly With the Strongest System* combines the elements of the "reincarnation" and "system" modes.

Readers on WebNovel come from more than 200 countries and regions around the world, the report shows. The biggest reader group comes from the US and the fastest growing is from Pakistan. Readers born after 1995 account for 75 percent of the total.

The translated versions of the 2,900 Chinese online novels

include various themes such as immortals, martial arts, fantasy, urban life and science fiction.

By reading online Chinese literature, overseas readers can get a better idea of traditional Chinese culture and contemporary China. Last year, words related to "China" appeared over 150,000 times in readers' comments on the platform. Other most-mentioned words in the comments include Taoism, gourmet food, martial arts, tea art and panda. The most-mentioned five Chinese cities are Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Macao and Hangzhou of Zhejiang province.

By the end of last year, nine translations of Chinese online novels had been viewed more than 100 million times on WebNovel. The novel, *Full Marks Hidden Marriage: Pick up a Son, Get a Free Husband*, by Jiong-jiongyouyao — a tale that describes perseverant, independent modern women — tops the most-read Chinese online novels, having been viewed more than 400 million times.

"No matter written in which language, stories can carry dreams, transcend cultural differences and win more readers, which is the charm of online literature," said Yang Chen, vice-president and chief editor of China Literature, at the award ceremony of the WSA 2022.

Now in China, online literature has become one of the pillar sources of cultural industry. Online novels have been adapted into audiobooks, cartoons, TV series, films, video games and creative cultural products. Similarly, China Literature has also been working on the adaptations of original works on WebNovel.

The report shows that 40 percent of the award-winning works are being adapted into audiobooks, cartoons, films or TV series, with collaborative teams mainly from the US, Britain, India, South Korea and Thailand.

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“Food is of utmost importance for folks on both sides of the Straits. With the same heritage and roots, we attach great value to what we eat.”

Zheng Yaling, 22, college student

Student cooks up tasty plan to fuel cross-Straits culinary exchange

By CHEN XUE
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“I’m a foodie with a capital F,” Zheng Yaling says in the latest installment of *Gen Z’s Words*, an online program produced by 21st Century, a media organization affiliated with China Daily.

Zheng, 22, was born in Taiwan. But, because her parents are from different sides of the Taiwan Straits — her mother is from Fujian province, while her father is from Jiayi, Taiwan — she has felt the connection between the island and the Chinese mainland from a very young age.

Currently studying at Hunan University, Zheng has taken part in various cross-Straits exchanges but she’s always wanted to do something food-related, since it’s not only her personal passion, but also, she believes, a passion shared by people across the Taiwan Straits.

“Food is of utmost importance for folks on both sides of the Straits. With the same heritage and roots, we attach great value to what we eat,” she says.

So, during this past Spring Festival, Zheng set up a stall on the streets of Taiwan’s Beigang, to sell *renaiobao* (hot rice cream), a trendy kind of “ice cream cone” filled with glutinous rice or red beans with sweet cream toppings that originated in Henan province.

Initially worrying that people would hesitate to try something they were not familiar with, Zheng was quickly overwhelmed by the enthusiasm of the crowd, some of whom even pitched in to help her sell the snacks. The sales easily exceeded her expectations — she sold more than 200 *renaiobao* on her first day. Even after she had packed up her stall and got ready to go home, people kept coming and arranged a time with her to come back the next day.

But that was not all. Knowing that Zheng is studying in Hunan province, where it snows and which is famous for its spicy food, some customers would get curious and ask Zheng how she was faring with the weather and cuisine there. They would also share whatever they knew about Hunan, from the Zhangjiajie National Forest Park, where the movie *Avatar* was filmed, to whether the rumor is true that Chayan Yuese — a popular local milk tea chain — always has queues stretching out the door.

“It was not just a business,” says Zheng. “I was deeply affected by the enthusiasm of everyone I met.”

