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# CHINA DAILY

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XI'S VISION

## Small town thrives with winter games

Global, regional ice and snow sporting events are improving the lives of many rural residents

By HOU CHENCHEN in Harbin and AN BAIJIE in Beijing

For years, Yabuli, a small town in Northeast China's Heilongjiang province that was unknown to all but those who lived there, luxuriated in splendid isolation. That was the case until 1996, when fame hit and transformed the town.

The instant celebrity came about because that year's Asian Winter Games skiing events were held there. Now the town is preparing for a second brush with history, as it prepares to again stage skiing events for the 9th Asian Winter Games next year.

It is no overstatement to say that the 1996 Asian Winter Games changed the town forever, as Yabuli cashed in on its fame, with Yabuli Ski Resort generating the construction of transformational infrastructure, the improvement of transportation and the creation of jobs.

In fact, Yabuli locals, dragged quickly from geographical obscurity, claimed a key role for themselves in helping to build China's major winter sports industry.

"If we had no winter sports venues in Yabuli, such a remote village would not be linked to the high-speed railway lines," said Sun Jingjing, who, like many of her fellow villagers, saw her life being transformed by major sports events.

The first of those was the Asian Winter Games in 1996, followed by the National Winter Games 12 years later, the same year as the Summer Olympics in Beijing. In 2025, the Asian Games will return.

Sun, who lives at the foot of the Yabuli snowfields, now runs a homestay. The income from that is complemented by what she gets from agricultural work that consists of growing black fungus and picking mushrooms in the mountains. That work is done predominantly during the summer, and during the ski season in winter, Sun welcomes paying guests into her home, which is complete with a restaurant whose menu includes products from her farming.

Another homestay operator is Yu Zhenyou, who is in his 50s and has



been in the business since 2019. The farmer from Qingshan village, which is adjacent to the resort, is another villager whose first business venture cashed in on Yabuli's winter tourism.

"The Asian Winter Games have completely changed the destiny of local villagers," Yu said. "Our lives and the work we do are closely linked to the boost in winter sports."

Yabuli, which is 177 kilometers southeast of Heilongjiang's capital, Harbin, is now regarded as one of the country's top ski resorts, and is particularly noted for its ski jumping facilities.

Many other Yabuli locals count the blessings that winter sports have given them.

"Soon after the Asian Winter Games in 1996, a highway was built near our village, and it is precisely because of the resort that the level of our local infrastructure now matches that of a city," Yu said.

Many young residents work as ski instructors around the country, having had an early start in the winter sports sector, Sun said.

Yabuli locals now play a key role in major ski resorts nationwide, providing valuable industry experience, such as operating snow-making machines and helping in the financial management of ski resorts in other provinces and regions.

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Tourists experience skiing at Yabuli Ski Resort in Heilongjiang province on Dec 12. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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## Destruction continues



Young Palestinians walk among the debris of the destroyed al-Shuheda Mosque on Sunday following Israeli attacks in Deir al-Balah in the Gaza Strip. ALI JADALLAH VIA GETTY IMAGES See story, page 7

## A-share market needs policy stimulus to give confidence a boost, experts say

By SHI JING in Shanghai and ZHOU LANXU in Beijing

Lack of investor confidence continues to affect the performance of the subdued A-share market, with industry experts calling for stronger policies to seize the right time window to inject more liquidity into the market and buoy overall sentiment.

After rattling investors by sinking below the 2,640-point mark during the early hours of trading on Monday, the benchmark Shanghai Composite Index managed to climb back to 2,702.19 points at the end of the day, shedding 1.02 percent in the process.

The Shenzhen Component Index dropped 1.13 percent, while the technology-focused ChiNext in Shenzhen managed to stage a V-shaped comeback by closing 0.79 percent higher.

"Amid elevated uncertainties on multiple fronts, the risk appetite of investors has declined sharply and triggered a reevaluation of stocks, a process that has been reinforced by panic selling and a liquidity crisis, leading to the current market slump," said Xue Yi, a professor of finance at the University of International Business and Economics.

"Taking substantial measures to stabilize the market is warranted at this juncture," Xue said, adding that this would enhance the income expectations of the middle-income group, thereby boosting

consumer spending and revitalizing the economy.

In a meeting held on Sunday, China Securities Regulatory Commission said that it will make greater efforts to stabilize market performance, expectations and confidence and resolutely prevent abnormal market volatility.

The commission will encourage institutions to increase counter-cyclical investments, introduce more mid- to long-term capital into the market and respond to investors' concerns in a timely manner, it said on Sunday.

Commenting on share pledges, which investors have expressed much concern about, the commission said on Monday that pledges accounted for 3.38 percent of the total market value of the Shanghai and Shenzhen bourses, down from the peak of 10.51 percent in 2018. The size of share pledges had actually fallen compared with the end of last year.

A pledge of stock occurs when companies use shares as collateral and takes loans against them.

Analysts from Huaxi Securities explained that the recent collective redemption of mutual fund products by investors due to their decreasing net value has further dragged down the indexes. With Spring Festival approaching, investors may become more conservative as they would want to hold cash to avoid external volatility when the A-share market suspends trading for the holiday. Meanwhile, the 0.5-percentage-

point reserve requirement ratio cut took effect on Monday, providing 1 trillion yuan (\$140.76 billion) of long-term liquidity, according to China's central bank.

Experts from Founder Securities said that there is a structural liquidity deficiency in the A-share market at present. Institutions have poured much money into market heavyweights to stabilize the indexes, resulting in inadequate liquidity for small-cap stocks. Derivatives using high leverages have also contributed to the structural liquidity shortage. As the US Federal Reserve's rate cuts may not happen anytime soon, capital inflow into the A-share market has also become hesitant.

But the problem that needs immediate attention is the lack of investor confidence. According to experts, this has resulted in the recent slide in the A-share market, and does not truly reflect China's economic fundamentals.

The Caixin China General Service PMI stood at 52.7 in January, marking the 13th straight month of expansion in services activity.

There should be a combination of supportive policies released by different government departments to restore market confidence, which is the A-share's endogenous driving force and the biggest variable at present, said experts at Founder Securities.

Contact the writers at shijing@chinadaily.com.cn

## BREATHING FRESH AIR INTO HOSPITAL REFORMS

Flu season reveals need to fine-tune nation's three-tier system

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai zhouwenting@chinadaily.com.cn

Influenza and respiratory illnesses such as pneumonia have swept the country this winter, hitting residents in big cities such as Beijing and Shanghai.

While the spread of these illnesses has been uniform, where infected people have gone for treatment has seen huge variations. Images and stories of bigger and better-



equipped hospitals overflowing with patients — with some waiting for hours to see a doctor — have been making headlines. Despite the strong demand for treatment, primary medical institutions, or community health service centers, were much less sought after.

China has a three-tier system for hospitals. Tertiary hospitals, which have the largest number of beds and provide comprehensive medical services, are at the top. Most county-level hospitals are classified as secondary, while the majority of grassroots community health centers are designated as primary and have less than 100 beds.

See Diagnosis, page 2

WORLD WATCH By Mehmood UI Hassan Khan

## White paper offers strategic road map for fighting terrorism

The white paper titled "China's Legal Framework and Measures for Counterterrorism", released recently by the State Council Information Office, reflects the strategic importance of Chinese wisdom in eradicating terrorism through legal measures.

The document highlights China's strong resolve to fight and eliminate terrorism and terrorist activities. China has long faced the real threat of terrorism, with hundreds of casualties in terrorist attacks. It has adopted holistic, comprehensive and logic-based national strategies in combating terrorism by holding sagacity of law and neutrality of the judicial system as having a human face, and discouraging the naked use of force. The white paper will also help dispel disinformation and refute rumors, especially regarding China's counterterrorism efforts in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

The State Council Information Office has previously released several white papers relating to counterterrorism work in China's Xinjiang region, and these focused mainly on counterterrorism, deradicalization, human rights protection and vocational education and training, showing the progress that Xinjiang has made in terms of human rights protection.

Summing up the characteristics of China's counterterrorism efforts over the past decades, the white paper is China's first systematic exposition of the legal system and practice of its counterterrorism work, which will help the outside world gain a comprehensive understanding of the country's counterterrorism legislation and practices.

China uses law and people-centric measures that cover all aspects of humanity, including human values, protection of basic rights, and the safety and security of the common people, while fighting terrorism.

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# PAGE TWO

From page 1

The strong preferences in hospital choices were clearly demonstrated recently in Shanghai. According to a report by Shanghai TV, on Dec 17 the number of child patients seeking emergency treatment at the Luding Road campus of Shanghai Children's Hospital, a tertiary hospital, was 1,539. However, on the same day at Putuo District People's Hospital, a secondary one, it was 301. At Changfeng Community Health Service Center, a primary medical institution, it was just one. All the medical institutions are located in Shanghai's Putuo district.

The issue of how to fine-tune the three-tier system triggered heated discussions among local lawmakers and political advisers in Shanghai last month during their annual plenary sessions.

"In winter in the future, when people no longer have to line up to see doctors and there are no more crowds in big hospitals, we will be able to say that the city's three-tier diagnosis and treatment system is complete," Zhang Wenhong, a national political adviser, said at the session.

In the early 2010s, the State Council, China's Cabinet, released several documents to accelerate the construction of the hierarchical diagnosis and treatment system in order to improve the efficiency of medical resources utilization and standardize medical treatment.

Under the three-tier system, community health service centers provide diagnosis and treatment of common diseases and routine examinations of residents. Regional medical centers, or secondary ones, provide further diagnosis and treatment, including for complicated and difficult cases. Comprehensive tertiary hospitals handle very complicated, difficult and rare cases, and also perform surgeries.

While delivering the Shanghai government work report at the sessions, Gong Zheng, mayor of Shanghai, said that the city will strive to make high-quality medical resources more available at the grassroots level, and continue to strengthen the capacity building of community health services this year.

Local legislators and political advisers made various suggestions with many focusing on how to make community centers more attractive choices for local residents.

### National needs

"The upgraded strength of health services at the grassroots level should not only deal with seasonal contagious diseases better, but also meet the overall future medical needs of the country when it is faced with an increasingly aging population," said Zhang, the national political adviser, who is also head of the infectious disease department at Shanghai Huashan Hospital.

Shanghai is one of the first Chinese cities to deal with the realities of an aging society. At the end of 2022, more than 5.5 million of the city's permanent residents were aged 60 or older, accounting for 36.8 percent of the city's total population, according to the latest official statistics.

Nationally, the country may enter a stage of moderate aging next year. The National Health Commission has estimated that the number of elderly people aged 60 and above will exceed 300 million in 2025, accounting for over 20 percent of China's population.

There are more than 977,000 primary medical institutions in the country, accounting for nearly 95 percent of the total number of medical institutions, according to the NHC. However, to date they have not been given adequate resources, according to experts.

The availability of basic medicines at community health service

centers is limited, said Gu Jieyan, a political adviser. "It's necessary to expand the scope of drugs supplied at such grassroots facilities and allow them to have therapies for common diseases consistent with secondary and tertiary medical institutions in the same region," said Gu, also vice-governor of Shanghai's Songjiang district and in charge of its public health system.

Wang Changfeng, a 73-year-old Shanghai resident, said that he usually goes to a tertiary hospital for treatment of his chronic cough because the medicine that works best for him is only available there.

"Seeing a doctor there usually takes half a day. And in a long cycle of treatment this situation may be repeated several times," he said.

### Way forward

The medical and health division of the Shanghai Municipal Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference submitted a proposal at the session. The proposal not only mentioned expanding the availability of drugs, but also widening the scope of medical examinations and tests at primary medical institutions.

It also said it is necessary to increase charges for medical services, which are currently much lower than their real value. "In the current situation, tertiary hospitals, which are mostly responsible for their own profits and losses, have to pursue large amounts of services to survive. This also results in doctors' having an excessively heavy workload," said the proposal.

"This results in lighter loads on secondary and primary hospitals and doctors there aren't able to improve their skill sets because they cannot access a variety of patient cases."

Gu also suggested diverting a proportion of medical appointments usually done at higher-level hospitals to doctors at primary medical institutions.



ART BY LU PING / CHINA DAILY

She suggested that job packages and career opportunities at primary medical institutions be more in line with tertiary hospitals. This would include the chance of job promotions and housing subsidies.

In a proposal submitted to the session by the Shanghai committee of the China Association for Promoting Democracy, an alliance of different-level hospitals was suggested in order to remove the need for a single hospital to sign work contracts with new recruits. This new employment structure would help guarantee recruits have access to the same opportunities for their career development.

Such alliances have been established in many cities over the past decade in an effort to provide medical services of similar standards at different facilities.

Zhang, from Huashan Hospital, suggested doctors from primary institutions undergo regular training at higher-level hospitals to improve their professional skills.

"The continuous improvement of doctors' abilities will make the public more willing to turn to primary medical institutions," he said. "An increase in patient numbers will in turn improve a doctor's diagnosis and treatment ability, which will motivate doctors to do better work."

Other suggestions included well-known doctors from renowned hospitals working temporarily at primary medical institutions on a regular basis to attract residents to such facilities and build the capacity of the centers' medical teams.

### Pediatric services

As children are vulnerable to seasonal viruses, legislators and political advisers urged greater efforts to establish more reliable pediatric services at primary medical facilities.

There are 335 community health service centers in Shanghai, and the number of those providing pediatric care rose from 125 in 2019 to 246 in 2023. However, many parents said that they are still hesitant to send their children to primary facilities due to not enough choices of medicine and inadequate equipment for testing and physical checkups. Concerns were also expressed over the professional skills of doctors at the centers.

The majority of primary medical institutions that have pediatric care only provide such services between half a day and two days a week. Most of them do not have full-time pediatricians, and they rely on doctors from higher-level hospitals to see the young patients.

"We can't control when children fall ill and there is no emergency service at night or on the weekend. These are the main reasons why I won't prioritize such facilities for my choice," said Zhou Wenshu, the mother of a 1-year-old boy.

Ma Jin, a political adviser in Shanghai, suggested improving the provision of children's medication and test kits at primary medical institutions to better diagnose and treat basic pediatric diseases.

"When a minor can be accurately diagnosed the first time, basic treatment can be carried out to avoid their disease progressing to a severe condition," Ma said.

Some primary institutions said that they have stepped up their testing capabilities in recent years. At the Xinhua Subdistrict Community Health Service Center in Changning district, tests for respiratory pathogens, including influenza A and B, mycoplasma, adenovirus, and respiratory syncytial virus, have all been available in the past year.

Ma suggested that all the primary medical institutions in Shanghai provide basic pediatric services around the clock.

However, it is impractical for each community center to have a full-time pediatrician, so general practitioners need to be equipped with basic pediatric medical skills, he added.

"This way, patients who first seek medical advice at a primary institution who don't have their problem solved will have priority access to a senior doctor at a tertiary hospital," Gu said. "This is the original intention of building the three-level system compared with the current situation, where people go directly to a big hospital for almost everything," Gu said.

She also said physicians in certain departments at primary medical institutions should be authorized to prescribe certain medications for longer periods, making their services more attractive to local residents.

Other measures to make using primary medical institutions more attractive include higher reimbursements for medical bills and extension of service hours, said Jin Ying, a Shanghai legislator and director of the Dapuciao Community Health Service Center in Huangpu district.

"When someone runs a fever their temperature usually rises in the afternoon and during the night, while primary medical institutions usually stop providing services at 4:30 pm," she said. "This leaves patients with no other choice but to go to big hospitals."

Jin said that her center received an average of 300 patients per day during the seasonal peak of respiratory diseases in December, while Renji Hospital, a tertiary hospital located in the same district, reported 2,200 patients a day attending its emergency and fever clinics.

### Talent building

Primary medical institutions should give young medical talent more opportunities for career development, several legislators and political advisers suggested at the session.

Political adviser Jiang Qi said that the current system makes primary medical institutions unattractive to medical graduates as the pay is usually lower and there are fewer chances for promotion and to obtain a technical title.

## TOP NEWS

## Ready for action

Members of the 22nd Chinese Peacekeeping Troops to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon participate in a security drill on Sunday in the West Asian country. The drill included targeted exercises to counter security threats such as unauthorized individuals barging into the camp, car bomb attacks and armed assaults. It was aimed at improving the action plans for emergency response, and enhancing the rapid response and emergency handling capabilities of the peacekeepers. HUANG YUANLI / FOR CHINA DAILY



## Cold weather boosts warm ties

Ambassadors say winter tourism, sports offer an abundance of opportunities

By HOU CHENCHEN in Harbin  
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By saying on multiple occasions that ice and snow are as valuable as gold and silver, President Xi Jinping has turned winter's chill into a hot commodity.

During his visit to Northeast China's Heilongjiang province in September, Xi championed the idea of unlocking the winter economy's potential in sports and culture. Since then, a fresh surge of ice-and-snow enthusiasm has swept the country.

In fact, Heilongjiang has turned out to be the coolest spot in China now, and not just in temperature. With 6.62 million visits over the New Year holiday earlier this year, and the 2025 Asian Winter Games on the horizon, the province is riding a wave of success.

What's more, a global audience is catching on. Diplomats from 18 countries embarked on a five-day adventure in January, seeking ice-and-snow collaborations in Harbin, the capital of Heilongjiang.

## Slovakia: Nation explores direct flights



Peter Lizak

Slovakia is considering direct, round-trip flights to China to enhance the bilateral exchange of tourists, as the 75th anniversary of its establishment of diplomatic ties with China approaches, said Peter Lizak, Slovakia's ambassador to China.

Expressing much enthusiasm about the potential of ice and snow tourism during his recent visit, Lizak drew parallels between the scenic beauty of Harbin and the mountains in Slovakia.

Emphasizing Slovakia's strengths in developing winter sports and the winter economy, he said the country has developed infrastructure for ice and snow tourism and sports.

The historical ties between Slovakia and Heilongjiang date back to the early 20th century, with Slovak immigrants, particularly railway engineers, settling in Northeast China during the construction of a major railway.

The Slovak consulate building in Harbin stands as a testament to the two countries' long history of exchanges, he said.

## Lebanon: Winter Games offer platform for joint development



Milia Jabbour

The Asian Winter Games are a platform for fostering exchanges, collaboration and joint development among Asian countries, said Milia Jabbour, Lebanon's ambassador to China.

"Chinese are doing an amazing job when it comes to infrastructure in this area," she said. "It demonstrates the rapid and high-quality development of the ice and snow industry."

Jabbour said that both countries are eager to develop the ice and snow tourism industry.

"Snow is on our national flag, carrying the meaning of clarity. The clean fresh air, endless snow mountains and the winter sun in Harbin reminded me of my home country," she said.

The picturesque villages of Lebanon, which is home to the highest peaks in the Middle East, offer a major tourism site for winter sports, with plenty of opportunities for collaboration with China, Jabbour said.

The Asian Winter Games will be held early next year in Harbin.

Attracting return visits will be crucial to the ice and snow industry's next stage of development, Jabbour said. She added that Lebanon is offering visas upon arrival to Chinese visitors in order to foster exchanges.

