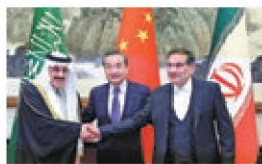


Triumph of peace

China's role in Saudi-Iran deal lauded as best practice of Global Security Initiative

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Power firms help keep homes toasty

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Innovative charm

Social media influencers revved up about enlightening visit to Macao

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# CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中国日报 THURSDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2023

## Seeking a solution



China's permanent representative to the United Nations, Zhang Jun (center), talks to members of the UN Security Council as well as Palestinian Ambassador to the United Nations Riyad Mansour (on Zhang's left) during a meeting on the Palestine-Israel conflict at the United Nations headquarters on Tuesday in New York City. A vote by the Security Council on a proposal by the United Arab Emirates on behalf of Arab and Muslim states calling for limiting the fighting and increasing humanitarian aid for the people of Gaza, had been scheduled for Thursday. MICHAEL M. SANTIAGO / AFP

## Xi highlights robust relations with Moscow

Russian Prime Minister Mishustin conveys condolences over Gansu-Qinghai earthquake

By XU WEI  
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President Xi Jinping pledged support to the Russian people in choosing their own path of development on Wednesday, while calling for more robust bilateral cooperation in the fields of economy, trade, energy and connectivity. During a meeting in Beijing with visiting Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin, Xi said the two nations should continue to enrich their bilateral cooperation by giving full play to the advantages of political mutual trust, economic complementarity, infrastructure connectivity and people-to-people exchanges.

He highlighted the need for joint efforts to safeguard the security and stability of industrial and supply chains.

The president hosted Mishustin, who is making his second visit to China this year for a regular meeting between Chinese and Russian heads of government, at the Great Hall of the People. The two also met during Xi's state visit to Russia in March.

Xi said that the two nations have already met the target of increasing annual bilateral trade to \$200 billion in the January-November period, a target set jointly by him and Russian President Vladimir Putin, which demonstrated the strong resilience and broad prospects of mutually beneficial cooperation.

He stressed that upholding and building up bilateral ties was the strategic choice made by both sides based on the fundamental interests of their peoples.

Xi expressed Beijing's readiness to work with Moscow to take the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations next year as a new starting point to continuously expand

the positive effects of the high-level political relationship.

In doing so, both nations can continue to jointly move forward in the process of comprehensively promoting economic and social development and realizing national rejuvenation, he added.

Xi underlined the strong resilience, vast potential and broad room for maneuver of the Chinese economy, saying that its long-term positive fundamentals remain unchanged.

He reiterated Beijing's commitment to promoting high-quality development and high-level opening-up, which he said will provide new opportunities for the development of all countries, including Russia.

The president called for joint efforts to ensure that the China-Russia Cultural Year in 2024 and 2025 is a success, including steps to design and carry out a variety of rich and colorful cultural and people-to-people exchange activities.

The goal is to consolidate social and public support for the everlasting friendship between the two countries, he explained.

The Russian prime minister stressed Moscow's readiness to further tap into potential and expand cooperation in areas such as trade, energy and connectivity.

He conveyed the condolences of the Russian government and people to Xi regarding the magnitude 6.2 earthquake that struck Gansu and Qinghai provinces late on Monday night, saying that Russia is willing to provide rescue assistance as needed.

The president expressed his gratitude, saying that President Putin and many foreign leaders sent messages of condolences after the earthquake.

See **Ties**, page 3

## WORLD WATCH

By Tom Fowdy

## West ignores its own past in stance on trial of Lai

Monday marked the beginning of the national security trial of Jimmy Lai Chee-ying, the former Hong Kong media tycoon and founder of the now-defunct Apple Daily, who is charged with foreign collusion and could face up to life in prison.

Naturally, the mainstream Western media have responded by framing him in the language of a "pro-democracy" campaigner and depicting the situation as an act of state persecution against the freedom of Hong Kong. However, this is a willful and deliberate misinterpretation of the facts.

First of all, we might ask ourselves whether it would be tolerable for an influential media mogul in Britain or the United States to collaborate, as Lai is accused of doing, with the highest-level leadership of a hostile power to foment an agenda of creating political change? It might be added that in Western countries, people are often prosecuted for collusion on far less of a premise.

As a wealthy and influential dissident figure in Hong Kong, Lai actively and publicly engaged with the highest levels of the administration of former US president Donald Trump and was seen as a conduit for US foreign policy goals, which was encouraged by many senior US politicians as a means of getting at China.

See **Trial**, page 3

## RURAL POLICE STATION EXTENDS HELPING HAND TO NATURE

Illegal hunting of birds targeted, migratory species protected

By LI YINGQING in Kunming and CHEN MEILING

In the past four decades, Dazhong Mountain in Yunnan province has stood silent witness to ways in which public awareness on environmental protection has changed significantly, with humans and wildlife benefiting from green efforts.

From September to February each year, the mountain, situated in Nanhua county, Chuxiong Yi autonomous prefecture, is home to more than 50 million migratory

### In-depth

birds from about 430 species.

Local villagers, who have been lifted out of poverty, used to visit the mountain to catch birds to eat or sell. The residents nicknamed the mountain "Da Que Shan", which translates as "bird-hunting mountain". But one year, chirping birds were no longer heard on its slopes.

Tao Faqing, 61, who lives in

Zhongshan village in Nanhua, said: "When I was young, every year the birds passed through Da Que Shan, and people in the village would hunt them. Gradually, these avian visitors fell silent."

Environmental damage in the area also posed a threat to other creatures and plants on the mountain, which covers 17,100 hectares, is rich in biodiversity and forms part of the Ailao Mountains National Nature Reserve.

See **Mountain**, page 2

## Relief, reconstruction efforts gather pace in quake-hit provinces

By WANG XIAOYU and MA JINGNA in Linxia, Gansu

A bonfire at a temporary shelter in Jishishan county, Gansu province, the epicenter of Monday's magnitude 6.2 earthquake, rekindled among survivors the hope of rebuilding their lives after the disaster as they endured frigid temperatures in the remote mountains of northwestern China.

Huddled inside a tent with her family, Ma Nuer, a resident of Kexinmin village, located near the epicenter, recalled how their house turned into a pile of rubble within a matter of seconds.

"The quake struck just before midnight. My husband, our two sons and I rushed to the nearest exit—a window—and jumped out. Our house collapsed in front of our eyes in 10 seconds or so," the 32-year-old woman said.

The family spent the first few hours after the disaster shivering in the open. "The rescuers arrived and put up tents for us. We were given noodles and baked buns."

Ma said she knows that rebuilding their lives from scratch won't be an easy task, but the swift mobilization of aid for the survivors has given her immense hope.

"I don't know what happened to our belongings, or whether we can

salvage anything at all. But at least tonight, my family and I have fire and a shelter to keep us warm," she said.

Kexinmin village, which has a population of around 1,400 people, is among the areas hardest hit by the quake in Jishishan county, which is located in Gansu's Linxia Hui autonomous prefecture. Hundreds of displaced villagers were relocated to three temporary shelters by Tuesday evening.

As of Wednesday morning, the earthquake had killed more than 130 people and injured hundreds in Gansu and neighboring Qinghai province. No secondary disaster had been reported, according to a news conference held by the earthquake relief team.

An inspection conducted at the Lijiaxia Hydropower Station showed that the dam and other facilities, including the spillway structures, were functioning normally, the team said. China's first megawatt hydropower station is located around 50 kilometers from the epicenter. The quake was strongly felt in the area, which prompted a level IV emergency response.

Search and rescue efforts ended at 3 pm on Tuesday, and priority work now includes treating the injured and rehabilitating the displaced, the team said at the news conference.

By Wednesday morning, 130,000 relief items, including tents, stoves, quilts and folding beds, had been sent to the quake-stricken areas.

A total of 87,076 people from 20,457 households had been relocated to temporary shelters, according to the Gansu provincial emergency management department.

Adequate food and heating arrangements have been made at these shelters. Provisional dwelling units are being set up to ensure each household has at least one fully insulated tent for the winter. Daily necessities, water and electricity will be guaranteed at these relocation sites, according to the department.

Wang Xihong, a member of an emergency rescue team administered by the Gansu branch of Red Cross Society of China, said he arrived at Kexinmin village around 3 am on Tuesday and has been working nonstop since, looking for trapped residents, removing debris on roads and setting up shelters.

"I need to catch a few winks of sleep, but taking a break is not on my mind right now. We have to help as many people as possible. Our top priority is keeping everyone warm in this frigid weather," he said.

Early Wednesday, a truck loaded with 1,440 quilts and 150 folding beds arrived at Kexinmin. "We still need more quilts and jackets to keep the chill out at night," Wang said.



Rescuers put up a tent for quake-affected residents in a village in Jishishan county, Gansu province, on Wednesday.

WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY

The insulated tents being set up for quake survivors are designed to last at least three months, according to Wang. "More equipment and materials are being transported to build outdoor toilets and infrastructure to ensure clean water," he added.

To ensure smooth supply of relief materials to the affected areas, the Gansu transportation department swiftly cleared highways, expressways and rural roads that were buried in debris during the quake. Green channels have been set up at toll stations leading to affected areas

to provide all relief vehicles free passage.

Planning for post-disaster reconstruction work has also started. The local authorities are consulting experts in various fields to assess the extent of damage to make preparations for a speedy all-around recovery.

Zhang Yu and Zhao Ruixue contributed to this story.

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# PAGE TWO



Wildlife on Dazhong Mountain, which forms part of the Ailao Mountains National Nature Reserve, is protected by officers at Hongtupo Forest Police Station in Chuxiong Yi autonomous prefecture, Yunnan province. PHOTOS BY HOU WEIJING / FOR CHINA DAILY



## Mountain: Environment significantly improved

From page 1

"When the mountain became barren and the birds stopped chirping, people began to worry if migrant species would ever return to the area," Tao said.

"We used to hunt birds, just as people visiting the coast go digging for clams, and those in the mountains go mushroom-picking. At the time, no one realized that hunting birds was wrong. If we didn't hunt them, what would we serve our guests during Spring Festival?"

In 1984, the Hongtupo Forest Police Station was established to crack down on illegal hunting and protect migratory birds. Officers at the station worked on the mountain from September to February, tracking the paths of migratory birds.

Initially, police patrolled the mountain without any major life necessities. There were no communication signals, and officers slept in tents despite the cold and the threat from wild animals, until a small shelter was built at the foot of the mountain in 2010.

Police officer Liu Yan said: "The toughest time was winter, when my quilt was never dry. When I was on duty, I walked long distances and sometimes found myself separated from my colleagues. I was all alone in the vast mountains. Words can't describe how I felt on such occasions."

Yang Zhengqiang, another police officer, said the forest terrain is steep, and poachers sometimes hide in the area.

"At night, when we are looking for poachers, we don't make a sound or use our flashlights. We once saw a campfire in the distance, but while crossing a ravine, I slipped and fell. My colleagues didn't notice, and I was afraid the accident would affect the operation, so I didn't dare make any noise. When dawn broke, I realized a high cliff was just a little further ahead of me."

Li Qiangao, former head of the police station, said: "In addition to mosquitoes and leeches, we needed to look out for wild boars, bears and venomous snakes. We often rolled around on the ground while capturing poachers, and when we stood up, we were covered in blood, as there were also many thorny plants in the forest."

He added that the police sometimes fell into ditches or became lost when they chased the poachers. Li once walked for two hours along a stream until finding a way off the mountain when the sun rose.

The duration, personnel and routes of the patrols are generally not fixed. The walking distance ranges from 5 to 50 kilometers. During patrols, the officers carry essential equipment such as tents, sleeping bags, ropes, water, medicine and food — usually rice and dry rations. Each patrol group consists of two to 10 people, Li said.

In heavy fog, officers on patrol teams connect themselves with a rope to prevent falling or getting lost. In extreme weather conditions, when they lose their way or are attacked by animals, they leave their remaining supplies of food

and water with younger officers to seek help.

"It is a tradition to leave the last drop of water for such officers so that our mission of protecting migrant birds is passed down from generation to generation," Li said.

Since 2009, a total of 1,516 administrative forestry cases have been investigated and handled, with 1,589 individuals penalized. More than 376 illegal hunting tools have been confiscated, along with 264 firearms and more than 2,300 rounds of ammunition.

### Door-to-door visits

As well as targeting criminal offenses, officers at the police station, together with the local government, work to improve awareness among villagers of the need to protect birds and other forms of wildlife.

Police carry out door-to-door visits among villagers to promote such work, but at first, the villagers didn't listen. Li said, "Before we entered their homes, I heard them muttering: 'Here come those people again!'"

He added that officers first chat with the villagers, and help them with farm work. After this, the main focus is on promoting laws and regulations related to wildlife protection, along with the legal responsibilities associated with hunting and eating wild animals.

To change the villagers' views, police also organized promotional activities in schools to get their message across to children.

Li said, "From resistance to acceptance, and then to support, each stage has taken a long time, ranging from several years to more than a decade, or even several decades."

Forty years ago, when he was a child, Li lived in a village in the area. One day, he saw adults lighting a bonfire and walking into the mountains with bamboo poles. Migratory birds flew toward the fire, falling victim one by one to the poles. The villagers collected the birds and took them home to eat.

"The cries of the birds echoed around the mountains, and also triggered my desire to protect them," Li said. After asking his father how he could help save migratory birds, his father told Li he could do so by becoming a police officer.

In 1999, Li graduated from a police training school, and for 18 years worked as chief of Hongtupo Forest Police Station, performing his duty of protecting the birds.

"Years ago, people thought birds were there to be hunted and eaten. Now, even children know that birds are to be observed and loved. The 'bird-hunting mountain' has become the 'bird-protecting mountain,'" Li said.

Years of hard work have paid off. Since 2019, there have been no reports of wild birds being hunted on Dazhong Mountain. The police station now operates mainly to promote avian protection and wild

animal rescue work.

Modern technological aids such as video surveillance, infrared cameras and drones are used to monitor poachers, fires and the behavior of wild animals.

If migratory birds encounter strong sources of light from cities or villages along their flight paths, they are easily misled and deviate from their intended route.

To ensure the birds arrive at their destinations, officers from the police station close the searchlight on the observation tower and tell villagers living at the foot of the mountain to stop using spotlights.

Over the past 20 years, locals have become used to turning off lights at night for three months of the year to help the birds.

Li said, "If the villagers' crops are damaged by wild animals, they report such incidents to the police, but they no longer harm the animals. They also rescue wildlife that is injured."

### Animal kingdom

Birds of many colors now fly over the villagers' heads, either in straight lines or zigzags, on the mountain, which boasts lush vegetation and many species of wildlife not seen in the area before.

Zhang Yueping, director of Hongtupo Forest Police Station, which is staffed by seven officers, including one woman, said: "The mountain is greener, the water is clearer, and the variety and quantity of wildlife and plants are constantly increasing. Wild animals, including forest musk deer and black-necked long-tailed pheasants, have reappeared in the area."

In addition to cracking down on illegal activity such as hunting and selling wild animals and their products, Zhang said the station will work to eradicate the habit of eating wild animals.

Observation stations have also been set up to monitor the habitats and populations of wild animals. These stations enable visitors to experience avian activities at all times and sense the harmonious coexistence between humans and animals.

Zhang said that together with other government departments, the police station plans to help build the Ailao Mountains National Forest Park, "to make wild animals a shared resource for people around the world".

The police station has become a mini zoo for rescued animals. More than 1,000 wild birds and other creatures, including black gibbons, bears, macaques and pythons, are released from the station every year. Many of them are rescued by locals.

A resident once brought a barn owl caught in a glue trap to the station. Officers removed the adhesive from the owl's feathers with scissors, washed it thoroughly, and placed it in a police car to bask in the midday sun.

By the time the officers had finished lunch, the owl had flown off. However, it later returned with several others, and they made their home in trees that stand near the police station. The officers even prepared food for the owls.

Xiao Jiu, a macaque whose legs were injured, was found by villagers, who took it to the police station, where officers bathed the animal and played with it every day. However, it later damaged taps and notebooks at the station, and as the creature was too young to survive in the wild, the police sent it to a zoo.

### Good returns

Local residents are also benefiting from green changes.

Jiang Wenkui, 41, who has been a forest ranger for 16 years, said, "Forest vegetation has increased significantly, and we no longer have any landslides in the area."

Villager and forest ranger Tao Faqing said, "There are more birds and fewer insects, which is good news for our crops."

Tao Faqing, who patrols the mountain and reports any suspicious activities, said: "Birds are humans' best friends. We are responsible for protecting them."

Some 200 forest rangers from Majie town work at observation stations in the area, where many villagers have opened bed-and-breakfast establishments to accommodate bird watchers and photographers.

Tao Jingping, 42, who runs a homestay with three rooms and offers catering services in Zhongshan village, Majie, said a maximum of 70 tourists arrive each day. "As the environment has improved significantly, I wanted to start my own business at home," she said, adding that the homestay earns her more than 10,000 yuan (\$1,396) a year.

"The village has changed a lot, and nobody hunts birds anymore. When they were still young, my daughter and son told me how cute birds are and that we need to protect them," she said.

Liao Chengfang, town mayor of Majie, said it plans to develop industries such as Chinese herbal medicine and ecotourism to increase residents' income.

"We are also considering a plan to offer high-end healthcare and rehabilitation programs to attract retirees to the area during the summer vacation, where they can rent a small courtyard to cook their own meals," he said.

"We will provide them with organic ingredients, and they can also go foraging for mushrooms in the mountains in July and August."

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Officers fetch water from a stream during a patrol on Dazhong Mountain. HOU WEIJING / FOR CHINA DAILY



Plants are inspected by officers in a Chinese yew forest on the mountain. HOU WEIJING / FOR CHINA DAILY



Above: A ceremony is held to mark the arrival of a new chief at the police station and the retirement of its predecessor.

Below: The mountain is patrolled by officers. PHOTOS BY HOU WEIJING / FOR CHINA DAILY



## TOP NEWS

## Fusion burgers let more Chinese have it their way

By WANG ZHUOQIONG  
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Fast-food chains, including KFC, McDonald's and Shake Shack, have rolled out more Chinese-inspired modified burgers, such as ones that replace the regular buns with traditional Chinese baked buns, to entice younger consumers.

The move, which comes amid growing competition in China from lower-priced domestic burger restaurants, features *guochao*, the trend of including Chinese cultural elements.

That trend is now influencing Western-style fast-food menus.

KFC, a unit of Yum China, the largest restaurant group in the country by outlets, recently launched Chinese-style burgers. Its menu now includes fried chicken sandwiches that replace their usual buns with Chinese-style baked buns.

Many food bloggers have said that KFC's new version of its iconic chicken burger is similar to the products of Tastien, a Chinese fast-food chain based in Fujian province.

Lei Dongyong, 23, an actress and livestreaming host, said that she had tried these burgers at both KFC and Tastien.

"KFC's Chinese-style burger doesn't taste as good as the local one. Tastien's burger tastes like a good combination between burger and *roujiamo*. It has larger portions and is cheaper," Lei said.

*Roujiamo*, or meat burger, is a crispy, oven-baked bun filled with diced pork — a specialty that originated in Shaanxi province.

