

Flexible approach

On-site child care helps mothers stay focused at brocade factory

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Shanghai aims to be first stop for inbound travelers

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Day of grief

Turkiye earthquake survivors gather on one-year anniversary of disaster

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# CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中國日報 WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2024

## Festive gathering



Panda cubs born in 2023 meet the public on Sunday during a celebration to welcome the Year of the Dragon at the Shenshuping base of the China Conservation and Research Center for the Giant Panda in Sichuan province.

## China, US in talks to stabilize economic, trade ties

By LIU ZHIHUA liuzhihua@chinadaily.com.cn

The latest meeting in Beijing between high-ranking Chinese and United States officials indicated that the two countries are making continuing joint efforts to stabilize bilateral economic and trade ties through a pragmatic approach and candid communication, experts said on Tuesday.

Both sides have expressed their concerns while seeking cooperation and improvement to bilateral economic and trade relations during recent talks, which at least will reduce misunderstanding or wrongful judgment.

Lu Feng, professor of economics at Peking University's National School of Development

China-US economic and trade affairs, met on Tuesday with a delegation led by Jay Shambaugh, under-secretary for international affairs at the US Department of the Treasury, who was in Beijing for the meeting of the economic working group.

During the meeting, the vice-premier emphasized the need for both sides to leverage the channels provided by the China-US economic working group to deepen exchanges, build consensus and foster stable economic relations, with the goal of ensuring mutual benefits for the businesses and people of both nations.

relations will be beneficial for both countries as well as the world. The two countries are expected to strengthen communication to better deal with challenges and pressures facing the whole world, such as climate change and the debt risk of some developing countries, Cui said.

## EVERYDAY HEROES ARRIVE IN A SNAP TO KEEP HOLIDAYS ROLLING

Electricity workers, doctors and traffic rescuers ensure Spring Festival travel beats the cold

By ZOU SHUO in Changsha, LIU KUN in Wuhan and ZHU LIXIN in Hefei

### In-depth

For several nights, Song Liang, an electricity maintenance worker in Wuhan, Hubei province, has slept with the window of his dormitory room open to make sure he is alert to falling snow and freezing rain.

the Qingliangzhai hill station, which sits at an altitude of 800 meters, to make sure the facilities still function smoothly in the freezing and icy conditions.

ice and snow by hand, Song said. Wuhan and many other places in central and eastern China, including Henan, Hunan and Anhui provinces, have been hit by heavy snow and freezing rain since Thursday.

The facilities Song and his colleagues maintain provide power to a section of the Beijing-Guangzhou High Speed Railway, one of China's most important rail arteries.

## XI'S VISION

# New productive forces play key role in growth

Innovation-driven development, frontier tech vital to country's strength, experts say

By FAN FEIFEI fanfeifei@chinadaily.com.cn

China's sharpening focus on the development of new productive forces is expected to give new impetus to high-quality economic development, promote the construction of a modern industrial system and boost the nation's core competitiveness globally amid headwinds and external uncertainties, said experts and company executives.

tion, industry insiders said. Their comments came as President Xi Jinping called for efforts to accelerate the development of new productive forces and firmly promote high-quality development.

Emphasizing the key role of innovation, new productive forces, a key phrase reiterated recently by China's top authorities, mean advanced productivity freed from traditional economic growth patterns and productivity development paths.

He emphasized that "strategic emerging industries and future industries" play a vital role in propelling the development of new productive forces.

## Deluge batters LA



A geologist surveys a mudslide Tuesday caused by heavy rains and runoffs in the Beverly Crest area of Los Angeles.

## Western nations' contempt threatens rules-based order

The allegations of genocide brought against Israel by South Africa in the International Court of Justice were a litmus test of commitment to justice. The outcome confirmed the failure of leadership by the very countries that originally created this legal framework.

### WORLD WATCH

Gaza is populated by Arabs, including Palestinians and Lebanese, and Christians. The Israeli military action targets the entire population of Gaza in a campaign that has also seen denial of medical supplies and widespread destruction of nonmilitary structures.

INSIDE Sino-African ties set example for South-South cooperation Global Views, page 13

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# PAGE TWO



Workers from transportation authorities help vehicles in Anhui province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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The thick snow has made the team's patrols very difficult. "The rain, snow and heavy fog mean that our clothes become wet very soon, and there is also the freezing temperature to contend with," Song said. "It is also challenging to walk mountain roads, which are covered by snow."

He said, however, the team is proud of its work and has a heavy sense of responsibility to help people get home to see their families during Spring Festival by ensuring the electricity supply.

Song is unsure whether he will be able to go to Wuhan and reunite with his family during the holiday as the snow is expected to continue for several more days. "I am prepared to spend Spring Festival eve in the dormitory. I also hope that the weather improves soon and people can have an easier journey home," he added.

Although he is not good at swimming, police officer Liu Bin did not hesitate to walk into a freezing river around noon on Sunday after he received a report that a man had fallen into the river in Taoyuan county, Hunan province.

The county has experienced heavy snow since Friday. The man, aged in his 20s, slipped and fell into the river while walking on a bridge.

Residents called the police and Liu, who lives near the river, rushed to the scene. The man had been trapped in the water for more than 30 minutes and could barely move when Liu arrived. "I served in the military for two years, so I am not afraid to die, let alone of the cold," Liu said.

With the help of the man's mother, Liu successfully pulled the man from the water. He was sent to the hospital and is in a stable condition.

"Police are always on the front line during emergencies. That's why I decided to join the force," Liu said.

At 3 am on Sunday, Luo Shamo, a road manager at Hunan Expressway Group's Yueyang subsidiary had been working at the Hangrui Dongting Lake Bridge in Yueyang, Hunan province, for more than nine hours.

With temperatures dropping to -2 C, his face had turned red, there was frost in his hair and eyelashes and his shoes were soaked.

As the bridge spans Dongting Lake, China's second largest freshwater lake, it is common for the roads to become icy in winter. Luo and his colleagues had been under immense pressure to manage the traffic following the recent heavy snow and freezing rain.

"I am not the one working the hardest. The driver who drives the snow removal tractor has worked for 24 hours and we are trying to get more drivers," he said.

Some of motorists worry that their car battery will go flat in the freezing temperatures so they drive in the emergency lane, making it difficult for the snow removal work. Part of Luo's job is to instruct each of those drivers to return to the correct lanes.

On many occasions he has had to help the drivers to move their cars, as the snow has made driving very challenging.

At 5 am, Luo looked tired, but he said he was not sleepy and added there was more work for him and his colleagues to do.

### Special delivery

Liu Fang, a doctor at the Dianfang township of Xiangxi Tujia and Miao autonomous prefecture in Hunan, received a call from a pregnant woman in a local village on Sunday morning who told her she was about to give birth to her third child.

Liu and three other medical workers at the hospital immediately gathered the necessary medical equipment and headed to the woman's house.

However, the hospital's ambulance was not fitted with snow chains and it was unable to get through the heavy snow. Luckily, the doctors came across a three-wheel vehicle on the way and arrived at the woman's home in about 20 minutes.

The baby, however, was not in the right birthing position and there was a possibility the mother would require an urgent cesarean section surgery. "We tried our best to make her feel less stressed while monitoring her blood pressure, oxygen level and the baby's heartbeat," Liu said. "Luckily, the mother and baby were in a stable condition."

The doctors contacted another hospital in the county, and Shi Anna and another doctor rushed to the house. Again, the heavy snow made the journey by car difficult and a snow chain snapped along the way.

"I did not want to rush the driver, because it is difficult to drive on mountain roads in heavy snow," Shi said. "But I also wanted to arrive at the woman's home as soon as possible. I was prepared to perform the C-section surgery at her home if her condition became critical," she said.

It took her team more than two hours to arrive at the village, which is usually reached in an hour. To their relief, the woman's condition was good, so they took her to the county hospital to perform the surgery.

"The journey to the hospital was extremely bumpy and we could see multiple cars on the side of the road that had been involved in accidents, but my mind was also occu-



## Big chill: Helping hand given to stuck travelers

A photo collage shows (from top) passengers waiting to board trains at Wuhan Railway Station in Hubei province on Sunday; vehicles stranded in a highway traffic jam in Wuhan on Monday; and workers clearing rail lines in Lianyungang, Jiangsu province. KE HAO / FOR CHINA DAILY, ZHENG XINQIA / NANFANG DAILY, WANG CHUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

pled with ensuring the safety of the mother and her child." They arrived at the hospital at 3:15 pm and the woman gave birth to her son at around 5 pm. Both the mother and baby were in a stable condition, Shi said.

### Cold comfort

A blizzard hit Anhui province on Jan 31, bringing huge challenges to local traffic management.

By Sunday afternoon, Anhui Transportation Holding Group, which administrates more than 5,000 kilometers of expressway in the province, had dispatched nearly 10,000 workers for emergency response work, according to the company.

Liu Meichen, aged in her 30s, oversees an expressway toll station in Jinzhai county in mountainous Lu'an city. On the night of Jan 31, she was ordered to gather supplies and head to the station after a traffic jam was noticed in the company's monitoring room.

"My supervisor, who has worked longer than me, told me the situation was almost as serious as 2008, so we need to respond quickly," said Liu, who has worked for the expressway company for 11 years.

When she arrived at the traffic jam site in an emergency response vehicle, she was shocked to see the road blocked by hundreds of vehicles and covered in snow and ice.

By Sunday afternoon, the expressway management company had dispatched snowplows about 4,400 times across the province and 5,200 metric tons of snow-melting agent had been used to clear the expressways.

"But the snow was too heavy in Jinzhai, new snowfall just kept covering up the roads as the workers kept sweeping," Liu said.

"My colleagues and I got out of the car and moved supplies by foot," said Liu, adding that rescuers were already

on the scene clearing snow and ice.

Weather reports said snowfall in some areas of the county was more than 15 centimeters.

"As we distributed the supplies, including instant noodles and hot water, we also helped push vehicles so they could move or give way to others," said Liu, who was responsible for serving a distance covering 5 km.

"The elderly, women and children received supplies first," said Liu, who distributed items to more than 300 people during the night.

On Sunday, the workers found a car in an emergency lane with two children inside. "They (the children) said their parents had left to seek treatment for another child who had a fever," said Liu. Her colleague drove the car to a safe place and contacted the parents.

As the traffic jam continued, more supplies were needed. Liu surprisingly found that many local villagers had brought food from their homes for the stranded travelers. "Some villagers took boiled eggs. They told me they had saved the eggs laid by their hens as a treat for their relatives returning home for Spring Festival," said Liu.

On Monday, when traffic began moving again, Liu noticed she and her colleagues and rescue workers were receiving overwhelming praise online.

"Thanks to the popularity of smartphones, social media and especially video platforms, the people we helped shot videos and posted them online to let more people know how we served the travelers in difficulty," said Liu.

"More importantly, people kept joining us to give a helping hand," she added.

Zhu Youfang contributed to this story.

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State Grid Wuhan employees do maintenance work in Hubei province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Trip to family home turns into snowy odyssey



Liu Kun Reporter's log

At 4 pm on Friday, me, my husband, our two daughters and niece — together with our dog — embarked on a journey from Wuhan to Yichang in Hubei province to celebrate *Xiao Nian*, or Minor Chinese New Year, with my husband's parents.

The day is traditionally seen as the prologue to the Spring Festival.

Although the weather forecast was for snow, we decided to drive to my in-laws' home as we had promised them a long time ago that the family would spend the festival together.

However, we underestimated the destructive power of nature.

We had expected traffic congestion, so shortly after we entered the G50 highway we filled the car with gasoline for the journey ahead. What we did not expect was that it would take almost 20 hours to finish the normal three-and-a-half-hour drive.

On the highway, traffic moved at a snail's pace, which is common during festivals. Ominously, the GPS soon told us it would take more than six hours to reach our destination.

When we reached Xiantao, the GPS said that the travel time would be further extended to eight hours.

We stopped at a service station in Qianjiang to get some food and water. The newly renovated station was filled with people and there was a festive atmosphere.

Although the cold weather had made travel more difficult, people still wanted to reunite with their families for the upcoming Spring Festival, the most important holiday of the year for Chinese people.

After we left the station, the traffic became more congested, and the navigation system said we could arrive at 3 am the next day. When freezing rain suddenly started, the traffic stopped completely.

"Do we need to spend the night on the highway?" one of my daughters asked with a hint of excitement. However, I began to worry whether we really had to spend the night there.

To save fuel and battery life, most of the cars had stopped and the highway fell into complete darkness. The children eventually became quiet and fell asleep.

However, we were soon awaked by lightning and thunder. It then began to hail, followed by heavy snowfall. The children became excited again and marveled at the site of the snow.

The highway turned into a giant parking lot. With all the cars stopped, it was like a scene from the Hollywood movie *The Day After Tomorrow*.

My husband and I started the car once every hour to keep us warm. My in-laws called often to check how we were going.

We tried to call the highway police to try to get more information, but we couldn't get through as there were too many people asking for help.

At dawn, people got out of their vehicles to stretch their legs and view the snow.

The cars started to move slowly at around 8 am, but the vehicle in front of us stayed still. My husband got out of our car to check on the driver only to find that he was still asleep.

On the highway, we could only move at 20 kilometers per hour due to the snow. Many cars had broken down and there were also traffic accidents.

We left the highway at Jinzhou and headed to Yichang via an expressway.

However, at a set of traffic lights our car became trapped in snow, so all of us got out and pushed it. We saw many other cars stuck in the snow and strangers offering to help move the vehicles.

At 2 pm the next day, we finally arrived in Yichang after our "special journey" of more than 20 hours.

We were exhausted, but also relieved that we had finally arrived at a warm family home.

Zou Shuo contributed to this story.



From left: Vehicles are stuck in a traffic jam on the Beijing-Hong Kong-Macao Expressway on Monday. A screen at Wuchang Railway Station in Wuhan displays train delays on Monday. Workers deliver instant noodles and hot water to drivers trapped on a highway in Wuhan. PHOTOS BY ZHENG XINQIA / NANFANG DAILY A tractor is used to clear ice and snow along a highway in Anhui. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## TOP NEWS

Tradition of lucky money  
a financial strain on elderlyBy LI LEI  
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With Spring Festival approaching, some retirees are facing a financial crunch.

Many will have to hand out thousands of yuan in red envelopes during the holiday, which starts on Saturday.

The age-old custom of giving out small sums of *yasuqian* — bad luck suppressing money — to young relatives at the start of the Chinese New Year has in recent years morphed into a race to keep up with the Joneses.

What once used to be just a few yuan for each child has grown to as much as 3,000 yuan (\$420) in affluent provinces such as Zhejiang, according to news reports.

Even in less well-off places such as Anhui province, a 200-yuan envelope is the norm in rural areas, which see an influx of urban students visiting their grandparents during the annual break.

Li Kun, a retiree in Hefei, the provincial capital of Anhui, is expecting to hand out more than 10 envelopes, each containing a 100-yuan banknote, just like he did last year.

The money Li will be giving away is equal to his month's pension, compelling the 72-year-old to fall back on his rainy day savings to see him through till the next pension check.

Li remembers the time decades ago when three- or five-yuan envelopes were enough to make children happy at family reunions, and adults did not feel burdened in any way.

"How much to give away in red envelopes must be in line with incomes, and people should not be competing to show off their affluence," he said.

Rising disposable incomes, coupled with a strong urge to keep up appearances, have put financially strapped older adults in a spot in rural areas where people are known to strain their wallets to appear generous or hospitable.

The worrisome trend has even caught the attention of authorities in a rural area of Anhui province.

Authorities in that area, Fuyang, said they will act to help villagers develop a "correct attitude" toward this practice of giving money in red envelopes and introduce a cap on the amount that can be given as part of a nationwide effort by authorities to curb unnecessary spending by financially vulnerable rural residents.

The restrictions would be

enshrined in the province's village regulations, a set of rules drafted and agreed upon by villagers, they said.

"I think it is a good policy," said Li, the retiree, adding that ordinary people cannot afford, and should not be expected, to put the same amount of money in red envelopes as wealthy people.

Wang Yamin, a village official in a suburb of Beijing, has seen his budget for *yasuqian* ballooning over the years, as families of friends have become bigger with the births of more children and even grandchildren.

This year, Wang, whose son attends college in Beijing, has set aside 4,000 yuan to give to children who will be visiting his home during the holiday. He has divided the recipients into three groups, based on his closeness to their parents, and accordingly prepared envelopes containing 100 to 500 yuan each.

"On average, the red envelopes cost about 200 yuan each," Wang, 46, said, adding that as a child, he was used to receiving 1-yuan envelopes.

However, the highly reciprocal nature of the tradition means that his son will receive almost the same amount of money from his relatives, which makes the process of parting with his money less painful.

"Exchanging red envelopes is more about cementing relations," he said.

Wang Chengfang, a retiree in Jinan, Shandong province, said he knows it is not a good thing to give large sums of money to young children, but he feels he has no choice.

"With the economy growing, and with pay raises and inflated prices, large red envelopes are the trend," he said.

In recent years, he has been spending up to 5,000 yuan, which is roughly his monthly salary, preparing red envelopes. His daughter, who is in her 30s, no longer receives red envelopes, and his granddaughter was only born recently.

The reciprocal nature of the tradition has made him reluctant to take his granddaughter to visit relatives during Spring Festival, because every yuan his granddaughter will receive would be like a "relationship debt" that must be paid back in the future.

"Taking a young kid on Chinese New Year visits also makes it appear that I am silently asking for red envelopes," he said.

Yan Zhongqian and Luo Jiaquan contributed to this story.

## Encountering the dragon



A family admires a Lego dragon in Richmond, Canada, on Monday. Robin Sather, one of the few Lego-certified professional builders, used more than 8,000 bricks to make the installation to welcome the Chinese New Year, the Year of the Dragon, which starts on Saturday. LIANG SEN / XINHUA

Kenya hails Chinese help  
in rescuing its fishermen

Humanitarian effort saved three lives, says Coast Guard in letter

By WANG XIAODONG in Nairobi, Kenya  
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The Kenya Coast Guard Service, the country's maritime law enforcement agency, has expressed appreciation for Chinese assistance in rescuing three Kenyan fishermen in the high seas.

In a letter addressed to the China Overseas Fisheries Association in Beijing through the Chinese embassy in Nairobi, which was released on Monday, the coast guard said it received information on Nov 30 that four Kenyan fishermen had gone

missing during a deep-sea fishing trip.

The Coast Guard immediately launched a search and rescue operation for the fishermen. The operation lasted for seven days, but ended without success, said the letter dated Jan 19.

On Dec 25, the Coast Guard received a report saying that a Chinese fishing vessel, *Luyingguanyu 108*, licensed by the fisheries authority of neighboring Tanzania, had rescued three Kenyan fishermen in a small capsized boat at sea.

The Chinese captain, in a humanitarian gesture, coordinated the rescue and provided food,

water and accommodation to the three. He immediately contacted the China Overseas Fisheries Association, which got in touch with its local partner in Kenya, Sam Maina.

## 'Good gesture'

The local partner, in turn, coordinated efforts with the Coast Guard and the captain to reunite the rescued fishermen with their families on Dec 27, the letter said.

"I, therefore, take this opportunity on behalf of the Kenya Coast Guard Service to appreciate the good gesture of the captain and

the China Overseas Fisheries Association ... which led to the rescue of Kenyan fishermen, hence saving their lives," Bruno Shioso, director-general of the Coast Guard, said in the letter.

According to an earlier report by Kenya News Agency, the four fishermen set off on a fishing trip from the coastal town of Malindi in November, but went missing after their boat malfunctioned and was hit by a rogue wave.

The three who were rescued — Hans Barak Killieney, Fahad Ali Mohammed and Akida Idd Mohammed — were stranded at sea for 22 days, while the fourth, Ibrahim, is believed to have drowned, the report said.