"During this trip, I find we can learn from each other," Jabbour said.

"As a new winter resort area, Heilongjiang can learn more from Lebanon and other countries to cultivate culture, identity and services around snow, while Lebanon can learn from Heilongjiang how to develop infrastructure and respect the ecosystem," she said.

"I will be looking forward to coming back, hopefully with a Lebanese delegation participating in the 2025 Asian Winter Games."

## Slovenia: Sustainable sports facilities emphasized



Alenka Suhadolnik

Alenka Suhadolnik, Slovenia's ambassador to China, said the two nations can forge cooperation in winter sports, especially in developing sustainable sports facilities.

"It is important that the facilities are designed in a way that they can function all year round. Designers should consider usage during the other seasons in addition to winter. That would add a lot to the sustainability of the projects," Suhadolnik said.

Slovenia is a key destination for China's winter sports training, fostering bilateral ties.

The 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics marked the start of an enhanced friendship between the two nations, leading to extensive exchanges and cooperation in the field of winter sports. Slovenian architects played a crucial role in the construction of China's national ski jumping center for those Games, Suhadolnik said.

The center is designed to operate during all four seasons. In summer, for example, innovative methods are used to simulate winter skating conditions, catering to athletes' training and competition needs.

Slovenia showcased numerous products at the China International Import Expo in November, emphasizing high-tech solutions for winter sports.

Suhadolnik stressed the importance of sharing insights on the sustainability of the winter sports industry and winter tourism through collaborative exchanges in the future.

## Austria: Good ties pave way for sharing of expertise



Andreas Riecken

"There is already cooperation going on, but you can never cooperate enough," said Andreas Riecken, Austria's ambassador to China.

The Austrian Alps cover much of the country, with 7,500 kilometers of ski slopes that make Austria one of the world's top ski destinations.

With its prominent position in winter sports, Austria is ready to contribute to the forthcoming Asian Winter Games and share Austrian experience, expertise and passion, Riecken said.

"Austria can share know-how in the ice and snow industry, from skiing equipment to cable cars," he added.

With diplomatic ties thriving for over 50 years, Austria and China have deepened their links. China is Austria's third-largest global trading partner.

Riecken said that the positive economic relationship has paved the way for substantial investments and collaboration in the winter sports industry.

"It is impressive how fast China is catching up in developing its ice and snow infrastructure. This trip provided us with an opportunity to discuss cooperation potential and the future of ice, snow and winter sports in China, as well as in Heilongjiang," he said.

## Switzerland: Trade relations bring positive outcomes



Juerg Burri

Juerg Burri, Switzerland's ambassador to China, said he looks forward to Swiss companies winning bids to provide goods and services for the 2025 Asian Winter Games in Harbin.

"In Harbin, when you see all the beautiful and well-nourished cows in the beautiful snowy landscapes, they may contribute to a Swiss-Chinese product, which is infant formula," Burri said.

Nestle, which arrived in Harbin in 1987, is the largest Swiss company of its kind in China, reflecting the long history of trade relations between the two countries.

Burri also pointed to the positive outcomes of Premier Li Qiang's recent visit to Switzerland and emphasized the potential upgrade of the decade-old free trade agreement.

He emphasized the need to develop all-season and sustainable tourism. "We have to invest in sustainable means of transportation, sustainable ways of managing hotels and sustainable ways of managing infrastructure," he said.

"Snow tourism spots should make sure that the tourists can experience an enriching day without using the car," Burri said.

He suggested that Harbin diversify its tourism with summer hiking, winter skiing and cultural events in rural areas for a vibrant experience.

Jiang Duo contributed to this story.

## Document: Counterterrorism work by China a contribution to regional and global security

From page 1

Chinese law prescribes the powers and responsibilities of law enforcement and judicial agencies in handling cases, emphasizing and guaranteeing impartiality, transparency, openness and accountability, with no violation of the law of the land in case management.

Regarding the strengthening of oversight, the document notes that the powers of law enforcement and judicial agencies are subject to oversight from people's congresses, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference at various levels, and the general public, in addition to statutory and internal oversight.

China regards respecting and protecting human rights as an underlying principle in improving its legal framework and its practices in the field of counterterrorism.

The white paper's central theme, that terrorism is the common enemy of humanity and that it poses a serious threat to global peace, has universal appeal in urging all members of the international community to share responsibility in fighting it.

China has clearly demonstrated the Chinese spirit of joint efforts, international cooperation, openness, transparency and sharing responsibility to overcome this menace that causes socioeconomic decline, social disintegration, political instability and the compromising of national sovereignty and territorial integrity around the globe.

Thus, it is the first strategic road map to globalize the implications of further enhancing the effectiveness of national, regional and international counterterrorism measures.

The document rightly showcases China's constant efforts to fight terrorism through building and following a sound legal framework, promoting stringent, unbiased, procedure-based law enforcement, and ensuring the objective administration of justice and the effective protection of human rights. As a result, Chinese policymakers have successfully safeguarded domestic and public security, protected people's lives and property, and contributed to global and regional security and stability.

The paper says counterterrorism efforts should be in complete compliance with the norms and principles of the United Nations, that measures should be adapted

China has clearly demonstrated the Chinese spirit of joint efforts, international cooperation, openness, transparency and sharing responsibility to overcome this menace that causes socioeconomic decline, social disintegration, political instability and the compromising of national sovereignty and territorial integrity around the globe.

to national conditions, and that legal institutions should be an essential part of global efforts to combat terrorism under the rule of law.

China's counterterrorism work has contributed to regional and global security and stability. Furthermore, by upholding the vision of a global community of shared future, China is willing to work closely with other countries to push forward the counterterrorism cause as part of global governance.

China has joined 12 global counterterrorism conventions and facilitated the formulation of documents such as the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Member States Agreement on Border Defense Cooperation. Therefore, it has played an important role in maintaining international and regional security and stability.

The Chinese government has succeeded in curbing the spread of terrorism, protecting citizens' rights to life, health and property, and maintaining social stability. It has also taken firm actions to protect the lawful rights and interests of citizens and organizations, and to guard against discrimination based on geographical area, ethnic group or religion.

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

## Farming cooperation



A farmer drives a China-made tractor in Apodi, Brazil, on Friday. More than 30 sets of farming equipment and vehicles from seven Chinese agricultural machinery manufacturing companies have been delivered to a farmers' organization in the city in northeastern Brazil under a cooperation agreement signed by universities and institutions in both countries. WANG TIANCONG / XINHUA

## Harbin: Continued growth seen for winter economy

From page 1

Heilongjiang expertise has helped train more than 12,000 of the nation's ski and other snow sport instructors, with about 1,500 specialists trained annually, which accounts for one-fourth of the total number in China, said Dong Xiaodong, deputy director-general of the administration of sports of Heilongjiang.

When visiting Heilongjiang in September, President Xi Jinping said the winter economy should be

fostered as a new source of growth, promoting the development of sports, culture, equipment and tourism related to ice and snow.

The hosting of the 2022 Winter Olympics has driven the growth of the winter sports industry and the ice and snow economy, and China's goal of involving 300 million people in ice and snow activities has come true, Xi said.

Chen Changpeng, office director of Yabuli Ski Resort, said the resort has hosted about 2,000 tourists a

day this winter. Most visitors have come from the Pearl River and Yangtze River delta regions, accounting for about 70 percent of total tourist figures.

The annual report on China's ice and snow tourism development, released by the China Tourism Academy in January, projected that by the end of the 2024-25 ice and snow season, China's ice and snow leisure tourism sector is expected to receive more than 520 million visitors, with its revenue exceeding

720 billion yuan (\$100 billion).

With the countdown to the second staging of the Asian Winter Games in Harbin next year, the province is proceeding with an infrastructure extension plan including a tourism railway extending to Yabuli. The extension is expected to be ready at the end of the year, said Shen Haitao, deputy secretary-general of the 9th Asian Winter Games executive committee, during a seminar on the Games and the high-quality development

of the ice and snow economy.

"We have formulated a plan for urban infrastructure improvement, including upgrading 163 roads and enhancing the cityscape. We are accelerating the second-phase expansion project of Harbin Taiping International Airport and the expansion of the Yaxue Highway connecting Harbin and Yabuli," Shen said.

Li Ling, an official of the province's culture and tourism department, said the recent trend of tourists from southern China heading in huge numbers to Heilongjiang is unprecedented.

As excitement builds for the

Asian Winter Games, Yabuli is also welcoming back many residents who had previously ventured out for work, as young villagers return from other provinces to their hometown to tap growing job opportunities.

"Five of my relatives who worked in the ski industry outside Yabuli in previous years have returned home, bitten by the ski fever," said Sun, the farmer and homestay operator.

Tang Miaofan and Jiang Duo contributed to this story.

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## CHINA

## Memorable moments for media mavens

Editor's note: China Daily reporters recall events or stories from the past year that have left a deep impression on them.

## Female workers at AI factory inspired by jobs

By YAN DONGJIE

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It was two weeks before a 6.2 magnitude earthquake jolted Linxia Hui autonomous prefecture in Gansu province, when I visited a group of female artificial intelligence trainers in an ethnic county.

It took me four hours to reach Jishishan Bonan, Dongxiang and Salar autonomous county by car after landing at Lanzhou International Airport as there is no train station in Jishishan.

The first meal I had there was a bowl of Lanzhou beef noodles for 8 yuan (\$1.12), about a quarter of the price in Beijing.

At an industrial park funded by Ant Group and the China Women's Development Foundation to support the employment of women, I met the female AI trainers beside what was probably the only coffee machine in the county.

The trainers teach AI systems how to think, interact and become useful.

Zhang Juan, 25, is the oldest sibling in her family and has two younger sisters and a younger brother. She is a university graduate and the main breadwinner in her family after her father passed away due to illness. Her uneducated mother used to work as a waitress and in a factory, but is now sick and getting old.

Zhang earns about 5,000 yuan a month. She uses half the money for rent and living expenses, and sends the other half to her family.

Despite her difficulties she laughs frequently. She talks, sings, and plays games with her colleagues during her work break. "I'm very happy with my life now as it is much better than when I was working as a surveyor in Lanzhou," she said.

She's proud being an AI trainer. "I'm AI's teacher. AI becomes smarter because I have been teaching it," she said.

I was touched by her attitude toward life and work — the attitude that many young people in big cities have been missing and longing for — to be fulfilled, relaxed, proud, and hopeful.

AI and ChatGPT have been hot topics in recent years, leading the ever-changing world and making it more fast-paced. However, it has also made some people feel under pressure and anxious.

But in this county in Northwest China, I witnessed its impact on ordinary people.

Even though their jobs are the most basic positions in an AI factory and involve simple and repetitive tasks, their lives have changed enormously in positive ways.

As women from previously impoverished ethnic minority counties, they now have stable



Yan Dongjie (center) interviews an official in Jishishan Bonan, Dongxiang and Salar autonomous county, Gansu province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

jobs and incomes. They no longer need to move for work and can stay in their hometowns to take care of their elderly parents and children.

They can earn an annual salary of 40,000 to 50,000 yuan, ensuring that their families won't return to poverty, which is defined as an annual income lower than 7,200 yuan.

On the morning I met them it was obvious they had put on makeup and dressed nicely for the occasion. In the office, they drank coffee like any white-collar worker in any city. During their break, they exercised on treadmills and

elliptical machines, chatted, joked and laughed. After work, they had enough time to help their children do their homework.

When I asked AI trainer Ma Lei's 7-year-old son what he wanted to do when he grows up, he said he wanted to be an "AI trainer like my mom".

Maybe it's because his mother has shown him the best possibility in life, I thought.

In an era of urban overwork and stress, their attitude toward life is very precious for a city dweller like me.

After the earthquake on Dec 18, I texted everybody I interviewed

in Jishishan. They all replied with short phrases such as — "Don't worry. We are all good."

From the WeChat moments they have posted I can see how the people in the county are coping well in the earthquake's aftermath. They eat hot noodles in tent shelters, have enough supplies and necessities, and classes for students have restarted. In their smiles, I discovered the secret of happiness.



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## 2023: The year China's private space sector took off

By ZHAO LEI

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I'm used to writing dozens of stories a year about people and developments in the space sector, and each year a few important missions have stood out.

For me, 2019 was memorable for the landing of the Chang'e 4 robotic probe on the far side of the moon, while Chang'e 5 and Beidou were the buzzwords in 2020.

Then, in 2021, I was impressed by the Tianwen 1 mission that placed the first Chinese rover on Mars and the commencement of the country's Tiangong space station program, with Tiangong going on to become my keyword for 2022.

Looking back at last year, I would call it the year of the rise of China's private space sector, with a number of private companies achieving remarkable feats.

In April, Space Pioneer conducted the successful maiden flight of its TL 2 rocket, making it the first privately built Chinese liquid-fueled rocket to reach orbit. By doing so, it also became the first privately developed, liquid-propellant rocket in the world to succeed in its first orbital attempt.



Zhao Lei poses for a photo at Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in northwestern China.



Li Menghan talks with elderly members of a Yueju Opera club in Shanghai's Xujiahui subdistrict.

## Rookie reporter finds preconceptions challenged on first trip for work

By LI MENGHAN

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Two years ago, I went on a nine-day trip to Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region as a graduate student where I met an indigenous folk band.

The leader of the band was Sun Chao, a worker at a State-owned enterprise in Shihezi, a city in the region's north. Sun told me he had an impoverished childhood, but in middle school he found a part-time job and earned enough money to buy his first guitar. As a native of Shihezi and a witness to its fighting spirit, he wanted to introduce and explain his home to other people.

During my one-hour conversation with Sun, he shared his experiences and told me the story behind a signature song he wrote, which tells, in part, of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps' efforts to reclaim the land and the bravery and hope of its residents.

It was through this conversation that I learned about the residents' hard work and perseverance, which gave me a new perspective that went beyond the area's stunning scenery, exotic fruit and the colorful people in their ethnic attire.

That trip was, more importantly, a lesson in the power of communication and how making a genuine

connection allows for a deeper understanding of a person, city, culture or even a country. This understanding has become even clearer since I joined China Daily in late September, and started telling the true, multifaceted and vast story of China.

My first face-to-face interview was with two foreign exchange students from the United States. But finding two US students was a difficult task as their number had dropped after the pandemic.

I was surprised to learn from them that their relatives had visited China and had a positive attitude toward the nation, despite the China-US relationship being tense when they were here. The students also expressed their disagreement with the Western media's depiction of China and the way things work here, saying it was totally backward.

One of the students now teaches business English at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing.

We have stayed in touch, and he recently asked me for help on a personal matter, which is proof to me of foreigners' real affection for China.

In October, I took my first work trip to Shanghai. I met a woman in her 80s who told me that she had lived in a 13-square-meter flat with her husband for 30 years.

Nowadays she has difficulty going up and down stairs due to heart disease. I was astonished to hear her story, and my impression of it as a modern metropolis changed.

But on that same trip I saw photovoltaic panels in a park in Jiujiang, Jiangxi province, generating power for nearby streetlights and a screen.

Once again, experience and talking with different people changed my preconceptions and better informed my judgment and report writing.

The first topic I chose to cover as a reporter was inspired by a trending hashtag on Weibo about a professional bridesmaid who booked eight jobs during the eight-day National Day holiday.

Qu Huan, an office clerk who markets herself as a bridesmaid on the weekend in Wafangdian, Liaoning province, said demand for professional bridesmaids emerged years ago, but had surged recently due to a lack of real-life socializing and people's unwillingness to burden others.

I've only been in journalism for just over four months, but the craft seems to be about the art of communication, keeping pace with society, and being willing to talk to people in person and get their stories. It's a career I'm firmly devoted to now, and in the future.

## Blind NPC deputy's courage helped me 'see'

By CAO YIN

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National lawmaker Wang Yongcheng is blind, but when I talk to him face-to-face or over the phone I think he can see. However, his kind of "seeing" does not involve eyes, but the heart.

In 1985, when Wang was 18, he lost his sight due to an accident at a construction site. Recalling the initial days after he became blind, the 56-year-old native of Sanming, Fujian province, told me, "It was like falling into an abyss, and hard to climb back out."

He said that he didn't want to talk to anyone at that time and even wrote a farewell letter, as being "invisible" made him feel inferior and irritable. It was like a dark cloud hanging over his family, he said.

"I felt so unlucky. I didn't know what my life was going to be like, let alone how to live," he added.

His attitude changed in late 1986 when he met Zhou Jianfa, a healthy woman four years younger than him, in his hometown. Unlike others who discriminated against him, Zhou was friendly and spoke with him about interesting subjects.

During my interviews with Wang, his voice rose every time he mentioned Zhou, and once he started talking about her he couldn't stop.

He said that it was Zhou's persistence that convinced her parents to accept their marriage, despite their initial resistance. "It was also her courage that inspired me to restart my life," he added.

After a few months studying Braille with Zhou's strong support, Wang went to Henan province in 1992 and was accepted into a massage school for the blind. In 1995, he completed his training and

returned home with outstanding massage skills.

With the aid of the disabled persons' federation in Sanming, he soon opened the first blind massage and healthcare center in the area. A year later, he began providing free massage training for visually impaired people to help lift them out of poverty and live better lives.

"I was so lucky to meet Zhou. She lifted me out of the darkness, so I want to be the light for other people," he told me. "I wish I could see her, and I believe she must be beautiful. But I think I've seen her with my heart."

In early 2023, Wang was elected as a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress, China's top legislature. He is the only visually impaired NPC deputy.

Over the past year, he has spoken for people with disabilities on education and employment issues. His suggestions were accepted by the top legislative body when it was formulating and revising laws.

After one of the interviews, I thanked Wang and said, "You've taught me a lot."

He smiled and said, "I thank my wife, as she helped me find myself and taught me to face real life, irrespective of whether it's painful or joyful."

The answer cheered me up, making me think of a well-known saying by French writer Romain Rolland: "There is only heroism in the world: to see the world as it is and to love it."

Life is full of accidents and suffering, and it also brings surprises and gifts. It is Wang's misfortune he cannot see, but fortunately, he met Zhou, the "gift" in his life. More importantly, he appreciates this "gift", and knows how to love her.



Cao Yin attends the Maritime Silk Road (Quanzhou) International Forum on Judicial Cooperation held in Fujian province.

In July, ZQ 2, a rocket model developed by LandSpace, succeeded in its second attempt to reach orbit and became the world's first methane-fueled rocket to complete an orbital mission.

In December, ZQ 2, one of the largest and most powerful private rockets in China, successfully conducted its third flight.

Private players also showed their technological innovation and creativity in the satellite field.

GalaxySpace, a leading private satellite maker, built China's first satellite equipped with a flexible solar array and sent it into space in July, tasking it with verifying a next-generation low-Earth-orbit broadband communication system and other advanced satellite technologies.

Having witnessed these and other accomplishments, I was reminded of an assertion made by a senior rocket designer at one of China's top space institutes during a face-to-face interview with me nine years ago, and I quote, "Private companies should not be allowed to design or build carrier rockets, because only the State-owned entities have the responsibility and ability to do so. Moreover, I don't think private players can ensure the quality of their rockets."