Chinese-style burgers are a favorite among younger generations because of their attractive pricing and the difference in marketing strategy, said Zhu Danpeng, a food and drink analyst in Guangzhou, Guangdong province.

International fast-food restaurants have gradually copied or learned from their Chinese counterparts in following the popularity of local tastes, contributing to the rise of fusion food, he said.

For example, two months ago, Shake Shack launched its first Chinese-style burger — a beef burger with spicy beans and radish that was inspired by Sichuan cuisine. Burger

Shake Shack has launched its first Chinese-style burger — a beef burger with spicy beans and radish that was inspired by Sichuan cuisine. Burger King has brought back its pork elbow burger and recently introduced a spicy crawfish beef burger.

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Over the years, KFC and McDonald's have innovated their menu with Chinese-style burgers and snacks, including KFC's Beijing Chicken barbecue, spicy beef burger, porridge and fried dough stick for breakfast.

Domestic fast-food chains, on the other hand, have stood out for their localized production procedures and ingredients. For instance, Tastien uses hand-made baked buns, while Jiaguolong Chinese Burger, a unit of the Xibei catering group, includes sweet rice wine in making the flour dough for its buns.

Furthermore, to appeal to more consumers, some restaurants' Chinese-style burgers use tofu and Peking duck instead of the beef and chicken widely seen in Western fast food.

Tastien now operates more than 6,100 stores — twice the number at the beginning of the year — with the majority of stores located in lower-tier cities.

The fast-food sector has grown rapidly this year, as the catering sector has seen strong recovery. In November, the total revenue of the catering industry nationwide reached 558 billion yuan (\$78.3 billion), an increase of 25.8 percent year-on-year, according to data released by the National Bureau of Statistics.

From January to November, nationwide restaurant revenue reached more than 4.7 trillion yuan, rising 19.4 percent compared with the same period last year.

## Ties: Bilateral trade could reach record high this year

From page 1

China is making every effort to carry out rescue efforts and is doing its best to protect the lives and property of the people, he said, adding that the rescue forces and materials in the disaster-stricken areas are sufficient, and the basic well-being of local residents has been guaranteed.

The people in the affected areas will surely be able to overcome the disaster and rebuild their homes under the strong leadership of the Communist Party of China, he added.

Xu Poling, director of the department of Russian economy of the

Institute of Russian, Eastern European and Central Asian Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said the high level of ties and strong political mutual trust between Beijing and Moscow have been evident in the frequent meetings between leaders from both countries.

He explained that trade between the two nations has grown exponentially and become more balanced, adding that bilateral trade could reach a historic high of \$230 billion this year.

"There is even greater room for bilateral cooperation in industrial goods and supply chains," he said.

## On a mission



A United Nations Mine Action Service trainer instructs Chinese peacekeepers during a minesweeping and explosive ordnance disposal session in Lebanon on Tuesday. Besides detecting and removing landmines and bombs, China's 22nd peacekeeping force to Lebanon will take part in engineering construction and humanitarian relief work. HUANG YUANLI / FOR CHINA DAILY

## China's exposure to US bonds falls further

Orderly reduction of Treasury holdings 'necessary', expert says

By SHI JING in Shanghai  
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As China continues to scale down its exposure to US Treasury bonds, experts have said such steps are necessary given the deteriorating overseas debt situation of the United States and China's need to optimize its own overseas assets structure.

According to the Treasury International Capital data released by the US Treasury Department on Tuesday, as of October, China held a net \$769.6 billion worth of US government bonds, down \$8.5 billion from a month earlier and the lowest since 2009. It is also the seventh consecutive month that China's investment in US Treasury bonds has shrunk.

China is the second-largest foreign investor in US government bonds after Japan, according to Treasury International Capital. However, China's holdings of US government securities have contracted by nearly \$100 billion so far this year.

While China has not been

**34**  
percent

Decrease in China's exposure to US Treasury bonds in the past 10 years

dumping the bonds, no fresh purchases are being made to replace bonds that have matured, Yu Yongding, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said at a forum on Sunday.

Yu, also a former adviser to the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, stressed that it is "necessary" for China to reduce its US Treasury holdings in an orderly manner given the deteriorating US overseas debt situation, the falling coupon rate of the Treasury bonds, and the likelihood of economic downturns in the US.

In 2006, when the ratio of net debt to GDP in the US crossed 10 percent, the capital markets had become nervous. Now, that ratio stands between 60 and 70 percent.

This indicates that the US' net overseas debt situation will continue to worsen, and it may get aggravated by the continued interest rate spikes by the US Federal Reserve. Therefore, China's orderly trimming of US Treasury securities is quite necessary, he said.

In August, Fitch Ratings lowered its US credit rating from AAA to AA+. Likewise, Moody's Investors Service lowered its outlook on US government debt in October to "negative" from "stable" due to large fiscal deficits and a decline in debt affordability.

In this case, Yu said China should step up its efforts to adjust the structure of its overseas assets and liabilities, increase its income from overseas net assets, and try its best to reduce its foreign exchange reserve to an adequate level that is internationally recognized.

To maintain the safety of China's foreign reserves and overseas assets, Yu said that the country should try to maintain a balance in foreign trade and make the

domestic market the mainstay over a period of time.

Wang Qing, chief macroeconomy analyst at Golden Credit Rating, said that China's shrinking exposure to US bonds has been a long-term trend since the holdings peaked at the end of 2013.

In 10 years, the holdings have declined nearly 34 percent. During the same period, China's gold reserves have continued to rise, reaching 70.46 million ounces at the end of September, more than double the size of its gold reserves at the end of 2013.

This is also part of China's long-term strategy of optimizing its structure of foreign exchange reserve assets, he said.

According to data released by the US Treasury Department, overall foreign investor holding of US Treasury bonds fell for the second consecutive month to \$7,565 trillion in October, from \$7,604 trillion in September.

Luo Zhiheng, chief economist at Yuekai Securities, said demand for US government securities has been insufficient mainly because of the Fed's shrinking balance sheet and the sale of US Treasury bonds by emerging economies since July to stabilize their exchange rates against the rising US dollar.

Meanwhile, after the failure of Silicon Valley Bank in March, the ability of US commercial banks to absorb US Treasury bonds has declined. These US domestic institutions have become especially cautious about buying long-term bonds, he said.

## Storm aftermath



Residents salvage their belongings on Tuesday in flooded Hallowell, Maine, in the United States. The Kennebec River in Hallowell spilled over its banks after a severe storm triggered torrential rainfall in northeastern US. ROBERT F. BUKATY / AP

## Trial: Western countries attempting to deprive nation of its sovereign rights

From page 1

Lai met with then US national security adviser John Bolton, then secretary of state Mike Pompeo and then vice-president Mike Pence, with the apparent goal of encouraging US intervention in the Hong Kong issue, which logically would represent a direct threat to China's sovereign interests.

We might ask ourselves again, would the US tolerate independence activists from Hawaii or Puerto Rico, or other state or territory, meeting with foreign leaders to further their agenda to undermine Washington's rule? Why would this be acceptable in Hong Kong just because it is under the banner of "freedom and democracy"?

In addition, Lai is accused of being a ringleader in one of the biggest periods of unrest, disorder and violence that the city of Hong Kong has ever seen. It is again without question that no other

state on Earth would tolerate riots on such a scale with the view to sustaining total insurrection against the state.

We can visit other examples. The United Kingdom has increasingly hardened its laws on the prosecution and jailing of violent activists. For example, a large number of Just Stop Oil and other climate activists have been imprisoned for paralyzing public infrastructure or other forms of disorder and vandalism.

In other Western countries, in particular the US, police have no qualms about even using force to suppress disruptive protests. We might add that the punishment for those who led the insurrection at the US Capitol in 2021 was also very harsh. Why should this be acceptable in Hong Kong, if not at home?

Given this, there is nothing unacceptable about the National Security Law for Hong Kong and its application to suppress foreign-backed insurrection that reduced

the city to a state of chaos in 2019. Western countries are attempting to deprive China of its sovereign rights, in its own lawful territory, as a pretext to advancing their own ideological goals.

The Basic Law of Hong Kong has long mandated the inclusion of a national security law. More to the point, the designated autonomy of Hong Kong has never been extended to matters of high sovereignty, foreign policy, national security or defense.

The city is a better place after the insurrection was ended, and we should not pretend that 150 years of British rule made the city a beacon of freedom or democracy, where people were free to pursue large-scale destruction and violence in the pursuit of political goals.

The author is a British political and international relations analyst. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## CHINA

# How tragedy and resilience unfolded as midnight struck

Residents, rescuers and survivors tell of dealing with the Gansu earthquake

By YANG ZEKUN and MA JINGNA in Linxia, Gansu

Monday night is already indelibly chiseled in the memory of 57-year-old Ma Maidong. After experiencing a 6.2 magnitude earthquake, he and his family, dressed in light clothing, waited to be rescued in an open field with temperatures dropping below -10 C.

A minute before midnight, an unexpected earthquake rattled Jishishan county in Linxia Hui autonomous prefecture in Northwest China's Gansu province. By 9 am on Wednesday, the earthquake had caused 113 deaths and 782 injuries, according to the Gansu provincial earthquake relief headquarters. In nearby Qinghai province, 21 were dead and 198 injured, with 13 missing.

Ma, a resident of Yangwa village in Liuji township, one of the severely affected areas, has a family of nine. Fortunately, that night only he, his wife and his grandson were staying in the family residence. His two sons and their wives were working in other areas, while Ma's two other grandchildren were at a boarding school in the county.

Realizing the imminent danger, Ma hastily woke his wife and grandson and guided them to an open area outside the courtyard of their home seconds before the residence crumbled.

The outside temperature had plummeted and Ma saw many of his neighbors, similarly dressed in minimal clothing, anxiously watching events unfold as they stood in the open field. Eventually, they lit a fire to keep warm.

"We were so afraid, and it was extremely cold. The mixed feelings puzzled me," he said.

The village roads to the outside world were blocked by mudslides and rocks. Ma regained his composure and called relatives in the county and arranged for them to pick up his two grandchildren at the boarding school.

"The collapsed house can be rebuilt later. Faced with such a natural disaster it's fortunate that there were no casualties among my family members," he said.

Ma's grandchildren are currently sheltering with him and his wife in a disaster-relief tent provided by local authorities. He estimates it will cost 500,000 yuan to rebuild his home, which will have to wait until spring when it is warmer. Construction activities are currently hindered by the low temperatures.

The earthquake's epicenter was in Jishishan county. Cities in Gansu, including Lanzhou, Qingyang and Pingliang, experienced noticeable tremors. As of 8 am on Tuesday, the China Earthquake Networks Center had recorded 32 aftershocks, with the highest intensity being a 4.1 magnitude quake.

In Jishishan, school walls collapsed and buildings were damaged, but all students were safely relocated and appeared to be suffer-



People wait for free beef noodles at a resettlement site on Wednesday after an earthquake hit Shiyuan town in Jishishan, Gansu province, on Monday. WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY

ing no emotional trauma, according to local authorities.

Zhang Shunshan, vice-principal of Gajichunlei Primary School in Liugou township, Jishishan, said after the earthquake that 79 boarding students had followed practice drills and were quickly evacuated safely to the playground. Temperatures were below -10 C and teachers used charcoal to light fires and provided quilts to keep the students warm.

Zhang said after ensuring the safety of students, teachers promptly notified parents and guardians to pick them up. All 79 students were safely collected by 10 am Tuesday.

Immediately following the disaster, over 4,500 personnel and more than 820 vehicles from the PLA Western Theater Command, the Gansu Provincial Military Command, People's Armed Police Force Gansu Corps, Gansu provincial fire rescue corps, as well as provincial and nongovernmental emergency rescue teams were mobilized to the disaster area.

Liu Xuefeng, deputy commander of Gansu Provincial Forest Fire Brigade, said that they arrived at Jishishan around 2 am on Tuesday and quickly initiated rescue operations.

Residential houses were severely damaged, especially rural homes with little earthquake resistance. The low temperatures forced many residents to gather wood and light fires for warmth, he said.

Liu said an early challenge for the rescuers was providing enough food, drinking water, shelter and heating devices for the survivors. However, through coordination with government departments at all levels, these challenges were gradually addressed. Food supplies, heating and other necessities have been steadily distributed to the affected areas.

On Wednesday, the rescue teams started to focus on search and rescue work and erecting temporary tents. Under the disaster management plan, Liu's team was assigned to survey all villages in a designated area and rescue any individuals trapped under rubble.

The Gansu Provincial Emergency



People affected by the earthquake charge their mobile phones at a temporary site in Dahejia town, Jishishan, on Wednesday. WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY



Forest firefighters help villagers move their sheep to safety on Wednesday after an earthquake damaged fences in Shiyuan town, Jishishan. WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY

Management Department said on Wednesday the rescue work is almost over. The focus of on-site personnel will shift to treating the injured and resettling affected residents, while ensuring the safety of people's lives and property.

Medical rescue teams from provinces, prefectures and counties sent 19 teams comprising 667 people and 99 ambulances to assess and classify the injured and transfer them to hospitals.

Severely affected residents have been relocated to safer areas. Governments at all levels have allocated

a huge amount of emergency relief materials, including tents, quilts, lights, folding beds and waterproof mats. Food and daily necessities are also being distributed to the affected areas to ensure people have clothing, food and shelter.

All highways, national and provincial main roads, and rural roads have been restored and are open to traffic.

Power has been fully restored to all earthquake-affected areas.

Contact the writers at yangzekun@chinadaily.com.cn

## Officers, doctors rush to save stricken village

By YANG ZEKUN and MA JINGNA in Linxia, Gansu

People's Armed Police Force officers and doctors have told how they raced against time to carry out rescues and provide medical treatment in Linxia Hui autonomous prefecture, Gansu province.

In the early hours of Tuesday, after the epicenter of the earthquake struck Jishishan county, PAPP Gansu Corps initiated emergency response measures.

A total of 333 officers rushed to hard-hit villages in Liuji township to start emergency rescue operations.

Officers from the Linxia detachment of the PAPP Gansu Corps were the first rescuers from the force to arrive at the disaster site. The detachment sent over 200 officers to search for and rescue trapped people, repair roads, transport supplies and erect tents.

Tashi Tseten, 26, a native of Qinghai province, was one of the first officers to arrive at Yangwa village in Liuji, at around 3 am.

Due to road blocks caused by fallen rocks and mud, rescue and other vehicles couldn't reach the affected village. Tashi Tseten and his comrades, equipped with tools and emergency lights, hiked several kilometers to reach the village as the outdoor temperature reached -10 C.

As they approached the village, officers saw people waiting for rescue by the roadside, some of whom were injured. Most of the villagers had hastily evacuated their homes and were clad in light clothing. The soldiers quickly took off their own coats and wrapped them around the injured people.

After assessing the injured, Tashi Tseten immediately picked up a child with a leg injury and carried the youngster to a safe area 1 kilometer away.

He then returned, and along with his comrades took an elderly person with a severe abdominal injury to an ambulance for further medical care.

Recalling the scene when he arrived at the village, Tashi Tseten

said the buildings were in a precarious state with bricks and tiles falling from walls and roofs.

"When I saw the injured, I felt a sense of urgency. Without thinking much, my primary focus was to quickly carry the injured to a safe area, ensuring they received timely medical treatment. We also needed to prioritize their safety during the transportation, avoiding secondary injuries," he explained.

On that night, Tashi Tseten also participated in the rescue of seven trapped people. According to the PAPP Gansu Corps, as of 7:30 am Tuesday, they had successfully rescued and relocated 45 trapped people and recovered eight bodies.

It is Tashi Tseten's fifth year of service and he said he had not experienced an earthquake before. "In times when the people need us, as an armed police officer, I should step forward to shoulder my responsibility," he said.

His unit is primarily tasked with setting up tents and transporting supplies. He and his comrades have erected over 100 tents.

Six doctors accompanied the detachment to provide medical assistance, including 35-year-old Wang Xiaoling. On Wednesday, she examined residents in Yangwa village.

Zhou Ase, 35, a Yangwei villager, had undergone gynecological surgery just eight days before the earthquake. Her abdominal wound had not yet healed, and her doctor had advised her to rest at home. However, when the earthquake struck, her husband hurriedly pulled her from bed, causing a tear in the stitches.

Wang located Zhou in a tent and after consulting with a gynecology specialist via a telephone conference, recommended that Zhou undergo further examination at a nearby hospital. However, Zhou expressed her desire to rest for a while, considering the recent earthquake.

Respecting the villager's wishes, Wang provided treatment and recovery advice, prescribing medications for related symptoms.

## Universities send help to quake-affected students

By ZHENG CAIXIONG in Guangzhou zhengcaixiong@chinadaily.com.cn

Major universities across the country are extending helping hands to students in earthquake-hit areas in Northwest China, aiming to help them overcome difficulties.

Temporary hardship allowances, plus psychological counseling services, are now being offered to students whose families were affected by the disaster.

In Gansu province, where a 6.2 magnitude earthquake struck, local universities are doing what they can to financially support and appease students from the families affected by the quake.

Ma Xiaojie, Party chief of Lanzhou University, immediately set up a special task force to visit the campus and student dormitories to respond in a timely manner to students' needs, according to a statement released by the university.

Ma urged relevant departments in his university to open a special channel for temporary assistance to the students in disaster-stricken areas as soon as possible to ensure their normal lives on campus.

Lanzhou-based Northwest Minzu University has so far provided temporary hardship allowances valued at 47,000 yuan (\$6,700) to 91 students affected by the disaster.

Northwest Normal University has decided to provide the first batch of temporary hardship subsidies worth 121,000 yuan to 121 students from families in earthquake-stricken areas, including Jishishan county in Linxia Hui autonomous prefecture of Gansu and Haidong city in Qinghai province.

As of Wednesday noon, Lanzhou University has distributed the first batch of special temporary hardship subsidies of 49,400 yuan to 32 students including An Jixi, a student from the First Clinical Medical College of the university. "It's timely help for me and my family,"

he said, adding that his family's house in Linxia collapsed due to the quake.

In Beijing, Renmin University of China has fully deployed emergency assistance for quake-affected students, including providing temporary hardship subsidies on Tuesday morning.

Similarly, Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications has opened an appointment channel for psychological counseling for students from disaster-stricken areas, which can provide immediate psychological counseling.

In Shanghai, 57 students from the disaster-affected areas had been identified by Tuesday night. Local universities and colleges are offering temporary hardship subsidies valued from 500 to 3,000 yuan to each of the students, according to the city's education department.

In Tianjin, in addition to temporary hardship subsidies, teachers and counselors from Tianjin University of Technology talked one-on-one to the students from quake-hit families.

In Guangdong province, universities are also offering temporary hardship allowances to such students. An assessment of how many students are from the quake areas and how their families have been affected has been carried out, according to a statement released by the Guangdong Department of Education on Wednesday.

South China University of Technology promptly provided funding for its students from stricken areas. It sent one-on-one messages urging students to contact the university if they encounter difficulties.

At the same time, counselors and teachers are following up on the studies and lives of these students.

Ma Jingna in Linxia, Gansu province, and Zhang Jiejin in Guangzhou contributed to this story.