This enthusiasm, Zheng believes, is thanks to online video platforms like TikTok, Xiaohongshu and Bilibili. According to her, she and her high school friends used to watch online cooking videos together of, for example, the Tianjin-style *jianbing guozi* — known as Chinese crepes. They were so obsessed with it that Zheng can still remember the process, step-by-step, in detail. Among her customers were also those who learned about the snack she was selling from just such a video.

“I often had customers come to me, saying things like ‘I’ve been watching Xiaohongshu and TikTok videos for a while. Today I finally get to eat *renaiobao* here in Beigang, and I’m so happy,’” recalls Zheng.

But Zheng is neither the only one, nor the first, to introduce such snacks to Taiwan. In fact, this past Spring Festival was the first time that Zheng went home since her freshman year in college, and she couldn’t help but notice that cuisine from the mainland has become more prominent in Taiwan.

“I saw Chengdu Carambola Ice in Ximending, Taipei, but I was even more surprised to find Chongqing hot and sour rice noodles, Shanxi sliced noodles, Shandong dumplings and even restaurants serving river snail rice noodles,” she says.

And this is not a one-way street. On her trips traveling to different parts of the Chinese mainland, such as the Ningxia Hui autonomous region and Beijing, Zheng also came across Taiwan culinary specialties, from beef noodle soup and braised pork on rice to rice balls and stinky tofu hot pot.

“I’ve gotten to experience the curiosity and fondness that people on both sides of the Straits have for each other’s cuisine,” says Zheng.

Zheng is planning to bring home more trendy foods from the mainland, so that more people can experience their wonderful flavor. She would also love it if her friends in Taiwan can join her for an exchange of knowledge and travel in the mainland.



Online
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Zheng Yaling, a Taiwan student from Hunan University, sells *renaiobao*, a trendy food that originated in Henan province, on the streets of Taiwan’s Beigang. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

LIFE

Spring salon

Belt and Road Poetry Bridge event spotlights cultures through original-language readings, **Yang Yang** reports.

In his poem *Asking*, Vietnamese writer Huu Thinh wrote, "I ask earth: How does earth live with earth? / We honor each other. / I ask water: How does water live with water? / We fill each other up. / I ask the grass: How does grass live with grass? / We weave into one another creating horizons. / I ask man: How does man live with man? / I ask man: How does man live with man? / I ask man: How does man live with man?"

At the first salon of the "literary network" of the Belt and Road Poetry Bridge, held in Dongyue Temple, a Taoist temple in Beijing more than 700 years old, in early March, Xia Lu, an associate professor from the School of Languages at Peking University, read the poem in Vietnamese, Chinese and English. She translated the poem into Chinese and English. Her emotional reading touched those present.

"To answer the question 'How does man live with man', there is at least one good way, that is, to listen. If we are willing to listen to the other, we definitely will make the world a better place," said Jiang Haoshu from China Writers Association, one of the initiators of the literary salon.

During a two-hour "tea with Chinese literature" session, among other guests, six international students from countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative studying at Tsinghua University joined four Chinese poets and scholars to read poems in Mandarin, Thai, Armenian, Myanmar, Urdu, French, Indonesian, Vietnamese, English and the Shanxi dialect.

It's spring and magnolia flowers in the yard of the temple are in bud. For thousands of years, poets across the world have created masterpieces about spring, said Li Shaojun, chief editor of Poetry Magazine in the opening speech of the activity. Poems that can best represent authentic beauty of the season transcend the limit of time and space, reaching people around the world, he added. "Today, we gather here to read poems, sharing with each other beautiful words from different cultures of countries involved in the BRI, which itself is a wonderful thing happening in spring."

Mbaka Ndoou Trinella from Congo who is studying international relations at Tsinghua, chose to read in French *Being a Woman in the Democratic Republic of Congo*, a poem created by young Congolese poet Ruth Maketa in 2021. Trinella said the poem resonated with her deeply when she first read it.