Following the successful rescue, Shioso said the Coast Guard will intensify its efforts to ensure it operates a more modern force and has enhanced capabilities for search and rescue operations.

The Coast Guard handles about 900 similar cases annually, with 62 percent involving small fishing vessels, Kenya News Agency said.

## Hands-on training



A student receives acupuncture treatment during a lecture at the Confucius Institute of the University of Bangui in the Central African Republic on Monday. The 20th Chinese medical team dispatched to the African nation delivered a lecture on acupuncture and cholera prevention to the university's students. HAN XU / XINHUA

## Gaza: Western double standards exposed

From page 1

The judges of the International Court of Justice were asked to rule on the allegations of genocide. They were not asked to rule on allegations of crimes against humanity or accusations of war crimes and breaches of internationally recognized rules of war.

The court ruled that Israel must ensure that its military does not commit acts of genocide and must likewise ensure that humanitarian aid to Gaza is increased.

Israel has not done this. Instead, it continues to treat all people in Gaza as if they are the same, including United Nations aid workers. In this sense, the International Court of Justice did affirm that Israel had to do more to prevent potential genocide, and it

had to stop the destruction of any evidence that might suggest genocide had taken place, and allow humanitarian efforts to be implemented without interruption.

Israel's actions are those of a state that has put itself above the rules of war. It is supported by the US, which has also placed itself above the global rules-based order when it suits its purpose.

The Israeli campaign is now almost entirely dependent upon the continued flow of US arms, ammunition and equipment. It's a supply stream that could be turned off simply by an executive order of US President Joe Biden. This failure to act, more than the mealy-mouthed expressions of disappointment from the Oval Office, expresses the true

complicity of the US in this collective punishment.

Looming beyond these issues is an issue of far greater importance, and that is the double standards that have been revealed in the approach to the rules-based order.

The refusal to comply with these rules, which are ignored when convenient by Western powers, strips away their moral authority. Although loud supporters of the global rules-based order, the US and the UK consistently choose to ignore these rules when it suits them to do so.

Opposition to the disproportionate Israeli response in Gaza should never have reached the point where it needed to be referred to the International Court of Justice. The moral failure of Western powers is that by failing to condemn or

prevent this escalation, by failing their moral duty to enforce global rules, they became complicit in the slaughter.

This dramatic selective application of the rules-based order is the most significant implication of the international court's judgment. It is well noted by the developing Global South, and by every other country that supported the referral to the court.

The implications of the international court's ruling, and its rejection by the US, the UK and their small group of allies, strike at the heart of the legitimacy of the rules-based global order. Their contempt suggests the current global order is no longer fit for purpose.

The author is an international financial technical analyst and a former national board member of the Australia China Business Council. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## Innovation: More support to beef up companies' tech advance urged

From page 1

More efforts should be made to beef up innovation capacities in core technologies in key fields, including big data, artificial intelligence, blockchain, sensors, quantum information, integrated circuits and new materials, bolster the in-depth integration of cutting-edge digital technologies with the real economy and strengthen the training of high-quality and digital-savvy talent, Du said.

Faced with increasingly fierce international competition, China's intensified efforts to foster new productive forces are of great significance in propelling the intelligent, green and high-end development of industries, improving the resilience and security of

industrial and supply chains, and consolidating the economic recovery momentum, said Pan Helin, co-director of the Digital Economy and Financial Innovation Research Center at Zhejiang University's International Business School.

He explained that "being different from traditional productive forces that are mainly driven by labor and land, new productive forces rely more on technological advancement and the effective use of resources, and provide vital support and guarantees for high-quality economic development."

Noting that enterprises have played a prominent part in driving technological innovation, Pan called for more detailed measures to step up policy support for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises,

strengthen the protection of intellectual property rights and optimize the business environment to attract capital and technology inflows.

Luo Zhongwei, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Industrial Economics, said, "More emphasis should be placed on nurturing emerging industries with strategic importance, such as new-generation information technology, biotechnology, new energy, new materials, high-end equipment manufacturing and green industry."

The Central Economic Work Conference in December had urged efforts to promote industrial innovation through sci-tech innovation and, in particular, develop new industries, models and impetus with innovative and cutting-edge

technologies, in order to foster new productive forces.

According to a guideline jointly released by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology and six other government departments in late January, China vowed to support the development of future industries, with a particular focus on six key fields: manufacturing, information, materials, energy, space and health.

Li Dongsheng, founder and chairman of Chinese consumer electronics maker TCL Technology Group Corp, said, "For China's manufacturing industry, accelerating the development of new productive forces means further stimulating the vitality of technological innovation, continuously investing in scientific research and talent

cultivation, and bolstering intelligent transformation of traditional manufacturing."

He said that TCL will invest more in AI, augmented reality, virtual reality, next-generation display technology, new energy, photovoltaics and materials used in the manufacturing of semiconductors.

Against the backdrop of a complicated international scenario, it is important to implement the innovation-driven development strategy and develop frontier technologies, in order to gain a competitive edge in global competition, said Chen Duan, director of the Digital Economy Integration Innovation Development Center at the Central University of Finance and Economics.

Chen said that the pursuit of scientific self-reliance is a prerequisite to

guarantee national security. "Meanwhile, China should further expand international sci-tech exchanges and cooperation, and take an active part in formulating global rules and standards for core technologies, which is crucial for creating an open and globally competitive innovation ecosystem," she added.

Private enterprises, which boast unique advantages in boosting technological innovation, should become an important force in the development of new productive forces, said Qi Xiangdong, chairman of Chinese cybersecurity company Qi-Anxin Technology Group.

The company, Qi said, will step up original and pioneering sci-tech innovation, and reinforce fundamental research in AI to promote its industrial application. The country should provide financial support and fiscal and tax incentives for innovation-oriented enterprises, he added.

## CHINA

## River's long history



Visitors learn about bronze artifacts at Guangdong Museum in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, on Tuesday. The exhibition focuses on the regional cultures of the upper, middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River Basin, showcasing 137 precious exhibits from the Shang and Zhou dynasties (c.16th century-256 BC). CHEN JIMIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

## Govt aims to bring major work accidents to a 'dynamic zero'

Ministry wants significant identified hazards eliminated before end of 2024

By JIANG CHENGLONG  
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The Work Safety Commission of the State Council, China's Cabinet, recently released a three-year plan that aims to achieve a "dynamic zero" of major accident hazards across the country.

Dynamic zero refers to the aim of achieving no hazards despite the risk of some unpreventable circumstances.

According to a news release from the Ministry of Emergency Management, the plan proposes that major accident hazards identified before this year should be eliminated by the end of this year, and any increase in major accident hazards should be curbed by the end of 2025.

By the end of 2026, a normalization mechanism will be formed to reach a dynamic zero-hazard

level, the release said.

The plan outlines a series of measures across eight areas, including enhancing the judgment standard system for major accident hazards, the upgrading of technology support, conducting safety education and training for heads of business entities, and improving the safety awareness and capabilities of employees in business units.

The plan also urges local governments and business units to coordinate economic growth and safe production, establish and improve a full-chain responsibility system for investigating and rectifying major accident hazards in key industries, and significantly enhance safety supervision capabilities.

According to the plan, by the end of 2026, the frequent occurrence of major and serious production safety accidents will be effectively curbed.

The head of safety coordination at the Ministry of Emergency Management said the three-year plan is a strategic arrangement based on a comprehensive analysis of the current situation and production safety risks.

The official noted that in recent years, the number of production safety accidents and fatalities in China has been declining annually. However, the production safety field still faces many unstable and uncertain factors.

Especially since last year, some regions and industrial sectors have experienced consecutive major and influential production safety accidents.

In November, there was a major gas explosion at a coal mine in Heilongjiang province.

The following month in Heilongjiang, there was an underground mine cart accident at another mine. The combined accidents resulted in 23 deaths and 13 injuries.

Also last month, another explo-

sion happened at a coal mine in Henan province, causing 16 deaths.

"The lessons from these accidents are very painful, requiring us to focus on the deep-seated contradictions and problems that constrain safe production," the official said.

According to the official, the plan provides targeted measures for investigating and rectifying major accident hazards.

Those include promoting enterprises to establish a normalization mechanism for self-examination and self-correction of major accident hazards.

Enterprise leaders are required to lead teams to conduct inspections at least once a quarter, and at least once a month in high-risk industries.

Personnel who fail to carry out investigations or fail to identify problems, or refuse to rectify issues after identifying them, resulting in the long-term existence of major accident hazards, will be held accountable.

## Panda cub videos released to ring in Lunar New Year

By HUANG ZHILING in Chengdu  
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Two leading panda breeding organizations in Sichuan province jointly issued videos with 24 newborn pandas on Tuesday to celebrate the Lunar New Year, which falls on Saturday.

In the videos, 14 keepers from the China Conservation and Research Center for the Giant Panda and 10 of their counterparts from the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding held pandas born last year, wishing all their viewers well during the Year of the Dragon.

It has been a tradition for both the center and the base to show newborn pandas to visitors on major holidays, said Qiu Yu, an information officer with the center.

Thirty-four pandas were born at the center and base last year, but 10 were not shown in the videos recorded on Sunday, he said.

The global captive panda population stands at 728, with 46 born last year in China and overseas, said Zhang Yue, deputy director of the wildlife conservation department of the National Forestry and Grassland Administration, at a news conference on Jan 25.

China began artificially breeding pandas in the 1960s. At the beginning of this century, it resolved three major panda breeding problems, and the captive population gradually expanded, he said.

It used to be difficult for captive pandas to become ruttish and mate, and for their cubs to survive, said Zhang Hemin, a senior panda expert who started studying the bears in 1983.

At first, researchers did not have a correct understanding of the habits of pandas.

Thinking they preferred a solitary life, researchers kept each panda isolated in a tiny den and only fed them bamboo.

Pandas in a captive environment became depressed and had difficulty becoming ruttish.

Researchers decided to start giving captive pandas more opportunities to socialize.

Male and female pandas were soon placed into each other's dens so that each would become familiar with the scents of the opposite sex.

"We also showed sexually mature pandas videos of their peers having sex, which they could learn in the wild but not in captivity," Zhang said.

Another problem they faced was how to keep pandas active.

Wild pandas generally stay active for hours each day.

To emulate their natural environment, researchers tried putting biscuits rich in vitamins and trace elements in places the pandas could not find easily, aiming to get them to move around.

Many newborn panda cubs used to die because of a quirk bred by nature.

While 50 percent of newborns are twins, a mother typically chooses to care for only one.

In the wild, a mother panda first tries to care for both babies. But several hours later, she realizes she can't. If she tries to support both, both would die. So the mothers desert one of their cubs, even if it cries for her, Zhang said.

Researchers settled on a course that was part philanthropy and part trickery.

They would take away the deserted baby and feed it milk. Then they would switch it with the favored cub from time to time. In this way, the mother unwittingly supported both.

With the three primary obstacles hindering the breeding of captive pandas overcome, a self-sustaining and growing panda population can be developed, Zhang said.

## Cleaning their plates



Sanitation workers celebrate the upcoming Chinese New Year at a group dinner in Yiwu, Zhejiang province, on Monday. Over 2,700 sanitation workers who will stay in the city for the holiday attended the event and watched a gala dedicated to them.

GONG XIANMING / FOR CHINA DAILY

## HK to require back-up plans in wake of Messi mess

By ATLAS SHAO in Hong Kong  
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The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region plans to put in place clear instructions for event organizers, including requesting them to draw up back-up plans in advance, in the wake of the no-show fiasco of soccer superstar Lionel Messi on Sunday at a friendly match, irritating local fans and those that had come in from afar to watch it.

Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu said on Tuesday he has instructed relevant authorities to review the incident, optimize arrangements and inform the public.

Lee said although the organizer, Tatler Asia, has withdrawn the "M" event status — a mark to showcase government-funded events — and its application for HK\$16 million (\$2.04 million) in government sponsorship, it still has responsibilities to respond to the demands of the fans who were badly let down.

On Sunday, Messi, who was by contract required to play for 45 minutes in the match between Inter Miami and Hong Kong XI, sat on the bench for the whole game due to a reported injury.

The government was informed of Messi's no-show by the organizer 10 minutes before the match ended, and its makeup proposals of having Messi address about

“Was it really so difficult for Messi to get on the stage to present the trophy, speak, or take some photos with the fans in order to show some respect?”

Michael Tien Puk-sun,  
a lawmaker in Hong Kong

40,000 disappointed fans was also met with no success.

The consumer council on Tuesday confirmed there have been 477 complaints so far, involving HK\$3.1 million. The highest amount involved for a single case was over HK\$24,000.

Speaking at a news conference in Japan on Tuesday, Messi said he had been suffering from muscle discomfort during the exhibition match in Saudi Arabia before moving on to Hong Kong, although an MRI scan showed no injuries.

He described his inability to play in Hong Kong as "bad luck", and said that he hoped to have the opportunity to come back and play a game there.

"But the truth is that it is a shame that I was not able to par-

ticipate," Messi said. He said he is feeling much better and hoped to take part in Wednesday's exhibition match against Japan's Vissel Kobe.

In a video posted to social media on Monday, Messi was seen to have completed a training session and was walking steadily.

Kevin Yeung Yun-hung, secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, said on a radio program on Tuesday morning he would feel unhappy if Messi plays the match in Japan, while he could not rule out the possibility that Messi's injury improved after a few days.

Messi's remarks drew the wrath of lawmaker Michael Tien Puk-sun, who called it a great insult since Messi made his explanation in Tokyo rather than when he was in Hong Kong.

"Was it really so difficult for Messi to get on the stage to present the trophy, speak, or take some photos with the fans in order to show some respect?" Tien wrote on social media.

"Had he done so, I would accept it even if he didn't play in the game."

The lawmaker called on the government to demand refunds from the event organizer, or otherwise ban it from renting venues in the city to host events.

Kenneth Fok Kai-kong, a lawmaker in the sports, performing arts, culture and publication sector, criticized the performance of

Inter Miami and Messi for being disrespectful to Hong Kong fans.

He revealed that the SAR government organized a high-level welcoming ceremony for Messi's arrival, and that the team left before the ceremony ended.

Fok said Inter Miami should not participate in soccer just for the sake of making money, and the team owed an explanation and apology to Hong Kong fans.

He also criticized Tatler Asia, which he said only focused on marketing and didn't care about the fans and soccer.

Vincent Cheng Wing-shun, vice-chairman of the Major Sports Events Committee, said he had asked the committee to hold a meeting as soon as possible to discuss the incident, and he believed that the committee would review the standards and criteria for approving the "M" mark events.

As for whether the incident would affect Hong Kong's ability to hold large-scale sports events in the future, Cheng said organizations and sports associations from around the world are still interested in organizing activities in Hong Kong, and there would still be many large-scale sports events held this year.

In spite of the careful inspection, he also pointed out that it is necessary to retain a certain degree of flexibility for the organizers, otherwise the creativity of the events might be affected.

## Briefly

### Crackdown targets drunk holiday drivers

China's Ministry of Public Security has urged public security organs nationwide to show zero tolerance for drunk driving during the upcoming Spring Festival holiday. A nationwide crackdown on the crime has been planned for the holiday period, as well as the periods immediately before and after the holiday, according to a circular issued by the ministry on Tuesday. Traffic control departments of public security organs will intensify law enforcement and inspections at night and in rural areas by deploying more police officers, the circular said. The Spring Festival holiday is seen as a high-risk period for driving under the influence of alcohol, as gatherings of families and friends increase at this time.

### Vulnerable groups get help from procurators

A total of 69,000 civil lawsuits were filed with support from Chinese procuratorates nationwide from January to November last year, up 16.5 percent year-on-year, a senior procurator said on Tuesday. Of the lawsuits, over 40,000 were initiated by migrant workers, said Feng Xiaoguang, a senior procurator with the Supreme People's Procuratorate.

Procuratorate organs support migrant workers, the elderly, the disabled, women and other vulnerable groups whose rights and interests have been violated. In recent years, lawsuits supported by procuratorial organs across the country have continued to increase, Feng said.

### Man who stabbed colleague executed

Zhang Keping, who fatally stabbed a colleague while drunk in 2022, was executed on Sunday after China's top court approved his death sentence. The execution was carried out by the Haidong Intermediate People's Court in Qinghai province, where Zhang was convicted of intentional homicide and reckless driving and received the death penalty. The Haidong court said Zhang and the victim, surnamed Yang, worked for the same company, and Yang was Zhang's superior. In September 2021, when Zhang's job was switched by his employer, Zhang became discontented with Yang, believing he was responsible for the change and that it would affect his work performance. The court said in a statement on Monday that it allowed Zhang to meet family members before his execution, which was supervised by Haidong prosecutors.

XINHUA

## CHINA

# Blind lawyer seeks success at firm in Guangzhou

Former masseur aims to protect rights of laborers and help disabled prosper

By ZHENG CAIXIONG  
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Pan Mingjing said he still has a long way to go before he becomes a "real practicing lawyer" and begins representing clients in court.

"I am prepared to fail, but I am brave enough to set out on my journey," he said.

Pan, 36, has officially become the first blind lawyer in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong province. Previously, he worked as a masseur in an urban village in the southern metropolis for two decades.

He now works at the Guangzhou Kingpound Law Firm.

"As a lawyer, I will certainly use my knowledge to help protect the rights and interests of the mass laborers," he said.

After interning for a year, he passed the assessment of the Guangzhou Lawyers Association and was officially certified to be a practicing lawyer.

"I can pass legal examinations as long as I work hard on my own, but my work as a lawyer needs to be seen as satisfactory by the parties involved," Pan said.

The most difficult part for him is overcoming people's perceptions of a visually impaired lawyer.

He said someone once told him, "If I want to hire a lawyer, I definitely won't hire a blind person."

This hurts him, but he knows that it's a belief held by many. He hopes he can dispel this stereotype through his work.

"Now I am a full-time lawyer, but there is still a gap between me and a real practicing lawyer," said Pan, adding that he is a pathfinder. "I hope to be able to explore where



As a lawyer, I will certainly use my knowledge to help protect the rights and interests of the mass laborers."

**Pan Mingjing**, the first blind lawyer in Guangzhou, Guangdong province

visually impaired people can go and how far they can go on the path of employment."

Pan lost his sight after a critical illness when he was 4 years old. He learned massage in Nanning, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, and moved to Guangzhou in 2003.

Despite his disability, he refused to settle for being a masseur for the rest of his life.

He began to prepare for the legal exam at the end of 2017 and listened to his law courses on his mobile phone for three to four hours every day between giving massages.

Local bar associations and volunteers helped Pan gather learning materials and register online for the exam. The Sun Yat-sen Library helped with practice tests twice a week to improve his efficiency in mock trials, and the Guangzhou Bureau of Justice also made it as easy as possible for him to take the exam, arranging for him to do so in a separate location with more convenient transportation links and barrier-free access.

To improve his testing efficiency, invigilators who were good listen-

ers, skilled in standard Chinese pronunciation and familiar with legal terminology were selected to oversee the exam.

Pan passed the national legal vocational exam and was granted a professional law qualification certificate in 2022.

After joining the Guangzhou Kingpound Law Firm, he was assigned to its labor law team, with the firm's senior partner Cai Fei personally serving as his mentor.

Although labor law was covered in the legal examination, the articles, cases, and explanations are complex, so Pan needed to conduct more thorough research in the area to perform his duties better.

Cai said he is confident Pan will be successful, as diligence and hard work are among the new lawyer's strengths.

"Pan now has some insights into labor law and can easily answer professional questions," he said, adding that Pan is just as knowledgeable as other lawyers in the field.

Cai conceded, though, that while Pan is licensed to serve as a court attorney, he is currently unable to appear in court independently.

"This would be irresponsible to the parties involved," he said, because, in court, attorneys often need to verify paper evidence, documents and signatures on the spot, things that Pan would struggle with because of his visual impairment.

While serving as an intern, Pan mainly participated in public welfare labor dispute mediation cases, which do not require reading paper documents, as well as mediation conducted via telephone and online mediation, Cai said.