## HK, Macao chip in to aid recovery

By WU KUNLING in Hong Kong amberwu@chinadailyhk.com

People and organizations in the Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions have chipped in to help people in quake-hit areas in Gansu province.

Donations made through the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in Hong Kong SAR included prominent philanthropic organizations like the Li Ka Shing Foundation, established by Hong Kong business tycoon Li Ka-shing, and the Hong Kong Jockey Club, one of the city's largest charitable groups, with contributions each of HK\$20 million (\$2.5 million).

Li and Winfried Engelbrecht-Bresges, chief executive officer of the jockey club, expressed their wishes for an early resumption of normal life in the affected areas, and

hoped the donations could help tide the affected people over difficult times.

The office also received donations of money and materials from a wide range of organizations and groups. Sino Group, one of the city's leading property developers, donated 2 million yuan (\$285,000) in the name of the Ng Teng Fong Charitable Foundation.

The Hong Kong Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (Provincial) Members Association also contributed HK\$2 million, with the Friends of Hong Kong Association giving HK\$1 million, the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions HK\$300,000, the Hong Kong Gansu Association HK\$100,000, while Zhao Dongping, chairman of the Hong Kong Gansu Association, gave a HK\$200,000 donation and another HK\$200,000 in materials.

In addition, the city's gas provider, The Hong Kong and China Gas Company Limited (Towngas), doled out 1 million yuan to support relief organizations on the mainland involved in the quake-stricken area, while extending heartfelt sympathies to the affected and high regard for relief workers.

In Macao, the city's leading gaming and resorts operator MGM China Holdings donated 10 million patacas (\$1.2 million) and the Macao Red Cross offered a grant of 200,000 yuan.

MGM's donations were extended through the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Macao SAR for emergency relief measures and post-disaster recovery work.

Pansy Ho Chiu-king, chairperson and executive director of MGM China Holdings, said the whole nation

is grieving for their mainland compatriots hit by the earthquake. She said immediate relief measures are needed in this critical hour, and hoped the people of Gansu will swiftly recover from the disaster.

The Macao Red Cross decided to allocate 200,000 yuan to the Gansu branch of the Red Cross Society of China for purchasing relief materials, saying it will continue to pay close attention to conditions in quake-stricken areas, and maintain close contact with the Red Cross Society of China and its Gansu branch in order to take prompt action.

The 6.2 magnitude earthquake hit Gansu and neighboring Qinghai province at midnight Monday, killing over 130 and injuring hundreds more. The search and rescue has lasted for more than 30 hours and is ongoing, with 13 people still missing in Qinghai. The amount of sand and silt earthworks in the affected area is huge, making the rescue extremely difficult.

## WORLD



Egypt's Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry speaks during an emergency meeting of Arab League foreign ministers in Cairo on May 7. KHALED DESOUKI / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

# Reconciliation a triumph of peace

Experts applaud China's mediation in Saudi-Iran deal as best practice of Global Security Initiative

By PAN JIE

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Footage aired on Saudi Arabia's Al Ekhbariya TV shows Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi, wearing a traditional Palestinian keffiyeh scarf, greeting Saudi officials at the King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh after disembarking from his plane on Nov 11. Raisi was among leaders of the Arab and Islamic states who had gathered for a summit calling for a ceasefire to the current conflict in Gaza.

The visit was labeled a landmark because the summit on Gaza marked the first trip by an Iranian leader to the kingdom in 11 years, thanks to the peace deal reached by the two regional rivals in Beijing on March 10.

Since the conflict began in Gaza on Oct 7, there has been an increase in engagement between the two sides.

On Oct 12, leaders of the two countries spoke by phone and expressed their support for the Palestinian people. Additionally, the invitation to Raisi to attend the Arab Islamic summit last month represents the highest level of interaction between the two sides since the March reconciliation.

Saudi Arabia and Iran have for long been at odds with each other, with differences rooted in philosophical and political ideologies, especially after Riyadh severed ties with Tehran in early 2016.

Experts have noticed that in the Middle East, there is an increasing sense of autonomy, and countries there are more inclined to pursue a balanced strategy that maximizes their own interests. They also attribute the changes to external conditions that partly contribute to this shift.

Washington's role cannot be ignored, said Liu Xinlu, dean of the School of Arabic Studies at Beijing Foreign Studies University. "The sufferings and chaos caused by White House policies have long upset the region."

Liu cited the so-called democratic transformation during the George W. Bush administration, the military withdrawal from Iraq during the Barack Obama administration, and the so-called offshore balance policy under the Joe Biden administration.

## 2023 year in Review

"It is the hegemonism, power politics and a Cold War mentality that lie behind all of these policies. Western countries prioritize their own interests at the expense of Middle Eastern countries, only causing regional chaos and turmoil," he said.

As a result, some Gulf nations that have long adopted pro-Western policies, including Saudi Arabia, have experienced "rifts" with Washington. In response, they have undertaken various measures to strengthen their ties with other major powers, Liu said.

Jiang Yingmei, a researcher at the Institute of West Asian and African Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said Saudi Arabia has shifted its focus to domestic economic development and transformation.

For instance, in 2016, Saudi Arabia introduced Vision 2030, a strategic initiative aimed at diversifying its economy away from reliance on oil revenues. This plan includes the implementation of significant infrastructure and tourism projects.

When Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to Tehran Abdullah bin Saud al-Anzi arrived in Iran, he highlighted the importance of Vision 2030, saying it provides a road map for both countries to enhance their cooperation.

### Unity urged

It is also a must for Saudi Arabia to unite all Gulf and even Middle Eastern countries, while taking measures to prevent external interference, to position itself as a "global power," said Li Shijun, an assistant researcher at the China-Arab Research Center on Reform and Development, Shanghai International Studies University.

"By doing so, Saudi Arabia can exert significant influence in international affairs," Li added.



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud (front right) and Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi (front left) attend a meeting of Arab and Islamic leaders in the Saudi capital Riyadh on Nov 11. AHMED NURELDINE / AFP

### Key events toward rapprochement

2016:

Saudi Arabia cuts diplomatic ties with Iran in response to attacks on Saudi diplomatic missions in Iran, after the kingdom executed a Shiite cleric.

2023:

March 10: Saudi Arabia and Iran agree to restore diplomatic ties under China's mediation after years of hostility.

April 6: Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud and Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian meet in Beijing.

Aug 18: Amir-Abdollahian meets

with Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud in Jeddah.

Sept 6: Saudi Arabia and Iran exchange envoys.

Nov 11: Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi arrives in Riyadh for a summit to discuss the conflict in Gaza.

Dec 15: The first vice-ministerial level meeting of the China-Saudi Arabia-Iran trilateral joint committee is held in Beijing.

CHINA DAILY

Jiang said, "As for Iran, which has long been subjected to US sanctions and is facing internal and external pressures, a reconciliation at this moment could not only alleviate tensions with neighboring countries but also serve as a breakthrough to alleviate the pressure of US sanctions."

Since the reconciliation deal was clinched, the role that China played in mediation has won praise from around the world.

Experts view the deal as a sign of increasing trust in China among Middle Eastern countries, and as an

example of effective diplomacy within the Global Security Initiative.

According to Saudi analyst Jasser al-Jasser, China's involvement was a significant factor in the reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran, given Beijing's strong ties with both Riyadh and Tehran.

The two regional giants are participants in the Belt and Road Initiative, and China serves as the largest trading partner for both.

"The successful mediation of China stems from the goodwill, fairness and justice principle and increasing

political mutual trust that China has upheld for a long time in the affairs of the Middle East," Jiang said.

For example, in addition to the Saudi-Iran detente, China has always maintained a fair stance on the Palestine-Israel conflict.

On Nov 15, as the rotating president of the United Nations Security Council, China pushed the Security Council to pass its first relevant resolution since the latest round of conflict broke out.

The resolution called for an emergency humanitarian pause and the establishment of a humanitarian corridor throughout the Gaza Strip.

Zhai Jun, China's special envoy on the Middle East Issue, has visited regional countries regarding the situation since October. He also attended the Cairo Peace Summit on the Palestinian question in Egypt and the International Humanitarian Conference in Support of Gaza in Paris.

### Indispensable role

"China is playing an indispensable positive role in promoting peace and negotiations, in clear contrast with US actions since the recent round of the Palestine-Israel conflict broke out," said Li from Shanghai International Studies University.

This choice underscores the profound trust placed in China in the Middle East. It indicates that China's proposals, including the Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative, and Global Civilization Initiative, have garnered extensive support within the region, Jiang said.

Liu said, "The Global Security Initiative proposed by China offers wisdom and solutions to help these countries address the root causes of conflicts and achieve long-term peace and stability."

Several Arab nations, including Djibouti and Sudan, have restored diplomatic relations with Iran. Djibouti and Iran announced the restoration of ties on Sept 21 on the sidelines of a UN General Assembly session, while Iran and Sudan came to a similar agreement on Oct 9, ending a seven-year rift.

There is also optimism regarding a reconciliation between Iran and

Egypt. During the Arab Islamic Summit last month, Raisi emphasized the importance of unity among Islamic countries and expressed his willingness to develop relations with Egypt. He said his country sees no hindrance to improving ties with the friendly nation of Egypt.

In addition, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates restored diplomatic relations with Qatar in April and June, respectively.

In another significant regional realignment, Syria made a stunning return to the Arab League in May.

During the meeting between the two presidents, the UAE leader said: "Syria has left its brothers for too long, and now it is time to return to them and to the Arab world."

On May 19, the 32nd Arab League Summit adopted a declaration that welcomed Syria's readmission to the Arab League and emphasized the urgent need to eliminate any external interference in Arab internal affairs.

The Saudi-Iran peace deal holds tremendous potential for both states, the larger Middle East and the greater Eurasian region. However, experts say challenges remain, and it is unlikely these issues would be easily resolved.

The rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran is deeply rooted. The struggle for leadership in the Gulf region and the Middle East is one of the core contradictions between the two sides, and it remains unresolved, Jiang said.

Li added that the fragility in their relationship can be seen in crises in Syria and Yemen, as well as in the normalizing of relations with Israel. It will take time to find out to what extent the detente can help resolve the Yemen crisis and the Syrian issue.

Yemen has been one of the countries most affected by differences between Riyadh and Tehran. The two nations supported opposing factions in the Yemeni civil war that broke out in 2014.

On Aug 11, the United Nations said Yemen continues to face a protracted political, humanitarian and developmental crisis after years of fighting between pro-government forces backed by a Saudi-led coalition, and Houthi militias backed by Iran.

## Two cultures interwoven through friendship



Pan Jie  
Reporter's  
log

"Seek knowledge even if you have to go as far as China" is the first Arabic proverb I learned when studying the language during my college years.

The saying highlights the Arab tradition of valuing knowledge and the pursuit of truth. It also reflects the admiration for China as a civilization. More than 2,000 years ago, the civi-

lizations of China and the Arab states, located on opposite ends of the Asian continent, forged a deep connection.

Through the ancient Silk Road, China's advancements in porcelain, papermaking and printing spread westward, while Arabic achievements in astronomy, calendar systems and medicine traveled eastward.

Historical records preserve the old tales of friendship. The fifth-century book *Houhanshu* (Book of Later Han [25-220]) mentioned Gan Ying, a Chinese envoy, "facing the Western Sea to look at the Great Qin (Han Dynasty term for the Roman Empire)". This marks the earliest documented evidence of Chinese

envoys reaching the Gulf region.

About 700 years ago, Wang Dayuan of the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) arrived in Mecca and described the city as "a combination of landscapes, a spring of four seasons, fertile fields and rich rice, and happy residents". His book *Daoyi Zhilue* (Brief Account of Foreign Countries and Isles) became an important document for China to understand ancient Saudi Arabia. Zheng He of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) made many voyages to Jeddah, Medina and other places in Saudi Arabia.

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the two sides have been supporting each other on

the path of pursuing national independence and development.

This time, the peace deal brought the world's attention to the mediator China again.

It echoes the old Arabic proverb, with analysts saying the agreement is the acceptance and welcoming response to China-proposed initiatives on security, development and civilization in the Middle East.

The book, *The Future of China's Rise and the Arabs: Follow Civilization*, written by Jordanian scholar Samir Ahmed and published in 2009, provides us with a perspective of how the Arabs see modern China's development.

In the book, Samir said the Arab rejuvenation should learn from China's development experience. He believed that the two civiliza-

tions could support each other, thereby realizing the "Chinese Dream" and the "Arab Dream".

From a smaller perspective, the positive perception of China among the younger generation of Arabs is also evident.

In a survey of Arabs aged 18 to 24 in 53 cities across 18 Arab countries this year, 80 percent of respondents viewed China as an "ally", surpassing that of the United States. The survey was conducted by Dubai-based public relations company Asda'a BCW from March 27 to April 12.

I reached out to my Saudi friend, Rahaf Alshamqit, who just graduated from Cairo University's Chinese language department, for her opinion on the poll results.

"In our society, there is a growing interest in Chinese language and

pop culture. Many Arab youths view China as distinct from the West and are drawn toward it," she said.

I could see this trend reflected in Rahaf's music playlist, which was filled with Chinese songs.

After the peace deal was reached in March, Rahaf reposted the news on her Sina Weibo account, saying: "Thank you China. It is unbelievable!"

I asked her, as an ordinary Saudi Arabian, what does your country's decision mean to you?

"It means a new travel destination! Now Iran has become my next travel destination," she said. "We support our government in every way."

Well, indeed, no matter what kind of ideology a country has and what form of government a country has, the policies always aim to benefit its people's way of life.

## WORLD

## Alarm sounded over Peru's glacier melt

By SERGIO HELD and GERMAN SANCHEZ in Bogota, Colombia  
For China Daily

Over the past six decades, Peru has lost more than half of its glacier surface, with as many as 175 glaciers becoming extinct. This loss is significant for the country and the global climate, and is a visible example of the climate change impact.

"Between 1962 and 2020, Peru lost about 56 percent of its glacier coverage. This means that over half of the country's water reserves in the form of glaciers have been drastically reduced over 58 years," said Jesus Gomez, glacier research director at the National Institute of Research on Glaciers and Mountain Ecosystems, or Inaigem, an entity under Peru's Ministry of Environment.

Peru is home to about 70 percent of the world's tropical glaciers, which are found in the Andes Mountains. These glaciers are a vital source of water for agriculture, drinking water and hydropower. They also play a significant role in regulating the climate and providing habitat for many plants and animals.

"Peru is home to the largest expanse of tropical greenery in the world... This concentration of tropical greenery has fostered communities that depend heavily on the life-sustaining waters flowing from the mountains. The retreat or loss of glaciers, therefore, poses a significant threat to the availability of water, not only for drinking but also for other essential uses such as agriculture and electricity generation," Gomez said.

The loss of glaciers in Peru is due to a variety of factors, including rising global temperatures, changes in precipitation patterns, and increased human activities in the mountains. Rising temperatures are causing glaciers to melt at an alarming rate. Changes in precipitation patterns, meanwhile, are leading to a decrease in snowfall, which is further contributing to glacier loss. Human activities, such as mining and deforestation, are also putting additional stress on glaciers.

"Climate change has been accelerating the process of deglaciation and generating a series of impacts," Francisco Medina, director of research in mountain ecosystems at Inaigem, said.

"Obviously, in the future, it means a reduction (in freshwater). Since the state began to monitor the glaciers in the country, it has been documenting and validating this process."

The decrease in water availability is a genuine problem for Peru, which is already a water-stressed country. The loss of glaciers is also leading to changes in the country's climate, making it more extreme and unpredictable. This is having a negative impact on agriculture and tourism.

The loss of Peru's glaciers is a major concern in regard to global climate. Glaciers play a key role in regulating the climate by reflecting sunlight and storing water. When glaciers melt, they release this stored water, which can contribute to sea level rise. The loss of glaciers is also leading to changes in air circulation patterns, which can affect weather patterns around the world.

The writers are freelance journalists for China Daily.



The draft law to control immigration is approved at the French National Assembly in Paris on Tuesday.  
LUDOVIC MARIN / AFP

## Immigration bill passes, but crisis looms for Macron

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

Lawmakers in France's National Assembly have voted to tighten the country's immigration rules, but their support of legislation championed by President Emmanuel Macron has stirred up a political crisis for him.

Macron's ruling centrist party was bitterly divided over the legislation, with many lawmakers saying it went too far. And Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally, which has a strong anti-immigration focus, supported it.

The legislation was too much for Health Minister Aurelien Rousseau who resigned in protest.

Because Macron's government does not have a majority in Parliament, it needs support from smaller parties but has always said it would never vote with the National Rally.

After the bill passed by 349 to 186, Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne said the legislation, which was originally meant to balance tough measures demanded by the public with the need to keep France open to foreign workers, was "a necessary, useful bill."

"I have the feeling of duty being accomplished," she told France Inter radio on Wednesday morning. "We don't vote with the RN... We respond to the concerns of



The political crisis around the immigration bill is a moment of truth where all the fragilities of Emmanuel Macron's mandate are coming together.

Editorial published by Le Monde newspaper

the French."

Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said the bill "protected the French" and insisted the government had to take steps to stem the rise of Le Pen's party.

"Who here can say that we must allow criminals, people on our land who attack us, attack our professors, and who attack our police forces, and who attack the youth on the cafe terraces, without reacting?" he said during the debate.

The legislation was actually drafted by a committee after opposition parties refused to debate a previous version last

week. Ironically, the compromise text was much tougher and called for migration quotas, less access to welfare benefits for foreigners, tough rules for foreign students, and no automatic right to a French passport for children born in France to nonnationals. It also calls for dual nationals convicted of serious crimes to lose their French citizenship and for undesirable people to be deported.

Le Pen called the legislation an "ideological victory," while far-right lawmaker Edwige Diaz said it was "incontestably inspired by Marine Le Pen."

A grouping of French immigration advocates said: "(The legislation is) the most regressive bill of the past 40 years for the rights and living conditions of foreigners, including those who have long been in France."

Left-leaning members of Macron's Renaissance party were furious with him for supporting it, Radio France Internationale reported.

The Le Monde newspaper said in an editorial: "The political crisis around the immigration bill is a moment of truth where all the fragilities of Emmanuel Macron's mandate are coming together."

Newspaper Le Figaro said several other government ministers are also likely preparing resignation letters.



## Coastal high-rises

Cars drive past the construction site of the Alamein Downtown Towers Project in New Alamein City, Egypt, on Monday. The construction of the towers, a cooperation project under the Belt and Road Initiative, has started capping its main structures.

SUI XIANKAI / XINHUA

## Putin: Russia ready to talk on Ukraine

Russian president says any negotiations should not sacrifice national interests

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

Russia is prepared to talk to Ukraine and its Western backers about the future of its neighbor if they want to, President Vladimir Putin said on Tuesday but stressed that Moscow would defend its interests.

"In Ukraine, those who are aggressive toward Russia, and in Europe and in the United States — do they want to negotiate? Let them. But we will do it based on our national interests," Putin told a meeting of the Defense Ministry's board in Moscow.

"We will not give up what is ours," Putin said, adding that Russia did not intend to fight with Europe.

According to the state news agency TASS, the meeting was attended by the military top brass, including Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu and General Valery Gerasimov, chief of the general staff of Russia's armed forces, as well as Federal Security Service Director Alexander Bortnikov.