"For ages, women in Africa have contributed tremendously to society but our social status has been rather low. So when they asked me to pick a poem that I liked and wanted to share, I chose this," she said in Chinese.

Ding Si Htoi San Pan, 28, from Myanmar, read a piece from Myanmar poet Zawgyi.

"Actually, there are 41 poems in this series, *The Way of Water Hyacinth*, by



Li Shaojun, Poetry Magazine chief editor, addresses the first salon of the "literary network" of Belt and Road Poetry Bridge at Dongyue Temple in March. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

This is a wonderful experience for me. I love all the poems. They are so beautiful. I'm deeply touched hearing them read in different languages."

Jiang Haoshu, China Writers Association



Overseas students, scholars and poets after the salon.

Zawgyi. I chose this because I like it best. It talks about how a person faces difficulties with courage. Despite repeated efforts, he or she is determined to go to

the destination," she said.

This event offered her a chance to take a look at Myanmar poetry, and also poems from other countries, she added.

"I'm touched by *Being a Woman in the Democratic Republic of Congo*, the Indonesian poem *Courage* by Soe Hok-Gie, and also the Chinese poem *Diping-*

xian (Horizon) by Su Liming," she said, adding that they are all powerful, about fighting for dreams despite all the difficulties.

Li Xiaoyang, from North China's Shanxi province, read his own poem *Yinmode Beidou* (Obscured Big Dipper) in the local dialect; Chinese poet Yang Biwei read her own *Gudu Xingqiu* (Lonely Planet); Zoon Ahmed Khan from Pakistan read Muhammad Iqbal's *Beyond the Stars*, which inspires young people to pursue their dreams; Hayk Geghamyan from Armenia read the love poem *If I Were Breeze* by Armenian poet Avetik Isahakyan; and Chayan Yalbert from Thailand read *Journey to Phukhaothong*, by Sunthorn Phu, the "Shakespeare of Siam".

While listening to the poems read in the original languages, attendees could refer to the Chinese translations on pamphlets.

Apart from reading, artist Luo Shijie played the *guqin* (Chinese seven-string musical instrument) at the event, and Lai Dafu, a scholar from the China University of Petroleum, played a piece of Chinese music with an ocarina.

"This is a wonderful experience for me. I love all the poems. They are so beautiful. I'm deeply touched hearing them read in different languages," said Jiang from China Writers Association.

"This afternoon is a great start for cultural exchanges. We are communicating through poetry and music in such a place that has a history of more than 700 years to explore the destinies of different cultures and nations, and the destinies of people. Our feelings and understanding can turn into poetry and all the poems can become bridges for us to better understand each other."

Lu Yang, a researcher from One Belt-One Road Strategy Institute at Tsinghua University, said, "It's the first time for me to hear poems read in 10 languages and dialects. Although we have the Chinese translations, they sound so different in their own languages."

She said the salon offered an opportunity to directly communicate with overseas students about their poetry and culture, and that more such events will take place.

"The BRI is to promote cooperation in different aspects, such as the connectivity of infrastructure and facilities, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and most importantly closer people-to-people ties. Through poetry, we listen to each other and increase communication. It truly is 'beauty for all to enjoy' and can draw people closer to each other," Lu added.

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Online
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Conductor welcomes the return of the sound of music

By CHEN NAN
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Walking into the guest room near the concert hall of the National Centre for the Performing Arts during the afternoon of March 27, Russian conductor Valery Gergiev looks at the photos hanging on the walls, featuring international musicians who performed at the venue, such as violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter and conductor Seiji Ozawa.

When he sees his own photo, Gergiev smiles.

It's been more than three years since the conductor performed at the NCPA in Beijing. With the country optimizing its response to COVID-19, performances involving people from overseas have resumed.

Gergiev returns to the NCPA, where he performed about ten times since its opening in 2007. From March 27 to 29, Gergiev and the Mariinsky Orchestra are performing at the NCPA. On March 30, the conductor will perform with the China NCPA Orchestra. The concert will feature young Chinese cellist Li La.