He's no longer giving interviews, but it would be interesting to know what he would say now about the rise of those private enterprises. I guess he might agree with me that open, fair and free competition leads to strength and prosperity in any industry.

## WORLD

## FRIENDS AFAR

## Home, home on the vast Chinese range

**Editor's note:** *China Daily* presents the series *Friends Afar* to tell the stories of people-to-people exchanges between China and other countries. Through the vivid narration of the people in the stories, readers can get a better understanding of a country that is boosting openness.

By WANG XIANGYAN

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"Dare to ask where the road is." That is the English title of one of 75-year-old Mark Levine's favorite Chinese songs, *Gan Wen Lu Zai He Fang*, which was also the theme song for the 1986 Chinese TV series *Journey to the West*.

The strange thing is that if Levine had ever dared to ask himself about where life's road might take him, the answer would have put him on a trajectory in exactly the opposite direction — to the east.

Moreover, when he decided to take up a one-year work contract in China in 2005, he would not have imagined that he would spend the next quarter of his life there.

Levine's favorite song recounts the story of the gritty determination of monk Xuanzang. He headed to ancient India on a mission during the Tang Dynasty (618-907) to obtain the Buddhist sutras.

"If I'm invited to sing only one song, it's always that song," said Levine, a singer, composer and teacher from the United States. "If I can sing more than one song, that's almost always the first one."

Levine's journey to the east that turned into an odyssey and ultimately a stay of almost 20 years began in Hua'an, Jiangsu province. As his one-year contract as a college English teacher neared its end, Levine, like Xuanzang, seemed to find a missionary zeal, and he decided he was not going home.

"One of the reasons was that I found many people, especially young students, had little understanding of the US. They thought everybody in the US was very rich," Levine said.

He said he was interested in why this misunderstanding existed and how to correct it.

Just as plenty of Chinese people barely understand the US, Levine himself had a lot to learn about China. As he did so over the next 19 years, he decided to put that learning into music.

"When I started writing my songs, I took the music style I was most comfortable with — the American country music — and attached it to a subject that I was just learning about and experiencing," said Levine, who grew up in Los Angeles and learned to play the guitar when he was 9.

Soon, an innovative, quirky blend of Chinese folk music and Western country music compositions and arrangements made their debut.

"One of my songs describes a 24-hour train journey. It was after Spring Festival and people were grumpy because they had to go back to work," Levine said.

"I've also written songs about my friend Fu Han's hometown in Hubei province. I saw the fireworks there and farmers were busy preparing meals for Spring Festival.

"All these are real. My songs are based on my experiences rather than on make-believe."

Fu, a musician and director, is

not only Levine's friend, but also his agent and partner of the music duo In Side Out.

In 2007, Levine began teaching at the Minzu University of China in Beijing, where he met Fu, who plays the two-stringed instrument *erhu* and introduced him to Chinese folk music.

"One day, it occurred to me that I could play *erhu* with him, combining two different music styles," Fu said. "*Erhu* has a beautiful sound similar to that of the violin, and it goes well with the rhythm of the guitar."

In Side Out's first performance was a folk song, *Masangshu'er Da Dengtai* of the Tujia ethnic group, during the Zhangjiajie International Country Music Week in Hunan province in 2013.

"We sang the song in Tujia dialect while playing the guitar and *erhu*. Many musicians from other countries were fascinated and asked me what the song meant," Fu said.

*Masang* and *dengtai* are two kinds of trees that always grow with one another, and they symbolize love for the people of the Tujia ethnic group.

The song is about a young man who is about to go into battle and he persuades his girlfriend to marry another man. However, the young woman decides to wait for his return from battle.

"The audience was unfamiliar with the lyrics, but this story of eternal love really touched them," Fu said.

The success encouraged the duo. Their performances are usually a combination of Chinese songs and Levine's country creations. Levine said one thing that US country music and Chinese folk music have in common is that both tell stories.

## What it really is like

Levine has also written books that illustrate his life in China. In *Stories from My Chinese Journey* published in 2014, and *Singing My China Stories to the World* published in 2021, he wrote so as to tell those unfamiliar with the country about what it really is like.

Levine's friends back home like his stories. They feel that what they know about China is incomplete and are eager to get a different perspective from his books, he said.

One of the misconceptions relates to the Uygur people, he said. He was able to gauge for himself how things really are when he visited Kashgar, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, in August and September.

"I visited a kindergarten and listened to various classes. There were two teachers in each classroom, one speaking Mandarin and the other Uygur. You could see there were Han children in the class learning Uygur. China is not destroying minority languages and culture," Levine said.

Regarding misunderstandings between China and the US, Levine said that while Chinese and US people are different in many ways, they have the same values and concerns deep down.

"We all want to have a good life for ourselves and families, a good life in a peaceful world where we have work to do, a decent place to live, sufficient food and access to medical care and education," he said.

Levine said he will spend the rest of his life in China, continuing to teach, write and sing.

## Southern California flooded



Firefighters rescue a woman from a homeless encampment that became surrounded by floodwater in the Santa Ana River during a rainstorm on Monday in San Bernardino, California. ETHAN SWOPE / AP

## UK's King Charles III diagnosed with cancer

LONDON — King Charles III has been diagnosed with a form of cancer and will postpone public engagements to undergo treatment, Buckingham Palace said on Monday, but added that he remained "wholly positive" about the scare less than 18 months into his reign.

Charles, 75, who became king of the United Kingdom in September 2022 following the death of his mother Queen Elizabeth, has begun a series of treatments, the palace said, adding that he was looking forward to returning to full-time duties as soon as possible.

The cancer revelation came after Charles spent three nights in the hospital last month, where he underwent a corrective procedure for a benign enlarged prostate.

The palace said a separate issue of concern had been spotted during that hospital stay, but did not give any further details beyond saying that tests had revealed the king had a "form of cancer".

"No further details are being shared at this stage, except to confirm that his majesty does not have prostate cancer," the palace said. "Throughout this period, his majesty will continue to undertake State business and official paperwork as usual."

Charles will continue to have meetings with UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, while his wife, Queen Camilla, will continue with her engagements. On Sunday, the king gave no indication of the diagnosis when he was pictured smiling and waving to onlookers as he attended a church service with Camilla.

It was his first public outing since he and his daughter-in-law Kate Middleton left the same London hospital a week ago, where they had both undergone planned treatments.

Kate, the Princess of Wales and wife of Prince William, the heir to the

British throne and the son of Charles, spent two weeks at the London clinic following abdominal surgery for an unspecified but noncancerous condition. She will not be returning to royal duties until after Easter.

William, who has been looking after their three children as she recovers, will carry out his first public engagement since her operation on Wednesday.

While the royals usually closely guard details of their health, regarding it as a private matter, Charles has been open about his recent treatment.

"His Majesty has chosen to share his diagnosis to prevent speculation and in the hope it may assist public understanding for all those around the world who are affected by cancer," Buckingham Palace said.

Sunak sent his best wishes to the King on X. "I have no doubt he'll be back to full strength in no time and I know the whole country will be wishing him well," he said.

The leaders of Australia and Canada, where Charles is also head of state, expressed their best wishes and hopes for the king to make a speedy recovery, while US President Joe Biden said he was concerned by the news and planned to call Charles later.

"Navigating a cancer diagnosis, treatment, and survivorship takes hope and absolute courage," Biden said. "Jill and I join the people of the United Kingdom in praying that His Majesty experiences a swift and full recovery."

The monarch told his immediate family personally about his cancer diagnosis, and Prince Harry, his younger son, will travel to the UK to see him in the coming days, a source close to the Duke of Sussex said.

Harry lives in California with his American wife Meghan and their two

children, after the couple stepped down from royal duties in 2020.

After waiting longer than any heir in British history to become king, Charles' first year on the throne was dominated by his coronation — Britain's biggest ceremonial event for generations, full of pomp and pageantry.

While before he became sovereign there were suggestions that the longtime environmental campaigner would bring a radical overhaul of the monarchy, Charles has generally followed in the style of his mother while trying to add some of his own touches.

Polls suggest most Britons have a favorable view of his reign so far, although younger generations appear much less enthusiastic about the royal family in general.

Prior to his recent health issues, the biggest shadow over the royals was the ongoing fallout between his son Harry and the rest of his family, most notably Harry's elder brother Prince William.

Ingrid Seward, editor-in-chief of *Majesty Magazine*, said that for Charles, a workaholic who often worked until midnight on his papers, his recent health issues would mean he would have to take it more slowly.

"His body will tell him he has to, and Camilla certainly will," she said. "I think he's mentally exhausted since the death of the queen. It's been nonstop for him since then."

While Queen Margrethe II of Denmark abdicated last month in favor of her son King Frederik X after 52 years on the throne, Seward said there was no chance Charles would follow suit.

"Absolutely not, 100 percent no," she said.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## African music rises on global charts with TikTok's help

LOS ANGELES — When the biggest names in music gathered on Sunday for the industry's top honors at the Grammy Awards, they handed out a new trophy for best African music performance to South African singer Tyla for her hit, *Water*.

The prize aims to highlight regional musical traditions and recognize "recordings that utilize unique local expressions" across Africa. It also reflects the growing popularity of music from the continent, such as Afrobeats, which is gaining global audience with the help from social media platforms such as short video app TikTok.

Afrobeats originated in West Africa, primarily Ghana and Nigeria, though the term is often used as a catchall for various music styles coming from Africa. It features percussion rhythms mixed with various genres from rap to jazz, R&B and others.

Modern Afrobeats has "a feel-good groove to it," said Heran Mamo, R&B and hip-hop reporter at *Billboard* magazine, which created a US Afrobeats chart in 2022. "It's bound to reach a wider audience because it already contains a little bit of everything for everyone."

On Spotify, a digital music service, Afrobeats music was streamed 13.5 billion times in 2022, up from 2 billion in 2017.

Tyla, 22, hit the top 10 on *Billboard*'s Hot 100 chart with the danceable *Water*, an example of a genre known as amapiano, a jazz-and piano-infused sound.

A TikTok executive in South Africa had noticed Tyla gaining attention in her local market back in 2020, and reached out to her with tips on how to maximize her presence on the app.

*Water* was released in July, after Tyla signed with Sony Music Entertainment's Epic Records.

## Hashtag going viral

By September, TikTok users were replicating Tyla's dance moves in the #WaterChallenge. To date, 1.5 million videos have been created using the song, and the #WaterChallenge hashtag has been viewed 1.8 billion times, according to TikTok.

"I think that TikTok has played the role of incubator, but also the distributor to the billion-plus global users, and it's just really landed," Ole Obermann, global head of music at TikTok, said.

Tyla's success illustrates the power of TikTok and YouTube to help artists find fan bases around the world, a role once reserved for music labels.

"The proliferation of streaming along with new social media platforms has accelerated artist discovery, and has provided new mediums for artists to grow their fan bases globally," Bank of America Securities analyst Jessica Reif Cohen said in a research note predicting this year's media trends.

For US teenagers, TikTok ranks as the second-most common music discovery source behind YouTube, according to a recent MIDIA Research survey that showed 45 percent of 16- to 19-year-olds found new music through the platform.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## 'Suspense' in slowest horse race wins new fans in Japan

OBHIRO, Japan — Speed is not everything at one racecourse in Japan, where the unpredictable stop-and-start drama of the world's slowest horse race has drawn new fans eager to bet on their sturdy favorite.

A fanfare plays, the gates flip open and they are off — but at a plod rather than a gallop, pulling heavy sleighs in a tradition that harks back more than a century.

The Banei Keiba races are held in Obihiro, a city in northern Japan's Hokkaido, where spectators cheer on the muscular workhorses moving at the pace of a brisk human walk.

Eight equine competitors kicked up dust during a recent afternoon as they powered over the first of two mounds on the 200-meter track. But they soon began to halt, taking the first of several breaks to catch their breath, which billowed in the winter air.

The slow progress "builds a little bit of suspense", 24-year-old Australian tourist Esther McCourt told

Agence France-Presse, marveling at the size of the horses.

"No matter how good people or horses look in the beginning, the crucial part is the last 50 meters, so it can change at any time," she said.

The popularity of Banei Keiba had dwindled until renewed marketing efforts coincided with a surge of interest during the pandemic, when people began to watch the races and place bets online.

Those casual gamblers along with dedicated fans have boosted the event's annual sales to \$370 million — a fivefold increase from their low point in 2011.

Banei Keiba developed when Japanese settlers migrated to Hokkaido, a sparsely populated island with long, bitter winters.

They relied on horses known as *bamba* to clear fields, transport goods and operate mines, and would pit them against each other in tug-of-war games and other contests at festivals.

*Bamba* are twice as heavy as racing thoroughbreds, and the sleighs they



Horses compete at a Banei Keiba race at the Obihiro racecourse in Obihiro, Hokkaido Prefecture, Japan, on Dec 9. PHILIP FONG / AFP

tug weigh more than 600 kilograms.

Three other cities in the region used to host similar races, but they all stopped under mountains of debt in 2006. The long-stagnant Japanese economy had hit Banei Keiba hard, and the regular punters who kept it going were getting older.

Obihiro Racecourse, now the tra-

dition's sole custodian, made efforts to attract more young families and tourists by cleaning up the facility and making it smoke-free.

Now there are about 750 horses taking part in the races, kept by 28 trainers, 150 caretakers and 21 jockeys.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

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## WORLD

## Economists pilloried for inaccurate forecasts

PARIS — Economists are taking flak after missing the mark on inflation, failing to anticipate disruptions in global supply chains and forecasting a recession that has not materialized.

The COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, and more recently the Middle East conflict have made it tougher for experts to see clearly into their economic crystal balls.

European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde joined the chorus of criticism at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, last month.

"Many economists are actually a tribal clique," she said, referring to a lack of openness to other scientific disciplines.

"They quote each other — men more than women, but that's another story," the former IMF chief and French finance minister said. "But they don't go beyond that world because they feel comfortable in that world."

Economists need to get out of their comfort zone of Excel spreadsheets and rigid models, some economists said about their own kind.

The world "has changed a little bit," Peter Vanden Houtte, chief eurozone economist at ING bank, said sarcastically.

Post-COVID-19 reopening of economies sent prices rising and they soared further after Russia launched its operation in Ukraine, belying assurances from Lagarde and US Federal Reserve chairman Jerome Powell that the increases would only be "transitory".

## Combating inflation

The central banks had to launch a series of interest rate hikes to combat inflation. While price rises have cooled in recent months, policymakers have kept the rates elevated as they wait to see whether they can be cut later this year.

Lagarde admitted that the forecasts used as a basis for ECB policy decisions were not always right and that factors linked to the crises were not taken into account in its models.

"The models we currently use are less reliable because there are many factors that are difficult to integrate," Vanden Houtte said.

Economists dropped the ball by looking through the prism of the past.

"It's not economic models that failed. It's the lack of imagination of economists," Maxime Darmet, an economist at Allianz Trade, said.

"They rested on their laurels" after 30 years of globalization during which "everything went well," Darmet said.

With central banks using rate hikes to stop economies from overheating, economists warned that growth in the developed world would fall sharply or even contract in 2023.

Instead, economic growth in the United States accelerated last year while the eurozone — except Germany — stayed in the green.

Vanden Houtte said the weak quality of data and a falling rate of responses to surveys were partly to blame.

New phenomena also threw a curveball. Savings have helped fuel consumption, while companies have "much better managed" high rates than in the past, said Christophe Barraud, director-general at Market Securities Monaco SAM.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



Chile's President Gabriel Boric (center) on Sunday visits residents of Quilpue, a hillside community in Vina del Mar, which was affected by forest fires. MARCELO SEGURA / CHILEAN PRESIDENCY / AFP

## Death toll in Chile forest fires rises to 112

SANTIAGO, Chile — Firefighters in central Chile on Sunday battled to quell fierce forest fires that have killed 112 people so far and razed entire neighborhoods, while President Gabriel Boric warned the country faces a "tragedy of very great magnitude."

Hundreds of people are still missing, authorities say, stoking fears the death toll will keep climbing as more bodies are found on hillsides and houses devastated by the wildfires.

The fires that gathered momentum on Friday now menaced the outer edges of Vina del Mar and Valparaiso, two coastal cities popular with tourists. The urban sprawl of those cities accounts for more than a million residents west of the capital Santiago.

Drone footage filmed by Reuters on Friday now showed whole neighborhoods scorched, with residents rummaging through husks of burned-out houses where corrugated iron roofs have collapsed. On the

streets, singed cars littered the roads.

"The wind was terrible, the heat scorching. There was no respite. People dispersed everywhere," said Pedro Quezada, a local builder in the Valparaiso region, standing amid charred debris of his destroyed home.

Videos shared on social media showed hillside fires burning close to apartment blocks in Valparaiso, spewing smoke into the air. Thick haze blanketed other urban zones, hobbling visibility.

Chilean authorities have introduced a 9 pm curfew in the hardest-hit areas and sent in the military to help firefighters stem the spread of fires, while helicopters dumped water to try to douse the flames from the air.

Chile's Legal Medical Service, the state coroner, said 112 people have died in the fires.

Earlier in the day, Boric, announcing two days of national mourning starting on Monday, said Chile should prepare itself

for more bad news. "It is Chile as a whole that suffers and mourns our dead," Boric said in a televised speech to the nation. "We are facing a tragedy of very great magnitude."

Deputy Interior Minister Manuel Monsalve on Sunday said 165 fires raged across Chile and estimated about 14,000 homes have been damaged in the Vina del Mar and Quilpue areas alone.

Those who returned to their ravaged homes found them almost unrecognizable, with many losing all their life's possessions.

Although wildfires are not uncommon during the Southern Hemisphere's summer, the lethality of these blazes stands out, making them the country's worst national disaster since the 2010 earthquake in which about 500 people died.

Last year, on the back of a record heat wave, some 27 people died and more than 400,000 hectares of land were affected.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Maoris fear for rights as NZ reviews treaty

By KARL WILSON in Sydney  
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New Zealand has often been looked up to as a country where indigenous and nonindigenous people got along well. One of the reasons for that was the Treaty of Waitangi signed in 1840 between British colonists and 540 indigenous chiefs.

The foundation document signed in 1840 establishes and guides the relationship between New Zealand's government and its indigenous population. It was not perfect, but the treaty gave the Maori people a voice in determining their future and a degree of autonomy.

For 184 years, the treaty has stood the test of time.

All that is starting to change as the new three-party coalition government under Prime Minister Christopher Luxon plans to "review" the treaty.

The move by the government has angered New Zealand's Maori people and many non-Maori people alike, who see it as being "racist" and anti-Maori.

There have been widespread protests, which are expected to culminate on Tuesday when New Zealanders gather to celebrate

Waitangi Day — the day the treaty was signed and known as the country's national day.

Politicians, Maori leaders and members of the public are set to start arriving in the seaside town in the north of the North Island.