Li Gang, another partner at the

law firm, also expressed confidence in Pan. "We plan to train Pan to become a professional labor lawyer in three years," Li said.

Li said he arranged for Pan to join the labor law team after carefully considering his strengths.

Labor lawyers often deal with ordinary workers, which is more suitable for Pan than high-end commercial litigators, and there is also a high demand for labor lawyers in the market, Li said.

He said that Pan can independently conduct consultations, and the law firm is also considering establishing a hotline and consultation platform for him to consult clients.

Pan can also offer mediation services and participate in online court hearings, he said, and he can advise other lawyers in his field.

"Pan is very professional and knows every detail clearly, and sharing his knowledge can greatly improve the efficiency of other lawyers," Li said.

Although Pan cannot appear in court independently, he can cooperate with colleagues and gradually begin working on his own to gain clients, Li added.

Pan said that as a practicing labor lawyer, he hopes to help broaden employment paths for people with disabilities, especially those with visual impairments.

"I hope to promote disabled people so they can have more opportunities and participate equally in society through my own work," he said. "If disabled people have dreams, they should pursue them bravely and boldly."

According to statistics, there are more than 80 million disabled people in China, including 17 million who are visually impaired.



Craftswomen weave traditional brocade in Xiushan Tujia autonomous county, Chongqing, on Jan 23. WANG QUANCHAO / XINHUA

## Mothers bring kids to work at Hunan factory

CHANGSHA — In a bustling brocade factory in central China's Hunan province, a harmonious blend of sounds fills the air. One side resonates with the rhythmic click-clack of the loom, while the other echoes with children's laughter.

Nestled in the city of Zhangjiajie, Guaiyaomei Tujia, an innovative ethnic brocade factory, has pioneered flexible working arrangements for rural women. This initiative empowers them to balance their professional commitments with childcare responsibilities.

Mothers often confront a tough decision in rural areas — whether to stay home to care for their children or work elsewhere to contribute to the family financially.

The factory in Zhangjiajie is endearingly called the "mother-friendly factory" and presents a groundbreaking solution to the dilemma.

Gong Qin, a worker at the factory, occasionally glances at her 4-year-old daughter with a smile. It brings her comfort to see her daughter joyfully playing with friends nearby while she focuses on her tasks. "My little girl is considerate and never disturbs me during work," Gong said with pride, adding that her daughter is familiar with the loom's components.

Gong began working at the factory eight years ago. Faced with the challenge of her husband working away from home, she proposed bringing her children to work.

To her delight, the factory welcomed her proposal. Since then, Gong's son has accompanied her to the workshop after school, where he and other children engage in playful learning and do their homework, creating a seamless transition from work to home life.

Gong appreciates the factory's flexible management, which allows for adaptable child pick-up

and drop-off times. "There's a dedicated area in the factory for our children's learning and entertainment, staffed with caregivers. It enables me to focus on my work," she said.

Zhang Tiantian, manager of the production base, said that the factory employs over 120 women, with 80 percent being mothers with young children. Around 50 mothers work alongside their youngsters year-round.

The Tujia traditional handmade brocade, a renowned craft in Zhangjiajie and one of China's five major brocades, boasts a rich heritage. In 2006, it earned a place on China's inaugural national list of intangible cultural heritage.

Despite being initially unfamiliar with the Tujia brocade, Gong has become a master artisan and an esteemed inheritor of the Tujia brocade after years of hard work. "Working with the Tujia brocade enriches my life, allowing me to be present in my children's growth and find self-worth in preserving and passing on our heritage," Gong said.

To further support children's development, the mother-friendly factory has established a parent-child canteen with nutritious meals, renovated 16 apartments for mothers and children, and organized volunteer-led after-school care. "In addition to promoting and improving the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, women can provide the best company for their children by getting employed and increasing their income," said Hu Xiaoxi, head of the Women's Federation of Wulingyuan district, where the factory is located.

"The mother-friendly factory increases the number of jobs available to women and provides them with more platforms to showcase their skills," Hu added.

XINHUA



Yang Kai checks a pickleball paddle in the showroom of his factory in Liangping village in Ningxian county, Gansu province, on Jan 21. CHENG NAN / XINHUA

## Gansu factory plays key role in China's pickleball industry

LANZHOU — With the whirl of machines in the background, workers manufacture pickleball paddles made of carbon fiber in a workshop.

Wearing glasses, 55-year-old Dou Xincal carefully inspects different batches of paddles that his colleagues bring to him. After a while, the pile of paddles on his table grows so large that it obscures him.

The factory where Dou works was established in 2020 in Liangping village in Ningxian county, Qingyang city, on the Loess Plateau of Northwest China's Gansu province. The village sits at an altitude of 1,200 meters.

The factory has played an important role in the pickleball industry in Northwest China.

Originating in the United States and Europe, pickleball has been described as a combination of tennis, table tennis and badminton.

"It appears to be a game for all

ages. The ball is lightweight because it's full of holes," said Yang Kai, the factory's owner, adding that there is much less impact on the body than when striking a tennis ball.

The factory has always been a contract manufacturer for other brands throughout the country.

"Last year, the factory's output value exceeded 10 million yuan (\$1.39 million), and pickleball paddles were mainly exported to markets in Europe, North America and South America," Yang said.

A pickleball paddle is smaller than a tennis racket, larger than a regular table tennis paddle and rectangular.

"A paddle made of carbon fiber is also lightweight, which makes it easy for all ages to use," said Yang, adding that the production process consists of 10 steps, including cutting the carbon fiber, molding, polishing and spraying.

The factory is only responsible for manufacturing. The procurement of materials and sales are handled by other companies.

Yang said the villagers in Liangping had never seen a pickleball or paddle before his factory arrived. The factory now employs over 120 workers.

He and his staff have built a pickleball court for villagers and workers to play in the factory courtyard. Employees such as Dou receive a monthly income of over 3,000 yuan. The factory has also attracted 890,000 yuan of investment from the village and other governments.

More than 70 countries and regions have established pickleball associations. The United States has launched professional competitions, attracting many athletes from other sports to participate in recent years.

Pickleball was introduced to China

over 10 years ago and has been continuously developed in many parts of the country. There are over 200,000 people who play the sport year-round in Guangdong province.

China's pickleball sports working committee was set up at the end of last year. The committee, led by the General Administration of Sports of China, will actively promote the popularization and development of pickleball across the country.

Pickleball practitioners such as Yang have more confidence in the industry after the establishment of the committee. He plans to run local pickleball associations and hold competitions on campuses in the future.

"This year, I will continue to establish more factories to expand production. I will try my best to promote pickleball in China," he said.

XINHUA

## Man, 88, honored as the oldest gaming vlogger

By QUAN ZHANFU  
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In an inspiring achievement, an 88-year-old video game enthusiast, affectionately known as the "Gamer Grandpa", has been honored with the Guinness World Record for being the oldest video game vlogger on Bilibili, a prominent video sharing platform in China, according to Jimu News, a news portal based in Hubei province that reported on the achievement on Jan 29.

The record-holder, a resident of Sichuan province named Yang Binglin, ventured into the world of video game vlogging four years ago on Bilibili. Garnering the admiration of over 280,000 followers, his passion for gaming and determination to share his experiences have made him a beloved figure among the gaming community.

After concluding his career in oil and gas drilling research and engineering in Sichuan in 1996, Yang embraced hobbies such as table tennis and electronic gaming. He transitioned from smaller games to more complex titles such as *Tomb Raider* and *Call of Duty*, amassing a collection of over 500 game discs from his explorations of video game stores nationwide.

In Yang's own words, becoming a vlogger has brought him a sense of honor. He treasures the interactions with his thousands of young fans and expresses gratitude for the heartfelt gift of a Playstation 5

console he received from his followers. While emphasizing the importance of balancing gaming with studying or working, he advises young gamers to immerse themselves in the activity by making plans and schedules.

Despite his profound passion for video games, Yang maintains a balanced lifestyle, engaging in activities such as playing table tennis at 7:30 am and going grocery shopping at 9:30 am. He spends three hours gaming each day, starting at 3 pm, and retires for the night at 9:30 pm.

To his grandson, Yang Yihuan, the "Gamer Grandpa" remains young within the gaming world and shows an eagerness to explore new technologies.

The senior's love for treasure-hunting games also allows him to virtually experience various cultures and historical settings.

"Grandpa does not excessively indulge in gaming despite his passion; he maintains a strict sense of self-discipline, specifically setting aside time for gaming each day and diligently taking notes on game strategies," Yang Yihua said.

Upon learning of his Guinness World Record, Yang Binglin expressed his desire to continue contributing to the gaming community, particularly in guiding the younger generation. He hopes to witness the emergence of new generations of gaming consoles and games in China, believing in the valuable wisdom embedded within gaming for children to enjoy.

# WORLD

## Turkiye grieves a year after quake

Haunted by past, survivors rebuild lives as they gather to commemorate anniversary

ANTAKYA, Türkiye — Ravaged by grief, bearing torches and holding up portraits of their lost families, thousands of earthquake survivors gathered in the predawn hours on Tuesday for the first anniversary of Türkiye's worst disaster of modern times.

At 4:17 am, the moment the first magnitude-7.8 earthquake set off a calamity that claimed more than 53,000 lives in Türkiye and nearly 6,000 in Syria, those affected by the quake gathered in the ruins of Antakya, capital of the southern province of Hatay, the hardest-hit region.

Last year's Feb 6 disaster flattened swathes of cities across 11 southern Turkish provinces and parts of Syria, becoming the quake-prone region's worst catastrophe in centuries.

It displaced millions and forced hundreds of thousands to move into container camps, where they have spent the past year haunted by the past.

The trauma and bouts of anger spilled over when people briefly scuffled with the police, who tried to stop one Antakya procession with barrier fences, according to Agence France-Presse reporters at the scene. But the overall mood was much the same as it was when disaster first struck — overwhelming grief and lingering disbelief.

Amid the fog by the Orontes River, people chanted "Can anyone hear me?" — echoing the voices of those buried under the rubble a year ago — and "We won't forget, we won't forgive".

The survivors embraced, placing candles where their loved ones were crushed to death in their sleep.



People gather in Hatay, Türkiye, on Tuesday to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the devastating earthquake and remember their lost family members and friends. UMIT BEKTAS / REUTERS

"Some of us were buried alive," said Mustafa Bahadırli, a 24-year-old in Antakya. "We called our government 'father' but the government left us without a father. We were abandoned for days and are still abandoned."

After a moment of silence, carnations were tossed into the river in an act of remembrance and a local orchestra played a song to honor the victims.

"It doesn't feel like it was a year ago. For me, it feels like it was yesterday," said Eda Boz, 44, who was forced to move to the capital Ankara and returned to Antakya for the commemorations.

"My childhood friends and classmates lived in this building," Boz said through tears. "We all knew each other."

The initial earthquake lasted 65

seconds, followed by thousands of aftershocks including a particularly frightening magnitude-7.5 one later that first fateful day.

In the wake of the disaster, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government promised to rebuild 680,000 homes across 11 provinces over two years, including some 250,000 in Hatay. Officials unveiled the latest homes for families in the run-up to the one-year anniversary.

Residents say the container homes are generally warm enough at night. Other displaced residents ended up in prefabricated houses that are a bit larger with two bedrooms and a living room.

In Antakya's historical Uzun Carsi Bazaar, parts of which withstood the quake even as much of the city center collapsed, economic strains are evident now that one-third of

the residents and tourists, once so vital, have vanished.

"Tourists don't visit Hatay anymore and many locals left the city or live in container houses located on the outskirts of the city. The recovery will take time," said Fatih Uzunparmak, owner of a local desert maker Cinaralti Kunefe, whose shop once regularly had long queues outside.

Shoemaker Mustafa Okay says the shop owners in Uzun Carsi Bazaar are still struggling financially, but he is hopeful things will get better in the coming months.

"I got loans from the banks and now I have to pay them back," he said. "Business is sluggish for now, but I hope it will get better after the winter."

AGENCIES—XINHUA

## Syrian 'miracle' baby marks 1st birthday without family

JINDAYRIS, Syria — A year ago, Afraa al-Sawadi was pulled from the rubble of her family home still attached to her dead mother by the umbilical cord, after a devastating earthquake hit northwestern Syria.

Now in the care of relatives after the quake on Feb 6 last year, she is among the orphaned children toughing it out in the war-ravaged country.

"We named her after her mother, Afraa, to carry on her name and not forget her family," said her uncle Khalil al-Sawadi, 35, who has taken the infant girl in alongside his seven children.

"My wife breastfed Afraa because we have a baby girl who we called Aataa ... they've become like twins."

The devastating quake ravaged Türkiye and Syria, and killed nearly 60,000 people.

Jindayris, in Aleppo Province near the border with Türkiye, was one of the areas worst hit by the quake, heaping more misery on the war-weary residents, many of them displaced during conflicts from other parts of the country.

From the first moments after Afraa's rescue, her story captured hearts and made international headlines as the quake's "miracle baby".

Now, Sawadi's daughters sing to Afraa, who is bundled up in winter clothes in their modest home.

The little girl with rosy cheeks and wide eyes turned 1 on Tuesday and has started crawling.

"When she began talking, she started calling me dad and calling her aunt mum," a visibly emotional Sawadi said.

Making a living through odd jobs after being displaced from eastern Syria, he said he felt a heavy responsibility in raising Afraa.

He expressed hope that she would have a bright future, getting a good education and even "doing better than my own children".

In Jindayris, quake-stricken

buildings sit in ruins, while others remain partially collapsed.

Hundreds of families still live in tents and makeshift shelters, while the luckier ones are in displacement camps made up of small cement buildings constructed with foreign donations.

Hamza al-Ahmed, 15, walks with crutches through the streets of Jindayris, where he lives with his brother, who is married.

The teenager was left orphaned when his family's building was destroyed in the quake.

"My father and mother and four siblings died. I spent 35 hours under the rubble," he told Agence France-Presse. "The building totally collapsed, nothing is left of it. It has become empty land."

Ahmed's leg had to be amputated and his arm was left injured because of crush syndrome, which occurs in limbs starved of blood circulation for too long.

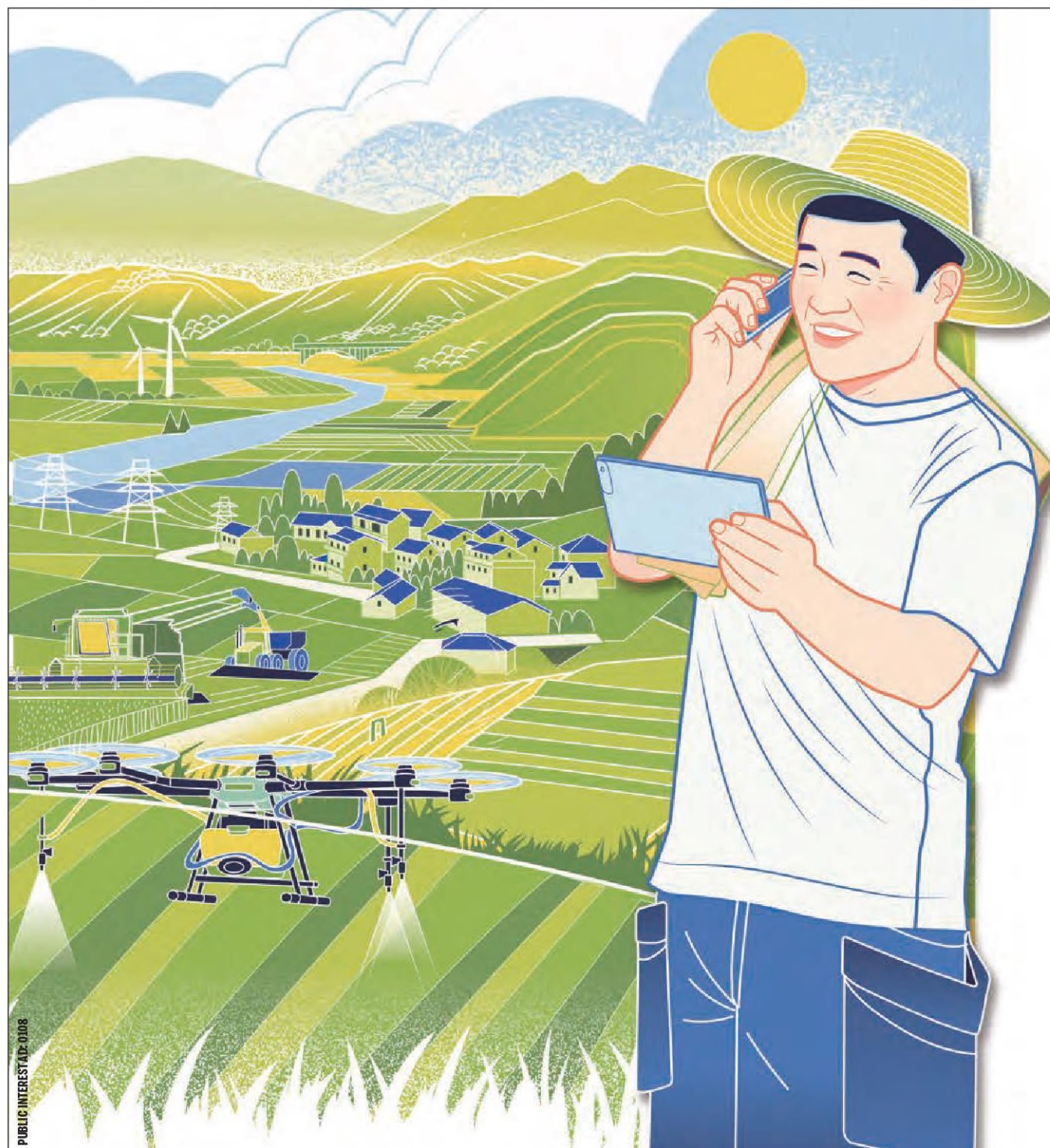
"Life without your parents is hard, but it goes on," said Ahmed, who is also getting used to using a prosthetic leg. "My dream now is to get better and to go back to standing on my feet."

According to the United Nations, 265,000 people in northwestern Syria had their homes destroyed in the quake, and more than 43,000 people displaced by the disaster have yet to return home.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



Afraa al-Sawadi sits in a swing in her uncle's house in Jindayris, Syria, on Sunday. AAREF WATAD / AFP



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# WORLDUS

## Deadly California storm triggers floods, blackouts

LOS ANGELES, California — A deadly Pacific storm, the second "Pineapple Express" weather system to sweep the West Coast in less than a week, dumped torrential rain over Southern California on Monday, triggering street flooding and mudslides throughout the region.

Extreme weather advisories for floods, high wind and winter storm conditions were posted on Monday across parts of California and southwestern Arizona where some 35 million people live, and authorities urged residents to limit their driving.

More than 1 million people statewide were without power.

The National Weather Service, or NWS, documented staggering rainfall amounts from the storm, which lashed Northern California on Sunday with hurricane-force gusts of wind, along with heavy precipitation that intensified as the system moved south on Sunday night and Monday.

The NWS said more than 25 centimeters of rain had fallen since Sunday across the Los Angeles area, the nation's second-largest city, with much more expected before the downpour was due to taper off later in the week.

Nearly 0.3 meters of rain was measured over a 24-hour period on the campus of the University of California at Los Angeles.

"We're talking about one of the wettest storm systems to impact the greater Los Angeles area" since records began, Ariel Cohen, chief NWS meteorologist in LA, told a news conference. "Going back to the 1870s, this is one of the top three."

At least two people were killed by wind-topped trees on Sunday — an 82-year-old man in the former gold

rush town of Yuba City and a 45-year-old man at Boulder Creek in the coastal Santa Cruz Mountains.

US President Joe Biden spoke to California Governor Gavin Newsom and Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass, and pledged to provide federal aid to areas hard hit by the Pacific storm pummeling the state, the White House said.