Since the news of the performances were announced, music lovers showed their enthusiasm and tick-



Russian conductor Valery Gergiev and Mariinsky Orchestra perform at the NCPA in Beijing on March 27.

PHOTOS BY JIANG DONG
AND PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ets sold out fast.

"I feel happy, privileged and honored. I have performed at the NCPA many times and it feels like coming home," says the conductor.

The conductor adds that he visited the Palace Museum on Monday morning. "It reminded me of the incredibly deep and great culture of China," he says.

He notes that the significance of the concerts with the Mariinsky Orchestra at the NCPA is that "inter-



national cultural exchange has resumed," he says.

"I remember clearly that in early 2020, when I was in New York, it was announced that flights were suspended and cultural institutions were closed in America. Then after I returned to St. Petersburg, we also closed the Mariinsky Theatre and we lost many projects, both inside and outside our country," the conductor adds. "Now, I am happy to come here to meet my friends in China.

"China is making huge and very rapid progress in building new opera houses, new concert halls and new museums. There are many young talented musicians in China that I love to work with, just like working with young Russian musicians as I always do," he says.

The music pieces that Gergiev and the Mariinsky Orchestra are performing in Beijing include works by Russian composers, such as Tchaikovsky's Symphony No 6 in B

minor, Op 74, Shostakovich's Symphony No 5 in D minor, Op 47, Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov's Sheherazade and Sergey Prokofiev's three excerpts from the ballet *Romeo & Juliet*.

The conductor also selected music pieces by Debussy, Mendelssohn and Rossini for the concerts, hoping to offer a diversity program for the Chinese audiences.

"We not only perform Russian music but also music from composers of different countries because I believe that great music has no borders and no limits. The power of music is to tell the world that a great music piece doesn't just belong to selected nations," Gergiev says.

Gergiev and the Mariinsky Orchestra's concerts at the NCPA follow Chinese President Xi Jinping's three-day visit to Russia about a week ago.

"We already have very rich cultural exchange, which will become richer. The NCPA brought wonderful productions to Russian people and we came here with our productions," says Gergiev. "After the historic state visit recently, our cultural ties and cultural exchange will strengthen and grow."

In addition to his work with the Mariinsky Orchestra, Gergiev was

also involved with other orchestras around the world. However, due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Gergiev stepped down as chief conductor of the Munich Philharmonic, a position he held since the 2015 to 2016 season. He also resigned from the Verbier Festival Orchestra from the position of music director.

"I visited about 40 to 50 countries every year over the past 30 years. Now, I become a little bit wiser. Maybe it's a little too much. I conducted less in the last three years because of reasons that are not connected to music. I conduct more and more in my country, which I am very happy about," says Gergiev, adding that in a festival coming in three weeks, he plans to go to 30 cities in Russia.

"Some of the cities are big cities and some are smaller cities. I love performing in smaller cities for people who may not have many opportunities to enjoy great concerts," he adds. "For conductors, it's not about where you go. It's about what you do."



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LIFE



One of Zha Wenhao's favorite writers is Russian storyteller Anton Chekhov (1860-1904).

Since Zha was a student at the Central Academy of Drama, the actor-turned-director has enjoyed reading Chekhov's works, from his full-length plays, such as *The Seagull* and *The Cherry Orchard*, to his short, one-act comedies, like *The Proposal*.

Now, as a director with the National Theatre of China, Zha is busy restaging a Chinese play, titled *Love, Chekhov*, which is based on three of the writer's comedies — *The Bear*, *The Proposal* and *The Wedding* — and will be staged at the company's theater from Wednesday to Sunday.

The play features veteran actors and actresses from the company, including Hou Yansong, who performs multiple roles, Chang Yuhong and Jiang Jiaqi.