Pita Tipene, chairman of the Waitangi National Trust board which organizes the event, said they expected upward of 60,000 people to attend Waitangi Day events.

New Zealand's center-right coalition, which took office late last year, is promising to undo policies of previous governments, particularly those promoting the official use of the Maori language and seeking to enhance indigenous living standards and rights.

The government has also said it will introduce, but is not committed to passing, a bill that would reinterpret the Treaty of Waitangi.

## Step backward

Critics said the moves are the most significant step backward for Maori rights in decades, and some have taken legal action against the government in an effort to stop the policy changes.

Luxon has tried to soothe fears in recent weeks that the document will be reinterpreted or is under threat.

The document has three articles. In the English version, Maori ceded the sovereignty of New Zealand to Britain; Maori gave the Crown an exclusive right to buy lands they wished to sell, and, in return, are guaranteed full rights of ownership of their lands, forests, fisheries and other possessions; and Maori are given the rights and privileges of British subjects.

Now, it would appear that the government wants to rewrite the principles of the treaty.

Recently, Maori King Te Arikini Tuheitia Paki held the first national hui — a meeting of Maori people — in a decade to discuss the government's agenda.

Part of the debate stems from the fact that there are two versions — one written in English and the other written in the language of the indigenous people.

"International law gives priority to the version signed by the indigenous people, but that is not something that the present government appears prepared to accept," Richard Shaw, professor of politics at Massey University, said.

Agencies via Xinhua contributed to this story.

## Chinese tech firms thrive on innovation

Industry insiders see companies' focus on R&D as key to capturing market share

By LIA ZHU in San Francisco  
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Chinese consumer electronics companies are stepping up their innovative strategies, fueled by a deep commitment to research and development and a growing focus on creative business models.

Companies like BOE Technology, a leading Chinese display panel manufacturer, exemplify this transformation.

"Technological innovation is the foundation and soul of BOE," Si Da, the company's vice-president and chief brand officer, told China Daily.

The company entered the semiconductor display industry in 2003. In just 20 years, it has become a global leader in the display industry. Si attributed the rapid growth to its commitment to technological innovation.

BOE ranked 15th among the most innovative companies in the US last year, according to a report released last month by IFL Claims Patent Services, which tracks patent applications and grant data.

"This is the sixth consecutive year that BOE has ranked in the list's top 20," Si said in an interview during the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas last month.

The company filed more than 90,000 new patent applications in 2023, more than 90 percent for inventions and over 33 percent for overseas patents. Behind the impressive patent portfolio is the R&D investment exceeding 7 percent of annual revenue with the R&D personnel accounting for 23 percent of the total workforce.

This dedication is echoed by Hisense USA, the fastest-growing TV brand in the US market. "Consumers are recognizing the quality of our products and willing to pay more for it," David Gold, president of Hisense USA, told China Daily.

This shift in consumer perception is driven by Hisense's focus on R&D centers in both the US and China, ensuring they cater to local preferences while leveraging Chinese innovation expertise.

"The continuous investment in R&D is our engine of growth," said Gold. "There's continuous investment in R&D from our headquarters in China."

Looking at the Chinese companies

participating in the CES in recent years, it is clear they are increasingly relying on quality and technology to win, said Liu Chun, vice-president of the China Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Machinery and Electronic Products.

"They have reached the consensus that it is difficult to win by competing on price. This is a marked shift from the past when Chinese companies were often seen as low-cost competitors," she told China Daily.

## Eye on expansion

This focus on innovation isn't just a corporate strategy. It reflects a broader shift among Chinese companies that have set their sights on global expansion.

Innovators based in China filed around 1.58 million patent applications in 2022, accounting for nearly half of the global patent applications and exceeding that of the US, according to a November report by the World Intellectual Property Organization.

The organization saw the highest volume of filing activity from China and sees China as the "main driver of global growth". In fields like solar cells and electric vehicle powertrain batteries, China has emerged as the largest source for patents, both applied and granted.

Rebecca Fannin, founder of Silicon Dragon Ventures, observed a significant shift. "We have seen the shift of copying from the US to China innovating on its own terms, and now taking some of these brands global," she said.

This shift is evident in areas like e-commerce and electric vehicles, where Chinese companies are "getting ahead of the United States," said Fannin at a recent webinar examining US-China innovation landscape.

"We definitely have seen this spread of Chinese technology innovation and also moving up the ladder to the creative aspect of it," she added.

Chinese companies aren't just innovating in technology; they're also redefining business models. "The aspect of business model innovation can't be ignored. The Chinese have excelled at this," said Fannin. Examples include the separation of car sales from battery subscriptions in electric vehicles and targeting rural shoppers in e-commerce.



Visitors try products at the BOE Technology booth during the 2024 Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas on Jan 9. ZENG HUI / XINHUA



Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele, along with his wife Gabriela Rodriguez, greets supporters after the presidential and legislative elections in San Salvador on Sunday. MARVIN RECINOS / AFP

## El Salvador's president Nayib Bukele set for encore

SAN SALVADOR — Incumbent Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele announced on Sunday that he had won the presidential election with more than 85 percent of votes.

In a post on X, formerly Twitter, Bukele celebrated his election victory and said his party, New Ideas, was set to win 58 of the 60 congressional seats that were up for grabs.

Thousands of Bukele's supporters clad in cyan blue and waving flags thronged San Salvador's central square to celebrate his reelection, which the 42-year-old leader

termed a "referendum" on his government.

"All together the opposition was pulverized," Bukele, standing with his wife on the balcony of the National Palace, told his supporters.

"El Salvador went from being the most unsafe (country) to the safest. Now in these next five years, wait to see what we are going to do," Bukele added.

Wildly popular, Bukele has campaigned on the success of his security strategy under which authorities arrested more than 75,000 Salvadorans. The detentions led to a sharp decline in

nationwide murder rates and fundamentally altered a country of 6.3 million people that was once among the world's most dangerous.

Hours earlier, Bukele held a news conference and said his party needed all the support it could muster to maintain its anti-gang fight and continue reshaping El Salvador.

"So, if we have already overcome our cancer, with metastases that were the gangs, now we only have to recover and be the person we always wanted to be," said Bukele.

Polls showed most voters wanted to reward Bukele for decimating the crime groups.

Candidates for FMLN and ARENA, two parties that rotated power between them until 2019, were set to receive single-digit support as voters once again rejected traditional parties whose rule was marked by violence and corruption for decades.

Bukele came to power in 2019 trouncing traditional parties with a vow to eliminate gang violence and rejuvenate a stagnant economy.

The Chinese embassy in San Salvador in a post on X congratulated Bukele and his party "for the historic victory in these elections".

AGENCIES—XINHUA

## WORLD

# Fighting rages as crisis nears fifth month

Hamas weighs Gaza cease-fire plan as envoys visit Middle East amid conflict

GAZA/JERUSALEM — Israeli strikes across Gaza killed scores overnight through Monday amid raging battles in the besieged territory's south as Hamas was reviewing a proposal for a halt in the nearly four-month-long conflict.

French Foreign Minister Stephane Sejourne was in Egypt and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken headed to the Middle East for another crisis tour on Monday to push for a cease-fire and hostage release.

The health ministry in the Hamas-ruled territory said at least 127 people were killed in Israeli strikes in the past 24 hours in the Gaza Strip.

The Hamas government media office said a kindergarten where families were sheltering was hit in the southern border city of Rafah, which is teeming with Palestinians displaced by the conflict.

"There is no safe place in the Gaza Strip, from north to south," displaced man Mohammed Kloub told Agence France-Presse in Rafah.

Blinken set off Sunday on what is his fifth Mideast trip since the Oct 7 attack by Hamas that set off the crisis.

He is expected to begin his trip on Monday in Saudi Arabia before visits to Israel, Egypt and Qatar.

Israel has warned its ground forces could advance on Rafah as part of its campaign to eliminate Hamas.

Strikes and tank fire targeted Khan Younis, southern Gaza's main city, with some air raids also hitting nearby Rafah, AFP reported.

Israel's army said its forces had raided a Hamas training facility in Khan Younis.

The Al-Qadisiya compound contained models of Israeli military bases, armored vehicles, as well as entry points to kibbutzim, a communal settlement in Israel, the army said.

The Palestine Red Crescent Society said that at the nearby Al-Amal hospital there were "alarming signs (of) a humanitarian disaster ... after 14 days of continuous siege."

With the conflict set to enter a fifth month on Wednesday, international mediators were pressing to seal a proposed truce deal thrashed out in a Paris meeting of top US, Israeli, Egyptian and Qatari officials.

Stephane Sejourne, on his first

Middle East tour, met his counterparts in Egypt and Jordan, with Amman's Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi saying "immediate international action" was needed.

Sejourne said he told Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi of France's desire "for a humanitarian cease-fire in Gaza and restarting talks for a ... two-state solution".

A top Hamas official in Lebanon, Osama Hamdan, said Hamas wanted "to put an end as quickly as possible to the aggression that our people suffer".

A Hamas source has said the proposal involves an initial six-week pause that would see more aid delivered into Gaza and the phased release of Israeli hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

## Tensions soaring

The conflict has also sent regional tensions soaring, with more attacks seen in the region.

US and British warplanes launched a new wave of airstrikes against Houthi camps in northern Yemen late Sunday, reported the Houthi-run al-Masirah TV.

The strikes hit targets in Saada Province, a Houthi stronghold, and Hodeidah, a strategic Red Sea port city.

Hamas condemned on Sunday the US-British airstrikes on Yemen, considering it "an escalation that will drag the region into more turmoil".

The United States will launch more strikes against Iran-backed militia groups in the Middle East, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan told an NBC program on Sunday.

Itamar Ben-Gvir, Israel's national security minister, said in an interview with The Wall Street Journal that US President Joe Biden was hindering Israel's war effort.

"Instead of giving us his full backing, Biden is busy with giving humanitarian aid and fuel (to Gaza), which goes to Hamas," Ben-Gvir said. "If Trump was in power, the US conduct would be completely different."

The Palestinian Foreign Ministry condemned Ben-Gvir's comments as "racist" and called for international sanctions against him, saying he threatens the region's stability.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

## Stunts on air



Saudi Hawks, the Royal Saudi Air Force aerobatic team, presents an air show during the second edition of the World Defense Show in Riyadh on Sunday. The show, which will run for five days featuring over 750 exhibitors from more than 65 countries, opened on Sunday. WANG DONGZHEN / XINHUA

# US Senate unveils \$118b bill on border security, assistance for Ukraine, Israel

WASHINGTON — The United States Senate unveiled a \$118 billion bipartisan border security bill on Sunday that would also provide aid to Ukraine and Israel, but it promptly slammed into opposition from the House of Representatives.

"I urge Congress to come together and swiftly pass this bipartisan agreement," US President Joe Biden said, also praising the migration measures in the bill, which took months to negotiate.

However, House of Representatives Speaker Mike Johnson declared it "dead on arrival" if it reaches his chamber.

"This bill is even worse than we expected, and won't come close to ending the border catastrophe the president has created," he said in a statement on X, formerly Twitter.

But Democratic and Republican Senate backers of the wide-ranging US border security and foreign military aid bill pledged to push ahead. Schumer said he would take steps to hold an initial vote on the bill on Wednesday.

If the bill were to become law, it would mark the most significant changes in US immigration and border security in decades, Reuters reported.

Some Democrats are angry that the measure does nothing to provide a pathway to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented people who have lived in the US for many years,

including "Dreamer" immigrants who were brought in as children.

Independent Senator Kyrsten Sinema told reporters the legislation would secure the US southern border, including by requiring the Department of Homeland Security to temporarily "shut down" the frontier to most migrants if there are an average of more than 5,000 crossing attempts per day over seven days.

In addition to \$20.23 billion for border security, the bill included \$60 billion to support Ukraine in its conflict with Russia, \$14.1 billion in security assistance for Israel, and \$2.44 billion to the US Central Command and the conflict in the Red Sea, according to figures from Senator Patty Murray, who chairs the Senate's Appropriations Committee.

An additional \$10 billion would provide humanitarian assistance for civilians in conflict zones including in Ukraine, Gaza and the West Bank, although the bill includes a provision barring its funds from going to the UN agency for Palestinians, known as the UNRWA.

## Request stalled

That request has been stalled by House Republicans' insistence that it be tied to a shift in immigration policy.

Mitch McConnell, the top Senate Republican, has supported the negotiations, saying Republicans would not get a better deal under a Republican White House.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Briefly

### UNITED STATES

#### Boeing flags potential delays after new issue

Boeing reported another problem with fuselages on its 737 jets that might delay deliveries of about 50 aircraft in the latest quality gaffe to plague the manufacturer. Boeing Commercial Airplanes CEO Stan Deal said in a letter to Boeing staff seen Monday that a worker at its supplier discovered misdrilled holes in fuselages. Spirit AeroSystems, based in Wichita, Kansas, makes a large part of the fuselages on Boeing Max jets. The problem was discovered by an employee of the supplier who notified his manager that two holes might have not been drilled according to specifications, Deal said.

### FRANCE

#### Paris votes to triple parking fees for SUVs

Parisians voted in a referendum on Sunday in favor of subjecting large SUVs to a threefold increase in parking charges as the French capital presses on with long-term plans to become a fully bikeable city. Some 54.5 percent of Parisians voted in favor of the measure, while 45.5 percent rejected it. The referendum, less than a year after city residents voted to ban e-scooters, aims to triple parking fees for cars of 1.6 tons and more to 18 euros (\$19) an hour to discourage "bulky, polluting" cars, City Hall said.

### SOUTH KOREA

#### Samsung chairman acquitted in suit

A South Korean court on Monday acquitted Samsung Electronics Chairman Lee Jae-yong of charges, such as stock price rigging and accounting fraud, linked to his management succession. The Seoul Central District Court ruled that no evidence was shown for all charges in this case, according to multiple local media reports. Thirteen more defendants, including former Samsung executives, were found not guilty of similar charges. Lee was indicted in September 2020 on charges of stock price manipulation.

### PAKISTAN

#### 10 killed in attack on police station

At least 10 police officers were killed and six others were injured in a terrorist attack at a police station in the Dera Ismail Khan district of Pakistan's northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province early on Monday, said the police. A group of unknown terrorists attacked the Chaudhwan police station in the Dera Ismail Khan district by using sniper guns, automatic rifles and hand grenades, Xinhua reported.

### GRAMMYS

#### Taylor Swift wins album of the year

Taylor Swift won album of the year at the Grammy Awards for *Midnights*, breaking the record for most wins in the category with four. She began her speech by thanking her producer and friend Jack Antonoff and added, "I would love to tell you this is the happiest moment of my life," she told the crowd but said she feels happy when she creates music and plays shows. Billie Eilish won song of the year for writing the *Barbie* hit, *What Was I Made For?*

AGENCIES—XINHUA

## Dragon-wear



People wear dragon-shaped headgear during the celebrations for the upcoming Chinese New Year at a park in Recife, Brazil, over the weekend. WANG TIANCONG / XINHUA

# Zelensky considers replacing army chief

KYIV — In an interview broadcast on Sunday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said he was considering a "reset" to replace several senior officials.

Speculation has gripped Ukraine for weeks over suggestions that the president was about to dismiss the commander in chief of Ukraine's Armed Forces, Valerii Zaluzhnyi. The two have been at odds over the conduct of the nearly two-year conflict, Reuters reported.

But Zelensky said any changes went beyond replacing a single person to harness efforts to boost capacities.

"When I speak of turnover, I have in mind something serious that does not concern a single person,

but the direction of the country's leadership," Zelensky told Italian state RAI television when asked about Zaluzhnyi.

"It is a question of the people who are to lead Ukraine. A reset is necessary, I am talking about a replacement of a number of state leaders, not only in the army sector.

"I am reflecting on this replacement. It's a question for the entire leadership of the country."

In an essay for *The Economist* last November, Zaluzhnyi said the conflict had entered a new phase of attrition. That drew a rebuke from the president.

Last week, as speculation over his dismissal intensified, he set out his case in a commentary for

broadcaster CNN on new electronic means of warfare.

On two occasions in the past week, Ukrainian media issued a torrent of reports that Zaluzhnyi's dismissal was imminent. In at least one instance, Zelensky's spokesperson denied the commander had been replaced.

Questions were also raised over whether Zaluzhnyi had been offered an alternative job, like an ambassadorship, and who might replace him.

Two leading possible candidates were Oleksandr Syrskyi, commander of land forces, and Kyrylo Budanov, head of the Ukrainian defense ministry's intelligence directorate.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

# UK retirement age needs to rise to 71, report shows

By JONATHAN POWELL  
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The retirement age for middle-aged workers in the United Kingdom will need to rise to 71, due to the effects of increasing life expectancy and declining birthrates on the state pension, research suggests.

Between May 2026 and March 2028, the current pension age in the UK, which is 66, is anticipated to increase to 67, and is projected to rise to 68 by 2044.

A report from the International Longevity Centre, titled *State Pension Age and Demographic Change*, indicates that with a high rate of workers

currently exiting the workforce before they reach state pension age primarily due to poor health, the current measures fall short of what is needed to sustain the pension system.

It implies that individuals born after April 1970 might need to work until the age of 71 before becoming eligible for pension benefits, *The Guardian* reported.

According to the research, there is a need for stronger emphasis on preventing ill health not only during old age but also from an early age throughout adulthood.

The Office for Budget Responsibility estimates that in the fiscal year 2023-24, pension benefits will

amount to 136 billion pounds (\$171.6 billion), with 124 billion pounds allocated to state pensions.

"In the UK, state pension age would need to be 70 or 71 compared with 66 now, to maintain the status quo of the number of workers per state pensioner," Les Mayhew, associate head of global research at the International Longevity Centre and author of the report, said.

"But if you bring preventable ill health into the equation, that would have to increase even more."

In response to the report, Jonathan Cribb, associate director and head of retirement at the Institute for Fiscal Studies, was quoted by

*The Guardian* as saying that a rise in the retirement age to 71 was not a "realistic policy option unless you have a real emergency".

While Cribb acknowledged the potential necessity of raising the pension age, he emphasized the importance of implementing additional cost-saving measures rather than solely relying on this approach, which he said was not "realistic or equitable".

A UK government spokesperson, cited by *The Guardian*, assured that measures taken would guarantee the state pension remained "a sustainable and fair foundation of income for future generations".

## Main attraction



People visit the China booth during the annual Los Angeles Travel & Adventure Show in the United States over the weekend. The show kicked off on Saturday. ZENG HUI / XINHUA

## BUSINESS

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An employee works on the production line of a machinery manufacturer in Huzhou, Zhejiang province. XIE SHANGGUO / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Stable growth forecast for China's machinery makers this year

By ZHONG NAN  
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China's machinery sector is expected to report year-on-year revenue and profit growth of 5 percent each this year, while exports are likely to increase by around 2 percent, industry experts estimated on Monday.