### Intense rainfall

The intense rainfall, with heavy snow in high-elevation mountain areas, was carried to California by a storm system that meteorologists call an atmospheric river, a vast airborne current of dense moisture funneled inland from the Pacific.

The latest tempest, and a less powerful storm that hit California on Wednesday and Thursday, also qualified as a "Pineapple Express", a type of atmospheric river originating from the subtropical waters around Hawaii.

Winds gusting to 121 kilometers per hour on Sunday downed trees and utility lines across the San Francisco Bay Area and California's Central Coast, knocking out power to roughly 875,000 homes at the storm's peak in that region.

A number of upscale communities built on the slopes of Hollywood Hills, Beverly Hills and Topanga Canyon were among the hardest hit by landslides.

Los Angeles officials reported 120 mudslides and debris flows throughout the city on Monday, and at least 25 structures were damaged by heavy rainfall or mudslides as of Monday evening.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



A resident clears debris from a mudslide at a home during a rainstorm in Los Angeles on Monday. ETHAN SWOPE / ASSOCIATED PRESS

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These materials are distributed by China Daily Distribution Corp. on behalf of China Daily Beijing, China. Additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.

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CHINA DAILY (ISSN 0748-6154) is

published daily except weekends by

China Daily USA, 1500 Broadway,

Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036.

Periodical postage paid at New York,

NY and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to

CHINA DAILY USA, 1500 Broadway,

Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036.

Vol. 38 — No. 656



Clothes representing the 11,500 Palestinian children and 36 Israeli children killed in Gaza are on display at the beach in Bournemouth, England, on Monday. FINNBARR WEBSTER / GETTY IMAGES

## US accused of stoking Middle East tensions

De-escalation and stepped-up peace efforts urged for Gaza conflict at UN

UNITED NATIONS — The United States was accused of stoking already high tensions in the Middle East conflict with its recent retaliatory strikes against Iraq and Syria, as the UN Security Council on Monday convened an emergency session to address the escalating conflict in Gaza.

The US military struck dozens of targets in Syria and Iraq overnight on Friday into Saturday, in retaliation to the Jan 28 drone attack on a base in Jordan that killed three US soldiers.

Council members expressed fears of a growing conflict in the Middle East and urged de-escalation and stepped-up peace efforts.

"It's clear that American airstrikes are specifically, deliberately aimed to stoke the conflict," said Russia's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia, whose country had called for the emergency meeting.

Nebenzia said the US violated international law and is continuing "to sow chaos and destruction in the Middle East."

The Russian ambassador said the United States is attempting "to flex muscles ... to justify and salvage the image of the current American administration ... in the light of the upcoming presidential prelection campaign."

China's permanent representative to the UN, Zhang Jun, said that action taken by the US was creating new turmoil in the Middle East.

He said the fundamental reason for the current situation is the failure to implement a cease-fire in Gaza, which is a prerequisite for any progress, calling on all countries concerned to stop acting out of self-interest.

"The US actions will certainly exacerbate the vicious cycle of tit-for-tat violence in the Middle East," Zhang said.

Anger over Israel's devastating campaign in Gaza — which began after Hamas' surprise attack on Oct 7 — has grown across the Middle East, stoking violence involving militant groups in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and Yemen.



The US actions will certainly exacerbate the vicious cycle of tit-for-tat violence in the Middle East."

Zhang Jun, China's permanent representative to the UN

Syria's permanent representative to the UN, Koussay Aldahhak, said the arguments heard at the meeting were the "same flimsy pretexts and misleading claims the US administration is promoting to justify its repeated attacks".

Algeria's UN Ambassador Amar Bendjama, the Arab representative on the council, defended the sovereignty of Iraq and Syria and also said the US airstrikes "are likely to further exacerbate the already precarious situation".

The Hamas Oct 7 attack killed about 1,160 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally.

Israel's withering military campaign has killed at least 27,585 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry in Gaza.

### Human cost

UN political affairs chief Rosemary DiCarlo briefed the council, urging all parties to heed Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' call "to step back from the brink and to consider the unbearable human and economic cost of a potential regional conflict".

The US strikes have drawn criticism from the governments of Iraq and Syria, and also from Iran, which has denied any role in last month's drone attack.

"Any attempt to attribute these actions to Iran or its armed forces is misleading, baseless and unacceptable," Iran's UN Ambassador Amir Saeid Iravani told the Council on Monday.

He pledged that if Iran faces "any threat, attack or aggression affecting its security", it would "not hesitate to exercise its inherent rights ... to respond firmly".

The White House said on Sunday it plans more retaliatory action.

"Let me be clear, the United States does not desire more conflict in a region when we are actively working to contain and de-escalate the conflict in Gaza," said US Deputy Ambassador Robert Wood.

He added: "We are not seeking a direct conflict with Iran, but we will continue to defend our personnel against unacceptable attacks. Period."

Meanwhile, heavy strikes and fighting in Gaza killed at least 99 people overnight through Tuesday, mostly women and children, said the health ministry in Gaza that has been under almost four months of bombardment.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Egypt on Tuesday, seeking a new cease-fire and "an enduring end" to the conflict.

Blinken — on his fifth regional tour since the bloodiest ever Gaza conflict broke out — was due to meet Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, a day after he held talks with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Riyadh.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, in a phone call, told Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday that "only a negotiated two-state solution would open up the prospect of a sustainable solution to the Middle East conflict".

For weeks, Yemen's Houthis have been targeting what they say are Israel-linked ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden in solidarity with Palestinians.

The attacks on the vital shipping route have disrupted global trade and prompted reprisals by US and British forces, including strikes on two "explosive-laden drone boats" on Monday, according to the US military.

The Houthis said on Tuesday they struck US and British ships in two separate attacks, one of which was confirmed by a security firm.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

## Trump piles pressure on Republicans to kill aid deal for Ukraine

WASHINGTON — It is less than nine months until the presidential election but Donald Trump is already wielding extraordinary influence as he seeks to bend US foreign policy to his ambitions of a return to the White House.

Trump has been a private citizen since leaving office in 2021 but is running for reelection and urging his party to reject a bill tying the toughest border security measures in a generation to \$60 billion in Ukraine aid.

"Don't be STUPID!! We need a separate Border and Immigration Bill. It should not be tied to foreign aid in anyway, shape, or form!" Trump, who looks almost certain to be facing US President Joe Biden again in November, posted on social media.

On Sunday, senators unveiled a bipartisan \$118 billion package of immigration restrictions that Biden has committed to signing into law. It is tied to a foreign aid package that includes \$60 billion for Ukraine and \$14 billion for Israel.

Biden's administration said on Monday he would veto a stand-alone bill backed by House of Representatives Republicans that would provide aid to Israel, as it pushes for the broader measure.

"We don't have enough agents. We don't have enough folks. We don't have enough judges. You don't have enough folks here. We need help. Why won't they give me the help?" Biden said on Monday when asked about the bill's prospects.

Trump has an iron grip on Republicans leading the House of Representatives, and has called repeatedly for the party to kill the legislation and deny Biden and his Democrats a political victory ahead of November's election. "This Bill is a great gift to the Democrats, and a Death Wish for The Republican Party," Trump said on Monday on his Truth Social website.

### Seeking debate

Trump, who has refused to debate any of his rivals for the Republican nomination, on Monday said he wanted to debate Biden immediately. "I'd like to debate him now because we should debate. We should debate for the good of the country," Trump said on a radio show hosted by conservative commentator Dan Bongino.

When asked by reporters during a trip to Las Vegas on Monday about Trump calling for a debate, Biden, a Democrat, said: "If I were him, I would want to debate me too. He's got nothing to do."

Trump and Biden debated twice during the 2020 race. A third debate was canceled after Trump tested positive for COVID-19 and declined to participate in a virtual event. Traditionally, there are three presidential debates.

The critical test for the bill will be its first procedural vote, expected on Wednesday, which will require support from 60 senators in a 100-member chamber that is almost evenly divided between the two parties.

Even if it gets over that hurdle, House Speaker Mike Johnson, who talks to Trump regularly, said the deal would be "dead on arrival" if it reaches the Republican-controlled lower chamber.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Appeals court: Trump can be prosecuted

By AI HEPING in New York  
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A federal appeals panel ruled Tuesday that former US president Donald Trump can face trial on charges that he plotted to overturn the results of the 2020 election, rejecting his claims that he is immune from prosecution.

Tuesday's ruling had been expected because of the skepticism that the three-judge panel of the US Court of Appeals in Washington expressed when Trump's lawyers first argued their case before the panel last month.

They claimed then that any act by a president can't be prosecuted unless the president is first impeached by the House of Representatives and

convicted in the Senate.

The appeals court gave Trump until Monday to file an emergency stay request with the Supreme Court to block its ruling.

If the high court decides to hear the case, it could be several more weeks or months before a decision is made.

Steven Cheung, a spokesman for Trump's campaign, said the former president "respectfully disagrees" with the decision and would appeal it.

"If immunity is not granted to a president, every future president who leaves office will be immediately indicted by the opposing party," Cheung said. "Without complete immunity, a president of the United States would not be

able to properly function."

Trump's attorneys had argued that if future executives believed that they could be indicted for their "official acts" as president, they would be more hesitant to act within their role.

But the judges rejected that claim. The panel wrote: "The risks of chilling presidential action or permitting meritless, harassing prosecutions are unlikely, unsupported by history and 'too remote and shadowy to shape the course of justice'.

We therefore conclude that functional policy considerations rooted in the structure of our government do not immunize former presidents from federal criminal prosecution."

A spokesman for Jack Smith, the special counsel who brought the

case against Trump, declined to comment on the court's decision.

Smith is seeking to prosecute Trump this year, and the Republican front-runner for the presidential nomination is seeking to delay it until after the November election.

If Trump defeats President Joe Biden, he could presumably try to use his position as head of the executive branch to order a new attorney general to dismiss the federal cases he faces or potentially could seek a pardon for himself.

In its 57-page ruling, the panel dismissed Trump's arguments that his efforts during the final months of his presidency to undo his loss, including by promoting false claims of voter fraud, fell within his official duties and that he was immune from

prosecution on criminal charges.

The judges — two appointed by Biden and one appointed by former president George H.W. Bush — said in their unanimous decision that despite the privileges of the office he once held, Trump was subject to federal criminal law like any other American.

"We cannot accept former President Trump's claim that a president has unbounded authority to commit crimes that would neutralize the most fundamental check on executive power — the recognition and implementation of election results," the judges wrote. "Nor can we sanction his apparent contention that the executive has carte blanche to violate the rights of individual citizens to vote and to have their votes count."

"Former president Trump's stance would collapse our system of separated powers by placing the president beyond the reach of all three

branches," they wrote. "Presidential immunity against federal indictment would mean that, as to the president, the Congress could not legislate, the executive could not prosecute, and the judiciary could not review. We cannot accept that the office of the presidency places its former occupants above the law for all time thereafter."

"For the purpose of this criminal case, former President Trump has become citizen Trump, with all of the defenses of any other criminal defendant. But any executive immunity that may have protected him while he served as President no longer protects him against this prosecution."

Tuesday's ruling is the second time since December that judges have held that Trump can be prosecuted for actions taken while in the White House and in the run-up to the Jan 6, 2021, attack on the US Capitol.

## BUSINESS

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## Chile sees increase in cherry exports to China

By ZHONG NAN  
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Fueled by China's soaring market demand and global advancements in cold chain logistics, Chile's cherry exports to the nation are projected to reach 92 percent of its total exports in this category during the 2023-24 season, up from 88 percent during the previous season, the country's top diplomat to China said.

There has been a significant increase in Chile's cherry exports to China in recent weeks, totaling 365,968 metric tons, compared to 362,607 tons in the 2022-23 season.

This trend is expected to continue leading up to the Chinese Lunar New Year, according to information released by the Chilean embassy in Beijing.

The cherry, a fruit that was not part of Chile's exports to China 15 years ago, has now become the second-most important product exported from Chile to the country, following copper ore, with over \$2 billion in export value annually, said Mauricio Hurtado, Chile's ambassador to China.

Hurtado said: "The trade expansion in this field has not only benefited both countries economically but has also created opportunities for introducing new varieties and a wider range of products in the Chinese market," Hurtado said. "We are introducing peaches in China this year, marking the continuation of the cherry season. We will also export Coho salmon, a variety prevalent in Chile, to China."

"We are currently in a position to resume exporting poultry and chicken products to China. This comes after Chile was declared free of bird flu a few months ago, a significant development for our producers who are eager to restart trade as soon as possible."

Eager to boost its exports to China, the Agricultural and Livestock Service, a Chilean government branch, and Shanghai Customs began collaborating on a joint plan to expedite the entry of loads of Chilean fresh fruit into the ports of Shanghai last year.

This effort specifically targets containers undergoing cold treat-

ments during transit, in response to the implementation of phytosanitary measures designed to control fruit flies. This measure is particularly crucial for fruit originating from regions in Chile that sporadically face fruit fly outbreaks, said Shanghai Customs.

China's General Administration of Customs authorized the pilot plan for fresh cherries in November 2023. Subsequently, the first container with Chilean cherries adopting this modality successfully arrived in Shanghai on Jan 21.

This innovative approach allows for the online verification of the containers' complete location and calibration details.

Presently, it takes 28 days for a container vessel to transport cherries from Chile to ports in Shanghai.

Driven by the China-Chile Free Trade Agreement and the Belt and Road Initiative, Hurtado said that business ties between China and Chile will continue to grow this year, with notable diversification in areas such as technology cooperation and trade in services.

As China has found it difficult to grow all of the food it needs and has consequently formed closer ties with the global food market, demand for beef, mutton, pork, fruit, wine and dairy products will certainly offer many opportunities for major exporters of agricultural products, including Spain, Ireland, Chile, Argentina and the United States, said Ding Lixin, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences in Beijing.

With the facilitation of e-commerce, foreign businesses now have the capability to connect with consumers across all regions of China, a feat that was unthinkable just a decade ago, he said.

China provided increased market access for imports of certain agricultural and food products from over 51 countries and regions in 2023, according to information released by the GAC.

The GAC signed 156 cooperation documents with foreign partners last year, including 84 documents on market access for agricultural and food products with other Belt and Road cooperation partners.



Shoppers browse festive goods at a supermarket in Hua'an, Jiangsu province. ZHAO QIRUI / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Consumption drive gets fresh focus

Policy measures will seek to spur demand with sustainable expansion

By WANG KEJU  
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China will roll out a series of well-targeted policy measures aimed at shifting the focus of consumption from post-pandemic recovery to sustainable expansion, so as to stimulate domestic demand, boost consumer confidence and drive long-term economic growth, officials and experts said.

In the face of sluggish external demand, the robust growth in consumer spending and its increasing foundational role in China's economy call for stronger steps to enhance the provision of high-quality goods and services and enhance the business environment, in order to tap into this vast market potential, they said.

The significant contribution of consumption to economic expansion, accounting for 82.5 percent, had solidified its role as a primary driver of growth last year, said Sheng Qipeng, vice-minister of commerce, at a news conference on Tuesday.

China's total retail sales of consumer goods, a major indicator of the country's consumption strength, climbed 7.2 percent year-on-year to reach 47.15 trillion yuan (\$6.56 trillion) in 2023, according to data from the National Bureau of Statistics.

Going forward, the country is targeting the stabilization and expansion of traditional consumption sectors that are closely related to people's daily lives, Sheng said, adding the key areas of focus include automobiles, appliances and home furnishings.

Big-ticket items such as automobiles have emerged as a crucial pillar supporting the country's domestic consumption, said Xu Hongcai, deputy director of the China Association of Policy Science's Economic Policy Committee.

Total car sales in China increased by 12 percent to top 30.09 million units in 2023. In particular, sales of new energy vehicles exceeded 9.49 million units, surging almost 38 percent from the previous year, according to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

Proactive measures such as issuing consumer vouchers and providing trade-in subsidies should be leveraged by localities to not only stimulate demand for new vehicles but also promote the adoption of greener and more energy-efficient models, Xu said.

Meanwhile, amid the country's ongoing efforts to encourage consumers to upgrade their household items and drive sales in relevant industries, the MOC, along with other departments concerned, introduced some measures on Thursday to strengthen the recycling system for discarded appliances and furniture.

In addition, new forms of consumption, characterized by green, healthy and smart choices, have flourished and become a key dynamo driving consumption growth, said Sheng, adding that dedicated efforts will be channeled toward bigger strides on this front.

E-commerce, a pivotal component of new consumption patterns, registered record online retail sales of 15.4 trillion yuan in 2023, securing its position as the global leader

for the 11th consecutive year, the MOC said.

While the new consumption sector continues to thrive, issues like regional disparities, inadequate infrastructure and lagging public services have come to the fore, said Zhu Keli, founding director of the China Institute of New Economy.

In addition, a mismatch between policy supply and actual development needs, and the need for optimization of the business environment are key areas that require attention, Zhu said, adding that more government support will be needed to address these challenges.

China will also set its sights on expanding service consumption as a key priority to optimize and upgrade its consumption structure, aiming to foster improved living standards and enhance people's overall well-being.

Miao Muyang, director-general of the department of industrial development in the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, said that as Spring Festival approaches, local governments across China are gearing up to distribute over 600 million yuan in consumer discounts to promote cultural and tourism consumption.

The discounts can be utilized for a wide range of experiences, including performances, scenic areas, local delicacies, hotels and homestays, Miao said.

A survey conducted by National Business Daily and HCR, a Beijing-based market research company, reveals that consumers are highly enthusiastic about traveling during the holiday period, with an average planned duration of 5.32 days. More than 50 percent of respondents estimate that their per capita expenditure will range from 2,001 yuan to 6,000 yuan.

## Xinjiang lab to boost aircraft checks

By ZHU WENQIAN in Beijing  
and MAO WEIHUA in Urumqi

A new aircraft metal testing laboratory in Urumqi, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region in Northwest China, has become the country's first such facility to use independently developed Chinese equipment, promising to make aircraft health checks in the region more convenient.

The lab, located in the Xinjiang base of State-owned China Southern Airlines, began operations recently, and is expected to cater to growing travel demand.

Equipped with domestically produced electron microscopes, the facility is considered a landmark achievement as Chinese-made high-precision testing instruments are used for the first time in China's civil aviation industry's aircraft metal testing process.

Before this lab was established, the metals used in the fuselage of local aircraft had to be tested at facilities in cities such as Beijing and Guangzhou, Guangdong province, thousands of kilometers away.

The entire process took several days, and planes in Xinjiang had to be parked on the tarmac until the results were released. Now, detailed inspection reports from the Urumqi lab can materialize within three hours to show whether or not the aircraft meet the requirements of airworthiness.

The Spring Festival travel rush that began on Jan 26 and will last until March 5 is expected to benefit from the new lab's opening as the facility will help improve the reliability and utilization rate of civil aircraft in Xinjiang, and provide more capacities to transport passengers, China Southern Airlines said.

The number of air passenger trips to be handled during the Spring Festival holiday is expected to exceed 80 million, a potential record and possibly marking almost a 10 percent surge from the comparable pre-pandemic level in 2019, and up a staggering 45 percent over the 2023 festival period level, according to projections of the Civil Aviation Administration of China.

"Next, the Xinjiang base of China Southern will continuously strengthen its technological innovation capabilities, improve safety management level and grab the business opportunities emerging from the China (Xinjiang) Pilot Free Trade Zone," said Zhang Yunbing, manager of the Xinjiang base of China Southern's engineering and technology branch.

"We will continue to promote the high-quality development of the civil aviation sector in Xinjiang with highly advanced technologies," Zhang said.

China Southern said it has utilized multiple advanced technologies to help monitor aircraft.

For instance, with artificial intelligence equipment, maintenance employees regularly conduct inspections. They use endoscopes to detect any issues with the fan blades and other internal structures.