"When I read the romantic stories told in Chekhov's works, I couldn't help wondering what Chekhov's attitude toward love and marriage was and how he dealt with romantic relationships," says Zha. "When I read his works in my 20s, and now again in my 30s, I feel different about those stories. I want to share my understanding about the writer and his works about love, relationships and marriage with the audience."

Zha adds that the restaging of *Love, Chekhov* will once again explore individuals seeking out and struggling for happiness and love.

The Proposal follows 25-year-old Natalya Stepanovna and 23-year-old Ivan Vassilevitch Lomov, who start their romantic relationship fighting and arguing, rather than with romance and flirtation. Both of them clearly feel some pressure to marry soon and they consider each other as not bad-looking, well-educated and seemingly suitable for marriage.

"The story is a satire on marriage, which mirrors the situation of some young people nowadays. Chekhov tried to convey the message that we cannot look to marriage to make us happy. Instead, we must find happiness ourselves. We should marry for better reasons than improving our financial status or meeting a standard set by society. We should marry because we are truly in love," the director says.

Like *The Proposal*, Chekhov's other two comedies: *The Wedding* and *The Bear*, also intrigued the director with their witty, realistic dialogues and keen insights into human relationships.

The Wedding depicts the wedding reception of a middle class family in Russia, in which the mother of the

bride, assuming airs and graces, deals with quarrelsome guests and a chain reaction of absurd events that occur as the result of a guest's mistaken identity, satirizing the lucrative nature of marriage.

In *The Bear*, a virtuous, spirited widow, Elena Ivanovna Popova, is pressed to repay a debt and ends up receiving an offer of marriage.

"The three short stories made me laugh and think. We create a new story based on all three of those sto-

ries, hoping to inspire audiences to think about their own romantic relationships," says Zha, adding that in *Love, Chekhov*, he also incorporates famous characters and stories from the great writer's classic novels, such as *The Man in a Case*, *A Joke*, *The Bride and About Love*.

"They communicate with the characters in *Love, Chekhov*, forming an extended universe encompassing Chekhov's literary world, reframing the classic stories with a

FROM RUSSIA, WITH LOVE

Chinese play based on Chekhov's satirical view of romance is set to return to the stage of the National Theatre in Beijing, **Chen Nan** reports.



Top: (From left) A scene from the Chinese play, *Love, Chekhov*, which is based on three of the Russian writer's comedies — *The Bear*, *The Proposal* and *The Wedding*, director Zha Wenhao explores love and marriage in the play; and a scene from *The Wedding*. **Above:** Award-winning actor Hou Yansong (front) performs onstage. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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Zha Wenhao, director of the play, *Love, Chekhov*

contemporary perspective and a new narrative to explore love," the director says.

Zha also spent a long time reading the biography of Chekhov, as well as the writer's letters to his family and friends, in a bid to try to understand Chekhov's life and his path as a writer.

Born in 1860, Chekhov grew up in the Russian town of Taganrog. He spent much of his childhood quietly sitting in his father's grocery store. He observed the customers and listened to them talking, gossiping and complaining. His ability to listen would become one of his most valuable skills as a storyteller. He began writing humorous stories for local newspapers and journals because he felt the pressure of being the head of the household following the collapse of his father's business.

Zha also studied Chekhov's love life. The writer's fear and doubts about marriage led to him not taking love seriously, resulting in a string of occasional affairs. Chekhov did not fall in love until he met Olga Knipper, a Russian actress. They were very discreetly married in 1901.

"Love is an eternal mystery for the writer and, of course, for all of us," Zha says.

Zha also invited Gu Chunfang, a professor of the School of Arts, Peking University, to give a lecture about Chekhov and his life stories, hoping to help the cast members better understand the great writer.

"*Love, Chekhov* is very interesting. For the audience, it gives a fresh perspective of Chekhov. Audiences naturally feel connected to him by watching the play," says Gu.

In April 2021, *Love, Chekhov* premiered in Beijing as that year's first new production of the National Theatre of China, receiving warm feedback from audiences.