Despite the uncertainties caused by weakening global demand and geopolitical tensions, the foreign trade growth of China's machinery industry — a key economic indicator — rose 1.7 percent on a yearly basis to \$1.09 trillion in 2023, maintaining the \$1 trillion mark in foreign trade value for the third consecutive year, according to information released by the Beijing-based China Machinery Industry Federation (CMIF).

China's exports of machinery products amounted to \$783.02 billion last year, an increase of 5.8 percent year-on-year, accounting for 23.2 percent of the country's total export value.

Ye Dingda, chief economist of CMIF, said a large number of Chinese manufacturers are keen to cultivate new markets, such as Russian-speaking regions, Africa, Europe and Latin America to further expand their market presence. They have progressively developed a diverse pattern in the foreign trade market, Ye said.

"This trend will continue in 2024," Ye said. "Thanks to their advances in technology and competitive pricing, Chinese machinery manufacturers have

experienced a notable rise in the production and export of both mainframes and complete machinery units in recent years."

The combined export value of China's three tech-intensive green products — solar batteries, lithium-ion batteries and electric vehicles — reached 1.06 trillion yuan (\$147.31 billion) last year, breaking the 1 trillion yuan mark for the first time, with a year-on-year increase of 29.9 percent, according to data from CMIF.

Chen Bin, deputy director of CMIF's expert committee, said the machinery industry's external demand is under pressure due to several challenges, including the constriction of trade from a recovering global supply chain, a deceleration in the economic rebound of developed countries, escalating trade protectionism and geopolitical tensions.

For example, popular Chinese machinery products have become new targets of international trade disputes in recent years. The European Union has initiated a countervailing duty investigation into China's new energy vehicles and launched an anti-dumping investigation into mobile lifting platforms. The United Kingdom has begun anti-dumping and countervailing duty investigations into Chinese excavators.

Highlighting that a new round of technological revolution and industrial transformation will bring new growth opportunities, Chen said the deep integration of next-generation information tech-

nology with traditional industries, along with the advancement of eco-friendly practices, will hasten the shift in production and consumption patterns in both Chinese and global markets.

Nantong Tongyang Port Co Ltd, a freight forwarder located in Nantong, Jiangsu province, shipped 80 buses manufactured by Heifei, Anhui province-based Anhui Ankai Automobile Co Ltd to Saudi Arabia and Egypt from a port in Nantong, late last month.

The freight forwarder will transport a total of 380 buses, comprising both traditional fuel and electric-powered models, to various destinations across the world this month.

Benefiting from a tangible growth of the Belt and Road Initiative and Chinese automakers' established reputation in the Middle East, North Africa and member economies of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Chinese vehicles have sold well in overseas markets, said Tang Donghui, a sales manager at Nantong Tongyang Port Co Ltd.

The company will further help its clients ship 2,000 buses to global markets this year, Tang said.

According to Nanjing Customs data, Jiangsu province, a key export hub in China, achieved an export value of 194.9 billion yuan for solar batteries, lithium-ion batteries and electric vehicles in 2023. This secured the top position in export volume in China for the province, representing a year-on-year growth of 12.3 percent.

## More measures coming to brighten biz climate

Foreign investors, unified market in focus as plans afoot to advance reforms

By OUYANG SHIJIA  
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China will take a number of measures to improve its business environment and attract more foreign investment, in order to strengthen the drive for high-quality economic development, officials said on Monday.

Xiao Weiming, deputy secretary-general of the National Development and Reform Commission, the country's top economic regulator, said China will further improve institutional rules conducive to the construction of a unified national market.

"We will actively and steadily advance reforms in key areas such as finance, taxation and statistics, including studying and improving local tax systems," he said at a news conference in Beijing on Monday.

China, he said, will also conduct in-depth rectification of prominent issues in key areas and continuously report typical cases for new achievements in the construction of a unified national market, creating a favorable business environment for various types of operating business entities.

Meng Wei, director of the NDRC's

Department of Laws and Regulations, highlighted the importance of fostering a market-oriented, law-based and internationalized business environment, calling for effective measures to address key issues faced by enterprises.

She said the measures include eliminating various unreasonable restrictions to better uphold fair competition, improving top-level design to better protect legal rights and facilitating cross-border investment to enhance institutional opening-up.

This year, the country will enact policies to address outstanding issues in optimizing the law-based business environment. Assessments of consistency in macro policies will be strengthened to create a stable and transparent institutional environment devoid of negative surprises, Meng said.

Addressing concerns of foreign enterprises regarding market access and industrial cooperation, Meng said the country will introduce an action plan to attract and utilize foreign investment more effectively. Measures will also be taken to further reduce the negative list for for-

ign investment as well as remove restrictions on foreign investment in the manufacturing sector.

China has already made great strides in creating a favorable environment for all types of business entities. As of the end of January, amid China's push to seek private investment in thousands of local government projects through a national unified platform established last year, the private sector has participated in 1,591 such projects worth 1.98 trillion yuan (\$275 billion) in all, NDRC data showed.

With a series of measures to stabilize the economy and promote development taking effect, China's business entities have experienced a positive resurgence. As of the end of 2023, there were 184 million business entities in all, including over 32 million newly established ones. More than 10 million new companies were registered last year, up around 16 percent.

Ren Duanping, an official with the State Administration for Market Regulation, said the administration will take further steps to end unjustified charges levied on businesses as well as rectify unfair market competition and market intervention behavior, in a move to stimulate the vitality of market entities and strengthen their internal driving force.

## Inner Mongolia all in on green energy

By LIU YUKUN in Beijing and  
YUAN HUI in Hohhot

North China's Inner Mongolia autonomous region is set to facilitate the eco-friendly transformation of its advantageous traditional energy industries amid concerted efforts to exploit its abundant wind and solar resources to advance new energy in the region, said its annual government work report.

As a national coal hub and a region boasting abundant natural resources, it has positioned itself as playing a pivotal role in ensuring China's energy security. Last year, it topped the country in terms of coal supplies, newly increased and total installed capacity of power generation, and that of power generated from new energy resources.

This year, Inner Mongolia aims to bolster its new energy sector even further. The goal is to achieve a substantial investment of 300 billion yuan (\$41.76 billion) for the entire new energy industry chain, an additional installed new energy capacity of over 40 million kilo-

watts, and to maintain its leading position nationwide in both total and newly added new energy capacity, the report said.

Meanwhile, efforts are underway to establish national-level clusters focusing on rare earth materials, a modern coal chemical sector, silicon materials and photovoltaic manufacturing, said the report.

Sun Shaocheng, Party secretary of Inner Mongolia, said as a resource-rich region, Inner Mongolia will steadfastly advance energy-related economic development. Building upon the existing industrial foundation, the region will concurrently develop coal, electricity, oil, gas, wind and solar power, aiming to establish a collaborative, complementary and efficient energy supply system.

"Inner Mongolia boasts abundant new energy resources, with wind and solar energy constituting around 57 percent and 21 percent of the national total, respectively. We are seizing the opportunity (presented by China's green commitment), actively promoting the construction

of new energy projects," Sun said.

The efforts of boosting new energy development align with China's goal of achieving carbon neutrality before 2060, which was set in 2020.

"At the same time, traditional energy industries should not be simply labeled as 'low-end industries' and cease operating. Instead, efforts are needed to promote a high-end, intelligent and green transition. Large-scale technological transformation and upgrading projects should be implemented to drive equipment renewal, production process upgrades and digital empowerment, fostering the creation of more low-carbon and zero-carbon industrial parks," Sun said.

In 2023, Inner Mongolia saw coal output of 1.22 billion metric tons and total installed capacity for power generation exceed 200 million kW, supplying energy for 29 provinces nationwide. It also started operating China's largest onshore wind power base, said the report.

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## Dalian port gets smart touch with 5G

By ZHANG XIAOMIN  
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Liaoning Port Group's Dalian Container Terminal Co, which is located in Jinpu New Area of Dalian, Liaoning province, has enhanced efficiency with its integration of 5G-enabled unmanned container trucks, automated rail-mounted gantry cranes and remote-controlled quay cranes.

"The screen provides a clear panoramic view. By operating the joysticks in the office, I can complete the task now," said Qin Xuhai, 48, a quay crane operator in the terminal who now remotely maneuvers containers from ships onto smart container trucks.

Qin had 17 years of experience as a quay crane operator before he became a remote operator in June 2022. He recalled the challenges of traditional on-site operations, including physical strain and uncomfortable working conditions within the crane cabin at about 40 meters high.

A few hundred meters away from the office building, in the automated operations area, six unmanned container trucks are in use beneath a quay crane.

Once loaded, the trucks navigate through the yard, delivering the containers to automated rail-mounted

gantry cranes before returning to the quay for their next task.

These unmanned trucks rely on "5G+Beidou" technology, enabling real-time reception and execution of transport instructions, including autonomous driving, automatic positioning and overtaking operations.

Wang Chong, deputy manager of operations and management at the container terminal, stated that all unmanned trucks at the terminal are electrically powered, allowing for seven to eight hours of continuous operation after a one-hour charge, making them more energy-efficient compared to conventional internal combustion engine-driven transport methods.

The terminal is utilizing 15 5G-enabled unmanned container trucks now.

"Under the traditional manned truck operation mode, each operating line required six drivers, necessitating shift rotations. With unmanned trucks, automated operations can meet the 24-hour production demand, requiring only one staff member to monitor each operating line remotely," Wang said.

As for the 24 rail-mounted gantry cranes, they needed 16 personnel. Now, only five are required, and during personnel shortages, such as during the pandemic, as few as three were needed, he said.

"The system's intelligent algorithms ensure that the containers arriving at the port are automatically allocated to the optimal position in the yard, reducing waiting times under the same crane and thereby enhancing operational efficiency," Wang said.

According to data, after the system's online operation, the comprehensive efficiency of single quay crane operations increased by 5 percent, vessel operations efficiency increased by 10 percent, and the time for external trailers in the port was reduced by nearly 20 percent.

Zhang Hao, deputy general manager of Dalian Container Terminal Co, said that out of the terminal's eight quay cranes, two have completed transformation to automated operations. Plans are afoot to have all the eight cranes fully automated by 2025.

The Liaoning Port Group's "Dayaowan Smart Port 2.0" project has achieved intelligent and green upgrades on top of automation. For instance, the terminal has established three indoor and one outdoor environmental monitoring points, integrating comprehensive data on five major environmental elements involving port water, electricity, air, weather and tides.

"Smart factories are still a bit distant, but 5G is close to us. Ultimately,



A view of Dalian Container Terminal. YANG YI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

we aim to achieve industrial IoT and smart factories," said Bo Hongguang, a professor at the Institute of Operation and Logistics, which is part of the Dalian University of Technology.

When intelligent terminals used by equipment and production lines are easily connected to the 5G network, it lays the most important foundation for subsequent industrial big data collection and further application, he said.

In the 2023 list of 5G-connected factories released by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, Dalian Container Terminal's 5G Smart Port was included as one of the 300 factories that were selected from submissions across the country.

The guidelines for the construction of 5G fully connected factories issued by the ministry in August 2022 proposed that during the 14th

Five-Year Plan (2021-25), the focus will be on various industries like raw materials, equipment, consumer goods and electronics as well as key industry sectors like mining, ports and power, promoting the construction of fully connected 5G factories and driving the deep development of 5G integrated applications.

China's automated container terminals, both those already built and others under construction, rank first in the world, according to a news conference held by the State Council Information Office on Dec 21.

Currently, 18 automated container terminals have been completed, with an additional 27 under construction, including renovated automated container terminals, said Yang Huaxiong, deputy director of the Water Transport Bureau of the Ministry of Transport.

### Briefly

#### Shanghai bonded LNG bunkering soars

Shanghai Port registered a bonded liquefied natural gas bunkering of over 260,000 cubic meters in 2023, marking a 98.5 percent year-on-year surge. Shanghai Port is China's first — and the world's third — port able to provide ship-to-ship bonded LNG bunkering with simultaneous operations. At present, the port offers a range of bunkering services on a regular basis. International shipping companies including CMA CGM Group and ZIM Integrated Shipping Services Ltd have chosen the port to refuel their tanks.

#### Consumer expo set in Haikou April 13-18

The fourth China International Consumer Products Expo will take place in Haikou, capital city of South China's Hainan province, from April 13 to 18. The expo will be held across various venues, with the Hainan International Convention and Exhibition Center serving as the main venue. The fourth CICPE will also feature themed exhibitions on galleons and yachts, health consumption and various other activities.

XINHUA • CHINA DAILY

# BUSINESS

## Electric motorcycle makers drive overseas

WUXI — An electric motorcycle manufacturer in Wuxi, East China's Jiangsu province, has found instant popularity online after its electric tricycle became the talk of a US town recently.

Wu Bo ordered the tricycle online in December as a Christmas gift for her father-in-law in the city of Dearborn, Michigan.

The \$600 electric vehicle, with its zippy maneuverability and an open cargo bed, soon captured the attention of the neighborhood, enticing local residents to take it for a test ride.

"This is beyond our expectations, knowing that our product has brought so much fun to a US family," said Qin Xiaoming, a manager with Jiangsu Guowei Motorcycle.

"I guess they'd never seen this stuff before," he said. "It's easy to drive. It can carry cargo and people, and it requires no gasoline at all. These features have combined to make them excited."

The tricycle's popularity jumped after Wu recorded footage of the ensuing joy ride and shared it across various social media platforms in China.

The viral videos have amassed tens of millions of views and resonated with netizens, prompting enthusiastic suggestions for overseas business expansion.

"What good fortune it is for Guowei! They definitely must cash in on it," commented an internet user with the handle Wenzhongzhou.

The manufacturer became keenly aware of the vast opportunities made possible on a global scale by this sudden surge in popularity. In fact, according to Ni Xiaofeng, general manager of Guowei, the number of online orders from the US has



Employees assemble an electric tricycle at a factory in Wuxi, Jiangsu province, on Jan 26. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

nearly tripled since January.

"Those videos gave us lots of confidence. We can see huge potential ahead, because two and three-wheeled electric motorcycles will remain a low-carbon option for short-distance commuting in the foreseeable future," he said.

Ni revealed that the 23-year-old company, based in Wuxi's Xishan district, strategized overseas plans more than a decade ago and has established solid sales networks in more than 80 countries and regions.

Guowei is a constant participant in domestic and global industrial exhibitions and trade fairs.

The company's next step is to enhance its localization efforts, including building factories overseas and studying the safety and quality regulations of targeted markets, he added.

The viral tricycle videos again underscore the importance of social media, said Fang Guoming, a manager with the Wuxi Sunlike Import and Export Co. "As a professional in this industry, I suggest you never

underestimate the significant role that social media plays."

Dubbed the Chinese capital of electric motorcycles, Xishan is home to tens of thousands of electric motorcycle makers. Official figures show that more than 22 million EM units rolled off the line here in 2022, accounting for around one-third of the nation's annual output and generating some 66 billion yuan (\$9.2 billion) in revenue.

More local players have responded to the nation's call of "going out" in recent years, said Shen Yu, secretary-general of the Xishan District Electric Vehicle Foreign Trade Association.

Shen estimates that the national average growth of EM exports in 2023 reached 20 percent despite a sluggish global economy.

In Xishan alone, more than 160 motorcycle makers are exporting their products and opening brand stores in over 140 countries and regions, he added.

Among them is Ishtiaq Ahmed, an

EM enthusiast and entrepreneur from Bangladesh. Ahmed, who was previously working with a large EM enterprise, is now harnessing China's expertise to create his own brand.

"Based on my couple of years of experience in this industry, I would say that China is dominating this industry pretty well due to its great supply chain and affordable prices," he said.

Ahmed said his team plans to locate the business in the Czech Republic, the most competitive region in Europe for a majority of businesses, to provide excellent after-sales support.

Yan Weijue in Wuxi contributed to this story.

CHINA DAILY



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## Holiday to spur recovery in tourism

By end-2023, sector bounced back to 88 percent of pre-pandemic levels

By ZHU WENQIAN zhuwenqian@chinadaily.com.cn

The speedy recovery of China's tourism sector has injected momentum into the global travel industry, spurred on by various visa-free policies and increased airline capacity, and China's outbound and inbound tourism markets will continue to grow rapidly this year, said the United Nations' World Tourism Organization.

By the end of last year, global tourism recovered to 88 percent of levels seen before the COVID-19 pandemic. International tourism is well on track to fully recover to pre-pandemic levels in 2024, despite economic challenges and uncertainties, said the World Tourism Barometer report recently released by the UNWTO.

The upcoming Chinese New Year break, which extends from Feb 10 to 17 — a day longer than usual — is expected to unleash the full potential of China's dynamic travel and consumption markets, an expert said.

"Travel has become a rigid demand point for urban and rural residents seeking better quality of life, and nothing can hinder the long-term prosperity of the tourism market and the high-quality development of the tourism industry," said Dai Bin, president of the China Tourism Academy.

The recent announcements of visa-free policies between China and the Southeast Asian countries of Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia are expected to spur more international travel during the Spring Festival holiday period.

More direct flights connecting cities in China with Southeast Asia have been launched to cater to growing demand among passengers.

Since Thursday, the number of flights from Guangzhou, Guangdong province, to Singapore and Kuala Lumpur operated by China Southern Airlines increased from three to four flights per day. The carrier's flights from Guangzhou to Bangkok rose from four to five daily, covering different time periods throughout the day.

In addition, Guangzhou-based China Southern has been cooperating with the local government by holding various activities to attract more overseas Chinese

residing in Southeast Asia to return to China for the long holiday, the airline said.

In addition, Scoot — the low-cost arm of Singapore Airlines Group — said the 30-day visa-free policy between China and Singapore, which is set to begin on Friday, has provided more options for travelers to explore the world. The carrier, which operates direct flights connecting 17 Chinese mainland cities with Singapore, is fully confident in the growth potential of China's air travel demand.

"China has always been an important market for Scoot, and flights connecting Chinese cities account for one-quarter of our global route network. With China-Singapore visa-free policy coming into place, demand for flights between the two countries is expected to be stronger," said Lee Yong Sin, general manager of Scoot China and vice-president of sales at Scoot.

Meanwhile, China announced in late November a unilateral 15-day visa-free entry policy for holders of ordinary passports from France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Malaysia, during the period from Dec 1, 2023 to Nov 30, 2024, and global searches for inbound travel to China have significantly increased since then.

The International Air Transport Association announced that the recovery in air travel continued in December and total traffic in 2023 edged even closer to matching pre-pandemic volume.

Total air traffic in 2023, measured in revenue passenger kilometers, rose 36.9 percent compared with 2022. Globally, full-year traffic in 2023 returned to 94.1 percent of pre-pandemic levels in 2019, according to the IATA, which represents some 300 airlines comprising 83 percent of global air traffic.

Last year, Asia-Pacific airlines posted a 126.1 percent rise in full-year international traffic compared with 2022, maintaining the strongest year-on-year growth among different regions, the IATA said.

"The strong post-pandemic rebound continued in 2023. The restoration of connectivity is powering the global economy as people travel to do business, further their education, take hard-earned vacations and much more," said Willie Walsh, IATA's director-general.