"The central and western areas of China boast the largest number of high-altitude airports, and present rich opportunities to develop regional aviation," said Li Guijin, a professor at the Civil Aviation Management Institute of China in Beijing.

"Domestic carriers should connect more smaller cities to their hub airports to build a competitive route network. The sustainable growth of regional aviation is at the core of the Chinese airline industry's competitiveness."

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A consumer buys Chilean cherries at a supermarket in Chongqing. SUN KAIFANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Briefly

## New PV project connected to grid

Tarim Oilfield — operated by China National Petroleum Corp, the country's leading oil and gas producer — has successfully connected a 600,000-kilowatt photovoltaic power generation project to the grid in Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. Total installed solar power capacity of the oilfield has leapt to 1.3 million kW.

## PBOC adds liquidity via reverse repos

China's central bank conducted 339 billion yuan (\$47.69 billion) in 14-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 1.95 percent on Tuesday. The move aims to keep liquidity stable ahead of Spring Festival that falls on Saturday this year, the People's Bank of China said in a statement. A reverse repo is a process by which the central bank purchases securities from commercial banks through bidding, with an agreement to sell them back in the future.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

## Country's travel boom buoys global expectations

As the eight-day Spring Festival holiday draws closer, tourist destinations worldwide are keen to welcome Chinese holidaymakers, with high hopes for a tourism boom.

In a video message last week, Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavorn extended a warm welcome to Chinese tourists, as they had been the largest source of inbound tourism for the country. The prime minister expressed hope that Chinese visitors would have a delightful and safe experience in Thailand.

This came after China and Thailand signed a mutual visa exemption agreement, which will come into effect on March 1.

"As a Thai citizen, I'm so excited about the news," said Chanapan Kaewklachaiyawuth, vice-president of the Thai Chinese Tourism Alliance Association, adding that it will facilitate travel and be the ideal mechanism to boost economic gains.

Chanapan said the association expects between 200,000 and 250,000 Chinese tourists to visit Thailand during this year's Spring

Festival holiday, which runs from Saturday to Feb 17.

In 2024, the Southeast Asian country aims to attract 8 million tourists from China, more than double the figure from 2023 and constituting 75 percent of the pre-pandemic peak level recorded in 2019.

Singapore, which also signed a visa-free agreement with China last month, experienced a recovery in its tourism sector last year, with the Chinese mainland topping its tourist spending chart.

The city-state expects the sector to recover further this year, driven by improved global flight connectivity and capacity as well as implementation of the mutual 30-day visa-free travel with China.

Tourism bureaus across China are actively promoting local attractions and employing innovative strategies to attract visitors. Featuring unique local traditions such as distinctive and traditional dressing-up dances and delectable cuisines, these efforts aim to captivate tourists in the lead-up to the Spring Festival holiday.

The "ice city" of Harbin, capital of Northeast China's Heilongjiang province, took advantage of its winter landscape to promote ice and snow tourism, attracting more than 3 million visitors during the three-day New Year holiday and raking in a total tourism revenue of 5.91 billion yuan (\$832 million), both hitting record highs.

On Alibaba's travel platform Fliggy, bookings for domestic and overseas destinations for visits during the Spring Festival holiday have surged, with those for outbound travel increasing more than 15-fold compared with 2023.

"Customers are eager to explore overseas destinations, particularly after countries like Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore waived visa requirements for Chinese tourists. It's like a renaissance for both individual and group tours," said Tan Mingyuan, a tour guide with GZL International Travel Service.

"I have to work the entire holiday period," said Tan, who just returned from the Philippines and is leaving for Vietnam with a

20-member tour group.

Looking ahead, 2024 will be a big year for China's tourism industry, which will enter "a new prosperous cycle," according to the China Tourism Academy.

Chinese tourists are expected to make more than 6 billion domestic trips this year, up from nearly 4.9 billion in 2023, while the number of outbound trips by Chinese tourists is expected to reach 130 million, a big jump from more than 87 million last year, according to the academy.

The United Nations World Tourism Organization said that following a strong 2023, international tourism is well on track to return to pre-pandemic levels this year.

According to the first UNWTO World Tourism Barometer of the year, the unleashing of remaining pent-up demand, increased air connectivity, and a stronger recovery of Asian markets and destinations, are expected to underpin a full recovery of the sector by the end of 2024.

XINHUA

# BUSINESS

## Oil spill recovery vessel launched

By LIU KUN in Wuhan and ZHOU HUIYING

A specialized oil spill recovery vessel *Haixun 041*, built by Wuhan-based Wuchang Shipbuilding Industry Group Co Ltd, a subsidiary of China Shipbuilding Industry Co Ltd, was launched at its Shuangliu Shipbuilding Base in Wuhan, Hubei province last week.

This marked the largest oil spill recovery vessel with the largest design size and the strongest oil spill recovery capability in China's maritime system, according to the group.

With a length of 79 meters, a width of 15 meters, and a depth of 5.6 meters, the *Haixun 041* can achieve a maximum speed of 15 nautical miles (27.78 kilometers) per hour.

Its endurance mileage can reach 3,000 nautical miles and fresh water and food can be maintained for 20 days at sea.

The vessel is fully electric-powered and equipped with a set of built-in oil recovery devices on the left and right sides, capable of recovering 200 cubic meters of oil per hour.

Its cabin is equipped with an oil recovery tank, and the deck is equipped with an inflatable oil boom, a light oil boom and an oil dispersing agent spraying device.

The oil recovery system is highly integrated, convenient and fast, and



A view of *Haixun 041*, an oil spill recovery vessel launched in Wuhan, Hubei province, last week. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

can meet the emergency response requirements of oil spill containment, recovery, storage, transfer and elimination.

The vessel also has high level of informatization, which can realize the integration, display, storage, communication, transmission, output and printing of emergency auxiliary decision information via the monitoring and detection of oil spill status, collection of water area information, and expansion and integration of ship-shore information resources.

Equipped with an emergency command and dispatch system, and data interaction system, the vessel can achieve accurate positioning and rapid response through satellite, 4G, 5G and other communication means, and can become the on-site emergency command

center for organizing and coordinating the disposal of major oil spill accidents.

It can safely navigate and conduct operations in rough seas.

The construction of *Haixun 041* began on June 30 last year.

The group organized an experienced design and construction team, implementing a series of advanced construction techniques such as simulated platform loading, structured outfitting, and forward process movement to effectively enhance construction efficiency.

They took less than seven months to successfully complete critical tasks such as ship design, segmentation construction, platform assembly, equipment acceptance and itemized inspections.

According to the group, all 70

compartments of the vessel have completed pressure testing and will conduct comprehensive interior outfitting and mooring trials.

The vessel is expected to be put into service after five months of installation and testing, in June.

It will be primarily deployed in the Beidaihe sea area off Hebei province, serving as an integrated maritime emergency command platform with functions for oil spill recovery, emergency standby, and comprehensive command.

This vessel will provide strong support for accelerating the construction of a strong maritime country and protecting the marine ecological environment, the group said.

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## Nonfinancial ODI shines bright in '23

Chinese firms particularly active in high-value overseas M&A activity

By LIU YUKUN [liuyukun@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:liuyukun@chinadaily.com.cn)

**\$31.8 billion**

nonfinancial ODI in 2023 in economies involved in the Belt and Road Initiative

Chinese companies are seeking new opportunities for overseas growth amid global supply chain restructuring, with ramped-up investment and a noticeable increase in high-value merger and acquisition activity overseas, experts said on Tuesday.

Reflecting on last year's investment landscape, experts underscored the substantial growth in nonfinancial outward direct investment, with a focus on sectors such as technology, power and new energy vehicles.

The remarks came after a recent report by accounting firm Ernst & Young China noted that China's nonfinancial ODI in 2023 grew 11.4 percent to \$130.1 billion, among which investment in economies involved in the Belt and Road Initiative totaled \$31.8 billion, up 22.6 percent year-on-year.

The country's total ODI reached \$147.9 billion last year, edging up 0.9 percent year-on-year, the report said.

Notably, newly signed China overseas engineering, procurement and construction projects totaled \$264.5 billion, marking a five-year high, up 4.5 percent year-on-year. Completed turnover reached \$160.9 billion, indicating a 3.8 percent growth, with BRI economies contributing over 80 percent, surpassing the overall growth rate.

Zhou Mi, a senior researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said the increase in nonfinancial ODI has directly spurred the creation of numerous new job opportunities and boosted tax revenue, thus playing a pivotal role in stimulating economic growth in recipient countries.

"China's outward investment in manufacturing and trade sectors has witnessed remarkable expansion. Over the past year or two, investment in green power and electric vehicles has surged. Moreover, there has been rapid growth in outward investment in services, particularly in logistics services for e-commerce," Zhou said.

According to the EY report, technology, media and telecom (TMT), advanced manufacturing and mobility sectors dominated overseas M&As in terms of deal value.

The power and utilities sector was the only one to witness

growth in both M&A deal value and volume, said the report.

Across all sectors, Chinese companies reported a 20.3 percent year-on-year increase in overseas M&A deal value, reaching \$39.8 billion, said the EY report.

Despite a decrease in the number of deals to 457 — a drop of 16.3 percent year-on-year — the presence of large transactions of which values exceed \$500 million clearly rose, the EY report said. M&A activity in BRI economies surged 32.4 percent year-on-year, outpacing the overall growth rate.

Loletta Chow, global leader of EY China overseas investment network, said: "At present, Chinese enterprises have entered a new phase of global expansion, with China's technology and brands increasing their presence overseas and delving into fresh growth opportunities. Simultaneously, China's industrial transformation aligns with global trends such as digitalization, green economy and reshaping of the industrial value chain."

Zhou from CAITEC said that the ongoing restructuring of the global supply chain presents Chinese enterprises with opportunities to align their strengths with evolving market needs. Additionally, Chinese firms are demonstrating robust global competitiveness across various manufacturing sectors. Thus many countries are actively embracing participation by Chinese firms. Furthermore, the emergence of new industries has opened up numerous opportunities for enterprises venturing abroad.

However, he said there are challenges from global economic uncertainties, geopolitical tensions, and evolving international economic and trade regulations.

"This year, the global geopolitical landscape may face more challenges, but China remains committed to its high-level policy of opening-up. Fueled by the strong drive for development among enterprises, it is anticipated that 'going global' will continue to be a key growth strategy for many Chinese companies," Chow of EY said.

## Shanghai FTZ to speed up data flow, cooperation

By SHI JING in Shanghai [shijing@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:shijing@chinadaily.com.cn)

The China (Shanghai) Pilot Free Trade Zone will further focus on facilitating data flow and strengthening international data cooperation, to advance institutional opening-up by aligning with high-standard economic and trade rules, local officials said on Tuesday.

The comments came during a news conference on Tuesday after the municipal government released a new set of guidelines addressing the general plan released by the State Council, China's Cabinet, in early December to deepen the opening-up of the Shanghai FTZ.

Zhu Min, director of the Shanghai Municipal Commission of Commerce, said the formulation of important data catalogs and the establishment of a legal, safe and convenient cross-border data flow mechanism should be first attempted in the Pudong New Area, where the Shanghai FTZ is located, as the general plan has suggested.

The State Council's general plan has also proposed to build an international open-source promotion agency to elevate the scope and intensity of public data openness. Small and medium-sized enterpris-

es have been advised to strengthen exchanges with overseas institutions on the digital economy, Zhu said.

To better conduct the general plan, the Shanghai FTZ will set up a unified system for cross-border data exchange, featuring higher compatibility and interoperability.

Apart from supporting the traditional electronic data interchange and application programming interface, the unified system is expected to consider the application of cross-chain docking of blockchain, which will complete the exchange mechanism of the "single window system", or the trade facilitation that allows an international trader to submit information to a single agency, he said.

Meanwhile, the Shanghai FTZ will introduce management measures for the authorization and operation of public data used at the "single window system".

The measures will cover the processing, utilization and services for such data, Zhu added.

Yang Chao, deputy director of the administrative committee of the Shanghai FTZ, said major breakthroughs should be made at the Shanghai FTZ, with the introduction of catalogs for key data as one important mission.

To better serve this goal, Pudong will roll out a batch of new regulations and measures to nurture the local data market, he said.

Lingang Special Area, the part of the Shanghai FTZ included in 2019, is expected to roll out its first batch of general data lists and key data catalogs in March, said Zhao Yihui, deputy director of Lingang's administrative committee.

Lingang should take the lead in exploring and carrying out pilot projects for mutual recognition of data rules.

It will work closer with the economies signing the Digital Economic Partnership Agreement to deepen cooperation in digital trade. It will also seek to build a cross-border interoperability service platform and an authentication hub for digital identities, he said.

Efforts will be made in Lingang to produce standard contracts for data export. There will also be pilot projects on the protection, certification and international mutual recognition of personal information in Lingang, Zhao said.

By giving full play to local data industrial parks, key industrial clusters of data outsourcing, international cloud services and data compliance should be part of Lingang.

The area will also develop the out-bound offshore data industry, exploring new business models such as offshore data processing, analysis and storage, he added.

The general plan said that financial institutions can transfer data required for daily operations to overseas destinations, as guided by China's security rules for cross-border transmission and the related data classification regulations.

Cross-border financial information services, as well as cross-border portfolio consulting and management have become integral to China's outbound financial services as the country deepens its opening-up in the financial sector, said Shi Liya, director of the cross-border renminbi business department at the People's Bank of China Shanghai head office.

The PBOC's Shanghai head office will provide domestic investment management, valuation and accounting services for fund products established overseas. It will support overseas investors to increase their yuan-denominated asset allocation. Cross-border transfers of leased assets in renminbi settlements will also be supported, she said.

## Orchids boosted by steady power supply in Jiangsu

By ZHUANG QIANG [zhuangqiang@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:zhuangqiang@chinadaily.com.cn)

In the town of Wangguan, under the prefecture-level city of Suqian in Jiangsu province, Wang Li, a cultivator of butterfly orchids, is jubilant over her blooming business prospects, as she can easily net 50,000 yuan (\$6,944) each year on a parcel of land as small as 0.067 hectare.

The sought-after plants, native to subtropical rainforest regions and well received by flower enthusiasts in recent years, are dubbed the "Queen of Orchids".

Wang said her business is helped by Butterfly Orchid World, located in nearby Caiji town, which boasts some 120 species of butterfly orchids to produce over 16 million such plants annually.

Shi Ruhao, production manager of Butterfly Orchid World — a unit of Jiangsu Guofeng Agricultural Technology Co Ltd — said the cultivation base in Sucheng district is a beautiful site to behold, with colorful butterfly orchids entering a proverbial daily beauty contest. Shi said the booming business of

the 63.3-hectare plantation base, composed of flowering areas, planting and maintenance sections, and a tissue specimen zone, needs partners to thrive.

One such partnership involves nearby growers, who can allow his company to grow sales, while another is the local electric power supplier which helps ensure safe operation of the constant temperature greenhouses surrounding the plants.

Shi said his company lands over 40 million yuan in sales each year, and has nearly 100 growers as work partners.

Noting that the butterfly orchids are delicate and need tender care, he added that since May 2022 when they first set up the base, one of his work priorities has been to coordinate with Caiji Power Supply Sub-branch of Suqian Power Supply Co under State Grid Corp.

"Our growing business is supported by stable power supplies, as in our base, a water-source heat pump system uses electricity to propel the water as a heat source in winter and a cold source for summer air conditioning," he said.

Each winter, the pump extracts heat from the water source and sends it to greenhouses at the base, which now host a large number of butterfly orchids in its flower-inducing areas for catalytic cultivation and fast blooming through temperature and humidity regulation, in order to win more sales prior to the coming Spring Festival, he said.

To support safe operations, Caiji subbranch has added two shared power transformers totaling 1,030 kilovolt-amperes and one 400-kVA dedicated transformer to the base since its establishment, said Wang Lihui from the subbranch.

State Grid shoulders a dual task of safeguarding the country's energy security as well as its economic lifeline as a mighty power supplier.

"Currently, it is peak season for butterfly orchid sales. All our 44 water-source heat pump air openings in our catalytic zone are working, rendering the power supply extremely important," Shi said.

With the support of intelligent equipment and sufficient electric power, Butterfly Orchid World produces a sufficient number of plants,

and sells them to customers nationwide as well as to some other countries such as Vietnam, he said.

Shi noted that his company is helping local growers through a mode of "leading enterprise + base + farmers". This strategy provides partner growers with greenhouses, seedlings, growing technology, management and sales, and then shares profits with them.

Grower Wang Li said: "With improving livelihoods, people are willing to buy some flowers for Lunar New Year over the years, intending to seek more happiness. From Spring Festival to Lantern Festival, it is a sales peak for me."

Seeing the flowers turn into "money trees" and the flower fields become "treasure pots", Wang is fully confident regarding her future prospects.

In Sucheng, the cultivation of butterfly orchids has also led to booming sales of plant seedlings, cultural and creative products, exceeding 300,000 yuan daily, and providing nearly 400 jobs for the surrounding areas, said Guo Panpan from Suqian Power Supply Co of State Grid.



A cultivator of butterfly orchids (center) addresses queries from local State Grid employees in Suqian, Jiangsu province, on Jan 18. GUO PANPAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

With rapid development of smart agriculture in recent years in Caiji, Tianwa Village Smart Agriculture Industrial Park and Niujiao Village Happy Countryside Resort have also sprung up, helping nearby farmers become more prosperous.

Guo said that to help bolster rural revitalization, her unit has invested

12.41 million yuan to build 42 new public transformers, 23 pole-mounted switches and lay power cables extending for 1.8 kilometers in the region.

They also paid over 150 visits to production sites, and distributed 230 safe-electricity brochures to local farmers, she added.

## BUSINESSFOCUS



# Shanghai eyes first stop in inbound travel

Metropolis to further promote culture, tourism and deepen its attraction among foreign visitors, brands

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai  
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Shanghai's strong attraction as a tourist destination will definitely benefit inbound tourism in China and the Yangtze River Delta region in particular, as it is one of the most vibrant cities in the country, said experts.

Multiple measures are in the cards to build the municipality — a strategic link between domestic and international economies — as a first stop for inbound travelers to the nation, they said.

There is a need to better promote the city's image among youth on social media platforms across the world and make mobility and payments easier for international travelers, the experts said.

Several countries, including Thailand and Singapore, have implemented mutual visa waiver programs with China over the past months.

Since Dec 1, China has also started allowing visitors from Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Malaysia to enter the country without a visa.

More than 210,000 visits from such countries were recorded within a month, up 28.5 percent compared with the previous month, according to the National Immigration Administration.

Shanghai will strengthen efforts to promote culture and tourism in the new year, including deepening its appeal as a beacon for international brands to launch new products, and taking actions to improve the energy level of business districts, said Gong Zheng, mayor of Shanghai.

Several other key projects are also planned this year to further boost culture and tourism in Shanghai, Gong said while delivering a work report of the Shanghai municipal government at the annual plenary sessions of the city's legislative and political advisory bodies late last month.

These include accelerating the construction of the Lego park, which is scheduled to open in 2025; expanding the Pujiang cruise route, fully resuming the operation of international cruises; and enriching landmark commercial zones such as Nanjing Road, Lujiazui and Xujiahui, Gong said.

Data from the Shanghai Municipal Administration of Culture and Tourism showed that the city received nearly 9 million inbound tourists in 2019, earning \$8.38 billion in foreign exchange from tourism, which accounted for about 1.5 percent of the city's GDP, signifi-



Top: Giant posters of recent hit television series *Blossoms Shanghai* draw the attention of pedestrians on East Nanjing Road in Shanghai in January.

Above: Huanghe Road in downtown Shanghai has become a tourist attraction due to the TV series and has been seeing heavy traffic of late. PHOTOS BY GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY

This will not only enhance Shanghai's international influence, but also inject new impetus into the city's, and even the country's, reform and opening-up."

Wu Beiqi, general manager of the China unit at Hong Kong-based Far East Consortium International Ltd

cantly higher than that of other big cities across the country.