The second round of performances in 2022 was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tian Qinxin, president of the National Theatre of China, notes that *Love, Chekhov* was originally launched in 2020 to mark the 160th anniversary of the writer's birth.

"His (Chekhov's) literary work has been embraced throughout the world. He is one of the most popular Russian writers among Chinese readers, since many of his works have been adapted into Chinese theatrical productions," said Tian during the premiere of *Love, Chekhov*. "*Love, Chekhov* is our latest attempt to interpret the great writer, as well as to show our respect to him."

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Italian shows passion for China's culture in viral dance videos

ROME — Niccolo Filippi, a 23-year-old Italian dance performer, sees his life as a book waiting to be written and relishes the opportunity to fill its blank pages with various cultures in which he immerses himself.

Having spent more than a decade on the dance floor, Filippi recently decided to explore Chinese culture and its traditional dance forms and believes that this experience will not only boost his career, but also broaden his horizons beyond the world of dance.

Filippi began his dance journey at the age of 5, starting with hip-hop, jazz and specializing in Latin-American dance. He won the Italian Championship for Latin American Dances in 2021.

However, his interest in diversifying his skills grew after he stumbled upon a short video of traditional Chinese-styled dance on YouTube.

"I saw it as an art that combines tradition and modernity, which was mostly the reason that I liked

it," says Filippi.

Ever since, he has been closely following Chinese dance performers and watching numerous videos to learn more about the traditional style that he admires. "I prefer the traditional style because of its light movements. It also reflects my personality with elegance," he adds.

Despite never expecting to have an opportunity to perform traditional Chinese dance, Filippi's chance came when he was invited to perform for a Chinese New Year celebration in the central Italian city of Florence.

He has since fully committed himself to the art form, learning several pieces and putting his newfound passion into practice.

"The biggest difference that I found (compared to other disciplines) is the change of mood and emotional expressions among dances," says Filippi, adding that he needed to shift from the dynamic moves of hip-hop to the graceful and fluid movements of Chinese dance.



Italian dancer Niccolo Filippi practices Chinese dance in *hanfu*, a form of traditional Chinese attire, in Florence, Italy.

SCREENSHOT FROM XINHUA VIDEO

Apart from the challenging choreography, Filippi also encounters language barriers. He says he has difficulty understanding the lyrics of the songs he dances to.

"I barely understand anything in the lyrics. I usually have to study the lyrics, get a translation, or ask a

friend to explain it," he says. However, he believes that the music's emotional essence transcends language and words, allowing him to connect with the music and dance to it effortlessly.

Despite these obstacles, Filippi's efforts have not gone unnoticed.

Two of his friends shared videos of his performances on social media, and the response was overwhelming. One video garnered 500,000 views, while the other received 200,000 views.

The comment section was filled with over 1,000 comments in Chinese, and, upon translation, Filippi discovered that most were praising his skills. Filippi was thrilled to receive so much positive feedback and was amazed at the popularity of the videos.

Filippi believes that learning about different cultures is priceless, and he sees it as a means of personal growth.

"I like to think of a person as a book, with their past writing some of the pages and infinite ones waiting to be filled with new experiences," he says. "Embracing different traditions and cultures, such as Chinese culture and many others, is like adding new chapters to my book, making it more diverse and wonderful."

Residing in Florence, a city

renowned for its artistic heritage and home to a sizable Chinese migrant community, he says many Chinese students visit Italy to study various forms of art and immerse themselves in the country's vibrant culture.

Conversely, a growing number of Italians are also showing a keen interest in Chinese culture, learning the language, delving into traditional Chinese art forms, and gaining insight into China's rich history and traditions.

As a young child, Filippi harbored a long-standing dream of one day visiting China. However, as he matured into an experienced dancer, his fascination with the country transcended mere tourism.

He yearns to explore the intricacies of Chinese culture and traditions, aspiring to broaden his horizons and develop as an individual, with a desire to learn that has extended beyond his love of dance.

XINHUA