## Hainan Air launches direct flights between Haikou, UAE

By CHEN BOWEN in Haikou chenbowen@chinadaily.com.cn

An increase in inbound visits to South China's Hainan province is underway, aligning with the province's efforts to launch and restore more international flight routes.

The first international air route between the tropical island province and the Middle East has commenced. The inaugural run of Hainan Airlines flight HU763 departing from Haikou Meilan International Airport to Abu Dhabi last week signifies a new chapter in connectivity between the two regions.

"The year 2024 marks the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the UAE. The new route plays a positive role in promoting Haikou Meilan International Air-

port to building a regional aviation gateway hub facing the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean," said Yang Xiaobin, president of Hainan Airport Group.

"It is also an innovative attempt by Hainan Airport Group to develop overseas routes together with cross-border e-commerce and air cargo business," Yang said.

Hainan Airport Group signed a strategic cooperation agreement with Dubai Integrated Economic Zones to cooperate alongside Abu Dhabi Airports during the China Hainan Free Trade Port-UAE Promotion Conference, under the theme: "Exchanging new development, sharing new opportunities", held in September in Dubai. The cooperation underscores the commitment to gradually fostering precise investment channels for the global aviation industry.

Hainan restored and opened 50 overseas passenger and cargo routes in 2023, aiming to enhance its global connectivity. The restoration of Hainan's main passenger source markets, including routes with Hong Kong, Singapore and Bangkok, holds promise for reinvigorating travel and trade ties in the post-pandemic landscape.

This year, the province plans to restore 62 overseas routes, Yang said.

The launch of the twice-weekly flights "marks an important milestone for Abu Dhabi Airports and the broader UAE-China relationship. The launch of this new route boosts our connectivity, and the route will further enhance bilateral relations and create new business and tourism opportunities between the two global destinations," said Elena Sorlini, managing director

and interim CEO of Abu Dhabi Airports.

Hainan aims to receive 1 million international overnight visitors in 2024, according to the provincial department of tourism, culture, radio, television and sport.

"The increase of overseas routes will attract more international tourists to Hainan, help to improve the internationalization level and promote the upgrading of Hainan's tourism industry," said a representative from the department.

"The routes are set to play a pivotal role in elevating the international visibility and reputation of Hainan. As more international tourists are exposed to the island's captivating scenery and rich culture, Hainan's global allure is poised to ascend, positioning it as a must-visit destination on the world stage," he said.

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# BUSINESSFOCUS

By WANG KEJU  
wangkeju@chinadaily.com.cn

As winter tightens its icy grip, hot spring getaways are growing in popularity across China.

From bathhouses in bustling cities to hot spring resorts in serene rural areas, an increasing number of individuals are seeking the soothing embrace of these warm retreats during the chilly season.

Opting for multifunctional hot spring venues, immersing oneself in warm waters, savoring delectable cuisine and beverages, and experiencing a blissful contrast of hot and cold — businesses in the hot spring industry are investing in innovative concepts and experiences to attract a diverse range of customers, according to analysts.

Travel portal Tuniu said in a recent report that consumer interest in hot spring tourism has experienced remarkable growth since November, with monthly keyword searches related to hot springs more than doubling compared to October.

The three-day New Year holiday saw an unprecedented demand in ride-hailing for destinations such as hot springs and bathhouses, with a staggering 2,000 percent year-on-year increase, data from online ride-hailing company Didi Chuxing showed.

Cities like Beijing, Harbin in Heilongjiang province, and Dalian in Liaoning province experienced a surge in demand for transportation to these spots, witnessing a several-fold growth in ride-hailing requests for those seeking a relaxing hot spring retreat, according to the data.

As the weather turns colder, individuals are actively seeking ways to relax and indulge in wellness experiences.

Hot springs, with their therapeutic properties and serene ambience, have emerged as a favored choice for those looking to escape the pressures of daily life and rejuvenate their mind and body, said Zhu Keli, founding director of the China Institute of New Economy.

Once considered a simple bathing activity, hot springs have undergone a transformation to emerge as a new form of social experience that integrates various functions such as dining, karaoke and gaming, among others.

This has redefined the way people enjoy hot springs, and turned them into hubs of relaxation, socializing and holistic entertainment, attracting younger people, Zhu added.

Zhou Yang, a 29-year-old Beijing resident, was intrigued by the overwhelming online posts about bathhouses where people could immerse themselves in hot springs while enjoying a range of additional activities.

She decided to give it a try on a Saturday in mid-January, as the allure of hot springs' therapeutic waters, coupled with an all-in-one entertainment and relaxation experience, proved irresistible.

However, upon entering the lobby, Zhou and her friends were taken aback as the hall was jam-packed,



## HOT SPRING TOURISM SIZZLES IN ICY CLIMES

with long waiting lines stretching in front of them.

Zhou and her friends' determination to experience the hot springs outweighed the inconvenience, prompting them to wait about an hour for their turn.

"These new hot spring bathing centers provide a comprehensive range of services that go beyond mere relaxation, including movie screenings, gaming facilities, indoor playgrounds and buffet dining," Zhou said. "The most appealing part for me is the concept of 'fruit freedom', allowing patrons to enjoy unlimited pricey fruit offerings such as durians and cherries."

Young consumers, specifically those born in the 1990s and 2000s, make up more than half of the hot spring market, data from Chinese travel agency ly.com showed.

With rates starting at 300 yuan (\$41.7) per visit for such bathhouses, indulging in a session at an all-inclusive bathhouse is not cheap at all, Zhou said. Higher-end establishments often charge more for premium services and exclusive amenities, she added.

### Social experience

The hot spring industry in China generally maintained a revenue level of about 250 billion yuan during 2018-22, with the exception of 2020 when earnings were a meager 105.95 billion yuan due to the COVID-19 pandemic, according to data from ocn.com.cn, a Shen-

More Chinese opting to savor experience, looking to escape daily life pressures, rejuvenate mind and body



**Top:** People enjoy leisure time at a hot spring resort in Zhaotong, Yunnan province, in January. ZENG SANDONG / FOR CHINA DAILY  
**Above:** Children play at a hot spring water park in Bozhou, Anhui province, in December. LIU QINLI / FOR CHINA DAILY

The most appealing part for me is the concept of 'fruit freedom', allowing patrons to enjoy unlimited pricey fruit offerings such as durians and cherries."

Zhou Yang, a 29-year-old Beijing resident

zhen-based consulting platform.

The evolution of hot springs into a new social experience has not only enhanced the visitor experience, but also attracted a wider demographic.

Families, friends and even corporate groups now view hot springs as a destination that offers something for everyone, said Bo Wenxi, chief economist at marketing firm Interpublic Group.

Moreover, while the northern region of China has traditionally been known for its bathhouse culture, data from Tuniu suggests that people from southern China are increasingly embracing hot spring tourism as a preferred leisure activity.

In November, more than 70 percent of hot spring bookings were made by users from southern regions.

Among them, Nanjing and Suzhou in Jiangsu province, Hangzhou and Wenzhou in Zhejiang province, and Guangzhou and Shenzhen in Guangdong province, as well as Shanghai, ranked high in terms of booking popularity, according to Tuniu.

Nestled in Northeast China's Heilongjiang province, Harbin, one of the nation's chilliest cities, has attracted droves of domestic visitors from warmer climes in the past weeks, especially those eager to experience the unique bathing culture and traditions that the city has to offer.

Data from e-commerce platform Meituan showed that during the New Year holiday, "bathhouse" emerged as the top trending search term in Harbin, with search volumes increasing by a remarkable 375.5 percent compared to the same period the previous year.

In addition, the transaction volume of bathhouses in Harbin experienced a significant year-on-year growth of 404.6 percent, while order volume and the number of users engaging in bathhouse visits increased by 324.1 percent and 331.1 percent, respectively.

"In order to avoid peak hours and long lines, my friends and I headed straight to a bathhouse that is highly recommended on social media platform Xiaohongshu — first thing upon landing," said Chen Jiaxin, a 28-year-old insurance broker based in Hong Kong, who traveled to Harbin in mid-January.

The city's cold climate provides the perfect backdrop for enjoying a relaxing and rejuvenating bathing experience, making it a popular choice for southern Chinese residents, who are accustomed to relatively moderate winters, to indulge in a hot bath or sauna in the freezing cold weather, Chen added.

As more individuals prioritize their well-being and seek holistic experiences, the demand for hot spring activities is expected to grow.

This presents an opportunity for businesses to tap into this lucrative market by providing innovative services that cater to the evolving needs and preferences of consumers, said Bo of Interpublic Group.

However, it is equally important to acknowledge that hot spring tourism exhibits a certain degree of seasonality, with fluctuations in demand based on the time of year, experts cautioned.

The seasonal nature of hot springs poses challenges for businesses operating in this sector.

The need to manage fluctuating demand requires careful planning and strategic approaches to ensure steady revenue streams throughout the year, said Wu Ruoshan, a visiting researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' tourism research center.

For instance, hot spring venues could introduce indoor thermal pools, spa treatments, wellness programs or cultural experiences to attract visitors during the months when outdoor activities may be less desirable.

By expanding their range of services, hot spring businesses can cater to a broader customer base and maintain a more consistent level of demand throughout the year, Wu said.

Furthermore, collaboration with other tourism sectors can be beneficial in addressing seasonality challenges.

Partnering with local attractions, hotels or tour operators to create bundled packages or joint marketing initiatives can help attract tourists to hot springs even during slower periods, Wu added.

## Stylish and functional: skiwear slides into action

By WANG KEJU

China's snow-covered playgrounds are witnessing a surge in popularity, especially for those seeking the thrill of gliding down pristine slopes this winter.

However, it is not only about adrenaline-pumping activities; skiing gear — which is turning enthusiasts into stylish trendsetters — has redefined the way winter sport is perceived.

Data from online travel agency Ctrip showed that ski ticket orders for the final week of 2023 posted a month-on-month growth of 113 percent. Meanwhile, the number of ski ticket orders nearly doubled compared to the same period the previous year.

As more individuals embrace the sport and seek out affordable yet fashionable options for their skiing journey, manufacturers and retailers within the skiing apparel sector have been presented with a substantial market opportunity.

"Gone are the days when skiing apparel was purely functional," said An Yang, a skiing enthusiast from Beijing.

Many of her friends who wanted to try skiing just for fun are turning to An for recommendations on skiing garments, she said.

They are specifically looking for gear that not only meets their functional needs, but also looks appealing on camera, since capturing memorable moments on the slopes has become an integral part of the snow sports experience, An added.

According to data from e-commerce platform Tmall, sales of skiing apparel in 2023 rose over 106 percent compared to the previous year, while skiing goggles saw a year-on-year growth of about 73 percent, and skiing helmets surged by over 81 percent from 2022.

The keyword search volume for "skiing" jumped 40-fold on Miao Street, the e-commerce platform of Intime Department Store, over the last 30 days since mid-December, while the number of skiwear items sold witnessed a year-on-year growth of over 100 percent.

"A few years ago, due to the high costs associated with purchasing their own gear, people heading to ski resorts mostly relied on rented skiwear, which were mostly in darker hues and lacking in fashion and self-expression," An said.

and casual travelers alike, said Chai Zhenzhen, an analyst at the research institute of Chinese e-commerce giant JD.

A report released by the China Tourism Academy in January highlighted China's status as the largest market for entry-level skiers.

With an increasing number of residents embracing the sport in the post-Winter Olympics era, there has been a significant surge in demand for beginner's skiing equipment.

As the ski apparel market experiences a surge in demand, a rising wave of domestic brands are now joining the race to capture a share of the pie alongside well-established overseas outdoor brands favored by seasoned skiers, Chai added.

Beneunder, a well-known brand in the outdoor sun protection category, has expanded its product line to cater to winter sports enthusiasts.

Recognizing the growing demand for ski apparel, the brand has introduced a ski suit set that aims to provide functionality and comfort while prioritizing lightweight design.

The three-in-one garment, which combines a protective outer layer with insulating inner layers, is priced at around 1,000 yuan (\$139) and features an extensive color pal-



Visitors check out skiwear products during global sports and outdoor expo ISPO in Beijing in January. WU CHANGQING / FOR CHINA DAILY

ette, according to information on its Tmall purchase page.

SnowFlying Industrial Co, a Chinese down apparel maker, has also set its sights on capturing the skiwear market. With a vision to create a "go-to skiwear for the younger generation", the company recently unveiled its skiwear pieces, with retail prices current-

ly set at about 1,500 yuan.

For beginners, ski apparel of domestic brands is proving to be a reliable and cost-effective option, offering a winning combination of style and performance, said Zhou Zhicong, a skiing coach in Chongli, a district of Hebei province's Zhangjiakou city which co-hosted the Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games.

Not only does it boast attractive aesthetics and functionality, but it also comes at a significantly lower price point compared to international high-end brands.

This affordability has led many newcomers to develop a passion for skiing, with the option to upgrade to renowned international brands at a later stage, Zhou added.

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Biden administration's restrictive trade initiative fails to gain traction in Asia-Pacific

Reports that talks over the "Indo-Pacific" Economic Framework for Prosperity have stalled suggest the United States' efforts to use the new economic agreement among 14 Asia-Pacific countries to counter China on the economic front in the region have basically failed.

Launched by Washington in May 2022, the Joe Biden administration's first major trade and economic initiative came with much fanfare and with the aim of strengthening relationships with key economies in the region to establish supply chains excluding China. It was to be built on four pillars — supply chains, clean energy, tax and anti-corruption, and trade — and involve US allies such as Japan, the Republic of Korea and Australia, with the IPEF participants together accounting for about 40 percent of the global economy.

Yet Biden's signature trade initiative has been pretty much dead in the water after the US opted against agreeing to an "early harvest" of outcomes for the "trade pillar" last November, mainly due to its refusal to open up the US market to the other members and domestic concerns about US jobs.

Senator Sherrod Brown, a Democrat from Ohio and leader of the Senate banking committee, has led the opposition within Biden's Democratic Party to the finalizing of the trade pillar, citing a lack of "enforceable labor standards". He also led the opposition to the Trans-Pacific Partnership in 2015, which American labor unions believe would cause more offshoring of jobs and lower wages,

and benefit only large corporations.

Many Democrats believe former president Barack Obama's support for the TPP helped Donald Trump win the 2016 election, and with many US workers believing the IPEF would be doing them no good, the Democrats don't want to risk losing the votes of labor unions, a key Democratic constituency, again.

Some US allies and partners have also been unenthusiastic about the trade initiative, partly because it is not a free trade deal and does not offer them US market access. That the IPEF seems set to go nowhere not only points to the failure of Washington to rebuild its economic leadership in the Asia-Pacific. It will also deal another heavy blow to the country's credibility, which took a hit when the US negotiated and then pulled out of the TPP in 2017.

The success of the Asia-Pacific economy depends on openness, cooperation and mutual benefits. For any regional economic cooperation framework to benefit its participating economies, it must be open and inclusive, rather than being discriminatory and exclusive.

The US should heed the message and change course as its attempt to hold back China's development by politicizing trade and tech issues has already disrupted the global industry and supply chains, causing severe damage to the multilateral trading system, which hurts the interests of all economies.

## US domestic politics further fueling global volatility

After the European Union approved a four-year €50 billion (\$53.86 billion) aid package to Ukraine last week, it was widely regarded as only being a matter of time before the US Congress would give the nod to the new military aid that the Joe Biden administration has long demanded for US proxies and allies on various fronts.

Senators on Sunday released the highly anticipated \$118 billion package for Ukraine, Israel and other allies of the United States, which, as demanded by Republicans, is paired with border enforcement policy.

That the Biden administration is required to strengthen federal border control in Texas and other border states, something that many Republicans insist is still not strong enough, was made the prerequisite for the military aid package after days of hard debate showed the extent to which some in the country's divided legislature are willing to take advantage of grave geopolitical situations in various parts of the world to realize their domestic agenda.

The aforementioned proposal to make border control a condition for the approval of the military aid package quickly ran into a wall of opposition from top House Republicans, including Speaker Mike Johnson. The Senate was expected this week to hold a key test vote on the legislation, but within hours of the text being released Johnson said on

social media that it would be "dead on arrival" if it reaches the House.

As the US media observed, the coming days will be "a crucial test" of whether congressional leaders can once again muscle their members to support such a package that is designed to assert the US' global commitment, and also shows the country's division on its own woes — only by leveraging bipartisan consensus on geopolitics can the two parties seek to accomplish their interest exchanges.

Thus the worry of some is reasonable that the partisan strife in the country, which will only markedly intensify with the unfolding of the presidential election, will add more uncertainties to the solution of international geopolitical problems, including rising tensions.

The quadrennial political show of the US will overlap with the key stages for development of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the Middle East crisis. Both crises have come to a critical juncture with more parties, such as Islamic State, seeking to take advantage of the conflicts after realizing the US is now preoccupied with its preelection tussling.

With Washington still resorting to force to assert itself, it is in danger of being played if it continues to divide its focus in this way. This will only propel the global turbulence to an even more acutely dangerous pitch.

## India should respect Maldives' sovereignty

Whether India will withdraw its troops from the Maldives by March 15 as required by the island country's government may be a matter of dignity for India. But for the Maldives, it is a matter of sovereignty.

The Maldives' foreign ministry said in a statement on Saturday that officials from both countries met in New Delhi and agreed that India would begin withdrawing troops from the Maldives on March 10 and complete the process by May 10. So it seems that both sides have reached a deal on the withdrawal of Indian troops from the island country.

What is weird is the fact that the Indian side did not mention the withdrawal of its troops, instead its foreign ministry said the two countries "agreed on a set of mutually workable solutions to enable continued operation of Indian aviation platforms" that provide humanitarian services to the Maldives.

It is believed that there are at least 75 Indian military personnel in the Maldives and their known activities include transporting patients from remote islands and rescuing people at sea.

Mohamed Muizzu became the first president of the Maldives to make China the destination for his first official trip in the region rather than India. Immediately after he concluded his successful China trip last month, he said to the media that the Maldives' smaller size did not give any country the license to bully it, which

many believe was a reference to India.

In the latest flare-up of frictions between the two countries on the issue, Indian military personnel boarded the Maldives' fishing vessels. The Maldives' defense ministry released a statement on the incident on Feb 2. But it did not explain what the Indian military personnel did on the boats.