However, earnings from tourism in Thailand and Spain, which have a well-developed tourism industry, accounted for 11.9 percent and 7.1 percent of their GDPs, respectively.

The Shanghai authorities should organize bloggers and vloggers in the fields of culture, tourism, lifestyle and art from major source countries, to experience Shanghai for themselves, and tell the city's stories from their perspective, according to a business proposal at the sessions.

The proposal suggested that Shanghai should create a more friendly and convenient service environment in terms of its telecommunication network, consumption and payment, hotel choices, and public signs in more diverse languages to better cater to the needs of foreign tourists, especially independent travelers.

It also mentioned that some countries, including Japan, Thailand, and Russia, had taken various steps to attract tourists from China in the years before the COVID-19 pandemic. These countries had upgraded their mobile online payment systems, added broadcasts in Chinese

on public transport, and provided services in Chinese at shopping malls. Such measures worked to draw tourists from the country.

It also suggested that Shanghai and the country's tourism authorities as well as industry players should have a stronger presence in international summits and exhibitions, including events during the China-France Year of Culture and Tourism, the China International Travel Mart, and the China International Import Expo.

This, it said, would strengthen communication and cooperation with foreign travel agents and cultural tourism enterprises, and further boost their confidence in the prospects of tourism in Shanghai and China.

Local political advisor Shen Feng proposed that more tourism programs with traditional Chinese and Shanghai-style cultural elements should be provided within the Shanghai International Resort Area.

"Currently, Shanghai Disneyland, which received a record 13 million tourists last year, outshone others within the resort area. The authority can mull a diverse variety of cultural experiences for visitors," said Shen, who is also deputy

Party secretary of Shanghai North Bund (Group) Co Ltd.

"More events, including galleries, art and performance centers, and workshops for visitors to experience Shanghai's city culture with its own characteristics, can also be provided," Shen said.

"Other foreign brands of theme parks can also be introduced to the resort. Countries and regions involved in the Belt and Road Initiative can set up booths to exhibit their own cultures and cuisine, as well as for interactions," he said.

Wu Beiqi, general manager of the China unit at Hong Kong-based Far East Consortium International Ltd, suggested that the historical and cultural district of the Bund be declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site so that it matches Shanghai's identity as "a grand meeting hall for the world."

The application process itself could be an opportunity for Shanghai to attract more international attention and investment, and promote Shanghai's international exchanges and cooperation, she said.

"This will not only enhance Shanghai's international influence, but also inject new impetus into the city's, and even the country's, reform and opening-up," said Wu.

"Many cities and regions with a UNESCO World Heritage Site tag will attract travelers from home and abroad, increase the rate of inbound tourism, and bring considerable consumption income," she said.

The move can also further develop relevant enterprises in the cultural tourism, exhibition and creation space, Wu said.

Chen Lingyan, a lawmaker in Shanghai, suggested a continuous upgrade of the business district of West Nanjing Road downtown to better fulfill its role of an exhibition window for brands from all over the world, as this will contribute to stimulating consumption and tourism.

"One focus can be on the small streets surrounding the main commercial street in the area, including Julu Road, Fumin Road and Changle Road. There can be integral planning so that they can better complement and expand the functions of the main business area," said Chen, who is also manager of a business unit from the Shanghai branch of China Cinda Asset Management, a State-owned financial enterprise.

Another focus area could be to make tax refunds for tourists easier and expand the service to more shops and a greater variety of commodities, she added.

## Futuristic makeover plan to draw in more consumers to city

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai

Shanghai must put in place interactive, intelligent, and green consumption models as the city's efforts to build itself into an international consumer hub quickly gather pace, experts said.

The comments follow the hit television series *Blossoms Shanghai* by Hong Kong director Wong Kar-wai which has made audiences flock nostalgically to iconic commercial venues featured in the drama, including East Nanjing Road and Huanghe Road in downtown Shanghai, over the past month.

Even as traditional shopping districts such as these continue to attract visitors, Shanghai must incorporate technology into its shopping experiences and develop futuristic business models to provide novel consumption scenarios, while benchmarking itself against the world's leading consumption centers such as New York, Paris and Tokyo, they said.

"We encourage more new consumption models, such as smart, unmanned and green retail across different industries in Shanghai," said Zhang Yajun, a researcher at the Shanghai Institute of Development Strategy. "New retail formats, including unmanned stores, unmanned restaurants and unmanned shelves with artificial intelligence and 5G technologies are expected to be warmly welcomed by the market."

Zhang said some world-famous cities such as Tokyo lead in unmanned retail, and this consumption format reduces costs as well as improves convenience.

"Interactive technologies, such as virtual reality and augmented reality, can also be applied to create more immersive, personalized consumption experiences," she said.

In fact, some attempts at new consumption experiences have been made locally in recent years.

For example, certain cosmetics companies have provided over-the-counter diagnostics tests for skin and offered tailor-made skin care products to consumers, Zhang said.

Chen Jining, Party secretary of Shanghai, said during a meeting with senior executives of a Swiss luxury brand recently that being at the forefront of China's reform and opening-up and an international metropolis with deep links to the world, the municipality is accelerating its urban energy levels and core competitiveness.

"With the continuous optimization of China's consumption structure and the diversification of consumer demand, there are extensive opportunities for win-win cooperation between Shanghai and foreign-funded companies," said Chen.

"We welcome foreign-funded enterprises to promote more first stores, first products, and exhibition activities in Shanghai, lead the international consumption trend, and better integrate green and digital concepts with consumption scenarios and technology applications," he said.

Shanghai's special plan for commercial space layout (2022-35) was released in January 2023, and aims to provide a commercial system aligned with the development goals of a modern socialist international metropolis, as well as build an international consumption center characterized by

gracefulness, happiness and affordability.

The plan considers a multilayered map of commercial districts targeting different consumers.

Among them, the core Lujiazui area in eastern Shanghai is proposed to be built into a world-class landmark commercial area of high quality to gather together global consumer brands.

Hongqiao business district in western Shanghai will be another world-class commercial area in the city. It will play up the long-lasting and guiding effects of the China International Import Expo and continue to function as a commercial and trade circulation center that links the Yangtze River Delta region, radiates to the entire country and faces the world.

The plan also involves 29 city-level commercial centers targeting visitors from all over the country and 45 regional-level ones targeting mainly local residents.

Some experts pointed out that Shanghai needs to further improve its internationalization while it aims to create a consumption center.

"We welcome foreign-funded enterprises to promote more first stores, first products, and exhibition activities in Shanghai ..."

Chen Jining, Party secretary of Shanghai

Yan Xu, an expert in economics and finance with the Shanghai Municipal Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, cited West Nanjing Road, the most representative international business district in Shanghai, as an example.

The per capita consumption amount there is less than one-ninth of that on Fifth Avenue in New York, and the proportion of international tourists is less than one-seventh of that in Tokyo's Ginza, he said.

"If consumers buy products of international brands in Shanghai, usually they don't enjoy an advantage in price, timeliness, and their completeness," said Yan.

"Take the category of cosmetics as an example. There's still a lot to be streamlined in Customs entry, inspection, and technical review processes so that new products from around the globe can reach Chinese consumers faster," he said.

Shanghai has a profound cultural heritage, including *Shikumen* (lane house) culture, Bund culture, and cheongsam or *qipao* culture.

The city should create a clear, vivid and appealing overall image for cultural tourism, which will also promote the city's name card for shopping, said Zhao Lijia, vice-president of the Shanghai Federation of Industry and Commerce.

"While the city is doing an urban upgrade, new content can revive the old spaces to create Shanghai-style tourism complexes with the city's own cultural symbol," she said.



People flock to a Chinese New Year-themed market on East Nanjing Road in Shanghai in January. WANG GANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Washington's anxieties unwarranted, ultimately fueled by performer politics

In a recent interview with Fox News Digital, Republican representative Carlos Gimenez, a member of the United States House Select Committee on Strategic Competition between the United States and China, called China's artificial intelligence and quantum computing pursuits "a lethal combination," and warned the US must win the "race" for AI dominance.

There is nothing new in Gimenez's anxiety over China eroding US dominance on the cutting edge of new tech and his government being poorly prepared for outcompeting China. It is only additional proof of a growing push on Capitol Hill for "decoupling" from China on the technology front.

As Washington moves to plug "loopholes" it has identified in the de facto technological blockade against Beijing, people such as Gimenez are busy connecting the dots as a means to prove their anti-China credentials as they compete to claim the spotlight in the fiercely competitive China-bashing that masquerades as political acumen in Washington.

"We have to win the race for AI because of the application of AI in everything, including military hardware," Gimenez said.

The GOP lawmaker's fears seem to know no bounds. He finds his government's endeavors against China worryingly inadequate. He sees TikTok as a bridgehead of Chinese infiltration, which over time, especially when it is married with Chinese AI capabilities, will prove lethal to the US. He has no lack of a sympathetic audience.

Such fears are also voiced by others keen for some showtime posturing. FBI Director Christo-

pher Wray, for one. With TikTok's access to US users and their data, China may not only conduct brainwashing, but "control and compromise devices," he told a recent congressional hearing.

The potential risks are so severe and pervasive in Gimenez's eyes that his advice is that a watchful eye be kept on all US "educational institutions that have close ties to Chinese companies" and "Chinese nationals that may be working for the PRC". In his eyes, they should be treated "as basically an extension of the Chinese military".

This may sound far-fetched. But it doesn't to many in the US, where such alarmism is incessantly bombarding the US public. The US propaganda machine runs 24/7, as those in Washington compete to perform their version of "America the Brave" in the hope they'll prove to have that X factor of popular appeal.

The unfortunate consequence of all this showboating is that Washington is indeed headed toward de-linking the two countries in the critical realms of new tech. The Chinese government has pushed to accelerate basic scientific research and Chinese companies have significantly increased their investment in AI and quantum computing, but that is in the context of the US blocking China's access to advanced technologies in recent years.

What is needed is collective efforts and a coordinated response, rather than decoupling and the building of fences as the development of AI and its governance are linked to the fate of all humankind. The US side should create favorable conditions for strengthening international coordination and cooperation in the field of AI and other emerging technologies.

## Japan should uphold wisdom of treaty with China

China Coast Guard vessels had to warn off Japanese fishing boats and patrol boats that had illegally entered China's territorial waters around the Diaoyu Islands on Jan 27.

Japan has been repeatedly provoking China with such intrusions.

If unchecked, tensions over the Diaoyu Islands, over which China holds irrefutable sovereignty, could easily become a flashpoint for conflict. Yet, Japan has shown little interest in ratcheting down the tensions as it has developed a penchant for using the disputes to fan domestic right-wing sentiment and strengthen its alliance with the United States.

Washington has stated on a number of occasions that the Diaoyu Islands fall within the scope of the US-Japan alliance, which has emboldened Tokyo to chance its arm with the aim of putting Beijing on the backfoot.

Apart from the East China Sea disputes, Japan has also begun to interfere in the Taiwan question as its officials repeatedly claim that "a Taiwan emergency is a Japanese emergency".

Last month, Japan claimed that an eight-day computer-simulation military exercise did not target any specific area or country. Yet a Jan 4 report from the Japanese news agency Kyodo News, citing government sources, said China was presented as the enemy in the exercise.

Those who sow the wind will reap the whirlwind. Japan should recognize the common interests it has with its neighbor, and the close economic and people-to-people ties that have

been formed, far outweigh the differences.

Despite all the spats between the two countries, China has always tried to keep Sino-Japanese relations on the right track. This intention was clearly shown at the meeting between the leaders of the two countries in November in San Francisco.

During that meeting, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, said his government had the desire to mend bilateral ties with China. If that is the case, Tokyo should do more to improve bilateral ties, rather than setting more obstacles in the way.

Last year marked the 45th anniversary of the conclusion of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between China and Japan. Relations have come a long way since that milestone moment, bringing tangible benefits to the two peoples and contributing to the prosperity of the two countries and the stability of the region and beyond. The principles and direction for bilateral interaction codified in the treaty are as relevant as ever at this point in time, when relations between the two sides are at a critical crossroad.

Tokyo should reset Japan's engagement and interaction with China on the basis of peace and friendship, recognizing that the two countries share common interests and common opportunities. It should work with Beijing to advance regional integration and reinforce the regional industry and supply chain system based on the two sides' comparative strengths so as to make the chains more stable and smooth for the benefit of both countries and the region as a whole.

## Shame on India for its coercion of Sri Lanka

Some Indian media outlets seemed irrefutable when they reported "India beats China in diplomatic duel" earlier this week, referring to an Indian Navy submarine visiting Colombo, capital of Sri Lanka, on the weekend, shortly after the island country suspended its reception of Chinese research ships under New Delhi's pressure.

Their crowing exposes how New Delhi is setting up obstacles to obstruct the development of India-China relations while trying to pass the buck for the souring relations to Beijing.

To begin with, New Delhi has been smearing China's marine research ships that belong to the State Oceanic Administration of China as "spy ships" of the People's Liberation Army Navy. Deep sea research is a cradle for new findings and technologies. Many countries do it by themselves or under multilateral cooperation frameworks. As long as China follows relevant international laws and codes, India has no right to interfere in it, let alone by coercing small island countries to do it in its stead.

That marine research ships of different countries stop for fueling and supplies in foreign ports is a normal practice. Not to mention the Chinese marine research ships' mission can also be of high value to the engineering and biological security of the ongoing Colombo Port City construction project, which is being carried out and funded by

Chinese companies despite the project being ceaselessly vilified and hindered by New Delhi since it started 10 years ago.

Under India's pressure, Colombo unilaterally suspended the hundreds of billions of dollars' project in 2015, citing the project's potential impact on the marine environment. After Sri Lanka realized how beneficial the project, which is tantamount to building the country a new city on the sea, would be and found no other country had the capability to complete it, it came back to China.

If India really thinks it can replace China in such projects, it should have helped Sri Lanka to complete the Colombo Port City project in 2015 soon after it pressured the country to dump China. The project will be completed in 20 to 25 years with even China's sizable input and world-class civil engineering efficiency.

To force Colombo to shut the door on Chinese research ships while China is still helping the country build its largest construction project in history is by no means a diplomatic success for India, but a shame. It only serves to show New Delhi's narrow-mindedness and lack of vision in handling relations with Beijing and its neighbors.

Those in New Delhi who view the Indian Ocean as India's sphere of influence should be reminded that a public square outside of one's door is not private property even if it bears one's name.

Lu Jun



## Opinion Line

## Economic growth in eurozone still weak and yet to bottom out

The International Monetary Fund recently updated its forecast for world economic growth for 2024, raising it to 3.1 percent, 0.2 percentage points higher than the forecast in October last year, a forecast that some analysts pointed out reflects its upward revisions of economic growth expectations for China, the United States and some emerging markets and developing countries.

However, the IMF forecasts the economy in the eurozone will grow by 0.9 percent in 2024, 0.3 percentage points lower than its previous forecast, also a significant decline among the major advanced economies. The weak economic growth in the eurozone reflects the continuing impact of weak consumer sentiment, high energy prices, and weak manufacturing and business investment at a time of high interest rates.

The data recently released by Eurostat also confirmed the near-stagnation of economic growth in the eurozone. On a seasonally adjusted basis, the eurozone economy grew 0.1 percent year-on-year in the fourth quarter of last year, but

did not grow from the previous quarter. Some institutions believe this reflects the eurozone economy has barely walked out of recession, but will be difficult to grow in the first half of this year.

At present, high interest rates are increasingly restraining the eurozone economy, continuing to push up the borrowing and production costs of enterprises, which has forced enterprises to reduce investment and consumers to curtail consumption. A recent survey on bank lending in the eurozone published by the European Central Bank also showed that demand for loans in the eurozone weakened further in the fourth quarter of last year, with companies' demand for loans and household demand for real estate and consumption loans both falling. At the same time, economic structural imbalances, insufficient innovation capacity and slow labor market reforms have also become important constraints on economic recovery in the eurozone.

From an external perspective, the pressures on the eurozone economy continue to build as geopolitical

risks increase, which may reignite inflation. The ongoing instability in the Red Sea, in particular, is adding uncertainty risks to Europe's economic prospects, energy supplies and prices. If tensions in the region continue, the eurozone is expected to face higher energy costs, freight delays and the return of high inflation.

There have been renewed calls for interest rate cuts in the eurozone, but an ECB monetary policy meeting held in late January decided to keep three key interest rates unchanged, and ECB President Christine Lagarde also said it was "too early to talk about a rate cut".

US Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell released the message on Jan 31 that the Fed will not cut interest rates soon. Considering that the ECB's decision-making rhythm is usually closely related to or even follows the pace of the Fed, although the European market is eager to see rate cuts, the ECB may not have much choice. The stranglehold on the eurozone's economic growth by high interest rates will continue.

— ECONOMIC DAILY

## Cases clearly define liability of dog-owners

The supreme court has recently observed that the dog-owners should bear full responsibility if their dogs attack someone.

There are relevant laws and regulations regarding dogs hurting people, stipulating that the dog-owners should bear criminal and administrative legal responsibilities if they are found responsible for not controlling their pets.

Yet the Civil Code stipulates that if it can be proved that there was some intentional fault or negli-

gence on the part of the victims, the dog-owners can be exempted from any responsibility or their culpability reduced. That clause has made it difficult for victims in some cases to protect their rights and interests.

By releasing a series of typical cases, the supreme court has addressed such questions. The key is the reaffirmation of "no-fault liability", under which owners of aggressive dogs must bear full responsibility for any harm done

regardless of whether or not the victims were at fault.

This is because aggressive dogs pose a higher risk to society, and those raising such dogs should bear greater responsibility. Further, raising large dogs in downtown areas is against the rules.

The releasing of the cases is conducive to clarifying the legal responsibility of relevant parties and raising the dog-owners' awareness of their responsibilities.

— BEIJING NEWS

## What They Say

## Sound relations built on 70 years of friendship

Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs Espen Barth Eide, who paid an official visit to China from Monday to Wednesday, is the first foreign minister from Europe to visit China this year, highlighting the importance that Norway attaches to its relations with China.

Norway was one of the first Western countries to establish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China, and this year marks the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

After 70 years of development, China-Norway relations have become more mature and resilient, maintaining strong endogenous momentum. China has expressed its appreciation that the Norwegian government views China's development objectively and rationally, adheres to the one-China principle, and holds true to its friendship with China.

As Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi pointed out during a meeting with his Norwegian counter-

part in Beijing on Monday, although China and Norway are far apart, with different national conditions and systems, they both seek to uphold global stability, peace and prosperity.

By adhering to candid communication, promoting cooperation in a pragmatic manner, and handling differences in a prudent manner they can inject more certainty, stability and positive energy into the world.

So it was good to hear the top Norwegian diplomat say that the Norwegian government advocates mutual respect and constructive dialogue as the means to promote the development of bilateral relations and jointly build an inclusive, peaceful and prosperous world.

The Norwegian side's recognition of China's transformation of its development model, and the broad cooperation space Eide highlighted as the two countries pursue their green transition indicate the Scandinavian country's willingness to work with China to tap into their economic complementarity and

jointly address the challenge of climate change.

The 70th anniversary of the founding of bilateral diplomatic relations provides the two sides with a good opportunity to intensify high-level exchanges, deepen practical cooperation in various fields, explore the establishment of a bilateral green transformation cooperation dialogue, and promote personnel exchanges. They have every reason to jointly advocate multilateralism and free trade, and strengthen collaboration on common challenges such as protecting biodiversity.

In their meeting, Wang and Eide also agreed on the need for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza, allowing for a significant increase in humanitarian aid, and the need for all parties to work together to prevent the conflict from spilling over, and called for the immediate release of all hostages. That sent a clear message to the world that they both stand on the side of justice, fairness and peace.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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## COMMENT

Jia Yuanhua and Ma Jihui

Reverse *chunyun* a paradigm shift in tour pattern

The Spring Festival travel rush, known as *chunyun* in Chinese, reflects a broader social phenomenon and is a unique transportation challenge that China faces. Characterized by the heavy, uni-directional flow of urban residents returning to their hometowns before Spring Festival for the family reunion on the eve of the Lunar New Year, *chunyun* creates lots of challenges for the transportation networks including the railways and airlines.