Russian troops, Putin said, now had the initiative on the battlefield. "We are not going to abandon the goals of the special military operation," Putin said, adding that Russia needs better military communication, reconnaissance, targeting and satellite capability.

He said Russia's defense industry was responding faster than that of the West, vowing that Russia would continue to upgrade its nuclear forces and keep its combat readiness at a high level.

Shoigu told the meeting that Russia's production of tanks has increased since the launch of the special military operation in February 2022 by 5.6 times, unmanned aerial vehicles by 16.8 times and artillery shells by 17.5 times.

He said Russia had recruited 490,000 soldiers on contract and voluntary basis in 2023 and will try to boost the contracted force to

745,000 men next year.

Meanwhile, the Russian Foreign Ministry said it had summoned Finland's ambassador on Tuesday to object to a new military agreement granting the US broad access to the vicinity of the new NATO member's long border with Russia.

## Countermeasures

Russian officials informed the ambassador that Moscow would "take the necessary measures to counter the aggressive decisions of Finland and its NATO allies", notably the growing NATO military presence near its border, ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said in a statement.

Helsinki became the US-led NATO military alliance's newest member this past year as its agreement with Washington is "aimed at allowing swift military access and aid to Finland in case of conflict."

The Kremlin said on Friday the pact would "pose an obvious threat to us" and lead to regional tensions.

In Washington, the Democratic and Republican leaders of the Senate said on Tuesday that the US will not be able to approve new aid for Ukraine before the end of the year, as the two sides continue to seek a compromise. "As negotiators work through remaining issues, it is our hope that their efforts will allow the Senate to take swift action... early in the new year," Democrat Chuck Schumer and Republican Mitch McConnell said in a joint statement.

The announcement from Capitol Hill marked another setback for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, whose government has warned of the "dire need" for weapons ahead of winter, Agence France-Presse commented.

The congressional impasse is also a blow to US President Joe Biden, who has made support for Ukraine and the strengthening of the Atlantic alliance hallmarks of his foreign policy, it added.

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## Palestinians struggle to provide food, shelter for children

GAZA — Mohammed Saad, a displaced Palestinian man, finally found a shelter for his eight-member family in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, more than 70 days after the outbreak of the Palestine-Israeli conflict on Oct 7.

The 59-year-old father of six used to be a well-off businessman, until Israeli attacks destroyed his home in Gaza City. After being forced to relocate southward, he started to take his family from one refugee shelter to another in Rafah.

"I took nothing except some cash when we moved south, and the amount can only afford daily necessities like food and water," he said.

"We had once sheltered in a UNRWA center in Deir al-Balah, but the Israeli army ordered us to evacuate and then we went to Khan Youn-

is until we received another evacuation order. That's how we ended up in Rafah," he said.

Currently, his family lives in a temporary tent established in the western part of Rafah and they have to share toilets with other families.

"I have to wait in long queues to get food, water, cooking gas, or any other things. Sometimes, I may go back to the tent without getting anything," he said.

The Rafah city, located near the border with Egypt, is crowded with hundreds of thousands of Palestinians displaced by Israeli raids amid worsening humanitarian conditions.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said in a press statement that with an estimated fourfold increase

in population density, exceeding 12,000 people per square kilometer, Rafah is now the most densely populated area in the Gaza Strip.

According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, or UNRWA, nearly 1.9 million people in Gaza, or approximately 85 percent, have been displaced from their homes.

The death toll of Palestinians from Israeli attacks in Gaza has risen to 19,667 and 52,586 others wounded since Oct 7, the Hamas-run health ministry said on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, Israel is continuing to attack Gaza from the air, land, and sea.

"The current unprecedented war has left me helpless as I do not have any money to buy the medicine for my children," Semaan Rashid,

another Palestinian taking shelter in Rafah, said.

His family sleeps in an old car and has to wait for hours for food from the UNRWA.

Starvation has been reported among a large number of people taking shelter in southern Gaza, according to the World Food Programme, as food security there is significantly deteriorating with the influx of population.

The WFP estimated that at least 50 percent of displaced families go to bed hungry at night.

The severe shortage of cooking gas has led to heavy reliance on firewood, wood scrap, and burning waste, which increases the risk of respiratory diseases.

XINHUA



Children rest in temporary shelters in the southern city of Rafah in the Gaza Strip on Monday. YASSER QUDIH / XINHUA

# WORLD US

## Court blocks Trump from ballot

Former US president, barred by Colorado fiat over Jan 6 riot, denies wrongdoing

LOS ANGELES — The Colorado Supreme Court ruled on Tuesday that Donald Trump is ineligible to run for president in 2024 because of the Jan 6, 2021, riot at the US Capitol, and the Centennial State authority should disqualify the former US president from appearing on the ballot in the 2024 presidential election.

The court, in a 4-3 opinion, found that Trump is barred under a provision of Section 3 of the 14th Amendment that prohibits people who engaged in insurrection from running for office and ordered the Secretary of State of Colorado not to list Trump's name on the 2024 presidential primary ballot or to count any write-in votes cast for him.

Colorado's case is the first of many legal challenges across the country to result in a ruling disqualifying Trump from the ballot as the former president seeks the 2024 Republican nomination, also marking the first time in history that Section 3 of the 14th Amendment has been used to disqualify a presidential candidate.

Trump has denied any wrongdoing and attacked the case in Colorado and similar lawsuits in other states against him as baseless and anti-democratic.

The Colorado Supreme Court stayed Tuesday's ruling until Jan 4, 2024, the day before the deadline for the Secretary of State to certify its presidential primary ballots.

It's a near certainty the case will head to the US Supreme Court, The Denver Post predicted, adding that Steven Cheung, a spokesperson for Trump's campaign, promised to file an appeal to the US Supreme Court quickly.

Cheung called the Colorado Supreme Court's decision "completely flawed".

All seven members of the



Former US president Donald Trump walks off stage after speaking at a rally in Iowa on Tuesday. CHARLIE NEIBERGALL / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Colorado Supreme Court were appointed by the state's Democratic governors. The suit was filed in early September against Trump and Colorado Secretary of State Jena Griswold, but the legal battle has always been between the plaintiffs and Trump's legal team.

Section 3 of the 14th Amendment says officials who take an oath to support the Constitution are banned from future office if they "engaged in insurrection". The Civil War-era constitutional clause is designed to disqualify anyone who took the oath of office in the Confederacy from running for public office.

It does not explicitly mention the presidency and has only been applied twice since 1919.

The Colorado Supreme Court's majority on Tuesday reversed a lower court's decision that the president was not an "officer" under the Constitution; therefore, the clause did not apply.

### Legal cases

Trump has frequently claimed "presidential immunity" in legal cases against him, trying to also have the felony charges against him dismissed.

"We have full confidence that the US Supreme Court will quickly rule in our favor and finally put an end to these un-American lawsuits," Cheung said in a statement.

Nevertheless, US District Judge Tanya Chutkan rejected his "immunity" claim on felony charges, ruling Trump's time in the White House did not give him the "divine right of kings to evade the criminal accountability that governs his fellow citizens".

Noah Bookbinder of the campaign group Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, which brought the original case, took to social media to hail Tuesday's ruling, calling it "a huge moment for democracy".

"It is not only historic and justified

but is necessary to protect the future of democracy in our country. Our Constitution clearly states that those who violate their oath by attacking our democracy are barred from serving in government."

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis — who is running against Trump for the 2024 Republican nomination but has closely aligned himself with many of the former president's political positions — said the US Supreme Court "should reverse" the Colorado ruling.

Trump's team was counting on the winding appellate process to delay the trial past the November 2024 election.

Lawsuits citing the 14th Amendment against Trump were dismissed early by multiple courts in many states, including Michigan, Minnesota, Washington, Arizona, Rhode Island, New Hampshire and Florida.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

## EU extends tariff suspension on US steel and aluminum

BRUSSELS — The European Union on Tuesday extended the suspension of its rebalancing tariffs on products from the United States in the context of the steel and aluminum dispute until March 31, 2025.

Initially implemented during Donald Trump's presidency, the EU rebalancing tariffs were a response to the US Section 232 tariffs on steel and aluminum.

The extension comes in response to the US extending its own suspension of tariffs for historical trade volumes reflected in the Tariff-Rate Quota system.

The extension should save EU steel and aluminum exporters approximately 15 billion euros (\$1.64 billion) in tariffs annually.

"The extension provides us with the necessary space to continue pursuing the full and permanent removal of 232 tariffs on EU exports, as well as working on addressing global overcapacity and decarbonization of steel and aluminum industries," Valdis Dombrovskis, executive vice-president of the European Commission and European commissioner for trade, said.

US Trade Representative Katherine Tai said in a separate statement that current talks are "technically complex".

The goal, she said, is to come up with an arrangement allowing both sides to incentivize "fair and clean production" in the sectors.

"The United States remains committed to our partnership with the EU and to staying at the table to continue the progress we have made so far," Tai said.

### Protectionist policies

Trump had slapped high tariffs on steel and aluminum coming from many countries, sweeping up EU exports in the process.

Trump's successor, Joe Biden, who also seeks to protect US industry, kept the tariffs in place but granted suspensions for EU exporters, Agence France-Presse reported.

The United States faces elections next year, and some of its states with high steel output are swing states that could help decide the outcome.



The extension provides us with the necessary space to continue pursuing the full and permanent removal of 232 tariffs on EU exports ... "

Valdis Dombrovskis, executive vice-president of the European Commission

The EU also faces bloc-wide elections next year that will usher in a new European Commission.

Dombrovskis said Brussels is "committed to ensuring that trans-Atlantic trade in steel and aluminum is undistorted and that our exporters are treated fairly".

The US and the EU have been at odds on steel and aluminum exports since 2018 when the US introduced tariffs on 6.4 billion euros worth of European steel and aluminum exports.

In retaliation, the EU introduced its rebalancing tariffs on US exports to the EU of a value of 2.8 billion euros.

Last year, the EU decided to suspend its rebalancing tariffs until Dec 31, 2023. The US replaced its Section 232 tariffs with a tariff-based system quota based on historical trade volume, with above-quota imports still subjected to tariffs.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

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Flocks of black-necked cranes are spotted near the Yarlung Zangbo River in Choma township, Lhaze county. YESHE TENZIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

# Environmental efforts protect Xizang wildlife

Upon graduating from university in 2004, Yang Le signed up for a volunteer program to aid the development of Southwest China's Xizang autonomous region. Since then, protecting black-necked cranes and other species of wildlife has become a 19-year mission.

He initially intended to broaden his horizons and gain some work experience, but he became engrossed in the program's environmental work and wound up staying for 19 years.

Yang, 42, is now a researcher and deputy director of the Xizang Institute of Plateau Biology. The intense sunlight on the plateau has turned his skin a darker shade, while his cheeks are rosy due to the high altitude.

Though hailing from Central China's Hunan province, he has dedicated most of his time to biological research and environmental protection on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, also known as the "roof of the world". He has paid particular attention to the black-necked crane, a species under first-class national protection in China.

"My teacher at university once told me that there was much work to be done in this vast world, offering plenty of scope for developing



Improvements in conservation see local species' numbers thriving

Above: Black-necked cranes use the countryside of Samdrubze district, Shigatse city, as their winter habitat. YESHE TENZIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

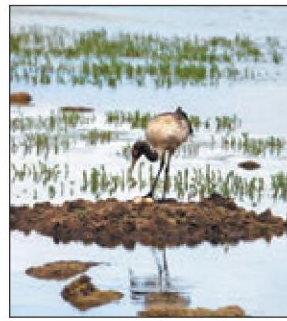
Below: A black-necked crane watches over its eggs at its habitat in Sa'kya county. DORJE WANGCHUK / FOR CHINA DAILY

my skills. He said Xizang was a land in need of development, so I decided to come here," Yang said.

With a university education in biology and a keen interest in wildlife, Yang found Xizang the ideal place to put his talents to use.

Over the past two decades, he has visited all the 74 counties across Xizang to observe the habitats and migration paths of black-necked cranes, helping to protect the endangered species.

"The black-necked crane is a



"The black-necked crane is a flagship species in Xizang, and its protection is important for the local ecosystem."

Yang Le, researcher and deputy director of the Xizang Institute of Plateau Biology

flagship species in Xizang, and its protection is important for the local ecosystem," he said.

Having spent so long observing the rare cranes, Yang has developed a special affection for the species.

"They are just like my own kids. A male black-necked crane only has one mate during its whole life. And watching them get married, have babies and migrate safely makes me happy," Yang said.

Over the years, Yang has come up with multiple suggestions on

how to improve the protection of the species. These include the establishment of nature reserves and building infrastructure to support the cranes in their habitats, aiming to strike a balance between human activities and ecological preservation.

Thanks to the efforts of Yang and his colleagues, over 70 black-necked crane observation areas have been established in Xizang. The population of the species has gradually increased over the years, rising from under 3,000 in 1995 to more than 10,000 now.

The local people are very fond of black-necked cranes, which they often call the "fairy cranes", "divine birds" or "auspicious birds".

Yang has managed to motivate more local residents to join his cause. In Lhunzhub, a county located near the middle reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo River and a core protection area for the black-necked cranes, wildlife rangers and local people have reached a consensus on helping the endangered wild animal wherever they can.

"Nature is always the guiding principle," said Yang. "I will stay on here, continuing to seek more value from life."

XINHUA

## Black-necked cranes flourish in Lhaze county

By YUAN SHENGGAO

As the vast harvested fields are bathed in the plateau's morning light, the sound of black-necked cranes searching for food fills the air in Lhaze county in the Xizang autonomous region, also known as Tibet.

At around 10 am, black-necked crane caretaker Tenzin sets off from Gyamda village on his electric tricycle for a patrol along the river and among the fields. A patrolman for more than two decades, he said protecting the rare birds is more than just a job.

A first-class nationally protected species, the crane is also categorized as vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, and Tibetans regard the birds as heralds of prosperity and auspiciousness. "Every year between October and March, the black-necked cranes choose to stay in our village, and my fellow villagers are happy to welcome them," said Tenzin, 72. "Whenever I hear them singing, I am happy from the

bottom of my heart, and they are very cute in my eyes."

He said that after accompanying them for so long, the birds seem to be friendly toward him, and they sometimes allow him to approach them.

Tenzin said thousands of the birds spend the winter in fields in his village and its vicinity. He said he hasn't counted the population but has noticed its growth over the past few decades.

He patrols the Yarlung Zangbo River and the fields once every two to three days, covering more than 30 kilometers a day, and makes sure the cranes are not being harmed by stray dogs or getting injured by high-voltage wires.

"Last year, two cranes died when they hit an electrified wire while landing in the fields," he said. "This year, I haven't seen any cranes harmed in such a way."

Tenzin saved one bird that broke a wing years ago when it flew into a wire. He took it home, sent it to the local forestry and grassland bureau for further treatment and then took

care of it for months.

He said he has had to prevent stray dogs from chasing the birds from time to time, and has used a slingshot to shoo them away.

Tenzin said that the local forestry and grassland bureau has been distributing food for the birds every year, with around 50 sacks of grain distributed last year. He and his family usually oversee the feeding.

The county's authorities and residents are now going above and beyond to protect the birds and their habitat in its black-necked crane national nature reserve. Established in 2003, the reserve has become a vital wintering habitat for the birds, and boasts a thriving population thanks to the unwavering commitment of conservation officers like Tenzin.

Lhaze county has undertaken various measures to effectively manage and safeguard the reserve, including the establishment of protection stations, the appointment of conservation officers and regular patrols that help to monitor any potential threats.

The county now has five management and protection stations, with eight patrolmen dedicated to the daily management and protection of black-necked cranes. An additional 150 ecological forest rangers have been added to the protection and management force this year. They regularly patrol the protected area, rescue injured black-necked cranes, and purchase feed and medication for use during winter.

The county government has spent 1.26 million yuan (\$176,780) on ecological restoration and afforestation, with 23 hectares of land in the black-necked crane nature reserve planted with trees.

"I am very happy to see that the local government also attaches such great importance to the protection of wildlife, including the black-necked cranes, and I will do my best to protect the species during the twilight of my life," Tenzin said. "I hope my son and grandson will take on the job in the future."

## Villagers in Lhundrub create a comfortable habitat for rare birds

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Tenzin, a resident in the township of Tsongdu in Lhundrub county, Xizang autonomous region, was happy to see the return of black-necked cranes.

"It's like welcoming back our family members," said the 60-year-old. "They leave us for the north every March and return every October."

The black-necked crane is a species on China's list of first-class protection. Among the 15 varieties of cranes worldwide, this is the one unique to China's plateau regions.

Xizang is the major habitat of this bird. Thanks to the locals' efforts in protecting the ecological environment, Xizang has witnessed the steady growth in the number of black-necked cranes over the decades.

The middle reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo River in Xizang are a major winter habitat for black-necked cranes, so the local authorities have reserved a large area of land — mostly wetlands along the watercourses — for the birds.

The Hutoushan Reservoir in Lhundrub county is a part of the Yarlung Zangbo Middle Reaches National Nature Reserve for Black-Necked Cranes. It is where Tenzin works as a patrolman for monitoring and protecting wildlife.

"Every autumn when the harvesting of crops is completed and the grass turns yellow, it's time for me and my fellow patrolmen to prepare for the return of the birds," Tenzin said.

He said his main job is to patrol along the reservoir, recording the number of the birds, making sure they are safe and have enough food, and rescuing the injured.

"Over the past 12 years, I have



Black-necked cranes fly over a snow-covered mountain in Lhundrub county. ZHANG RUIFENG / XINHUA

rescued four black-necked cranes with serious injury," Tenzin said. "I took the wounded home and they were discharged when they recovered."

Food supply for the birds is a serious concern of Tenzin and his colleagues.

The county of Lhundrub is an important farming base in Xizang for crops such as wheat, highland barley and rapeseed.

According to Tenzin, the harvest of wheat and highland barley is completed in October and plowing the farmlands begins in late November or early December. "During the interval between harvest and plowing, black-necked cranes live on grain scattered on the fields," Tenzin said.

Tenzin's family operates a farm of about 1.3 hectares, growing wheat and highland barley. "My family will postpone the plowing as late as possible, allowing the birds to have enough to eat," he said, adding that this is also the practice of many of his neighbors.

"But plowing is a necessity for farming," Tenzin said. "Once that is done, it means there might be a short supply of natural food for an

increasing crane population."

When a short supply of natural food is observed, people will come to feed. "Officials at the forestry and grassland bureau of Lhundrub county will deliver grains to various sites for feeding, which are taken care of by patrolmen like me."

Konchok Drolma, head of the bureau, said that Lhundrub county has received more than 2,000 black-necked cranes this winter, with most of them settling in wetland areas like the Hutoushan Reservoir.

"Based on our observation, there has been a shortage of natural food for such a number of cranes and other birds," Konchok Drolma said. "So we have delivered about 13,500 kilograms of wheat to the 10 feeding sites in Lhundrub since last winter."

In addition to black-necked cranes, she said that Lhundrub has seen increasing populations of such wildlife species as white-lipped deer and mallard ducks.

"It shows that Lhundrub has become a preferred home of wildlife due to the result of the environmental conservation efforts by several generations," she said.