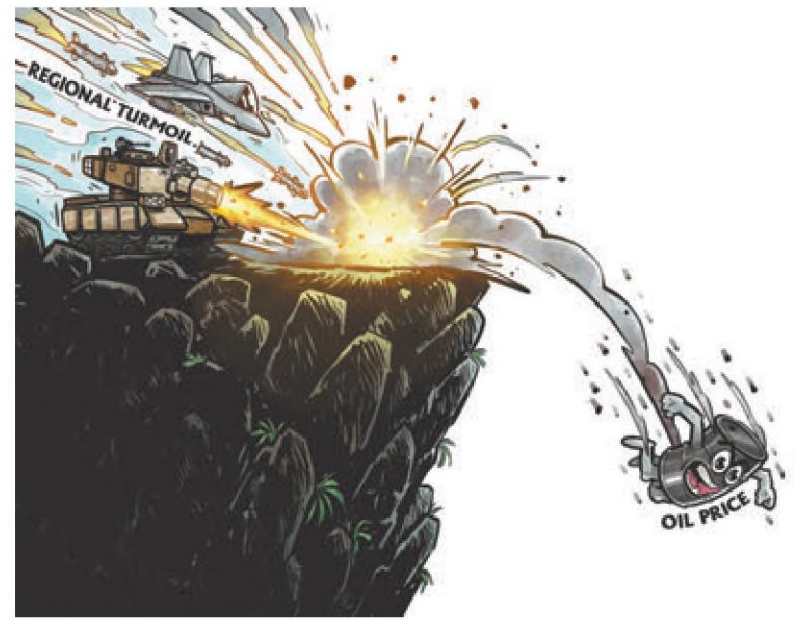
"On Feb 1, 2024, the foreign ministry of the Maldives has asked (India) officially for the details of the operation that was carried out while Maldivians were fishing in the Maldivian exclusive economic zone, without any coordination with the relevant authorities and against all international laws," the statement said in the native Dhivehi language.

There is no justification for India to defy the request of the Maldives, a sovereign country, by maintaining its military presence there.

It is quite probably for the sake of saving its face that India does not want to mention the withdrawal of its troops. With an election drawing close, the pullout of Indian troops from the neighboring island country may be considered as a humiliating diplomatic setback for the Narendra Modi administration.

India is a big country that has traditional friendly relations with the Maldives. It should respect the sovereignty of its neighbor. Chauvinism and a big brother attitude will only further worsen relations between the two countries, and the stability of the region.

Cai Meng



## Opinion Line

## Development is the foundation and priority for nation's security

If development comes to a halt, the foundation of security will be weakened. Only by developing the productive forces and enhancing the nation's economic, scientific and technological strength and overall national strength, can China build a security barrier for its prosperity, the people's well-being, social harmony and stability, and can it provide a solid material and technological foundation enabling it to effectively respond to various possible "gray rhino" and "black swan" events.

At the same time, security is a necessary environment and an important guardian for develop-

ment. In the current context of growing external uncertainties and complexity, China must put risk prevention and protection of security in a more prominent position.

Some core technologies in China are still subject to other countries. The country should attach great importance to basic research, strengthen the role of enterprises in scientific and technological innovation, and boost their innovation capability and creativity.

It should effectively guard against prominent risks in key areas, make coordinated efforts to defuse the risks in real estate, local govern-

ment debts, and small and medium-sized financial institutions, so as to resolutely hold the bottom line that no systemic risks will occur. At the same time, practical measures must be taken to ensure food, energy and resources security.

The more open the country is, the more important it is to pay attention to security, balance the relations between development and security, and make good use of the toolbox under various extreme situations to firmly safeguard national sovereignty, security and development interests.

— PEOPLES DAILY

## Coordination key to easing festival travel woes

On Sunday, Wuhan Tianhe International Airport in Wuhan, Hubei province, closed its two runways, while several trains were suspended at the city's railway station. Passengers were advised not to go to the train station without a clear message stating otherwise.

And Wuhan is not the only place battling heavy rain and snow, which has hit 11 provincial-level regions and is believed to be the most challenging weather since 2008. With 9 billion passenger trips expected to be made during the Spring Festival holiday which starts on Saturday, the challenge of ensuring safe and smooth travel should not be underestimated.

About 80 percent of the trips during this year's Spring Festival

travel rush are expected to be self-driving, and there are already reports of passengers being stranded on some highways and in service stations.

To help them, various departments of local governments and highway authorities need to strengthen their coordination to provide not only emergency services such as gas and food, but also precise traffic coordination and weather information so as to prevent more drivers from being trapped.

Especially, with the increasing popularity of electric vehicles, it's essential to ensure the stable operation of the power grid and prevent widespread power failure in the extreme weather conditions, so as

to lower the possibility of long queues at electricity charging posts.

For passengers stranded at train stations and airports due to train and flight delays, coordination between railway, aviation and other transport departments is essential so as to provide them with other choices such as buses. There should be targeted efforts to strengthen information and other supportive services to minimize passengers' anxiety.

While addressing these fundamental issues, it's crucial to draw lessons from similar events in the past. For instance, a key lesson that can be learned from 2008 is that highways should not be closed unless necessary.

— BEIJING NEWS

## What They Say

## Kishida government trying to play a dirty trick

The Fumio Kishida government of Japan has reportedly been trying to send two messages to former US president Donald Trump since the latter won Republican primaries in Iowa and New Hampshire about two weeks ago: don't try to strike any deal with Beijing that could upend years of collective efforts to rein in China and never weaken the United States' support for the secessionists of the Taiwan island.

According to Reuters' interviews with several anonymous Japanese officials familiar with the matter, Tokyo's outreach includes dispatching a senior ruling-party figure to try to meet Trump, and engagement by Japanese diplomats with think tanks and former US officials aligned with Trump.

Although a Trump aide told the media that no recent meetings have taken place between Trump and Japanese officials, and they would not comment further, something underneath is apparently going on with the Japanese side trying to influence the United States' China policy. As Japanese Prime Minister

Fumio Kishida prepares for an April state visit to the US at President Joe Biden's invitation, it would not prove a surprise for his team to try and pave the way through the aforementioned efforts for a possible meeting between him and Trump, or at least their respective advisors or aides, during his visit.

Tokyo has the tradition of making a bet in US presidential election and taking preemptive moves to establish relations in advance with the candidate that it thinks the most likely to win the election in a bid to try and command a good position as early as possible to influence the US' future Japan policy.

That's fine as long as the US side does not think such organized and systemic moves are attempts to interfere in its internal affairs or constitute behavior that seeks to manipulate the US' presidential election.

Yet what the Kishida government has been trying to do this time is intolerable. The despicable nature of its ignominious maneuvers under the table regarding Sino-US

relations and the Taiwan question only brings shame on Japan.

By trying to drive a wedge between Washington and Beijing and incite the US to obstruct China's national reunification in such an open and provocative manner, Tokyo has rendered all its claimed efforts to mend Sino-Japanese ties over the past few years in vain, and seriously damaged, if not shattered, the delicate mutual trust it has just built with Beijing since the meeting of the leaders of the two countries in San Francisco in November last year. Before the Kishida government rebuilds its credit, it is not Sino-US ties that will be affected, but the Sino-Japanese relations.

What Japan actually fears is that it will be left high and dry once the Sino-US ties recover, as it is well aware how far it has gone these years ardently playing the anti-China vanguard role assigned by Washington.

Now the question is whether the tail can wag the dog.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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## COMMENT

Shi Dan and Deng Zhou

## New productive forces need new industrialization

Recently, "new productive forces" has emerged as a prominent term in China, with its essence rooted in technological innovation. This concept serves as a pivotal driver for advancing high-quality economic development. The imperative for China to explore new avenues of development and facilitate high-quality development and new industrialization is pressing. To this end, China is actively integrating resources for technological innovation, leading the development of strategic emerging industries and future sectors, and expediting the establishment of new quality production capacity.

In the current global landscape, the ongoing new industrial revolution, propelled by advancements in digital technology, is disrupting traditional industries, established economic norms and long-accepted patterns of specialization. Simultaneously, countries across the world have been making greater efforts to reduce carbon dioxide emissions as a shared global goal, and easing their pursuit of fossil fuel-driven industrialization while taking measures to meet rising green demands.

Unlike some developed countries, China began its digitalization and green transformation at a relatively low development level, as it knows embracing the path of new industrialization is necessary for addressing the challenges and seizing the strategic opportunities.

New industrialization refers to industrialization of digital intelligence. The digital domain has seen a multitude of disruptive innovations, which have given rise to new industries and formats, creating novel production factors, and triggering changes in the organizational forms of production.

One manifestation of the changes in production is the substitution of labor by, among other things, automation, posing a serious challenge to labor-intensive industries and weakening the role of developing countries in the global industry chains. This has led to a reduction in China's competitiveness in labor-intensive industries and some segments of the industry chains. The essence of new industrialization lies in restructuring China's competitiveness, leveraging advanced production factors such as knowledge, technology, human capital and data to boost industrial development.

Besides, digital technology has become a crucial means to enhance technological capability and control the global value chains. To become a significant participant and a leader in the new industrial revolution, China must further integrate digital technology with manufacturing through new industrialization. For that, China has to comprehensively develop all aspects of the industry and value chains, product lifecycles, supply chains, and different segments of the business ecosystem.

Low-carbon development is what distinguishes new industrialization from traditional industrialization. And China has vowed to peak its carbon emissions before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060.



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

New industrialization advances on a low-carbon path, creating new constraints and challenges as well as new opportunities. Technologies, products, services and industries capable of overcoming these new constraints will become drivers of growth in the new industrialization process, by utilizing new energy and carbon capture, and preserving the ecology.

To promote green and low-carbon development, China needs to reduce carbon emissions from industries and build a world-class green industrial system through new industrialization, thus laying the material foundation for the overall green and low-carbon transformation of the economy, and providing low-carbon technologies, products and services to achieve the "dual-carbon" goals.

China's trajectory of new industrialization neither overly emphasizes an export-driven model nor treads the path of isolationism despite rising anti-globalization sentiments in some economies. In confronting the challenges posed by a fast-changing international landscape, China's new industrialization seeks to expand opening-up, leveraging both domestic and international markets and resources. The goal is to establish a development pattern centered on a

robust domestic cycle while simultaneously promoting mutual reinforcement between domestic and international cycles.

The new industrialization policy involves the further opening up of the economy. On the external front, it aims to consolidate export advantages by promoting Chinese investments, products and services worldwide. Its focus is also on strengthening international market channels, enhancing local capability, and ensuring export enterprises meet external demands. This approach will not only further strengthen the resilience and security of the industry and supply chains but also boost China's participation in international industrial division and competition.

The policy also advocates self-reliance while fostering political and policy interactions with other economies. Stressing the importance of communication in economic policies, industrial planning and regional industry chain construction, China aims to deepen regional industrial cooperation. However, its focus remains on using its vast market to attract more high-quality foreign investments.

New industrialization endeavors are expected to unleash potential demand and meet domestic consumption needs.

In the world's largest potential domestic market, unleashing demand will not only bolster the resilience and security of the industry and supply chains but also ensure the benefits of industrialization reach the broader population. By making industrial production more efficient, taking measures to increase the incomes of workers, improving the social security system, and boosting domestic consumer confidence, the policy will promote the development of new materials, products and business models.

Crucially, new industrialization serves as a catalyst for autonomous innovations. As China increases its technological capability, the emphasis is shifting from imitation and catching up to originality and leadership. This transformation requires a more extensive and intensive focus on innovations at the primary levels. By prioritizing the promotion of independent innovations, the policy aims to bolster the resilience of the industry and supply chains, and safeguard national industrial security.

The policy also facilitates independent but controllable innovations in technology, clearing of the technology development "bottleneck" — which China faces despite being a major player in technological innovations — by taking into consideration the global trends in technological advancements and adjusting the direction of innovations.

While continuing to learn from developed countries, particularly in core foundational technologies, key cutting-edge technologies and "futuristic technologies", China seeks to continually improve its independent industrial technology system.

New industrialization also boosts innovation capability that leads the new industrial revolution. In the midst of the new technological revolution triggering a new industrial revolution, countries are taking measures to adapt to changes, and implement necessary reforms. Recognizing its shortcomings in basic industrial capability, particularly in critical components and core technologies, China aims to capitalize on the opportunities created by the new technological revolution. The aim is to ensure China actively participates in high-end and emerging industries, giving shape to a new international division of labor in advanced industries.

In essence, China's new industrialization is a dynamic strategy that aligns with the evolving needs of the global economy. And China is positioned to not only continue playing a key role in the global economic landscape but also address the complex challenges through collaboration with other countries and promoting innovations. By continuing on this path, China strives to create a more integrated, sustainable and mutually beneficial global economic environment.

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## Visitors to China need not be worried about language problem

As of now, China has concluded mutual visa exemption agreements covering with 157 countries and simplified visa procedures or arrangements with 44 countries. Comprehensive mutual visa exemption has been achieved with 23 countries, including Thailand, Singapore, the Maldives, and the United Arab Emirates.

China has also decided to extend the unilateral visa exemptions, as a trail, to seven European countries, namely France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland and Ireland, for holders of ordinary passports. The unilateral visa-free entry is being widely regarded as China's move toward further opening-up and attracting more overseas tourists. There is reason to believe that many more people in these countries are either working out their travel plans or packing to travel to China, a country known for its beautiful landscapes, unique culture, friendly people and outstanding security.

Those who prefer traveling on their own instead of joining tour groups may be worried about language problems in China. As a lifelong self-guided tourist who has visited a few dozen countries, I know very well that poor communication can ruin a visit to an alien country. But such people should not worry if they can communicate in English.

Foreign language education used to be a privilege of the rich in China before 1949. After the founding of the People's Republic, when China was on good terms with the Soviet Union, the Russian language was taught as a high school subject in the 1950s and 1960s.

Many have raised concerns whether learning a foreign language is worth the time and effort, with some suggesting that English be removed as a compulsory subject.

Following the launch and reform and opening-up in the late 1970s, English became a major subject, first in junior high school and then in primary school. At present, English is taught even in some kindergartens. Now that China has a literacy rate of more than 97 percent, with many having received at least nine-year compulsory education, it is safe to conclude that about 1 billion people in China have studied English in school.

Ministry of Education data show that at present, more than 293 million students are studying in nearly 520,000 educational institutions. Since foreign language is a compulsory subject starting from the first year of primary school, we can safely say that nearly 300 million students have learned or are learning at least one foreign language in China. If we include those who have graduated from high school in the past decades but are trying to improve their language skills by attending after-school training institutes, the number can be close to 400 million.

By the time a student graduates from college, he or she should have learned at least one foreign language, in most cases English, for 16 years and passed the English Test Band 4, a national English eligibility test. They can thus communicate in English, or at least understand the language.

For the past few years, about 11 million students have been graduating from universities every year and the country has more than 200 million people who have received higher education, so it is fair to say that about 100 million Chinese can communicate in English.

Chinese students, like their counterparts in other countries, have to spend long hours learning a foreign language. Many have raised concerns whether learning a foreign language is worth the time and effort, with some suggesting that English be removed as a compulsory subject. I don't think such suggestions are likely to be implemented by the education authorities at a time when China is advocating building a community with a shared future for mankind and when English has become one of the most important mediums of communication globally.

So if you have any difficulty while traveling around China, just stop at a street corner, looking puzzled, preferably with a city tourist map in hand, and within minutes, if not seconds, someone will come and say, "Hello, can I help you?", in English.

If that someone happens to be a retired man like me, he could also invite you to a nearby tea-house for a cup of Longjing tea or to a pub for a Martini.

Li Guoxiang

## Zhejiang's rural vitalization inspiring for nation

This year's No 1 Central Document, as a tradition, focuses on rural vitalization, drawing inspiration from the Green Rural Revival Program in Zhejiang province. The initiative, planned and promoted by Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, when he was the Party secretary of Zhejiang province, can become a model for comprehensive rural vitalization.

The program, which began more than two decades ago, has helped address pressing issues while yielding remarkable results. Initiated to improve village sanitation and farmers' quality of life, it has not only transformed the countryside but also changed urban-rural relations, and enhanced rural production, lifestyle and governance.

Thanks to the rapid development of the private economy in Zhejiang since the launch of reform and opening-up, local farmers had become relatively affluent by the end of the century. But this prosperity had come at the cost of the environment.

To repair the environmental damage, the Green Rural Revival Program was launched in 2003 with the aim of restoring the environmental health of about 10,000 administrative villages in the province within five years. Out of these, about 1,000 villages were earmarked to be developed into moderately prosperous demonstration villages. The comprehensive development plan involved demol-

ishing illegal structures, improving waste and sewage management, shutting down polluting enterprises, building roads and upgrading public facilities.

**But while doing so, they need to adjust the program to suit the local conditions, distinguishing between developed and less-developed areas, urban outskirts and traditional rural regions, and grain-producing and non-grain producing areas.**

Zhejiang's unwavering commitment to the program has led to scientific rural vitalization. It is focused on the targeted improvement of the rural living environment and prevents ecological degradation, embodying the value that lucid waters and lush mountains are as valuable as gold and silver. It has improved rural aesthetics, refined cultural aspects, promoted sustainable industrial development, and strengthened ecological protection.

The impact of the program is evident in the transformation of villages such as Yucun village of Huzhou city in Zhejiang.

Once infamous for environmental degradation due to its focus on the "stone economy" — with mountains stripped bare and water resembling "soy sauce broth" — Yucun village has become an environmentally friendly village with the closure of mines and cement factories. Due to its scenic environment, Yucun village today thrives on agri-tourism, showcasing the success of the rural vitalization program.

Zhejiang's efforts to improve the rural environment have not only improved the farmers' quality of life but also spurred comprehensive rural vitalization. In September 2018, the program was honored with the United Nations' highest environmental accolade, the "Earth Guardian Award". The commendation said: "This exceptionally successful eco-restoration program shows the transformative power of economic and environmental development together."

With the continuous improvement in its ecological environment, Zhejiang has emerged as a national leader in rural economy. The per capita disposable income of Zhejiang's rural residents soared from 5,431 yuan (about \$760) in 2003 to 37,565 yuan in 2022. It maintained the highest position among provinces and autonomous regions for 38 consecutive years.

Zhejiang's success story continues with the "Beautiful Countryside+" initiative, fostering the vibrant development of new

agricultural, cultural and tourism models. Zhejiang has established 82 complete agricultural value chains with an output exceeding 1 billion yuan each, providing employment and entrepreneurship for 4.78 million farmers. By early 2023, Zhejiang had trained 47,000 "agricultural innovators" — individuals who after graduating from college engage in agricultural and rural entrepreneurship.

In implementing the No 1 Central Document, regions across China should learn from the experiences of Zhejiang's Green Rural Revival Program. But while doing so, they need to adjust the program to suit the local conditions, distinguishing between developed and less-developed areas, urban outskirts and traditional rural regions, and grain-producing and non-grain producing areas.

Besides, it is important that the program aligns with local development levels, financial capacities and farmers' needs. As such, a flexible and nuanced strategy needs to be adopted, and the focus should be on ensuring rural construction corresponds to the local economic development level, and avoiding formalism and striving to make achievements for the sake of achievements.

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## GLOBAL VIEWS

EDUARDO TZILI-APANGO

## Partners in deed

Mexico and China have shown how to strengthen win-win trade ties and promote South-South cooperation despite US' disruptive moves

On Jan 3, Mexico City inaugurated the operations of a light train railway, manufactured by a Chinese company, to strengthen mobilization in the southern part of the city. At the same time, the agriculture ministers of China and Mexico had an in-depth exchange on various topics including climate-smart agriculture. The Mexican government also launched an artificial intelligence talent development program in collaboration with Chinese tech companies to train Mexican people in cutting-edge digital technologies such as machine learning, deep learning and Open AI.