These challenges have long been considered insurmountable. But recent years have seen a quiet shift in the traditional way of celebrating Spring Festival, especially among young professionals working in major cities, who have been using "reverse *chunyun*" to avoid the one-way travel rush.

Faced with the difficulty in obtaining tickets for travel back home during *chunyun*, these young professionals are no longer fixated on spending time and money on visiting their hometowns. Instead, they take advantage of the relatively easy avail-

There is also a strong demand for intercity high-speed rail travel among major urban clusters, primarily driven by those visiting their hometowns and traveling to nearby places on vacation.

ability of tickets on trains and flights bound for major cities. They capitalize on the discounts offered on major city-bound flights and trains to bring their parents to the cities from their hometowns to celebrate the Lunar New Year with them, or go on vacation with family and friends as part of group tours.

According to the Guangdong Railway Group, during the 2024 Spring Festival travel rush, Guangzhou and Shenzhen are not only popular departure points but also popular destinations, with reverse travel during the Spring Festival travel rush gradually becoming a new trend. On Jan 30, the first five days of the Spring Festival travel rush,

the number of arriving passengers at major railway stations in Guangdong reached 4.38 million, an increase of over 80 percent compared to the previous year.

Of late, the Guangzhou Railway Group has been offering multiple discounts on long-distance train tickets for reverse *chunyun*, further boosting the trend. This shift underscores a change in the traditional migration pattern and traditional customs of the Chinese people.

The emergence of reverse *chunyun* can be attributed to the escalating marginal social costs associated with the traditional *chunyun* model. Additionally, the development of the internet and proliferation of smart transport apps have made social interactions easier and increased people's travel choices. As society progresses, changes in values and lifestyles are bound to happen, influencing the way in which we celebrate Spring Festival. To be sure, reverse *chunyun* yields significant socio-economic benefits.

First, thanks to reverse *chunyun*, many major cities don't look deserted during the Spring Festival holiday, ensuring the normal supply of labor, goods and services.

Second, the alternative modes of family reunion, such as video calls, have contributed to the changes in the vacation pattern.

Third, people's urge to travel abroad during holidays is gradually changing the traditional way people used to attend the family reunion on the eve of the Lunar New Year, which in turn has not only changed the demands associated with travel but also boosted the tourism industry.

And fourth, reverse *chunyun* has eased the pressure on transport networks during Spring Festival.

The changing phenomenon reflects societal progress. The gradual change in the way people spend their holidays and celebrate Spring Festival is conducive to not only optimizing the allocation of social resources but also social development, and therefore it should be encouraged.

The Spring Festival travel rush is both a challenge and an opportunity. People's travel demand remains strong, both for family visits and tourism, with the period being marked by cross-border, inter-provincial, intercity and urban-rural travel.

In terms of passenger distribution, driven by the popularity of ice and snow tourism in Northeast China, cities such as Harbin of Heilongjiang province experienced a significant increase in Spring Festival passenger traffic compared with the previous year. Some agencies' data analyses show the top 10 destinations for Spring Festival air travel are Chongqing, Harbin, Guiyang, Beijing, Chengdu, Kunming, Xi'an, Guangzhou, Changsha, and Shanghai. Harbin climbed from the 16th to the second place on the popularity list, becoming a new Spring Festival tourism hotspot. Search for high-speed rail and flight tickets from major cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen to Harbin, too, increased significantly compared with the previous year.

There is also a strong demand for intercity high-speed rail travel among major urban clusters, primarily driven by those visiting their hometowns and traveling to nearby places on vacation. Hence, there is need to develop intelligent transport services, and open new high-speed flight and train routes, and add more long-distance buses to meet the growing diversified travel demand.

The government, on its part, should further integrate transportation network resources, strengthen the coordinated scheduling and command of various transport modes, enhance seamless transfer mechanisms, improve the interconnectedness of Spring Festival travel services, create an efficient travel service supply chain, and take measures to ensure the high-quality development of Spring Festival travel services.

By effectively employing policy guidance and market regulations, optimizing transportation organization plans and market pricing mechanisms for reverse *chunyun*, and providing appropriate subsidies to transportation companies for opening new passenger routes during reverse *chunyun*, especially connecting flights and high-speed rail services, the government can help boost both socioeconomic benefits and transport companies' profits.

It is thus imperative that government departments and transportation companies continue to closely monitor the Spring Festival travel rush, including capacity allocation, emergency safety measures, service quality and fare levels, by collecting supply and demand data on reverse *chunyun* passengers, summarizing experiences and analyzing the emerging patterns, in order to provide smart, safe and smooth experience for passengers during Spring Festival.

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SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

Lei Xiaolu

## Manila violates DOC on Ren'ai Reef

The Philippines has been creating trouble on Ren'ai Jiao in the South China Sea. On Feb 2, the China Coast Guard monitored and tracked the Philippine civilian vessel that delivered supplies to a military vessel illegally "grounded" at China's Ren'ai Jiao, or Ren'ai Reef. And on Monday the CCG legally drove away a Philippine Coast Guard vessel which intruded into the waters.

On Dec 29, the spokesperson for the Armed Forces of the Philippines, Medel Aguilar, said the Philippine government is considering building a permanent civilian structure — a lighthouse or a marine science research center — on Ren'ai Jiao in the South China Sea, heightening tensions in the South China Sea. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning responded on the same day, asserting that Ren'ai Jiao "is part of China's Nansha Qundao", and China has "indisputable sovereignty over Nansha Qundao (Nansha Islands), including Ren'ai Jiao, and their adjacent waters".

Also, China has consistently held that the 2016 Arbitral Tribunal award is null and void, and never accepted the claim that Ren'ai Jiao is part of the Philippines' exclusive economic zone or continental shelf.

We have to trace the origin of the dispute over Ren'ai Jiao to determine whether the real dispute is about territorial sovereignty. In 1999, when the Philippines intentionally grounded BRP *Sierra Madre* on Ren'ai Jiao, every state took this as "a unilateral action to assert sovereignty over the Spratlys". This was confirmed on Aug 7, 2023, by then Philippine Foreign Affairs spokesperson Teresita Daza. She said the Philippines "decided to deploy a permanent station on Ayungin Shoal (the Philippines' name for Ren'ai

Jiao) in 1999", and maintain it as "a permanent station".

Besides, according to media reports, Philippine Coast Guard spokesman Jay Tarriela said *Sierra Madre* is "the symbol of Philippine sovereignty in the area".

It is thus clear that the Philippines intended to occupy Ren'ai Jiao and claim it as part of its territory in 1999, for which it intentionally grounded *Sierra Madre* on the reef. It used the illegal "grounding" to establish its permanent presence on the reef, and back its claim by building either a permanent military station or civilian infrastructure there.

When China demanded that the grounded ship be removed, then Philippine "president (Joseph) Estrada promised to tow it away as soon as it could be safely floated off the reef". When China and members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations negotiated on the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) from 1997 and eventually signed it in 2002, Ren'ai Jiao was not inhabited because *Sierra Madre* was a grounded ship (no matter intentionally or unintentionally) and Manila had promised to tow it away.

Importantly, Paragraph 5 of the DOC uses the term "inhabit"/"uninhabited" instead of "occupy"/"unoccupied". The wording reveals the understanding (and acceptance) of the 11 parties that Ren'ai Jiao was an inhabited feature in the South China Sea, to maintain the uninhabited status of the feature and prohibit any activities that would turn the reef into a permanent maritime base.

Para 5 represents the fundamental commitment of the 11 parties to the DOC that vowed to observe and respect the stance. Over the past more than 20 years, China and the ASEAN members have together,

and in good faith, implemented Para 5, which has played a key role in maintaining peace and stability in the region. In fact, Para 5 is the cornerstone of the regional rules for maintaining peace and stability.

But in August last year, the Philippines announced a change of plan and declared that it intends to build a permanent military base or civilian infrastructure on Ren'ai Jiao. Manila's decision is an attempt to turn Ren'ai Jiao into an inhabited feature, which is a clear breach of the commitments it has made in the DOC. This will complicate issues and escalate tensions.

For some time now, China and ASEAN members have been holding talks on the Code of Conduct for the South China Sea on the basis of effective and full implementation of the DOC. And by violating the DOC, the Philippines will pollute the good environment of the COC consultation and thus undermine the joint efforts of ASEAN and China to maintain peace and stability in the region.

Manila's decision to build civilian infrastructure is an attempt to turn Ren'ai Jiao into an inhabited reef. This will complicate issues and escalate disputes. Over the past more than 20 years, the ASEAN members and China have managed disputes through self-restraint, consultations and cooperation.

At the regional level, China and the ASEAN members have agreed on the DOC. And at the bilateral level, China and the Philippines have adhered to good practices in the past. For example, the Bilateral Consultative Mechanism, the joint working group on many cooperation issues including oil and gas exploration and exploitation, and fishing. China and the Philippines have also had a "gentlemen's agreement" on managing disputes at sea. These joint



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

efforts between the two sides stopped after Manila's provocative activities in 2023.

Therefore, the only possible way out of this problem is to not play tricks and, instead, resolve the sovereignty and maritime disputes in good faith, and maintain peace and stability in the region. This "dual-track approach" is also what China and the ASEAN members agreed on.

As Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi has

said, China remains committed to resolving differences through dialogue and consultation so as to maintain maritime stability, noting that this is an effective way for the neighbors to get along with each other and improve Beijing-Manila relations.

The author is a professor of law at Wuhan University. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## GLOBAL VIEWS



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

ZINE BARKA

## Complementarities and commonalities

Partnership with China secures the capital and technology that are essential for the development of African countries

North-South cooperation has been extensively documented in the socioeconomic literature in which developed countries provide aid and multifaceted assistance to developing countries. However, the concept of South-South cooperation is relatively new.

The concept of South-South cooperation was established in 1974 by the United Nations General Assembly to encourage developing countries to work together.

The countries of the Global South have similar economic conditions and share the common goal of policies based on respect for national sovereignty and free from any conditionalities. Practically, developing countries will share their development objectives through knowledge, skills and technical know-how exchanges. The common ground is their determination to engage in development without bending under pressure from Western countries or international financial institutions. However, two main ingredients are lacking in the development process of developing countries: limited capital resources and technology.

South-South cooperation is a manifestation of solidarity among peoples and countries of the Global South guided by the principles of respect for national sovereignty, national ownership and independence, equality, non-conditionality, non-interference in domestic affairs and mutual benefit. China-Africa cooperation has set an excellent example for developing countries to carry out South-South cooperation.

China began to engage with Africa in the spirit of friendship and solidarity. In addition, China's discourse on development aid and commitment to non-interference found particular resonance with African countries as they emerged from colonization.

As for trade between China and Africa, the data indicates that it reached \$140.88 billion in the first six months of 2023, up

3.1 percent from the same period in 2022.

It should also be noted that China is outclassing Western powers in infrastructure projects in Africa. Since the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, China has made considerable investments in many countries in various sectors. Thanks to investment in infrastructure and the accelerated progress in establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area, connectivity has been boosting trade and promoting economic development in Africa.

In 2022, Chinese foreign direct investment in Africa totaled \$3.4 billion. This volume of direct investment fully demonstrates the strength of economic and trade cooperation between China and Africa and the confidence of Chinese enterprises in the African market.

Beijing is now the fourth-largest source of foreign direct investment in Africa; more than 3,000 Chinese companies are already on the continent. Private companies now account for 70 percent of Chinese companies investing in Africa. The sectors in which these companies invest have expanded beyond natural resources, construction and mining to include manufacturing, technology, agriculture, real estate, finance and e-commerce, where China's investment in Africa promotes sustainable development and modernization.

China-Algeria cooperation is an example of successful cooperation between China and Africa, injecting vitality into South-South cooperation.

During his visit in July 2023, the Algerian president signed with his Chinese counterpart 19 agreements and memoranda in various sectors of activities for a Chinese investment volume of \$36 billion.

Among significant Chinese investments in Algeria is the exploitation of the Gara Djebilet mine, which aims to extract two million metric tons of iron ore annually by 2026. The annual

extraction capacity is expected to increase to 50 million tons by 2040. This will give play to Algeria's resource advantages and enrich China's import channel.

Another major project being carried out within the Belt and Road Initiative framework is that of an expansive 6,000 kilometers of railway lines, which will facilitate the exploitation of mines, promote trade, and create economic vitality in Algeria.

China and Algeria have been linked by a comprehensive strategic partnership since 2004. Since then, China has gradually become one of Algeria's main trade partners. In 2019, China became Algeria's number one trade financing country. Trade between China and Algeria increased from \$1 billion in 2003 to over \$7 billion in 2022. The potential for trade will be even more remarkable when all aspects of the comprehensive strategic partnership are set in motion in the coming years. Such fruitful cooperation is only a microcosm of China-Algeria and China-Africa cooperation.

In conclusion, it can be said that the role and place of Africa-China cooperation is bound to develop in the future as the need to stimulate economic and social development in Africa is great. Capital and technology lacking in African countries are now being secured step by step through their partnership with China. And China, as a country of the Global South, sensitive to the concerns of African countries, is called upon to assume a more proper role, thanks to these diverse potentialities, to enable African countries to initiate a development policy far from the external constraints that they were once subjected to by colonizing countries.

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YANG BAORONG

## System reset

By focusing on complementary cooperation and shared development, countries of the Global South can spur better global governance

Since the start of this century, the economies of developed countries have registered relatively slow growth, while some developing countries have experienced rapid economic growth. This high-speed economic growth in countries of the Global South has created new opportunities for more extensive complementary cooperation among developing countries and is becoming a new growth engine for the global economy.

Driven by the wave of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the Global South countries are focusing on complementary cooperation and shared development, actively embracing technological innovation and development opportunities, and aiming to create a more equitable and reasonable international cooperation ecosystem. This approach will help steer international relations and global governance in a more just, reasonable and healthy direction.

However, there are still significant disparities in development between the Global North and the Global South. The future development of the Global South faces several challenges.

First, sustainable development is the key to resolving current global issues. Historical issues such as national border disputes and racial discrimination, however, can create conflicts among the Global South countries, distracting attention from sustainable development issues.

Therefore, the Global South countries need to further consolidate a consensus on promoting development and avoid being sidetracked by sudden hot-spot issues. Additionally, in pursuing the attainment of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, there should be increased support for the institutional and cooperative development of the Global South countries.

Second, there is a need to guard against some developed countries to divide the Global South through their so-called value-based tricks and direction misguidance. A current hype focuses on the "North-South differences" or the so-called impact of the rising South on the global order and "new colonialism". The purpose is to deliberately construct barriers against globalization, thereby interrupting supply and industry chains and maintaining the existing techno-

logical hegemony and developmental disparities. For instance, in recent years, with the support of the United States, India has been seeking to shape its image as a leader of the Global South in regional or multilateral cooperation mechanisms, bringing new challenges to South-South solidarity.

Third, a common mistake in international relations is the comparison of different countries' social phenomena without considering the differences in the historical starting point and development levels in the modernization processes between developed and developing countries. Although these comparisons lack a common basis and are thus irrational, they are often used by some hegemonic countries as a tool to criticize developing countries. For example, some developed countries, while neglecting the resource and technology needs of the developing countries in their development process, criticize their governments for inaction and simultaneously prohibit or restrict the export of technology that could aid in green development.

The Global South needs to promote more institutional innovations that facilitate differentiated development. This involves at least three aspects.

First, in the past, the Global South countries lacked necessary mechanisms and capabilities. On the one hand, although the Global South countries have built many platforms and mechanisms for cooperative development, their participation in global development and governance is still fragmented, compared to the current international cooperation mechanisms dominated by developed countries. An example is the South-South debt financing support mechanism.

On the other hand, for a long time, the Western countries, particularly the US, have held "double standards" on international affairs and development issues. This not only serves to maintain their vested interests but also reflects the developed countries' lack of proper understanding of the different development needs of the less developed Global South countries. To address this, it is necessary to strengthen international cooperation that objectively reflects the development demands of the Global South

and integrates them in the relevant platforms and mechanisms so they can participate in global governance.

Second, there is a need to pay close attention to the misalignment between the existing international cooperation mechanisms and the development needs of the Global South countries, such as industrial development priorities and aid methods that are ill-suited for the development needs of these countries. It is noteworthy that when the Global South has relatively abundant development elements such as capital accumulation, large-scale industrial clusters, less commercially developed resources and large populations, it is possible to establish new standards and systems for cooperation among the Southern countries based on these elements. In view of this, the Global South should focus on enriching various development resources and enhancing their systematic participation in global affairs.

Third, under the new conditions of technological development, efforts should be made to create cooperative mechanisms conducive to fair and reasonable international political and economic development. Whether it is North-South cooperation or South-South cooperation, traditional cooperation mechanisms can no longer satisfy the development needs of countries under the rapidly changing conditions of technological development. Globalized production and distribution, accelerated circulation of resources and information, and the new technological revolution are bringing profound changes to global development that will impact the development of international relations in unprecedented ways. To address these issues, strengthen South-South cooperation, and shape North-South relations in new direction, more institutional designs and a complete overhaul of concepts are needed.

The author is a researcher at the Institute of West-Asian and African Studies and the China-Africa Institute at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. 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.



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

## Z WEEKLY

All about Gen Z

## Z WEEKLY

## Rediscovering the magic of Lunar New Year

Growing up in Suzhou, I was surrounded by local Chinese New Year traditions. However, I took them for granted, never really intending to delve deeper into their significance.

While filming for the China Daily program *Strait Forward* recently, I had the pleasure of exploring these traditions with my friend Chen Yizhen from Taiwan. These traditions were mostly new to her, but it seemed that I was experiencing them for the first time too, gaining a profound understanding of Spring Festival.

One highlight was Suzhou's Taohuawu Woodcut New Year Prints, a national intangible cultural heritage. Although I grew up amid these vibrant and warm paintings, sporting their typical round and plump figures, I never knew their history. Together, Chen and I visited a workshop on Pingjiang Road, a historic and iconic street in the city, where a local artist shared the history of the art form and the stories of artists who have passed down this heritage since the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

Our excitement peaked when we had the chance to try painting one ourselves. Chen mentioned they also have Chinese New Year paintings in Taiwan, but they're mostly machine-printed. For me, despite having seen a lot of these prints, trying my hand at one was also a first. As I carefully dealt with the intricate artistry, I couldn't help but feel that only by experiencing these ancient skills firsthand can one truly sense the strong Lunar New Year atmosphere and appreciate the holiday's beautiful significance.

Participating in making Suzhou pastries was equally delightful. At a local restaurant, Chen and I learned to create Suzhou-style sweet square rice cakes. For me, it was about relishing the nostalgic flavor of my childhood and gaining a renewed impression of how my favorite snack was made. For Chen, it was a fascinating cultural discovery: there are similar snacks in Taiwan, and her favorite not only looks just like the Suzhou rice cakes but is chewy too!

Looking at Suzhou's Chinese New Year traditions through Chen's eyes provided a brand new perspective, allowing me to understand and appreciate them more.

Suzhou boasts numerous intangible cultural heritage projects. I hope that more young people from different parts of China will come to my hometown, breathe new life into our traditional culture, and showcase its allure to the world.

Written by Wang Linghan, a 20-year-old student at Nanjing Normal University.



Wang Linghan is painting a Taohuawu Woodcut New Year Print at a local workshop in Suzhou, Jiangsu province. DONG MING / FOR CHINA DAILY

## A cross-Strait tale of heritage and flavor

Through art and cuisine, youth from the Chinese mainland and Taiwan on *Strait Forward* celebrate shared traditions, **Gui Qian** reports.