Black-necked cranes forage on farmlands in Gyamda village in Lhaze county. PHURBU TSEING / FOR CHINA DAILY

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# BUSINESS



Technicians from China National Petroleum Corp conduct an inspection at a natural gas processing facility of Changqing oilfield in Yulin, Shaanxi province, in July. WANG PENG / XINHUA

## Power firms help keep homes toasty

Recent cold wave, snowfalls prompt energy suppliers to stock up on feedstocks

By ZHENG XIN

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China's State-owned enterprises are making all-out efforts to ensure adequate and stable heating in the country in response to the ongoing cold snap and heavy snowfall across regions over the past week.

As the country has seen sudden frigid temperatures, triggering a sharp increase in heating demand, State Power Investment Corp has been stepping up energy supplies to meet the growing power demand, with overall thermal coal inventories increasing to more than 18.5 million metric tons, which will last for more than a month, it said.

The company has also been diversifying energy resources and incorporating renewable options to enhance overall sustainability. It reported more than 29.3 billion kilowatt-hours of power generation since December, with renewable energy sources accounting for around 49.01 percent, it said.

On the other hand, natural gas production and supply have also been running at full swing at Changqing oilfield to ensure residents have warm homes during the winter, with daily natural gas output reaching 152 million cubic meters, said its operator China National Petroleum Corp.

The oilfield, located in Northwest China's Ordos basin, is the nation's largest oil-and-gas field, sending natural gas to more than 40 major cities, including Bei-



An inspection robot oversees Changqing oilfield in July. WANG PENG / XINHUA

jing and Tianjin. To ensure sufficient natural gas for this year's winter heating season, the oilfield has produced 49.2 billion cubic meters of natural gas so far this year, it said.

In addition to Changqing oilfield, other key energy suppliers in northern regions — such as Daqing and Tarim oilfields — have all kicked into high gear to meet the heating needs of households during the cold months.

CNPC said it has also been stepping up efforts to diversify its gas resources, including developing domestic gas, imported pipeline gas and imported liquefied natural gas. Annual gas supply provided by the company accounts for more than 60 percent of total consumption of the energy resource nationwide, it said.

China Petroleum & Chemical Corp,

also known as Sinopec, launched the country's largest LNG storage tank last month in Shandong province, with a storage capacity of 270,000 cubic meters.

With an additional gas storage capacity of 165 million cubic meters, which can meet the gas demand of 2.16 million households for five months during the winter, the LNG tank will further bolster natural gas storage capacity and help meet peak-shaving and seasonal rebalancing demand in the country, it said.

An analyst said State-owned energy corporations play a key role in guaranteeing ample energy and heating capacity to ensure reliable and sustainable energy supply.

Leading the charge, major energy corporations are investing in infrastructure upgrades to optimize the efficiency of power generation and distribution sys-

tems, said Luo Zuoxian, head of intelligence and research at the Sinopec Economics and Development Research Institute.

Strategic stockpiling of essential resources, along with improved coordination with regional authorities, have addressed potential challenges and minimized disruptions in heating services, Luo said.

The National Development and Reform Commission said on Tuesday that the country can secure sufficient energy supply for winter heating demand this year.

Storage of coal, a traditional key energy resource for heating, at the country's power plants has been above 200 million tons, sufficiently ensuring coal demand for heating and power generation, it said.

Moreover, the country is also striving to diversify its energy mix for winter heating to accelerate the energy sector's low-carbon shift, including nuclear energy, which has already been applied as an alternative energy resource for heating in China.

China Three Gorges Corp said it has been stepping up hydropower generation amid the extreme weather. The six hydropower stations operated by the company, including the Three Gorges Dam project — the world's largest hydropower project — and the Baihetan hydropower station, generate 700 million kWh of clean power everyday, with a peak maximum output exceeding 43 million kilowatts, a record high, it said.

The company has also been stepping up development of hydropower and electrochemical energy storage to overcome possible intermittency, randomness and volatility of new energy and ease pressure on the power system, the company added.

## Emerging industries attract foreign investment

HEFEI — Volkswagen Anhui's MEB plant in Hefei, capital of East China's Anhui province, is buzzing with activity as more than 1,000 robots engage in the production of new energy vehicles.

Next to the production plant, two supplier parks have been set up, with 18 partners already moving in.

In just two and a half years, Volkswagen has built a new hub in Hefei, covering the complete value chain from research and development to manufacturing, sales and service of NEVs.

"We are specifically utilizing new technologies and the outstanding infrastructure of Anhui," said Erwin Gabardi, CEO of Volkswagen Anhui. "We will also benefit from this innovative strength."

Volkswagen is among several global companies that have consistently increased investments in China's emerging industries.

As China promotes industrial innovation with technological innovation, more high-quality, high-end, and technologically innovative industries are becoming the new magnet for foreign investment.

Data from the Ministry of Commerce show that the actual use of foreign investment in manufacturing rose 1.9 percent year-on-year to 283.44 billion yuan (\$39.84 billion) during the first 10 months, with that in high-tech manufacturing logging an increase of 9.5 percent.

"Take Anhui as an example, foreign enterprises here have expressed a definite willingness to expand investment in industries including high-end equipment manufacturing, new energy and other related sectors," said Wang Yaping, deputy general manager of Deloitte China's Hefei branch.

According to a market survey by the company, the upgrading of China's consumer market and the enhancement of sci-tech innovation have continuously strengthened foreign enterprises' willingness to seek new businesses in China, Wang added.

As one of the most representative emerging industries of China, the booming NEV industry has attracted global automakers to expand investment and build a complete industrial chain in recent years.

With an investment exceeding 7.5 billion yuan, Volkswagen is establishing the Volkswagen Group China Technology Co, which will become the largest development center outside Germany upon completion.

Last month, the company announced plans to develop its first China-specific electric automobile platform.

"Over the years, we have consistently invested in facilities and platforms to support NEV production, R&D, and sales and service. With our 'in China for China' strategy, we will develop much more technology here in the future. We will make better use of local innovative strength and respond more quickly to the needs of Chinese customers," Gabardi told Xinhua.

In May 2023, BMW Group's joint venture in China, BMW Brilliance Automotive Ltd, began construction of a new battery production plant in Shenyang, capital of Northeast China's Liaoning province.

Besides the NEV industry, China's innovative development in fields including biological medicine and digital economy has also provided sustained impetus to foreign investment.

"We will continue to develop in China, actively promote sci-tech innovation, and constantly explore new opportunities in new fields," said Liu Zhifei, president and general manager of Corning Greater China.

In September 2023, Corning opened its Advanced Flow Pharmaceutical Technology (AFPT) facility in a biomedical industrial park in Suzhou of Jiangsu province.

The AFPT services will provide faster methods for identifying effective compounds during early-stage research and will help shorten drug development timelines.

Industry insiders believe that besides the boom in emerging industries, one of the key factors that will encourage foreign enterprises to stay and develop well in China is the building of a world-class business environment.

Central and local governments have introduced a raft of measures to build a first-class business environment. Anhui province, for example, has rolled out targeted policies and measures to support foreign enterprises in setting up R&D centers, said Zhang Rui, an official with the Anhui Provincial Department of Commerce.

"The local government has provided us with a fertile market environment and unwavering support," Gabardi said. "They have rolled out preferential policies that can fuel the rapid progress of our project and have supported our recruitment and nurturing of talent."

According to a survey conducted by the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade during the third quarter this year, over 80 percent of the surveyed companies said that they are satisfied with the business environment in China.

XINHUA

## Homestays with new features big draw among travelers

By ZHU WENQIAN

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Chinese travelers are increasingly seeking high-quality homestays with unique experiences, while the number of operators of bed-and-breakfast stays has significantly exceeded levels seen before the COVID-19 outbreak, according to a new report.

Booking numbers of B&B stays have grown by 120 percent this year over the pre-pandemic period in 2019, said booking platform Tujia.

Homestays that offer distinctive experiences such as pottery art and gardening have become particularly popular, according to the homestay operator.

Cities that saw robust bookings for homestays include Chengdu, Sichuan province; Chongqing; Beijing; Shanghai; and Dali, Yunnan province. The number of bookings in smaller cities in Northwest China has also increased rapidly.

"The homestay industry has been developing in China for over a decade, and they are now beginning to offer differentiated competition to hotels. This is the first year of high-quality development seen in homestays in China," said Long Fei, a

researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

"Chinese consumers have been seeking better quality and unique experiences. Besides satisfying the demand for basic accommodation, homestay operators have focused on providing travelers with personalized experiences that distinguish them from hotels," Long said.

Among various age groups, those born in the 1990s booked the highest number of homestays. Those born in the 2000s focused on experiences in particular, choosing to stay in different places within the same city, with the average stay in one place being 1.5 days, Tujia found.

Homestays with multiple rooms or yards have been well received, and the booking volume of such types of stays doubled from those seen in 2019, according to the platform.

This year, the number of new homestay operators jumped 77 percent over 2019, with nearly half of these operators born in the 1990s or after the year 2000.

In addition to increased income, operators said they also hoped to make new friends and acquire more cultural experiences by operating homestays, Tujia found.



Tourists savor locally produced honey products at a rural homestay in Chun'an county, Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, in November. XU YU / XINHUA

Most operators run one to two homestays, while more than 60 percent of the operators have other jobs as well, mainly in the catering and accommodation sectors. Others are engaged in sectors such as culture, sports, education and the internet.

"The homestays' features indicate the operators' personalities, hobbies, ethnicities, and experiences, which form a unique culture. This attracts many guests

who share similar tastes and hobbies," said Liu Yang, chief commercial officer of Tujia.

"There is one homestay operator who specializes in crab farming, and he can weigh crabs by hand. He personally provides guests with experiences such as fruit picking, fishing, and lake tours. He has become quite popular in the region," Liu added.

# BUSINESSFOCUS

## Yangjiang eyes BRI, RCEP to improve status

Hub for knives, scissors to expand ties with foreign firms for stable development

By ZHENG CAIXIONG  
in Yangjiang, Guangdong  
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Yangjiang in Guangdong province is sitting on a myriad of opportunities to consolidate its status as a major global production base for high-quality knives and scissors, and cooperate further with the rest of the world, thanks to the Belt and Road Initiative and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement.

The coastal city in western Guangdong is sparing no effort to expand exchanges with overseas entities to further develop its knives and scissors industry.

Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the city's hardware, knives and scissors industry has developed rapidly, with market entities increasing to nearly 10,000 households in recent years following deepened reform and opening-up policies, according to Yu Jinfu, deputy Party secretary and mayor of Yangjiang.

In 2022, the export volume of Yangjiang's hardware, knives and scissors increased by 48.7 percent compared to that in 2019, demonstrating the strong resilience and vitality of the key growth sector, he said.

Yangjiang, which has a history of more than 1,400 years making knives and scissors, is now known as "capital of Chinese knives and scissors" and has formed large-scale industrial clusters for the same with a complete industrial chain and diverse product categories.

The city is also known as the "export base of Chinese knives and scissors" and "a global procurement base of Chinese knives and scissors".

"Yangjiang will value openness and sharing with the rest of the world and expand cooperation with foreign firms to accelerate its high-quality development and high-level opening-up in the following months," Yu said at the opening ceremony of the 22nd China International Hardware Knives and Scissors Fair held in the city in late October.

Yu said he expects the fair to continuously adhere to the concept of "openness, communication, cooperation, sharing and win-win development", and help build a bridge for economic and trade cooperation, technological exchanges, and shared business opportunities for market players going forward.

The city government, he said, will continue to make great efforts to create more business opportunities for investors and business representatives from around the world.

Yu said the local government wel-



Sellers display products via livestreaming during an international expo for knives and scissors in Yangjiang, Guangdong province, in October 2020. LIANG WENDONG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

comes more investors and business people from around the world to expand exchanges and cooperation.

During the fair, relevant departments in Yangjiang signed letters of intent and cooperation agreements with Kyrgyzstan, the Philippines and Thailand to increase its reach in the global market.

The city government also signed a cooperation strategic framework agreement with the RCEP Industry Cooperation Committee, and is planning to establish a cooperation mechanism to further strengthen exchanges with business associations of countries and regions involved in the BRI.

According to official statistics, Yangjiang's annual production of hardware, knives and scissors has exceeded 55 billion yuan (\$7.86 billion), accounting for about 70 percent of China's total and 85 percent of its export value.

The city's hardware, knives and scissors products are now sold to more than 130 countries and regions, mostly to developed nations and regions.

Chen Xiaofeng, chairman of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade Guangdong Committee, said the hardware, knives and scissors sector is a pillar industry in Yangjiang that plays a big part in the city's economic development.

"With the fair continually improving its professionalization, marketization and internationalization, it has now become the world's largest hardware, knives and scissors exhibition and one of Guangdong's seven major professional exhibitions that helps link Yangjiang to the rest of the world," he said.

"In addition to exhibiting the latest products and technologies, the fair has built a good platform for Sino-foreign exchanges and cooperation," Chen said.

He urged companies and exhib-



Foreign visitors check out products displayed during the 22nd China (Yangjiang) International Hardware Knives and Scissors Fair in Yangjiang in October. ZHENG CAIXIONG / CHINA DAILY



Shibazi, a major Chinese producer of knives and scissors, is seeking expansion via cooperation with foreign counterparts during the 22nd China (Yangjiang) International Hardware Knives and Scissors Fair in Yangjiang in October. ZHENG CAIXIONG / CHINA DAILY

itors to seize the opportunities to expand exchanges and cooperation while making efforts to increase their presence in both

domestic and foreign markets.

Chen said his council will deepen cooperation with Yangjiang to promote the city's hardware, knives and

**48.7 percent**

growth in export volume of Yangjiang's hardware, knives and scissors in 2022, compared to 2019

scissors industry to achieve green development, digital empowerment and intelligent transformation in the future.

China, ASEAN and BRI-related countries have great potential in advancing exchanges and cooperation, said Xu Ningning, executive president of the China-ASEAN Business Council and chairman of the RCEP Industry Cooperation Committee.

China, BRI-related economies and RCEP member countries should make a big push to strengthen industrial cooperation, optimize regional industrial layouts and more effectively allocate resources, said Xu, who is also the chief Chinese expert on China-ASEAN businesses.

The RCEP agreement, which took effect on Jan 1 last year, covers 15 Asia-Pacific economies: China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and 10 member states of ASEAN. It has created the world's largest free trade bloc by promoting regional economic integration through tariff concessions and other trade and investment liberalization and facilitation measures.

The RCEP region covers a market of 2.2 billion people, or nearly 30 percent of the world's population, with a combined GDP of \$26.2 trillion, or about 30 percent of global GDP, accounting for nearly 28 percent of global trade.

Major Chinese knives and scissors makers attending the fair spared no effort to expand exchanges and cooperation with their foreign counterparts, particularly those from BRI-involved and RCEP member countries and regions.

Zhong Jialiang, general manager of Beijing Wangmazi Technology Co Ltd, said the company is seeking to increase its presence in BRI-involved markets and RCEP member countries, while making efforts to consolidate its traditional markets — the United States and Europe.

According to Zhong, Wangmazi reached a sales value of more than 700 million yuan, including about 500 million yuan from overseas sales, last year.

Zhong said the knives and scissors industry has broad development prospects.

Previously, many Chinese families used only one kitchen knife to chop, cut, slice or peel meat, vegetables and fruit, he said.

"Many households now use knives with different functions to deal with different kinds of foods in their kitchens, making the market for knives and scissors bigger," he added.

Knives and scissors can also be made into handicrafts and gifts, he said.

Sending someone a *caidao* (kitchen knife) has good connotations as it has a similar pronunciation to wealth arriving in Chinese, added Zhong.

"*Caidao* symbolizes the arrival of wealth in Chinese," he said.

"Compared to big-name foreign knives and scissors, domestic products that can compete with foreign products in terms of quality lack in popularity," he added.

Ni Qiong, a sales manager with Guangdong Inwin Industrial Group, said it will make greater efforts to develop the markets in BRI economies and RCEP member countries in the near future.

Currently, 95 percent of Ni's products are exported to the US, Europe and Russia.

Wajid Niaz, a business representative from Pakistan, said Yangjiang can further develop new markets.

"Yangjiang's knives and scissors are of good quality and have a wide range. I can always buy the right products in the city," said Niaz, who has attended the China (Yangjiang) International Hardware Knives and Scissors Fair more than 10 times.

Zhong Min, chairman of Yangjiang-based Guangdong Jinhui Knife and Scissors Inc, said Yangjiang's companies have great potential to expand cooperation with Southeast Asia and the BRI markets.

"After some entrepreneurs from Yangjiang paid multiple group visits to Southeast Asian countries in the first half of this year, they found that these countries — with a large population — have strong market vitality, but they attract relatively lesser attention from big-name international brands; therefore, Yangjiang's space for cooperation with Southeast Asian and BRI economies is huge," said Zhong.

Covering an exhibition floor space of more than 20,000 square meters, the 22nd China (Yangjiang) International Hardware Knives and Scissors Fair aimed to further advance global exchanges and cooperation in the industry. It provided more than 700 exhibition booths to participants from around the world.

A total of 269 companies from China and abroad participated in the four-day event, organizers said.

More than 10,000 professional buyers, traders and business representatives visited the fair, which was held from Oct 19 to 22.

China's major knives and scissors makers, including Shibazi, Zhangxiaoquan and Wangmazi, also set up booths at the fair, aiming to seek new partnerships with foreign counterparts.

In addition to knives and scissors, special household items and other kitchen supplies, the exhibits included stainless steel products, daily hardware, steel tools, construction hardware, horticultural equipment, packaging and decoration materials and hardware machinery.

The fair was held offline for the first time after a gap of three years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

# Working together for shared prosperity

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## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Marcos puts himself in Washington's loop to detriment of regional peace and stability

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr's remarks on the South China Sea issue on Saturday only serve to highlight his hypocrisy.

In his interview with Japanese media outlets, Marcos claimed a "more peaceful" approach is needed to de-escalate the tensions in the waters. But the "paradigm shift" he proposed — the Philippines should engage with partners in the "Indo-Pacific" and other countries — will do exactly the opposite.

Trying to pass the buck for the worsening situation in the waters to Beijing, the Philippine leader pretended that Manila is an innocent and helpless victim of Chinese "bullying".

But Marcos is in a better position than any other partners to know that it is not the failure of the "traditional methods of diplomacy" between Beijing and Manila that has caused the rising tensions, but rather his government going all-in with the US "Indo-Pacific" strategy.

The world sees clearly that, emboldened by Washington and Tokyo, the Marcos government is now hellbent on turning the maritime disputes the Philippines has with China into a card that Washington can play in its strategy to contain China.

Manila has already discarded the long-term tacit consensus with Beijing that the two sides had observed over the past decades: That no third party, not to mention a nonclaimant external force, should be allowed to hijack their disputes to sow discord between them.

The Marcos government's change of approach

happened soon after his honeymooned visit to Beijing in January, which secured his government large amounts of Chinese investment, projects and orders. During that visit, Marcos stressed that China is the strongest partner of the Philippines, and nothing can hold back the continuation and development of the Philippines-China friendship. He said that his government is willing to continue to properly handle maritime issues through friendly consultations, and resume negotiations on oil and gas exploration.