Celebrating the spirit of the upcoming Spring Festival, China Daily's latest *Strait Forward* episode features two young women from the Chinese mainland and Taiwan. Chen Yizhen, 30, a Taiwan student at Beijing's Tsinghua University, and Wang Linghan, 20, a student from Nanjing Normal University in Jiangsu province, met in the Shushan village in Suzhou, East China's Jiangsu province, to discuss life and traditions on each side of the Taiwan Strait.

In the episode, which aired on Feb 5, the two also experienced various cultural traditions of Suzhou, including visiting a Taohuawu Woodcut New Year Prints workshop, searching for the "colors" of the new year.

One of the workshop's artists demonstrated the intricate process of crafting prints by hand. For example, creating an image like the Chinese character *fu*, which means good fortune, involves seven wooden plates — one for the outline and six for different colors.

Mastering the outline plate demands precise skills. The artist meticulously carved each line with a knife, aiming to capture the agility and richness of a delicate brush painting.

The two guests then tried their hand at the craft, placing thin rice paper over inked wooden plates for printing.

Despite its seemingly simple nature, this process proved challenging — one slight mistake could tear the delicate paper. "It looked so easy when the artist did it, but it requires professional skills," Wang said.

According to the artist, completing one piece takes seven to eight months. Due to the time and effort involved, handmade Chinese New Year woodcut prints gradually faded with the wider use of printing machines. However, they are making a comeback as people once again seek unique handmade artisanship.

"When people start to display Chinese New Year paintings on their doors, windows, and walls, it signals the arrival of the new year. But we've seen an increase in mass-produced prints. Although their colors are vibrant, they always seem to me to lack a certain soul," Chen said. "In a world where everything is about speed and efficiency, it's heartening to see artisans spending months carving wooden plates and painting layer by layer to accurately present the colors of the spiritual home of the Chinese people."

Chen also shared her experience working with other cultural heritage projects during her internship last year at the Culture and Tourism Bureau in Zhangzhou, East China's

Fujian province. She discovered many connections between the Chinese mainland and Taiwan's cultural heritage projects. For example, Taiwan's glove puppetry is very similar to Fujian's puppetry.

"Many of Taiwan's intangible cultural heritage projects were originally passed down from Fujian and then evolved over time. This made me feel that the Chinese mainland and Taiwan share the same roots and culture," Chen said.

When she shared videos of herself crafting intangible cultural heritage artworks with her friends in Taiwan, they were all very curious and said they wanted to visit the Chinese mainland.

After leaving the workshop, Chen and Wang went on to taste the delicious Suzhou-style pastries.

"As a Suzhou local, the thing I miss the most during Spring Festival is taking a bite of the chewy and sweet square rice cakes," Wang said.

Suzhou, known for its rich agricultural culture, combines rice with seasonal ingredients to craft exquisite pastries for each season, such as rose cakes in spring, mint cakes in summer, and date, pine nut, and walnut cakes in autumn and winter. Eating sticky rice square cakes during Spring Festival is a way of celebrating family

reunions and wishing for prosperity.

"It's not just the rice cakes. Food is crucial for Chinese people, especially during the Lunar New Year's Eve dinner, which is the most important meal of the year. People place their expectations for the new year in these delicious dishes," Wang explained.

Chen said people in Taiwan have *tangyuan*, or glutinous rice balls, with peanut or sesame filling, just like people on the Chinese mainland. And Wang introduced the unique salty glutinous rice balls from Suzhou, often filled with meat, shepherd's purse, or shredded radish, offering a fresh and appetizing taste.

"Whether we are from the Chinese mainland or Taiwan, we all, as Chinese people, have a strong emotional attachment to our families. No matter how far we are from home, we must come back for the family reunion when Spring Festival arrives," Chen said. "I hope everyone who has to spend time away from their families can return home soon and have a happy Spring Festival."

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Online Watch the video by scanning the code.

Chen Yizhen (left) and Wang Linghan met at a farmhouse in Shushan village, Suzhou, Jiangsu province, in the latest episode of *Strait Forward*. DONG MING / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Taiwan students embracing tradition and togetherness

By GUI QIAN

Spring Festival stands out as the most important annual family celebration in China. People from across the country and around the world make their way home for family reunions and festivities.

Chen Simo, a Taiwan student at Shanghai International Studies University, cherishes the entire lead-up to the celebration — from selecting and pasting couplets, shopping for Chinese New Year goods, undertaking a thorough cleaning process, preparing the reunion dinner and gathering around the TV for the Spring Festival Gala.

"It's not just the lively atmosphere I look forward to; it's the serene moments with family, the comforting embrace of home, and the joy of ushering in the new

year collectively," she said. "Each step in this process is a thread in the fabric of happiness and warmth."

Tsai Li, a Taiwan student at Wuhan University in Central China's Hubei province, eagerly anticipates setting off fireworks, seeing it as not just a traditional custom but also a profound emotional expression.

For Lin Yenchen, a Taiwan student at Peking University, the excitement lies in watching the Spring Festival Gala with family and friends, followed by a visit to the cinema for holiday films. Meanwhile, for Lin Kuanting, also a Taiwan student at Peking University, the highlight is the reunion dinner with family, where the thought of savoring an oyster omelet and *fotiaoqiang*, a traditional soup made of various seafood in East

China's Fujian province, fills him with immense happiness.

Reflecting on the significance of "home" and "reunion", Chen poetically describes "reunion" as the interweaving of countless lights, with "home" standing out among them — a constant beacon patiently awaiting her return.

To Lin Peiyang, a Taiwan student at Peking University, reunion signifies returning to a place of belonging and security. "As a student away from my hometown, home is a sanctuary filled with love and a wellspring of strength during challenging times in my life, propelling me forward," she said.

Lin Yenchen views home as where the heart finds peace. "My home resides where my family is. Beijing, Taiwan, and Fujian are all my homes. Reunion, for

me, is the most eagerly anticipated and joyous occasion, a sentiment I hope echoes for cross-Strait compatriots."

Looking ahead to the new year, Zheng Tingyi, a Taiwan student at Beijing Normal University, conveyed his wish for the realization of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and his heartfelt desire for reunification on both sides of the Strait. Similarly, Liu Yufu, a Taiwan student at Peking University, aspires to witness higher-quality development for China, his motherland, improved lives for its people, and deeper integration across the Taiwan Strait.

Chen used a metaphor of the dragon for her wishes for an auspicious year. "With the dragon soaring across the Chinese land, it will bring good fortune to the nation," she said.

## Z WEEKLY

## The story behind BOY STORY

BOY STORY, a hip-hop boy band, reflects on their nine-year journey, sharing tales of growth, deep bonds, and musical evolution, Li Xinran reports.

Officially debuting in 2018, BOY STORY was launched by JYP Entertainment and Tencent Music Entertainment Group. The six members, aged 16 to 19, are Jia Hanyu, Li Zihao, He Xinlong, Yu Zeyu, Gou Mingrui, and Ren Shuyang.

"BOY STORY is undefined, and its potential is unlimited," said Jia Hanyu, 19, the leader of the hip-hop boy band. "Our slogan is to keep it real and always showcase and express our true selves."

Although they are so young, they've known each other for almost nine years, having met during auditions.

Yu Zeyu, 18, was the first to be recruited into the company. He still vividly remembers his first encounters. "I first met Zihao in a park. He was already a great dancer at that time, and I was impressed. When I first saw Hanyu, he was dressed like a Christmas tree, wearing a green T-shirt, black shorts, and red shoes. As for Mingrui, I saw him in Chongqing's audition and he was the only contestant who performed sitting in a chair, which left an impression on me. Xinlong was the first to take the initiative to approach me among all the trainees, and it was touching. Shuyang was the youngest contestant but was full of confidence while doing a locking piece, and I really liked the harem pants he was wearing."

For Ren Shuyang, 16, he recalls some "painful" yet joyous memories. "When I was 9 years old, the older trainees often joked around with me. However, I was too little to understand and I felt like falling prey to the tigers," he said. But they were all kids after all. "When we caused trouble or made mistakes, we had to do push-ups. And whenever our eyes met, we would start giggling immediately," Ren added.

Over the years, the six have developed strong and deep bonds with one another. "We wouldn't say cheesy words like 'we're family', but we, indeed, are family, even though we're not biologically related," said He Xinlong, 18. "Every time I watch fan-made videos of clips from when we were little, I find the six of us super adorable."

As a group of Generation Z singers, BOY STORY has been focusing the theme of their songs on growing up or upgrading oneself.

He believes that growing up is inevitable for everyone. "Even if you try to bypass it, you'll realize you've only taken a detour. Eventually, you'll have to deal with it," He said. "I believe growing up happens when you learn to resolve issues in different approaches."

In Jia's opinion, growth is the by-product of one's efforts, and sometimes it's not even consciously realized or intended by oneself. "When you look back on a long period of time, you may realize that you've changed and improved a lot. But during that time, you're simply working hard and doing what you have to do."

To Li Zihao, 19, growing up may seem like a scary thing when a person is young. However, as long as one has a group of friends accompanying him or her every step of the way, it's not a big deal anymore. "Everyone has to grow up eventually," he said.

#### The story continues

The year 2023 was an important and eventful time for BOY STORY. It was the fifth anniversary of their debut and was marked by new accomplishments.

With the COVID-19 pandemic a thing of the past, they were able to hold concerts and perform at music festivals both in China and abroad. Representing China, they also participated in singing the official anthem of COP28, *Lasting Legacy*, on Dec 2, 2023, in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.



BOY STORY members posing for a group photo for their third EP, *Ji*, released on Feb 3.

Center: He Xinlong. Clockwise from top: Li Zihao, Yu Zeyu, Gou Mingrui, Ren Shuyang, and Jia Hanyu. PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"We're heading in the direction of becoming mature artists, and we're doing quite well," said Yu. "However, we all feel that we're not satisfied, whether with the results so far or with our efforts during the process."

On Feb 3, BOY STORY released their third EP *Ji*, meaning extreme and opposites. As usual, all members participated in the production of the album which includes six songs.

Li introduced that the title song *Alpha* is about the contradiction of opposites.

"Contradictions are everywhere: within oneself, between oneself and the society, and even among the six of us," he said. "We often have many emotions and thoughts, and we enjoy the collisions of these ideas. We hope this song can express these reflections and convey the message that as 'alphas', we want to dominate the music world."

Li added that the album also includes two special songs that further illustrate the message of *Ji*. The first one is the production of the three elder members, including Li himself. It's called *Overheat*, and the lyrics are distinctive and powerful rap. The other one is *Lost*, which is written by the three younger members. "It has a unique and softer vibe," Li said.

While *Overheat* talks about ambition and greed, *Lost* depicts the double-sided nature of things, like freedom and being lost.

"If you only listen to the melody, it may sound bright and upbeat, but the lyrics are actually complex and a little dark," explained Ren, who participated in the creation of *Lost*. "This is another contrast we're trying to create."

When it comes to the creation, the three younger members expressed that it was an excruciating process. Gou Mingrui, 17, for example, said it was hard to find inspiration.

"Inspiration doesn't come as you wish. We had to sit in the studio for a long time, writing and deleting repetitively," Gou said. "Shuyang is a person full of whimsy. He babbled strange thoughts and phrases non-stop for an hour that day, saying things like 'a watch without a pointer' and 'endless sleep'. Interestingly, one or two of these ideas actually helped."

Since this album is the first time they've introduced accompanying dancers, the choreography also posed new challenges for the group. And more complex choreography also means it's more tiring when they perform live. But they all consider performing live as one of the responsibilities of an idol or artist.

"Every profession comes with its responsibilities," said He. "For instance, students must study, and doctors need to help their patients. Our responsibilities include performing our best on stage, constantly learning and upgrading ourselves offstage, and conveying positive energy and a message to our fans."

When it comes to this year's goal, He said he hopes to collaborate with artists in other countries and interact more with the "Boss" — the official name of BOY STORY's fans — both at home and abroad.

For Ren, he hopes that more people could learn about BOY STORY. "Some may have heard of us, but their impressions may be that of when we were still kids. I hope people can see how we've changed and what we're aiming to become."

In fact, when they were first given the name "BOY STORY" by J.Y. Park, co-founder of JYP Entertainment, they all felt awkward about it. But surprisingly, the name soon began to grow on them.

"Ten years, and 20 years later, even to the point when we have to walk with canes, whenever we get together, we'll always be BOY STORY," said Gou.

Ten years, and 20 years later, even to the point when we have to walk with canes, whenever we get together, we'll always be BOY STORY."

Gou Mingrui, 17, a member of BOY STORY

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## Z WEEKLY

## Hues of heritage

Liu Wenting, a devoted craftswoman from Jiexiu, Shanxi, preserves her family's colored glaze legacy, blending ancient traditions with modern education to inspire a new generation of artisans.

By LI YANG

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In the heart of Jiexiu, North China's Shanxi province, Liu Wenting, a woman in her 30s, embraces her destiny as a colored glaze craftswoman, following in the footsteps of her family.

Raised in the rich tradition of this ancient art, Liu is now a recognized inheritor of Jiexiu's intangible cultural heritage, as acknowledged by local authorities.

Liu's affinity for the age-old craft dates back to her earliest memories of playing with clay — the raw material fundamental to this traditional art. After completing her college education, Liu began a career in the family trade, having acquired skills passed down from her father and three uncles.

Jiexiu, hailed as the "hometown of colored glaze" in China, is one of the birthplaces of colored glaze for traditional Chinese architecture.

The colored glaze pieces include ceramics, building models, and sculptures. Renowned for their vibrant hues and distinctive designs, these pieces have found frequent application in the decoration of ancient Chinese palaces, temples, and pagodas.

Glazes can also form a variety of surface finishes, such as different colors and gloss levels, influenced not only by raw materials but also by factors like firing temperature, duration, and cooling method. Glazes improve the underlying texture or design, whether it be painted, carved, or engraved.

Since the true form of earthenware only reveals itself after cooling from the kiln's heat, this unpredictable nature adds to the intricacy and allure of the craft.

According to Liu, the disposition, color, and texture of a piece can change significantly due to even a slight alteration in how it's made. This means that the procedures required to create handmade colored glaze cannot be easily automated so it's hard to put traditional craftsmen out of business.

Sometimes even skilled artisans like Liu Kaibao, Liu Wenting's father and a fifth-generation craftsman in Liu's family, cannot



Liu Wenting spends her days in creating colored glaze artworks. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

guarantee consistent outcomes, especially with particular shades like peacock blue.

Liu Kaibao, who lives in Hongshan village, is one of the first intangible cultural heritage inheritors of colored glaze in the village.

His cousin Li Jianguo, who was previously a technician at the former Hongshan Ceramics Factory, is also a master of the craft.

The Liu family and their relatives, including the Li family, work together in a workshop they jointly

founded in the village where they not only design and make colored glaze but also teach the skills and knowledge to their disciples.

"To make colored glaze, you must have clean raw materials and clean water sources, just like you

must have a pure heart to make fine products," said Liu Kaibao. "My father's persistence and love for the art and its special beauty had made me fall in love with this craft since I was a child. I have been treating this art as the heri-

tage of my ancestors. I'm obliged to pass it on to future generations."

Over the past two years, Liu Wenting worked with her family to create a giant colored glaze work titled *Kylin and Eight Treasures*, featuring an auspicious mythical creature from an ancient Chinese legend. This piece was installed in the theater building in the square of Jiexiu Culture and Art Center. The work showcases the Liu family's brilliant technique, and they have been proud of it.

In recent years, the Jiexiu municipal government has placed greater importance on the protection of glaze production techniques. As part of the city's public cultural activities, the Liu family exhibited their works at the vocational school in Jiexiu and introduced the craft to the students in 2021 — the same year they started cooperating with the school, and set up a colored glaze society for students. Since then, the project has attracted over 115 students.

Liu Wenting works as a part-time instructor for the project.

The Liu family workshop also offers students internships so they can gain hands-on experience by taking part in all procedures related to the design and making of colored glaze products.

Last year, the colored glaze works made by the students were exhibited at the third Shanxi Intangible Cultural Heritage Expo in Pingyao, Shanxi.

"This set of 12 zodiac clay sculptures covered by colored glaze is handmade through my imagination. I carefully observed my teacher Liu Wenting's demonstrations. Coupled with my exploration and innovation, I realized that I can make good works as well," said Gao Caixuan, a student whose works were shown at the expo.

"I'm glad to see the ancient crafts appeal to a younger generation," said Liu Wenting. "The cooperation between us and the vocational school creates a new method to pass on traditional skills."

According to her, previously, such skills were only passed down within families. But now, a new generation can acquire these skills and pass them on in their own way.

## Chinese art students embrace global creativity

By MENG WENJIE

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"Art creation is fundamentally a journey of self-discovery," said Liu Ziyang, founder of the School of International Art (SIA), a study abroad agency.

Liu, born in 1991, pursued further studies at the School of Visual Arts in New York City in 2010. At that time, he noted that not many Chinese students were studying art abroad. Due to differences in domestic and international art teaching methods, he encountered challenges.

"This is why I understand the difficulties Chinese students face when applying for art studies abroad," he said.

Inspired by this awareness and motivated by the lack of available services, Liu established SIA in 2011 during his second year of college.

The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service and Pearson recently collaborated to release the latest trend report on Chinese students studying in the UK. According to the report, the popularity of business subjects has been on a decline since 2013, while interest in art majors has more than doubled over

the past decade. "Studying abroad for art has become a new trend today," Liu said.

To him, SIA is more than just a study abroad agency. "It's a bridge. I want to introduce diverse teaching methods in art education from abroad to China," he said.

Following this philosophy, Liu has invited professors from various overseas universities to teach his students, offering them a genuine international art education experience.

One person benefiting from this approach is Huang Yijia, a 21-year-old art student from Xiangyang, Central China's Hubei province. Currently enrolled at the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute in Chongqing, Huang is preparing to study interior design at the Royal College of Art in the UK.

In the application process, one of Huang's portfolio projects was completed under the guidance of a UK professor. This procedure challenged her at first, particularly due to language barriers and differences in teaching methods. However, it also urged her to find ways to overcome these obstacles. Huang diligently prepared for lessons, creating checklists of learning objectives and



"It's a bridge. I want to introduce diverse teaching methods in art education from abroad to China."

Liu Ziyang, founder of SIA



"She did not set a design direction for me but instead encouraged me to explore independently."

Huang Yijia, a prospective student at the Royal College of Art, UK

recording lectures to ensure no details had slipped through the cracks.

Reflecting on what she had learned in the past few months and her previous art education, where teachers directed studies within specific research areas, Huang appreciated the UK professor's approach.

"She did not set a design direction for me but instead encouraged me to explore independently," Huang said, expressing her hope to spark new creative ideas and discover her true passions in this new teaching model during her future studies in the UK.

Liu also noticed that the lines between arts and other subjects are blurred. This is leading to more students choosing comprehensive universities and subjects that combine different areas. "I think this is a development trend for future art majors," he said.

Huang Zhiyuan, 18, is an example of this trend. Preparing for interdisciplinary studies at Washington University in St. Louis, the United States, he combines his passion for drawing with his interests in biology, focusing on communication design. He believes that art extends

beyond conventional boundaries, emphasizing the potential of industrial design to merge artistic and scientific principles for the good of society.

"Since I was young, I have always been curious about science and willing to try new things. Interdisciplinary studies can provide me with various challenges and stimulate my interest in different disciplines," Huang Zhiyuan explained.

In his exploration of interdisciplinary studies, he stressed the importance of addressing today's challenges using different approaches.

His innovative fragrance diffuser, for example, which is based on the Sniffin' Sticks Test theory, shows how combining different areas of research and investigation can help in tackling complex issues, such as the early detection of Alzheimer's disease.

"In today's world, many problems can't be solved with just one subject. I believe interdisciplinary studies can better deal with these problems in the future and promote human development," he said, highlighting the importance of looking at the big picture in shaping the future of art education.