However, without any provocation from the Chinese side, just a few weeks later, in spite of Beijing's strong opposition, the Philippines opened four new military bases to the US overlooking waters south of Taiwan island and the east flank of the South China Sea, signed a fresh security treaty with Japan targeting China, resumed joint air and sea patrols with the US in the disputed waters that had been suspended for years, and started trying to transport building materials to the old battleship the Philippines grounded on China's Ren'ai Reef 24 years ago to consolidate it into a permanent foothold.

As Marcos told the Japanese media, "We have to do something, what we have not done before. We have to come up with a new concept, a new principle, a new idea so that we move forward." The Philippines has done that, and in doing so it is leading the situation to open conflict.

If Manila continues to mistake Beijing's restraint for weakness, it will stand to lose much more than it gains playing its dangerous game.

## Actions of US military true cause for concern

As friendly neighbors, it is only natural that China and Russia should have good military-to-military ties. There is no justification for the United States to express alarm at alleged increased joint military actions by China and Russia, as the head of US Indo-Pacific Command John C. Aquilino has done. It only goes to show how adept the United States is at raising false alarms.

Speaking in Tokyo on Monday, Aquilino said the increasing military activity of China and Russia is a serious concern. He also accused China of escalating maritime confrontations with its neighbors.

Such allegations do not hold water as they are either a distortion of the facts or sheer fallacies. The two militaries have a legitimate right to work together to enhance cooperation and coordination. That they are doing so now is natural outcome of their robust bilateral ties and the ever deepening political and strategic mutual trust between the two countries. The top leaders of the two countries have met 43 times since 2013 while bilateral trade this year is moving steadily toward the goal of \$200 billion that the two leaders jointly set.

In contrast, the United States has formed cliques to target countries it does not see eye to eye with and stokes the fires of differences that exist so they erupt into conflagrations.

Under the pretext of freedom of navigation, the

US also frequently and provocatively sends warships to sail in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea. The US has also increased the number of military bases it has in the region under the excuse of protecting its own interests and those of its allies, despite there not being any new or escalated threat to them.

The world should be concerned about Aquilino's remarks as they are another indication that the US is seeking to "set the theater for war" in the region as the top US Marine Corps general in Japan said earlier this year.

What the world should really be alarmed by is the US pouring oil on what had been the dying embers of the territorial disputes in a bid to stoke them into the flames of confrontation.

That the Philippines has constantly worked with the US military to make waves in the South China Sea this year at the instigation of the US is just one example of its antics.

The truth is countries have long been subject to US bullying, and many countries just dare not to speak up against it lest they fall foul of its aggressive acts. But, this does not necessarily mean they approve of the US' conduct, which is habitually detrimental to world peace and stability.

It is the actions of the US that are cause for concern, not those of the countries it is targeting with its actions.

## Mud slung at China again fails to stick

In yet another move to demonize China, US intelligence agencies have accused the country of seeking to shape the outcome of specific races in the United States' 2022 midterm elections, which they claim reflects a more aggressive approach by Beijing to try to influence US politics.

The declassified assessment, released on Tuesday by the US Office of the Director of National Intelligence, said the Chinese government "tacitly approved efforts to try to influence a handful of midterm races involving members of both US political parties".

Yet shooting that argument in the foot, the document also said Beijing believed Congress would remain "adversarial" toward China regardless of which party was in power, leaving people wondering why Beijing would go to so much trouble and risk to bet on something that would not bring any benefit to China.

The absurdity of the report is further revealed in the assumption that Chinese officials chose to ramp up operations aimed at shaping US policy last year "because they did not expect the current administration to retaliate as severely as they feared in 2020".

This is nonsensical given the hard-line that Congress has taken toward China, which offers little wriggle room for the administration regardless of its stripe. Indeed, the Joe Biden administration has doubled down on its predecessor's tough China stance, continuing the trade war, intensifying the attack on the technological front, and trying to tighten the restraining bonds of its alliance-knot-

ted containment; moves that have already dramatically frayed Sino-US ties.

China has rejected the accusation of malign mid-term influence, with a spokesman for its embassy in Washington describing the US report as "groundless" and "fabricated out of thin air". The attempts to denigrate China fly in the face of the fact that China has always adhered to the principle of noninterference in any other country's internal affairs.

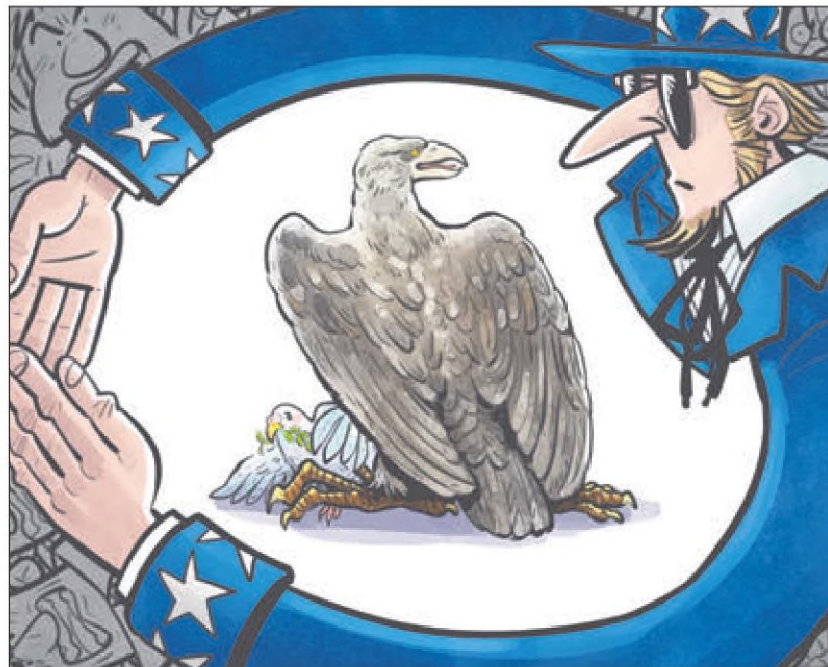
Yet there is no denying the fiction of China sticking its nose into the internal affairs of other countries has become an increasingly popular frightener among some politicians in Western countries.

The Scott Morrison administration claimed that Chinese spies sought to fund candidates for Australia's Labor opposition party in the 2022 federal election. The United Kingdom's security agency MI5 issued a warning last year claiming an alleged Chinese agent had infiltrated Parliament to interfere in UK politics. And Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau ordered a probe in March into alleged Chinese interference in the country's 2019 and 2021 federal elections.

But not one of these accusations targeting China has ever been substantiated. This, however, does not prevent the China hawks in these countries persisting with their give-a-dog-a-bad-name-to-hang-him tricks. No doubt more tall stories will be forthcoming to try and tarnish China's international image and fool people into believing the country poses a serious threat to their countries' national security.

Fortunately they cannot fool all the people all the time.

Cai Meng



## Opinion Line

## Gold rush of central banks reflects fragile and unbalanced recovery

The World Gold Council said in a report on Monday that central banks continued to buy gold on a large scale in October, pushing global official gold reserves to increase by a net 42 metric tons in a month.

It is unusual for so many central banks to hoard gold on such a large scale. Although a most reliable safe asset, geopolitical conflicts do not necessarily lead to a spike in gold prices. In fact, the price of gold went down during the United States-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. However, the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine conflicts, in which the US is not directly involved, have triggered a rise in gold prices.

The decline in the US dollar's credibility is another major reason. It is a long-established law that gold

prices fall when dollar assets are reliable, and rise when dollar assets become riskier. As of October, the US' debt had reached a record \$33.5 trillion. The US has raised its debt ceiling time and again, which is equal to paying old debts with the new, resulting in the ratio of its debt to GDP exceeding 120 percent, far above the 60 percent international warning line. The age-old belief that US treasuries were the most liquid "risk-free assets" is now under a cloud.

After the US Federal Reserve raised interest rates 11 times since March 2022, pushing the federal funds rate to its highest level in 22 years, the market widely expects the Fed to start a rate cut cycle next year. The decline in the credit of dollar assets, as well as the risk of asset impairment caused by the US'

rate cuts, has also caused other central banks to sell dollars and buy gold.

As one of the biggest buyers of gold in recent years, China has increased its holding for 13 consecutive months. There is a particular need for China's central bank to increase its gold holdings, given that its gold reserves stood at 2,214.60 tons at the end of October, just 4.3 percent of its foreign exchange reserves. Appropriately increasing gold holdings can help China safeguard national economic security, maintain the investment flexibility of the financial market, and prepare for the internationalization of the renminbi. It will also make it ready for the expansion of the economy and consumption in the times ahead.

— BEIJING NEWS

## Platforms obligated to ban gluttony shows

"Big stomach" shows that had disappeared from livestreaming platforms have made a comeback. In such shows, livestreamers are seen eating lots of food to lure audiences into buying the food or diet pills they are promoting.

The law has long forbidden it. Even livestreaming platforms have blocked accounts promoting such gluttonous shows.

Some audiences have confessed to being amused by such lives-

streaming shows, as it helps ease their stress after a day's work. However, one cannot overlook the dangers of gluttony. Many livestreamers in the shows are overweight apart from having diabetes, high blood pressure and other lifestyle diseases.

In 2021, a 29-year-old livestreamer who weighed over 150 kilograms died. The risk of sudden death is also high for livestreamers showing off their drinking capacity. In June, a

livestreamer who promoted alcoholic drinks in his shows died soon after guzzling large amount of alcohol.

These types of show set a bad example for society for unhealthy eating and drinking habits. Particularly, young people who watch the shows might be misled.

More should be done to ban such shows. The platform companies are obligated to fulfill their responsibility for that end.

— ZHANG ZHOULIANG, CHINA DAILY

## What They Say

## Information sharing boosts disaster relief in cold weather

As of Wednesday morning, the 6.2-magnitude earthquake that jolted the Linxia Hui autonomous prefecture in Northwest China's Gansu province and some places in neighboring Qinghai province at midnight on Monday had killed 131 people — 113 in Gansu and 18 in Qinghai — with 16 still missing in Qinghai.

The country has upgraded the national disaster-relief emergency response to Level II for the earthquake. Over 736 rescuers from the projects of central enterprises in nearby areas, as well as 2,042 firefighters, have been sent to the quake-hit region, according to the Ministry of Emergency Management.

It is good to hear that national rescue teams, medical workers from Beijing, Sichuan province and other places, and epidemic disease prevention and control staff arrived in Linxia and nearby hard-hit areas within 24 hours of the quake happening, along with some social rescue and disaster relief personnel and organizations.

More relief supplies are also being rushed to the disaster-affected areas that are remote and

sparsely populated places in the rugged mountainous region to the northeast of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. The ministry said the third batch of relief goods, including 2,000 cotton tents, 5,000 rollaway beds, 5,000 overcoats, and 10,000 quilts, have been allocated to Gansu.

The traffic administrative departments in neighboring provincial-level regions, such as Shaanxi province and the Ningxia Hui autonomous region, have given a green light to all the rescue and relief vehicles heading to the earthquake-stricken areas, exempting their expressway tolls, to help them reach their destinations as soon as possible.

Although the first round of rescue work had been concluded by Wednesday morning, there is still more that needs to be done to avoid any secondary disaster, and better take care of the hundreds of injured and about 90,000 people evacuated from their homes.

The biggest concern right now is the low temperatures at high altitudes. The meteorological depart-

ment forecasts that the local temperature will be -14 C to 1 C over the next three days, and the northwest wind there will be between level 3 and level 5. The harsh weather conditions are a tough test to those living in the temporary shelters and tents in the disaster-affected areas, as well as the rescuers.

Previous disaster relief experience shows that due to a lack of disaster information data sharing, there is often a misalignment between donated materials and local needs. For example, bottled water and instant noodles are piled up in resettlement sites, but there are very few trauma drugs and antibiotics, which are urgently needed.

According to local governments, the supplies that are currently needed in the disaster area include generators, thick coats, stoves and fuel, food, heating facilities, women's sanitary articles, etc.

The local governments in Gansu and Qinghai should manage well the allocation of relief supplies and rescue personnel according to the practical needs of the people.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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## COMMENT

Chen Jie and Li Kemeng

## Demand, expectations vital to realty market

Given the prevailing economic situation, it is necessary to stabilize the real estate market in order to ensure continued economic growth, especially because the real estate market has fluctuated between slump and stability.

From January to November 2023, the total commercial housing sales area was 1,005 million square meters, down 8.0 percent year-on-year, with the overall sales revenue for commercial property being 10.53 trillion yuan (\$1.36 trillion), down 5.2 percent year-on-year.

According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics, the price of second-hand residential property in first-tier, second-tier and third-tier cities fell by 44.04 percent, 7.52 percent and 9.54 percent, respectively, in November compared with their record peaks. The wide belief in the market, though, is that the real contraction is significantly higher than the figures cited above.

The contraction figures have been computed by the authors based on the NBS's accumulated data on month-to-month changes.

The real estate market's decline can be attributed to a variety of causes, along with the years-long fast-paced development of the real estate sector, which addressed the housing shortage problem, and the saturation of demand due to such factors as the aging population, low fertility rate and slowing urbanization.

In particular, three factors have led to the decline of the real estate market: lower income expectation leading to reduced affordability, declining housing prices resulting in decrease in supply, and weak confidence in housing as security investment leading to a drop in demand.

These factors have made selling property a challenging task, resulting in increased liquidity crises and the risk of defaults by real estate companies. This, in turn, has further lowered people's expectations in property prices, leading to a decline in housing demand. Hence, it is essential to take robust measures to raise people's expectations and stabilize the market.

To be sure, the authorities including the local governments have taken a range of measures to stabilize the local housing markets and stimulate demand based on the principle of "housing is for living in, not for speculation".

On the other hand, the government has extended its support for financing for real estate developers. On July 10, the People's Bank of China and the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission issued a notice, encouraging financial institutions to provide pre-existing financing for real estate developers, that is, development loans and trust loans via loan extensions and modified repayment arrangements.

Besides, the Central Financial Work Conference, held on Oct 30-31, said that all kinds of owners should be treated equally and the reasonable financing needs of real estate firms ought to be fulfilled.

Yet due to the general lack of market confidence, many developers still face financial challenges. To boost housing demand, though, first-tier cities such as



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

Beijing and Shanghai reduced the eligibility requirements for "first-time homebuyers" on Sept 1. Under this policy, households or individuals will be considered first-time homebuyers and can apply for housing loans as long as no member of the households or the individuals own any property in the city of purchase, regardless of whether they have previously got a home loan or have any loan records.

However, this support policy has had limited impact on transactions due to the overall decline in demand and consumer confidence.

In Shanghai, for example, 15,197 second-hand residential transactions were registered in September, which was an 11 percent increase from August. But the second-hand housing market, too, cooled down, with only 13,294 units being sold in October — a 12.53 percent decline from September.

In November, the sales of second-hand housing rebounded a bit, with 14,077 transactions, 5.89 percent more than in October, but the average transaction price fell to 40,693 yuan per square meter, 3 percent lower on a year-to-year basis.

On Dec 14, both the Beijing and Shanghai municipal governments announced a new round of policy adjustments for the property market, including a lower threshold for buying

"ordinary" residential property, lower down payments and reduced mortgage interest rates for first-time homebuyers.

According to the market agency's data, the property markets in the two cities responded positively to the policy changes. But despite such policies boosting sales in the short run, their long-term impacts were limited.

To ensure the long-term stability of the real estate market, the major challenge is to break the vicious circle of weak demand and pessimistic expectations. In other words, the declining demand due to reduced affordability as a result of slowing economic growth and low expectations of property prices rising, along with the rapid increase in housing inventory, depressed price expectations leading to suppressed demand.

To strike a balance between stabilizing the real estate market and preventing speculation, it is essential to recognize the inflexible housing needs and boost demand by offering credit incentives, tax reductions and other measures.

Simultaneously, efforts should be made to expedite the construction of affordable housing. And in areas where conditions permit, the government could consider converting surplus commercial housing into rental housing. This approach can help fulfill the tempo-

rary housing needs of new urban residents and young people. And after the market recovers, a rent-to-own plan could be introduced, allowing the government to gradually withdraw its initial investment.

The government could also encourage residents to organize themselves into housing cooperatives and buy unsold housing units at a discount, while retaining a part of the assets as equity and allowing third-party sponsors to provide funding. The unsold housing units can then be converted into shared ownership or cooperative housing involving multiple stakeholders, and when housing prices rise again, the government, real estate firms and third parties can invest their ownership stakes.

In short, a combination of strategies and concerted efforts can strike a balance between stimulating demand and preventing speculation, thus stabilizing the housing market.

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Fu Suixin

## US can't deny China its developing nation status

China has made great contributions to the global fight against climate change, and vowed to peak its carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and realize carbon neutrality before 2060.

Yet developed economies asked China at the recently concluded United Nations Climate Change Conference in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, to make even more ambitious commitments, including reducing coal-fired power generation and contributing to the global "Loss and Damage Fund" created at last year's climate change conference in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt.

The developed world should know that China is not a developed country. Instead, it is a major developing country which fulfills its due responsibilities of addressing the challenges brought about by climate change. But the US Congress has been using every means possible to contain China's development by, among other things, labeling it as a "developed country".

Thanks to the United States' self-proclaimed role as a global leader, members of the House of Representatives voted 415 to 0 to pass the "PRC Is Not a Developing Country Act" on March 27 to strip China of its developing nation status. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee approved the "Ending China's Developing Nation Status Act" without dissent on June 8 for the same purpose.

The second act requires the US secretary of state to make efforts to change China's status from a developing to a developed nation in international organizations and treaties where a mechanism for change exists. The US senators who supported the bill claimed that China enjoys privileges and special treatment in many international organizations because of its developing nation status.

Although the Republican and Democratic party members in the Congress are highly polarized and disagree on most domestic and global issues, taking a tough stance against China is one of the few issues on which they readily agree, as the cross-party proposal of dozens of China-related bills in less than half a year shows.

The US started using China's developing status as an excuse to contain China since the former Donald Trump administration. Saying that China was harming US interests in competitions by claiming the developing nation status, the former US president demanded the reform of the World Trade Organization. Accordingly, Trump signed the "Memorandum on Reforming Developing-Country Status in the World Trade Organization" in July 2019 to target China, claiming that "the WTO continues to rest on an outdated dichotomy between developed and developing countries, allowing some WTO members to gain unfair advantages in the international trade arena".

Incumbent US President Joe Biden has been following Trump's policy, with the US Senate voting to approve an international climate treaty, suggesting that China no longer be classified as a developing country.

It is important to make it clear that China, lawfully recognized as a developing country, cannot be deprived of its developing nation status just because a few politicians in Capitol Hill want it to.

The World Bank divides economies into four income groups — low, lower-middle, upper-middle and high income — based on per capita gross national income (GNI). High-income countries, with per capita GNI above \$13,205, are usually designated as developed countries. In 2021, China's rankings, in terms of per capita GNI (\$11,880) and Human Development Index (0.768), were 68th and 79th respectively which were similar to other developing countries. Moreover, China's per capita GDP in 2022 was one-fifth that of the advanced economies and one-sixth that of the US.

The International Monetary Fund, on its part, classifies 196 economies into two major groups, advanced economies, and emerging market and developing economies, with China belonging to the latter group. The classification is based on countries' aggregate GDP, exports of goods and services and population rather than strict economic or other criteria, which have evolved over time.

As an important member of the developing countries' family, China is committed to safeguarding the common interests of developing nations. And as the largest developing country, China endeavors to strengthen solidarity and cooperation with other developing countries, safeguard the common interests of the developing world, and promote the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind.

Also, China has forged mutually beneficial relationships with many countries and international organizations, but it has never used its developing country status to compete with other developing countries for resources.

Furthermore, China's contributions to global economic growth and the United Nations' regular and peacekeeping force budgets outweigh that of most developed countries, and its commitment to further open up its economy and offer concessions to institutions are moves that have won widespread praise from other developing countries.

Yet the US has repeatedly said that China is a developed country, in order to deprive China of its developing country status and check its rise. Its aim is to coerce China to shoulder global responsibilities beyond its capability, increase China's development cost, and divide and weaken developing countries.

However, the US can neither deny the fact that China is still a developing country nor stop China from realizing its national rejuvenation.

*The author is an assistant researcher at the Institute of American Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

Wang Halliang

## 'Taiwan election intervention' a total deception

Sandra Oudkirk, director of the "American Institute in Taiwan's Taipei Office", recently claimed that Taiwan has been at the receiving end of severe cyberattacks which have not only impacted Taiwan residents' daily lives but also undermined the island's "democratic system". She also accused the Chinese mainland of interfering in the island's 2024 elections.

Claiming that Oudkirk is right, Lai Ching-te, a "Taiwan independence" advocate, said that her remarks once again demonstrate "US support for Taiwan", and urged the island's residents to be aware of the mainland's "interference" in the elections.

Such remarks by US officials are nothing but attempts to divert attention from real issues, giving people like Lai the opportunity to take advantage of the situation to deceive voters. It is therefore necessary to make clear certain facts.

When it comes to interference in Taiwan's elections, one cannot help but ask who is actually doing so? The answer becomes clear if we analyze the remarks and actions of US officials and Taiwan politicians. Don't the interviews of mem-

bers of Taiwan's major political parties by media outlets in the US constitute an interference in the elections?

Also, Laura Rosenberger, the "chairperson of the American Institute in Taiwan", has visited Taiwan three times since taking office in March this year, frequently meeting with different candidates. What is the purpose behind her visits and meetings? These visits are conducted for "on-site inspections" and misleading the people.

In addition, some US scholars have written articles in influential publications, giving "weighty" suggestions aimed at influencing the elections. Oudkirk's remarks, in fact, go beyond her official role, and legitimize the Democratic Progressive Party's hype about the mainland "interfering" in the island's "internal affairs", are in themselves interferences the elections with the intention of misleading voters.

It must be emphasized that the island's elections are purely China's internal affair which brooks no interference by external or other forces. During the meeting between the Chinese and US heads of state in San Francisco, Washington made a solemn political

commitment to China on the Taiwan question.

As a responsible country, the US should honor its words, fulfill its commitments, refrain from supporting "Taiwan independence" forces and avoid sending wrong signals to Taiwan separatists. But the US continues to say one thing and do another, frequently interfering in Taiwan's elections and trying to cover up its own misdeeds by baselessly accusing the mainland of interfering in the island's elections. US officials have been doing this for decades and hence it is an open secret today.

Lai's endorsement of Oudkirk's baseless accusations is aimed at confusing the concepts of Taiwan and "Taiwan independence". His advocacy for "Taiwan independence" has caused great concern among Taiwan residents and made Americans uneasy. In fact, his endorsement of Oudkirk's accusations has poisoned his election campaign.

During her visit to Taiwan in October, Rosenberger said that the US opposes unilateral changes to the status quo, and asserted that the US does not support "Taiwan independence", and instead calls for a dialogue between the two

sides of the Taiwan Strait.

But Lai conveniently forgot to mention the US stance against "Taiwan independence" and selectively used the phrase "US support for Taiwan" to deceive the public and garner votes for himself in the upcoming elections. In reality, whether the US "supports Taiwan" or not is determined by the US' interests. Accordingly, for the US, Taiwan is nothing more than a pawn on its strategic chessboard to be used to contain Beijing, and can be sacrificed any time.

The poorly orchestrated act performed by Oudkirk and Lai raises questions about their underlying motives, which Taiwan residents should ponder over. Is the US "supporting Taiwan" or "harming Taiwan", and are the DPP authorities "protecting Taiwan" or "bringing disaster to Taiwan"? I hope Taiwan residents get to know the reality and make a rational judgment, and not fall for the tricks of Lai and his ilk.

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# GLOBAL VIEWS

JOSE LUIS CENTELLA GÓMEZ

## Kernal of coexistence

China's initiatives are basis for building a community with a shared future for humanity in harmony with nature

The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic persist, the Ukraine crisis continues, and new conflicts are emerging, pushing the world closer to what some label a new Cold War — a world divided into disconnected and politically, economically, and militarily opposed blocs. Therefore, the proposal to build a community with a shared future for humanity in harmony with nature among all the states and peoples of the world is of great importance in this time of international tensions.

The Belt and Road Initiative, also known as the New Silk Road, involves various projects in social, economic and cultural cooperation based on a network of infrastructure spreading across the five continents. It shapes the most extensive project of international cooperation in history, aiming to promote social development between China and the rest of the world, significantly impacting the improvement of people's living standards in countries facing tremendous challenges in Africa, Asia and Latin America. From its inception, the project was designed to develop according to the principles of ecological sustainability and the promotion of renewable energies.

The BRI aims to implement projects benefiting local populations, promoting action not only on the symptoms of problems but proposing measures to combat the backwardness and social injustice suffered by millions of people worldwide. In this way, the initiative is a significant aid in overcoming the challenge of achieving peaceful coexistence among countries.

The Global Security Initiative implicitly condemns practices of decoupling between states, cutting off supplies, sanctions, provocations and putting pressure on countries that do not accept the hegemony of the United States. It aims to prevent the consolidation of a new Cold War mentality.

The initiative upholds a commitment to the concept of common, comprehensive,

cooperative and sustainable security. And it calls on the international community to work within a multilateral order to maintain peace and security worldwide and resolve disputes peacefully through dialogues and consultations adhering to the principles of the UN Charter. It rejects double standards and the use of unilateral sanctions as elements of international policy. It also underscores the importance of countries working together on regional disputes and global challenges such as terrorism, climate change, cybersecurity and biosecurity.

The initiative's focus is on awareness and discussion, aiming to move the world away from the current dynamics of confrontation, which could have severe consequences for humanity.

The Global Development Initiative strives to build an open world economy and establish a global governance system, along with a fair and reasonable institutional environment that allows cultivating new driving forces for global development. It promotes scientific and technological innovation for faster technology transfer and knowledge sharing, drives the development of modern industries, and accelerates the transition to low-carbon development, aiming for more robust, green and healthy global development.

The initiative advocates for a reformed global governance that seeks the well-being of all men and women on the planet, in harmony with nature. It aims to bury colonialism and the dependencies between poor and rich countries, and to develop within the framework that can fulfill the objectives of the UN Charter and the 2030 Agenda.

From this perspective, the fight against the global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences demonstrates the correctness of the statement that "all countries must cooperate to face the challenges that humanity shares and jointly safeguard shared interests". It is a great truth that development is not possible without a



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

peaceful and secure framework for international relations.

The Global Civilization Initiative aims to foster the joint development of common values shared by all civilizations throughout human history — values based on justice, equality and freedom to choose the path each people can take to achieve modernity and improve the living conditions of their peoples. It advocates for respecting the diverse social, cultural, and historical realities and peculiarities of each place on

the planet, rejecting the imposition of a single model of civilization. It supports multiple relationships that allow for the exchange of knowledge and values among all the peoples of the world and to bury colonialism as a system that seeks to impose social, cultural and economic hegemony. It calls for building horizontal and egalitarian international relations.

The challenge is on the table, and the question is whether we can understand that the future is in our hands to build

together a community with a shared future of peace and progress for all humanity in harmony with nature. It must be clear that it is impossible to speak of building a community with a shared future for all if this future is not built in harmony with nature.

*The author is president of the Communist Party of Spain. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

BERNARD DEWIT

## Building an important bridge

The EU and China are committed to a relationship based on mutual respect, wanting to promote dialogue and fostering the important role they can play as global players in an equitable world order

This year marked the start of much-needed reconnection and re-engagement to expand the business relations between Europe and China. We have seen many Chinese business delegations being eager to travel to the European Union again after China fully reopened its borders following the easing of restrictions that were in place because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a significant and promising turning point, and these people-to-people contacts are much needed to plug the gap in trust and communication after three years of limited contact.

As the chairman of the Belgian-Chinese Chamber of Commerce for over 25 years, I have been lucky enough to witness the changing relationship between the EU and China. The channels of communication between the EU and China remain open, but are disrupted from time to time. The announcement of the screening mechanism for foreign direct investment or the EU's countermeasures against Chinese electric vehicles come to mind here. These differences in political and economic decision-making are not only a reflection of each power's leadership and culture, but are often a reflection of a completely different way of looking at the world.

Characterized by many ups and downs, the continuation of diplomatic and economic relations and people-to-people contacts has nonetheless persisted. Especially in today's world with global threats and challenges continuing to emerge, and the dynamics of decoupling, protectionism and unilateralism, we remain crucial mutual partners. At a time when several countries speak about putting up new trade barriers, we should remember that protectionism has not been a solution for social progress and poverty alleviation, on the contrary.

It is therefore in the EU and China's best interest to further strengthen their cooperation to solve common challenges such as global hunger and climate change. Even though the EU considers China both a rival and partner, it remains committed to cooperating with China to ensure continued progress in order to reach the United Nations sustainable development goals and the Paris Agreement targets. The EU and China have both committed to a comprehensive strategic partnership through the

EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation and the 2019 Joint Communication "EU-China — A Strategic Outlook". The EU supported low-carbon urban development in China in 2018, with European cities such as Amsterdam and Bologna providing technical advice to Chinese cities such as Zhuhai and Guilin on solid waste management, wastewater treatment and on how to become resilient cities. EU projects have also helped Chinese small and medium-sized enterprises adopt energy efficient solutions to reduce their environmental impact.

China has also taken active efforts to address climate change by launching major efforts to increase the protection of its wetlands and animal species, and has committed to reaching peak carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and achieving carbon neutrality before 2060.

**Both the EU and China support multilateralism and agree to promote necessary reform of the World Trade Organization. Mentioning China's great efforts in renewable energy expansion and reducing methane emissions, both sides have also recommitted to working together on climate action and global health improvements.**

Indeed, Chinese and European experts are already communicating on emissions trading systems, long-term low emissions development strategies, greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles and agriculture, climate-smart cities and scientific and technology development. However, experts still see many possibilities for cooperation on climate issues, which should not be ignored and could be further developed. When it comes to eradicating hunger and poverty, EU-China cooperation in research has been conducted in recent years. In 2011, an EU-China Task Force on Food, Agriculture and Biotechnology was created, as well as the Food, Agriculture and Biotechnology Flagship Initiative, to increase joint studies on sustainable agriculture, food security and safety. EU-China collaboration in food, agriculture and biotechnology research has

been a win-win investment for both sides. The efficiency and quality of agricultural research in both Europe and China have improved because of this.

It is therefore clear to see that decoupling our economies would have significantly negative implications for both economies and for the world at large.

The continuation of EU-China relations was reconfirmed during the 24th EU-China Summit recently held in Beijing, the first in-person meeting between Chinese and European leaders in four years. The European Union emphasized the need for a more balanced economic relationship, seeing that the trade deficit is almost 400 billion euros (\$436.3 billion) according to Eurostat figures, and urged China to ensure a level playing field and improve market access for European companies. Regarding the trade deficit, Beijing points out that this has already decreased by nearly 17 percent in the current year.

Both the EU and China support multilateralism and agree to promote necessary reform of the World Trade Organization. Mentioning China's great efforts in renewable energy expansion and reducing methane emissions, both sides have also recommitted to working together on climate action and global health improvements. The constructive conclusions of the summit show that both the EU and China are still committed to a relationship based on mutual respect, wanting to promote dialogue and fostering the important role that they can both play as global players in an equitable world order.

From Jan 1, 2024, to the end of June 2024, Belgium will assume the presidency of the Council of the EU. This means that the country will take up a leading role in Europe, especially in the relationship between Europe and foreign countries. In that context, the Belgian-Chinese Chamber of Commerce will remain committed to its role as a bridge between Belgium, Europe and China.

*The author is chairman of the Belgian-Chinese Chamber of Commerce and senior partner of Dewit Law Office. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

## LIFE

Few places have such a reputation for dishing up creativity as Macao. You can taste the difference, literally, in the special administrative region of China.

And it is still evolving. Amid the culinary landscape of the past decade, fusion cuisine has emerged as a prominent trend, with chefs from diverse backgrounds crafting innovative creations by blending elements from different culinary traditions.

In Macao, the roots of fusion cuisine actually run much deeper, spanning at least four centuries — the cuisine is acknowledged by UNESCO as the world's inaugural fusion food.

This unique culinary tradition traces its origins to the age of maritime exploration, recording a symphony of flavors that has matured and settled, indeed marinated, in Macao over time.

This cuisine not only melds ingredients, spices and cooking techniques but also seamlessly intertwines cultures and histories, creating an outstanding culinary tapestry.

However, despite its rich history, the cuisine remains a relatively undiscovered gem, frequently mischaracterized as a mere extension of Cantonese cooking.

Encapsulating the essence of centuries-old cross-cultural influences, it has been enlisted among China's National Intangible Cultural Heritage, as well as being added to Macao's intangible cultural heritage list.

Macao was named a Creative City of Gastronomy by UNESCO in 2017. The local government has since introduced a comprehensive set of initiatives to enhance the preservation and inheritance of its cuisine. Chefs have also made a sustained effort to help this historical record of the city to continue to shine.

Today, its food stands as a cherished classic, widely favored by tourists.

In Ana Manhao Sou's mind, this cuisine embodies the home-cooked meals of Macao-born Portuguese.

Sou, 61, was born and raised in Macao after her parents emigrated from Portugal in the 1950s.

Fluent in Cantonese, with a Western appearance, she is a genuine Macao native. Following her retirement in 2013, she ventured into the culinary scene by opening Belos Tempos.

Located in Rua da Felicidade, one of Macao's most historic and tourist-centric streets, the small two-story restaurant serves Portuguese and Macao food. The menus at the restaurant are written in English, Portuguese and Chinese.

Sou is keen on creating Macao food and spreading the word about its traditional and cultural value.

"I learned to cook from my mom. My cuisine combines ingredients from Portugal and China, and you can also taste my mom's flavors in it," Sou says.

Sou highlighted that a rich variety of spices is a notable characteristic.

The culinary tradition embraces spices from India, Indonesia, and ingredients from other countries along the maritime trade route, including curry, pepper, cloves, cinnamon, turmeric and saffron.

Tacho is one of Sou's signature dishes, representing the quintessential flavors of a Portuguese household in Macao. According to her, the term tacho in Portuguese translates to big plate.

This dish holds special significance for Portuguese families in Macao during Christmas, as Sou explains: "While turkey might not grace our table, tacho is a must, enjoyed only once a year."

Tacho is a culinary mosaic, combining diverse Chinese and Western ingredients. Sou emphasizes the individuality of each family's tacho, with variations reflecting treasured, handed-down recipes. Common components include stewed chicken, pig's trotters, cured duck legs, sausages, fried pig skin, and cabbage.

"In our family's tacho, we skip the mushrooms and used



# A cuisine that shows excellent taste

With ingredients spanning time and cultures, food in Macao is something to savor, **Li Yingxue** reports.



**Top left:** Minchi, a classic dish in Macao cuisine, the name of which is derived from the English word "mince". **Top right:** Ana Manhao Sou, a local cuisine chef in Macao, who is keen on spreading the word about the cuisine's traditional and cultural value. **Middle:** African chicken created by Portuguese chef Joao Casimiro from Rossio restaurant in Macao. **Above left:** A traditional African chicken dish. **Above right:** Chef Casimiro. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



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to include beef, but I've omitted it now," Sou says.

Originally a winter delicacy, Sou sometimes caters to demand by preparing the dish for guests during the summer. "Whether consumed by locals or tourists, this dish exudes a sense of home," adds Sou.

Sou believes that another feature of the cuisine is the meticulous chopping of ingredients. This practice originated for two main reasons: first, in Portuguese households, often large and communal, finely chopped food facilitates easy sharing among family members. Second, chopping ingredients into small pieces increases the quantity, offering a practical way to manage household expenses.

"Although dishes in our cuisine cook quickly, the preparation demands a significant amount of time, especially when it comes to finely chopping various ingredients," Sou explains.

Minchi is another classic dish, with the name derived from the English word mince. There are various cooking methods for minchi, using meat that can be pork, beef or a mix of both, sometimes turkey or shrimp, alongside pickled vegetables, fried potato cubes, Portuguese cured sausages, among other ingredients.

Minchi rice is one of Sou's specialties. She stir-fries minced pork with diced potatoes, serving it with a perfectly fried sunny-side-up egg.

Sou believes that the current momentum of traditional cuisine is promising, thanks to the support from the local government. She is also enthusiastic about teaching young individuals how to cook all the dishes in her repertoire.

When discussing Macao food, Bacalhau, deserves a special mention. It's crafted from salted and preserved cod, while boasts versatility — suitable for grilling, roasting, braising and even raw consumption. It was served as a convenient preserved food in previous generations. Found on the menus of numerous restaurants across Macao, it is always a popular choice, especially in the form of Bacalhau Croquettes, in which cod and mashed potatoes are shaped into balls and deep-fried.

At the Coast restaurant in Macao, Bacalhau Croquettes shine as one of the best-selling dishes. Chef Jefferson Lim has added innovative touches while preserving the traditional essence of the dish.

While the traditional Bacalhau Croquettes are typically savored on their own, Lim, recognizing the local preference for sauces accompanying fried foods, has thoughtfully paired them with two homemade sauces: a custom egg yolk sauce and malt vinegar.

The sweet, but not overpowering, malt vinegar sauce complements the crispy Bacalhau balls, resulting in a harmonious collision of flavors that achieves a perfectly balanced taste. Lim also adheres to the traditional oval shape of Bacalhau, ensuring guests can conveniently dip the delicacy into the sauces.

For another signature dish, African chicken, by Portuguese chef Joao Casimiro at Rossio restaurant, is a mouthwatering prospect.

Usually, the chicken is roasted with a layer of thick sauce on top, yet Casimiro serves a different smooth sauce beneath it to make it even more flavorful.

Casimiro boasts an impressive 16-year career in the culinary field. After gaining experience in Portugal and subsequently relocating to Milan, he has dedicated the last five years of his culinary journey to Macao.

Since his arrival in Macao, the 38-year-old chef has actively immersed himself in the world of its cuisine. "The cuisine here is a full fusion of cultures that developed throughout the years and mainly in people's homes, in families, not in restaurants like here," he says, adding that each family had their own recipes and some have, regrettably, been lost to time.

"I think that the younger generations should research their family recipes and create a database," he says.

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# CULTURE

## Artist paints a picture of his times

Retrospective of Wei Qimei examines how his realist style was shaped by changing tastes, **Lin Qi** reports.

**Y**u Ding, a professor at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, recalls his first task after enrolling to study art history at the academy decades ago — he was assigned to interview Wei Qimei, an oil painter and professor of prominence at the school.

Entering Wei's home and studio, Yu says he was surprised to find that besides paintings, tools and books about art, the eminent artist also had newspapers and various publications related to other subjects.

"I remembered that he read a journal called Public Health and Well-being, and another one called Science Bulletin," Yu says.

"I asked him why he read so much, and why he was interested in information that seemed totally unrelated to art, to the work he was doing.

"He replied that as an artist, one should at first try to know about the world, to understand what and why the world is going on the way it is, and then he or she is able to show it in their work.

"That was the most important thing I learned from him."

Wei passed away in 2009. Equipped with an intensified understanding of Wei's art and life, Yu has curated two exhibitions in the past decade — one dedicated to Wei's drawing and the other to his comics.

Now Yu has curated a third exhibition to mark the 100th anniversary of Wei's birth this year. Titled *Depicting the Times*, the show through to Friday at the Art Museum of CAFA is a retrospective of Wei's artistic development over years marked by his commitment, wit and social concerns.

The title of the exhibition, Yu says, is derived from how Wei used to call himself, "a man who holds painting brushes", which reveals the simple, modest side of him and meanwhile, his firm belief that art should reveal the times and address people's needs.

The exhibition traces Wei's evolution in painting. In the early stage, he focused on a realist approach to depicting socialist construction after the founding of the People's Republic of China and the lives of factory workers and farmers.

His solid training to be a painter attentive to details was the result of strict discipline under Xu Beihong, his mentor, while studying art in Chongqing in the 1940s.

Xu emphasized a realist approach. Wei followed Xu to become a young teacher at CAFA, when Xu became the head of the academy in the early 1950s.

Beginning in the 1980s, Wei was introduced to the different styles of art from the outside, as the country began opening-up. While not turning away from his cultural roots and the social realities of the country, he was inspired to start his own artistic explorations.

Jin Shangyi, a celebrated oil painter, once studied under Wei's mentorship and after graduation, worked with him at CAFA's oil painting department.

"Wei was one of the most productive teacher-artists at CAFA during my school years," Jin says.

"He was astute and kept pace with the needs of time. His experiments with different styles continued for years, through to the later stage of his life when he persisted with changes in his work."

The exhibition gathers iconic works from different stages of Wei's career, such as *Model Breeder*, a signature piece of socialist realism from 1956 and a collection of the National Art Museum of China, and *Passageway*, a 1990 work representative of his experimental embrace of the variations in realism.

Yu says the exhibition also shows Wei's endeavors in traditional ink art, and many of his ink paintings on display are being shown to the public for the first time.

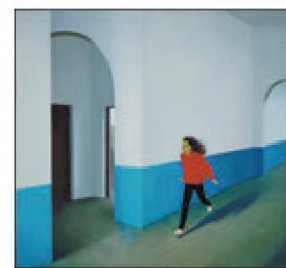
Wei's initial art education was a copy of *Jiesiyuan Huapu*, or the Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting, an ancient illustrated guidebook of classic Chinese paintings, which he obtained in childhood for learning.

Yu says they have put together Wei's oil and ink paintings on the same themes.

"This will give the audience a clear comparison showing what the artist did to bridge the two cultures," he explains.

"While he made oil paintings, he thought about the possibilities to integrate the style with the ink traditions. His work in the two fields was carried out simultaneously. He tried to find a connection between the two different languages of art, by which he looked to navigate ink art into the modern era."

Wei once compared the persistence of an artist with his or her work to that of a messenger pigeon following its flight route. "It flies



*Depicting the Times*, running at the Art Museum of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, features iconic works by Wei Qimei. Highlights include *Model Breeder* (top left), *Passageway* (top right, bottom), *Early Spring* (left), *Summertime* (above) and *Musician* (left below). A photo taken in 1998 (top right) shows Wei Qimei in the same posture as his self-portrait *Departure Station, Streetcar 108*.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

“While he made oil paintings, he thought about the possibilities to integrate the style with the ink traditions. ... He tried to find a connection between the two different languages of art.”

**Yu Ding**, curator, talking about Wei Qimei's works

through the clouds, the rainstorms, the winds and to a sunny sky. It flies up and down, sometimes turns around, or glides. No matter what, it heads for the set destination, with firmness and courage.”

Wei's comics are another highlight at the exhibition to show his acumen in addressing social issues. It was grounded on his keen interest in acquiring information of different social sectors, through extensive reading.

In an article in memory of Wei in 2009, Xu Bing, a noted artist who studied and taught at CAFA, remembered that back in the 1980s, he saw a lot of Wei in the school's small reading room, deep in concentration flipping through books and magazines.

"He sat there, and everything around him became quiet, ... he was so into reading that it seemed he was invisible to the passersby, and not a thing in the world could disrupt him at that moment," Xu Bing wrote.

"He was never a painter who created works to awe. But always, his work delivers intelligence and a sense of calmness."

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## Blockbusters dominate domestic film market, report finds

By **XU FAN**  
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Approaching the end of 2023, China's film market has seen a polarized box-office ratio, with more than half of ticket revenues generated by the 10 highest-grossing blockbusters, according to a report released by Tencent News in Beijing on Dec 14.

The report, 2023 Tencent Entertainment White Paper, finds that as of Nov 20, the country earned 50.32 billion yuan (\$7.04 billion) in overall box-office revenue, with 26.65 billion yuan, or 53 percent, generated by 10 movies, all produced by Chinese companies.

All 10 of the highest-grossing blockbusters, with six of them earning more than 2 billion yuan each, were released during one of the five most lucrative box-office seasons — namely, the New Year, Spring Festival vacation, May Day, the summer vacation, and National Day.

It indicates that the market remains lackluster during the comparatively smaller holidays and weekends, mainly due to a shortage

of big-budget movies to attract a large number of people to cinemas, as analyzed in the report.

So far, China has a total of 76,705 screens in 12,557 cinemas, a slight increase from the 76,150 screens in 12,460 cinemas last year.

However, this indicates that the once blistering speed has slowed down.

As of Oct 30, a total of 385 movies had been released this year, which is, admittedly, more than the number released during the same period last year.

However, it still does not match the number from the same periods in 2018 and 2019.

The report also breaks down age-related preferences. Those younger than 23 mostly fancy comedies, while viewers aged between 24 and 29 prefer realistic tales concerning social issues.

Yu Dong, founder and president of Bona Film Group, says that the Chinese film industry has recovered with significant momentum this year, exemplified by the box-office haul passing 50 billion yuan in just 317 days, the first time to



Kris Phillips (left) and Jin Chen won the best actor and actress awards presented by Tencent News in Beijing on Dec 14.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

return to the inspiring mark since the pandemic.

However, the domestic movie market is currently undergoing a major transformation in audience

preferences, requiring industry insiders to pay more attention to the tastes and habits of younger viewers, says Yu.

He explains that over the past

three years, the pandemic has caused many young audiences to shift toward television and online series, resulting in the necessity for filmmakers to produce high-quality movies with human interest and artistic innovation to attract them back to theaters.

The report was released at an event held in Beijing's Shougang Park, which also presented a total of 21 honors to a string of celebrities, with actor Kris Phillips, better known domestically as Fei Xiang, taking home the honorary title of the Film Actor of the Year.

Due to his vivid performance as an aggressive tyrant in the mythological epic *Creation of the Gods I: Kingdom of Storms*, Phillips has recovered his popular appeal among young audiences over the three decades since his debut as a singer on the stage of the Spring Festival Gala in 1987.

From his magnetic voice, speaking Mandarin with a slightly American English accent, to his sculpted and muscular physique, Phillips has topped the trending topics regarding movie actors on China's major

social platforms, followed by actors Zhu Yilong and Wang Chuanjun in the second and third positions, respectively, according to the Tencent report.

"I really didn't expect that I could have the opportunity to be part of China's film industry after being a singer so many years later," says Phillips.

Expressing his gratitude to his fans who have followed him for decades, he says he has heard that it was the older audience who took their children to the theaters, influencing the youngsters to develop an interest in the movie.

He says it's very emotional experience for himself and hopes the sequels of *Creation of the Gods* will continue to draw domestic theatergoers.

The Film Actress of the Year honor went to Jin Chen, for her character of a model in the summer blockbuster *No More Bets*.

A-listed Huang Xiaoming won the TV Actor of the Year for his two popular dramas, the romantic tale *Alliance* and espionage series *The Infiltrator*.

## LIFE



Nicaraguan businessman in China taps improving international relationship to promote the Central American country's agricultural bounty, **Alexis Hooi** reports.

Two of the first few things about Nicaraguan Claudio Frixione that amaze his Chinese contacts are his birthplace and school.

"They're always very interested in the hospital where I was born, the school I attended, because those places are owned by the company I work for," Frixione, 26, says.

Frixione, an employee of Flor de Cana, Nicaragua's award-winning rum, received free medical care and education from the parent company of the 133-year-old brand because his parents were also its employees.

"My father worked for the company for more than 40 years and my mother for 20-plus years before retiring, so I was 'raised' in the company, and I finished my high school at the school of the company; you can say our family is closely linked to it," he says.

Frixione says that, as Asia-Pacific marketing manager for one of the biggest Nicaraguan brands, and the only Nicaraguan working in the field in China, he is also perfectly positioned to introduce his Central American country to Chinese friends and beyond.

"Nicaragua boasts quality agricultural products like its rum, cigars and coffee; its magnificent landscape includes volcanoes and lakes. They are all just waiting for more people to discover them," he says.

Frixione, who obtained a scholarship for his tertiary studies in Taiwan majoring in business administration, including a year learning the Chinese language, moved to Shanghai half a year ago.

He stands out among Nicaraguans not only for speaking fluent Mandarin, but also for having obtained a visa to work in the Chinese mainland.

"We see a lot of potential here for us ... rum is something that you can enjoy with other Nicaraguan specialties, such as chocolate or even a good cigar," says Frixione, adding that increasingly affluent and savvy Chinese consumers who enjoy Scotch whisky and French cognac will also be able to experience premium rum through Nicaragua's offerings.



**Top:** Sugarcane farmed on soil enriched by volcanic ash from the San Cristobal volcano helps produce quality rum in Nicaragua. **Above:** Claudio Frixione attends a liquor industry event in Shanghai in August. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"The availability of all these products coming from Nicaragua to China can help people understand more about our culture," he says.

"For example, Nicaraguans, we have our unique drinking culture. At dining tables, it's our bottles of rum, it's not just for adding into cocktails at bars that many other people may be used to."

Latest developments in China-Nicaragua ties are set to fuel Frixione's optimism for growth — in August, the two sides inked a free-trade agreement offering mutually beneficial trade and investment cooperation.

The milestone move follows the resumption of diplomatic relations between China and the Central American nation in 2021.

At an event in December marking the second anniversary of the relationship, Michael Campbell, Nicaragua's ambassador to China, said major areas of cooperation include infrastructure, development and industry projects, expertise and exchange, as well as the promotion of trade and investments.

"Nicaragua aims to become a strategic ally of China in Central America and a regional platform for Chinese companies," he said.

"We are actively promoting investment and trade in sectors such as agriculture, fishing and aquaculture, mining, light manufacturing, banking and finance,

telecommunications, pharmaceuticals, renewable energy and tourism," Campbell said.

"Nicaragua is welcoming Chinese companies and entrepreneurs with arms wide open, inviting them to visit our country and take advantage of our geographic location, natural resources and scenic beauty," he said.

Cai Wei, director-general of the Department of Latin American and Caribbean Affairs of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said at the event in Beijing that bilateral relations in the past two years "have developed by leaps and bounds".

"In April this year, I visited Nicaragua and had extensive in-depth exchanges with the country. I personally experienced the profound political mutual trust and friendship between the two countries," Cai said.

"Learning to sing Chinese songs has increasingly become a new 'trend' among Nicaraguan students. China-Nicaragua friendship is deeply rooted in the hearts of the people and benefits the people, which fully demonstrates that the resumption of diplomatic relations between China and Nicaragua is a correct decision that conforms to the trend and is in line with the fundamental interests of both countries," Cai said.

Nicaragua also joined the Belt and Road Initiative last year, promising to further tap growth opportunities.

For Frixione, the potential of China-Nicaragua cooperation can be understood in how his rum can be suitably paired with Chinese cuisine such as pork belly dishes.

"Stewed, something silky like what you have in Shanghai food, it gives that beautiful balance," he says.

"Round that off with an amazing cigar, if you're into smoking them, and a good, dark chocolate, that's a perfect pairing."

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## Nation's tiger preservation efforts appear to be a roaring success story

The zoology community is torn on why Africa has no tigers. In fact, many contend that comic strip star Calvin's imaginary feline friend Hobbes and his ilk were never native to the continent in the first place, and therefore there was never an "Out of Africa" moment like we *Homo sapiens* had some two to three hundred millennia ago.

Most of us are too young to remember that seminal event, however, but we probably know that tigers are not among the big cat populations of Africa today, with lions, leopards and cheetahs being quite the cat's meow on the savannah.

We also probably know that the big striped cats are very adaptable to varying climates. Tigers thrive in ultrahot, humid climes like India, Bangladesh and much of Southeast Asia — notably Indonesia. However, they also manage to exist — though in far fewer numbers — in Eastern Siberia and Northeast China.



**A. Thomas Pasek**  
Second Thoughts

So, considering that all tigers had a common ancestor at one point in animal antiquity, it speaks to their tenacity as to how these cagey carnivores can exist in both steaming jungles and icy tundras alike.

However, Siberian tigers, also known as Amur tigers, are among the most endangered creatures on the planet.

This subspecies calls Russia's Far East, Northeast China and the northern part of the Korean Peninsula its current home.

The good news for fans of these graceful, yet deadly predators (at least they're deadly in the eyes of their favorite prey in China — roe deer) — is that *Panthera tigris altaica* seems to be roaring back to sustainable numbers in the country.

These finicky felines also seem to have self-developed either a vaccine or cure for COVID-19, perhaps Tiger Balm? That's because during the height of the pandemic, in the summer of 2021, some 55 wild specimens of the species were documented in China during a zoological survey, pointing to a population recovery of the critically endangered animal that, not long ago, many feared would disappear from the country.

Experts spotted the tigers via infrared cameras surreptitiously placed in a handful of habitats deemed suitable for the big cats in China's northeast provinces, said a study published in the journal *Biological Conservation*.

The research was jointly conducted by China's Northeast Forestry University, the Wildlife Conservation Society, the World Wildlife Fund and the University of California among others. In 2013, only seven individuals were spotted by the cameras, so the nearly eight-fold surge eight years later met with a roar of approval from those following news related to protected and endangered species.

Furthermore, the findings showed the habitats in question have the potential to support over 310 Siberian tigers.

Though rare due to their small population and particular prey preferences, tiger-human interactions can sometimes end badly for the latter. In 2014, a tour bus driver met his maker while trying to tend to an engine problem when a tiger ambushed him, likely serving as a horrifying spectacle to the passengers on board the broken-down vehicle.

But the country has bent over backward to do its best to keep tiger preserves as far as possible from human populations, and works to keep loggers and hikers properly sequestered from the big cats.

Chinese culture has long had strong cultural and aesthetic affinity for these endangered animals. One of the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac is dedicated to the tiger, and the striped and sleek "Kings of the Tundra" are the subject of countless paintings, sketches and sculptures of the master artists of yore.

In Li Bai's (701-762) otherworldly poem about dreaming of travel to a distant town, the big cats (perhaps not endangered at the time) get prominent mention. Li writes: "A tiger strikes the harp, a phoenix rides a chariot; the immortals line up like hemp."

With China's conservational and environmental protection efforts, fans of these fragile but ferocious felines can perhaps attain a semblance of immortality for the latter.

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## Social media stars get all revved up over Macao

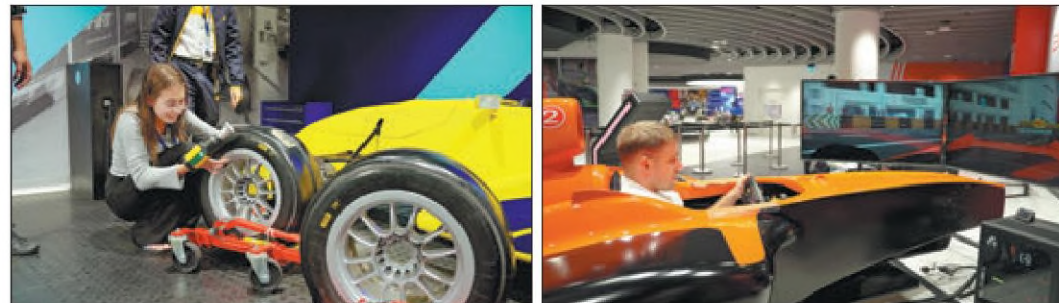
MACAO — At the Macao Grand Prix Museum, Patrick Koellmer, a German well-known on Chinese social media, immersed himself in the VR experience of road racing.

"It's so exciting!" he acclaims. "We Germans love motor racing. This museum reminds me of the BMW Museum in Munich."

Koellmer and several other social media influencers are taking part in an event organized by media groups on the Chinese mainland to visit six major cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and experience the region's vitality and innovative charm. They recently spent a weekend in Macao.

Having lived in China for over a decade, Koellmer graduated from Xiamen University in East China's Fujian province and now works in Zhuhai, a city in South China's Guangdong province that borders Macao. He loves sharing Chinese food, scenery and culture on social media.

"I've been to Macao before, but I didn't know the motor racing culture here is so rich," he says, promising to share his interesting experiences from the trip on the internet.



**Left:** Ukrainian Karyna Kovalevska experiences changing tires for a racing car during a group tour of social media influencers in Macao. **Right:** German influencer Patrick Koellmer tries out VR racing at the Macao Grand Prix Museum. PHOTOS BY XINHUA

by the famous tourist sights of Macao such as the ruins of St. Paul's and local delicacies.

"It's very easy to get to Macao or Zhuhai from Hong Kong," says Xiong, who moved to Hong Kong after getting married five years ago.

"Some of my family in Hong Kong had never visited Zhuhai before. I took them there a while ago. They had a real experience of the convenience of living in the Greater Bay Area," Xiong says.

Wang Yun-ting, an internet celebrity from Taiwan who now lives in Shanghai,

says she is amazed by the convenient transport between Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao.

Wang plans to recommend to her followers a weekend trip to Hong Kong and Macao to feel the charm of the two cities, particularly the nightlife in Macao.

"Saturday in Hong Kong and Sunday in Macao, then you can return home for work on Monday," she adds.

Karyna Kovalevska, a Ukrainian who married a Chinese man in 2021 and came to live in China, describes Macao as "a well-

developed city with many beautiful buildings and friendly people."

Now working together with her husband as e-commerce streamers selling fruit, Karyna says she looked forward to this trip to the Greater Bay Area and hoped to make more friends here.

"I hope my followers on the internet, particularly foreigners, can learn more about this area through my videos and better understand China's development," she adds.

XINHUA