These are just the most recent examples of how China and Mexico are setting a positive example for South-South cooperation in the context of competition led by the United States. Mexico and China are among the most important trade and economic partners of the US. In 2018, the US government initiated a trade war against China, imposing several trade tariffs on Chinese imports, and it renegotiated the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). As a result, many Chinese digital and technological products were sanctioned in the US, and the NAFTA became the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) which contains a controversial clause that supposedly limits Mexico's opportunities for expanding trade ties with China.

Nevertheless, China and Mexico have managed to face these restrictions in a peaceful and responsible manner, and with the objective of promoting common development, which is one of the main goals of South-South cooperation. Since the establishment of the comprehensive strategic partnership between Mexico and China in 2013, Mexican exports to China have almost doubled, from \$6.17 billion in 2013 to \$10.7 billion in 2022. In the three months, from January to March 2023, Chinese foreign direct investment in Mexico reached a record \$407 million, mostly in equity capital.

Trade between the two countries is highly complementary and diverse, while

investments have focused on infrastructure and productivity. Notwithstanding the USMCA's so-called anti-China clause, Mexico and China have also started a new boom on near-shoring with win-win implications.

China and Mexico ought to maintain the pace in their cooperation based on cautious strategic balancing, which means consoli-

dating South-South cooperation by taking into consideration the geopolitical realities in Mexico's vicinity. This implies to advance in securing independent, strong and fair bilateral relations, not bound by major-country ideological and geopolitical competition.

In fact, Mexico, along with the rest of the

Latin America and the Caribbean region, has implemented a cautious strategic balance amid an emerging multipolarity in the global order. Besides South-South cooperation cases in China-Mexico relations, three LAC examples also come to mind.

First, the establishment of the China-Latin America and the Caribbean Technology

Transfer Center in Dongguan, Guangdong province, in 2023 is aimed at boosting the LAC technological capabilities in new energy, information technology, as well as in disaster prevention and emergency response.

Second, the opening of the China-Cuba e-commerce "Dofimall" store at the end of 2023 has strengthened the "China-Latin America Industrial Park" project, and deepened bilateral supply chains.

Third, the establishment of the Phoenix Park Industrial Estate in Trinidad and Tobago, which is the Caribbean's first comprehensive intelligent industrial park, has boosted South-South cooperation under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative.

In clear contrast, the US has failed to cooperate more with LAC countries and it has not helped the region to enhance its infrastructure and productive capabilities. It seems the US wants Mexico and the other LAC countries to commit to an ideological agenda that does not bolster important development necessities in the LAC region, as it is seen in Washington's political treatment of Cuba.

The emerging multipolarity in the world order appears to be a period of confrontation and convergence between the Global North with its ideological agenda and the Global South with its pursuit of development. Hopefully, this competition will turn into cooperation. China and Mexico have set a positive example of how to achieve cooperation for development. For other LAC countries, it is fundamental to maintain this South-South trend to maintain multilateralism.

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LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

GUO XIAOQIONG AND CAI ZHEN

## Risks and rewards

With countries now prioritizing economic security there are both opportunities and challenges for SCO cooperation

The US-led West is bent on the "double containment" of China and Russia. With rising geopolitical tensions, the economic cooperation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is facing challenges on multiple fronts.

First, economic security is now high on the agenda of all countries. The once prevailing pursuit of "efficiency and profits" has turned into "security first" in the global layout of industry and supply chains, which are expected to become even more localized, diversified and clustered. Against such a background, security issues will be more pronounced in the SCO's economic cooperation.

Second, severe disruptions in the global supply chains of energy and strategic minerals have arisen from the sanctions imposed against Russia.

At the same time, the United States has consistently coerced its allies into trying to contain China, the impact being felt equally by the industry and supply chains in China as well as by global and regional trade and investment.

Third, the downward economic pressure on the SCO member countries has resulted in a lack of impetus in regional economic cooperation.

Economic and trade activities involving Russia or Russian entities and individuals are usually subjected to strict sanctions that generate losses and add risks to the economic cooperation under the SCO framework.

At present, with the major power competition intensifying, the world economic order is going through profound transitions, and regional clustering is becoming ever prominent. With the SCO expanding its reach and influence in Eurasia, South Asia and the Middle East, the regional economic cooperation of the SCO is presented with challenges and opportunities alike.

First, the layout of global industry and supply chains is increasingly being shaped by clustering and friendsourcing patterns under the rising influence of regional cooperation mechanisms.

Second, Russia's development in the energy, finance and technology sectors is inseparable from the outside world. Therefore, while ensuring its sustenance needs, it is striving to strengthen economic ties and

cooperation with the non-Western countries and organizations such as the SCO.

Third, the Eurasian countries have strong needs for economic development, while China boasts a large market, sufficient capital and high-caliber technological conditions. The cooperation carried out under the Belt and Road Initiative, which has no political strings attached and endorses the concept of common development, is winning recognition and engagement from regional countries.

Fourth, the international monetary system is going through changes, especially

with a rising renminbi. Since the international currencies such as the US dollar and the international financial communication systems such as SWIFT have been increasingly weaponized as part of the Western sanctions on Russia, countries around the world are seeking to reduce their reliance on dollars in terms of payment methods and instead turning to other safer alternatives, among which the renminbi stands out. According to the International Monetary Fund, by the end of 2022, the size of the renminbi reserves held by global central banks was \$298.4 billion, accounting for 2.7 per-

cent of the Currency Composition of Official Foreign Reserves and making it a top five reserve currency in the world. The internationalization of the renminbi is contributing to a reciprocal and spiraling economic cooperation among the SCO countries.

Fruitful results have been secured and laid for further cooperation in the SCO. Since its inauguration the organization has established a full set of mechanisms for economic cooperation, accomplished a number of significant connectivity infrastructure programs, and put in place a complex infrastructure network composed of railways,

highways, oil pipelines and power grids.

The "Shanghai Spirit" is a fundamental principle of the SCO and is where its vitality lies. The SCO has become an important platform for reaching consensus among the member countries in the face of common threats and challenges. More importantly, SCO cooperation puts into practice the three global initiatives proposed by China — the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative.

Considering the differences in natural resources, economic size, development stage and development models of the SCO members, risk resistance means that member countries have different needs and roles to play in the regional cooperation. Emphasis needs to be laid on each country's economic development strategies, attention paid to their most urgent concerns and pragmatic means for cooperation explored, so that new potential for cooperation can be tapped.

China's industries are highly complementary with those of the other SCO countries. Enhancing cooperation in industrial capacity will not only help ease China's structural adjustment, but also boost the industrialization and modernization of other SCO countries.

All the member countries see the development of the digital economy as a long-term development goal, so China could also leverage its advantages in the digital economy and work together with other SCO countries to enhance digital cooperation. This ranges from promoting digital industrialization and industrial digitization in Eurasia, unearthing the potential of cooperation in cross-border e-commerce, smart cities, remote medical services, smart agriculture and other fields, and contributing to the development of new business formats.

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MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

## LIFE

## Maison &amp; Objet gets a taste of China

This year's first edition of Paris' premier trade fair treated to exhibition of Suzhou's sophisticated handicrafts, **Li Yingxue** reports.

Visitors to January's Maison & Objet in Paris were able to step into a world of elegance and tradition at *The Zhai* ("house" in Chinese), an exhibition that opened a time-space portal to the water towns of Jiangnan (the region south of the lower reaches of the Yangtze River) through the lens of its handicrafts.

Living testaments of the millennium-old knowledge and craftsmanship passed down by the artisans of Suzhou, Jiangsu province, traditional Chinese craft has now been placed center stage at the renowned international platform.

Based on themes such as "city," "intangible cultural heritage" and "handicraft," *The Zhai* opened its doors at this year's edition of Maison & Objet Paris between Jan 18 and 22 with a glittering showcase of over 200 time-honored Suzhou crafts.

The museum-style exhibition, which was the first project in a series called "The Zhai," is designed to serve as a dynamic platform for cultural exchange between China and France. It revolves around the concept of "city, home and objects," and makes use of a partner city — with Suzhou as the first — as its starting point.

Maison & Objet Paris is one of the three premier trade show expos in Europe, and is celebrating its 30th anniversary by embracing the theme of "Tech Eden," which addresses the fusion of design and sustainable development in response to technology and the challenges of environmental conservation.

The project responded to this theme by highlighting the harmony between humans and nature, drawing inspiration from the traditional Chinese philosophy of the "unity of heaven and humanity" embedded in traditional craftsmanship, as a way of illustrating Chinese thinking on such matters for future development.

Chinese Ambassador to France Lu Shaye visited the exhibition. After thoroughly examining the display, Lu expressed his wish for the project to build more international connections in the hopes that the project can contribute to the global recognition of China's traditional culture and craftsmanship.

Suzhou is a vital center for preserving traditional craftsmanship. In 2014, it was recognized by UNESCO as the City of Crafts and Folk Art. Suzhou stands out for its diversity and exceptional skills, producing over 3,000 kinds of items in 10 of the 11 main categories of Chinese craftsmanship.

Focusing on craftsmanship and intangible cultural heritage, the items on display came from three traditional craft towns in Suzhou: Guangfu and Shengze, and Zhenhu subdistrict.

Guangfu is known as the "hometown of a hundred crafts," and has a long history and numerous skilled



professionals involved in trades such as jade carving, nut carving, and woodcarving. Zhenhu is the main hub for Suzhou-style embroidery, which it has been producing for over 2,000 years. Almost half of its population is involved in the trade. Meanwhile, Shengze has a long-standing reputation for silk production, and its artisans have continued to innovate, giving rise to nationally recognized brands in the silk and textile sector.

All the items displayed were selected during the visit of Francois Delclaux, curator of the exhibition, to Suzhou in November.

Delclaux visited a number of cultural gems, from the Suzhou Museum and the Humble Administrator's Garden, to traditional craft towns like Guangfu and Shengze, and Zhenhu subdistrict.

The trip deepened his understanding of Suzhou's craftsmanship and cultural heritage. His



**Top left and right:** *The Zhai* presents Chinese intangible cultural heritage to the audience in Paris. The exhibition showcases over 200 items from Suzhou, Jiangsu province. **Middle:** Guests at the opening ceremony of the exhibition on Jan 18 in Paris. **Above:** The items on display come from three craft towns in Suzhou: Guangfu, Shengze and Zhenhu subdistrict. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

most significant discovery was that the traditional Chinese craftsmanship will make a mark on the international stage, which was evident in the distinctive qualities he observed in Suzhou.

On the opening day of the exhibition, Delclaux hosted a livestream in which he introduced Taihu Lake, the curatorial source of his inspiration for the exhibition, and also highlighted selected exhibits for a global audience.

"During my time in Suzhou, I was captivated by its long history, delightful culture and remarkable craftsmanship," he says, adding that his aim was to share his experiences with the audience through the exhibition and its curated selection.

Delclaux integrated elements from Suzhou into the space and took into account the tastes of people from different cultural backgrounds to ensure a better alignment with the expectations of

the international market.

He says that the exhibition and the project served as a useful way for the international audience to appreciate traditional Chinese craftsmanship, and sees this as a step toward keeping Chinese products up to date.

Looking ahead, he says that he hopes the exhibition will maximize on its brand appeal, create more international connections, and meet the needs of the global market.

During the opening ceremony, Guillaume Prot, show director of Maison & Objet Paris, expressed his pleasure at seeing the debut of Suzhou craftsmanship.

"We welcome more Chinese exhibitors to bring additional inspiration and surprises to the international design stage," Prot says, adding that the presence of Chinese exhibitors not only enhanced the French trade fair's international appeal, but also provided an opportunity to show the allure of Chinese products.

"In 2024, to mark the 60th anniversary of Sino-French diplomatic relations and the 30th anniversary of M & O, we have launched the China Intangible Cultural Heritage design pavilion. It serves as a platform for exhibition and business cooperation between the two countries, and will foster creative design collaborations. We are excited to witness a new chapter in Sino-French cooperation," he says.

Architect and interior designer Sebastien Couderc-Maugendre says that the crafts on display in *The Zhai* left a profound impression. "The themes, materials, and craftsmanship were something we seldom encounter in the international market. In future projects, I hope to integrate elements of traditional Chinese culture in my designs. I also look forward to collaborating directly with the skilled artisans who create these exquisite crafts," he says.

Jin Yi, head of *The Zhai* project, says that Suzhou's role as their first partner city has set the bar high for the project's international debut.

"*The Zhai* is open to collaboration opportunities nationwide for its biennial exhibitions. We invite cities with a rich history of traditional craftsmanship and unique brands like Suzhou to join us on the international stage and in entering the global market," she says.

Jin says that the aim of the project is to blend international design excellence and resources with traditional Chinese craftsmanship and brands, and also to broaden avenues of collaboration, and strengthen ties with brands, retailers and other creative sectors.

Together, the goal is to create products that are innovative, have significant international market potential, and resonate with global consumer trends, she says.

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## French musical makes Don Juan fall in love

*Don Juan*, one of the most popular French musicals, made its China debut on Jan 25 in Shanghai and will visit six other cities this year, the 20th anniversary of its premiere.

Written by French composer Felix Gray in 2003 and brought to the stage in 2004 by director Gilles Maheu, who also directed musical *Notre Dame de Paris*, this celebrated musical has been staged with great success in France, Canada and South Korea. In 2016, a Japanese version was staged by the Takarazuka Revue. Over the past two decades, it has been seen by 600,000 people around the world.

*Don Juan* is the legendary libertine and seducer of Spanish folklore, an aristocratic playboy known for his flirtatious behavior. Over the centuries, around 1,000 works of art have been made about him in forms ranging from poetry, to music and films, turning the fictional character into an icon of Western culture.

In 2003, Gray drew on Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni* and Tirso de Molina's *The Trickster of Seville and the Stone Guest* for his adaptation of the classic storyline.



**Left:** The cast and representatives of the production team from the *Don Juan* musical take a group photo at an event following the musical's Shanghai premiere. **Right:** Performers of the French musical *Don Juan* meet the audience after the performance at Shanghai Culture Square late last month. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Unlike most artistic works about *Don Juan*, the musical is a more modern interpretation of the character, and presents his story from a more human perspective.

Another highlight that differentiates the musical from other works about *Don Juan* is that the legendary seducer loses his heart.

"In the musical, *Don Juan* falls in love. Love becomes his biggest punishment, as he has broken the hearts of so many women, and then finds a love that borders on madness," Gray

said during an event following the musical's Shanghai premiere, adding that this particular twist to the well-known tale is unique.

"*Don Juan* is contradictory and confusing. He loves fighting, drinking, pleasure and all things crazy. But when we talk about *Don Juan*, no one knows what he really wanted. We don't even know if he was really happy," he says. "In the musical, we filled him with complex and infinite emotions, such as love and hate, friendship and

paternal love, betrayal and jealousy, loss and glory."

Gian Marco Schiavetti, who plays the title role, says that he used his own understanding of first love to inform his performance. "*Don Juan* has been living a bestial life. After he finds true love, he becomes like a child, begins to learn about love and its value, and finally realizes his mistakes and gently shows repentance. It can be seen as the process of change," he says.

Other captivating aspects are the

passionate music and dance performances, which have Spanish overtones, despite the show's French origins, including impressive, rhythmic and dreamy flamenco dance sequences, bright guitar tones and other Spanish musical elements.

"French musicals are often full of intense and strong expressions of emotion from beginning to end. That's what Latin culture is also supposed to be about, and that's what French culture is about, bringing

something very emotional to the audience," says the show's producer, Nicolas Talar.

Carlos Rodriguez, the show's choreographer, shared similar sentiments. "I think the most important part of flamenco is the voice and energy that comes from the heart, as this musical is speaking about love, passion, sadness and essence," he says.

The musical will continue its performance at Shanghai Culture Square until Thursday and will then continue its China tour to six other cities, including Beijing, Hangzhou in Zhejiang province, Guangzhou in Guangdong province, and Nanjing in Jiangsu province, from March 21 to May 5.

Laurent Ban, who plays the role of *Don Juan*'s best friend *Don Carlos*, has been to China many times to perform in musicals, including *Mozart*, *L'Opera Rock*. He says that the team has been preparing for this tour for four years.

"I think this is the right time to bring *Don Juan* to China, and this musical is to Chinese audiences' taste," Ban says. "It's not only the charm of French romance and Latin culture, but I think the rhythm, dance, emotional power, the passion for love, and the theme of having the courage to die for love will be well-received by Chinese audiences."

# LIFE



During this year's Spring Festival, Beijing People's Art Theatre will stage *Beneath the Red Banner*, adapted from Lao She's novel with the same title, which is directed by Feng Yuanzheng and Yan Rui, and features actor Pu Cunxin as the leading role. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Presenting plays for the people

Prestigious theater enters 2024 in fiery form, with Shanghai tour and first foreign performance since pandemic, **Chen Nan** reports.

Catching a performance by the Beijing People's Art Theatre is on the list for theatergoers in the capital during the upcoming Spring Festival holiday, which falls on Saturday.

The theater, one of the most prestigious in China, has already announced its holiday program.

*Beneath the Red Banner*, a play adapted from the Lao She novel of the same title, runs from Jan 19 to Feb 13 at the Capital Theater, home of the Beijing People's Art Theatre. The stage adaptation, which premiered on Jan 18 last year, is directed by Feng Yuanzheng and Yan Rui, and features actors including Pu Cunxin, Yang Lixin and Liang Danni.

"I can still vividly remember the warm audience feedback when we premiered the play as our first show in 2023. Tickets for the nine shows sold out fast," says Feng, who is an actor and also president of the Beijing People's Art Theatre.

"We decided to stage the production again at the beginning of the new year to mark the 125th anniversary of Lao She's birth," he adds.

Born Shu Qingchun to a Manchu family in Beijing in 1899, Lao She (1899-1966), is best known for his vivid grassroots depictions of social reality and Beijing culture, and particularly for his use of humor and the Beijing dialect.

*Beneath the Red Banner* is an unfinished autobiographical novel. It is told from the perspective of a Manchu boy and deals with his childhood and family, including portrayals of

his father, a poorly paid soldier who gets killed during the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, and his mother, a diligent woman who supports the family. Lao She's vivid descriptions of the Manchu system, etiquette, ceremony, dialect and other aspects are poignant and realistic.

Veteran actor-director Pu Cunxin plays Lao She in the stage production. His role helps the audience immerse themselves in the world of *Beneath the Red Banner* and takes them back to old Beijing. The final piece of dialogue was written by Pu, and reflects both the world of Lao She as well as the actor's own interpretation of the story.

"When the Beijing People's Art Theatre was born over 70 years ago, we adapted many works by Lao She, including one of our most classic and popular productions, *Teahouse*. We will continue to bring the great writer's works alive onstage to maintain our tradition," Feng says.

During the annual review of the theater's performance on Jan 30, Feng said that 2023 was very "special" for the performing arts scene, for being the year after the pandemic.

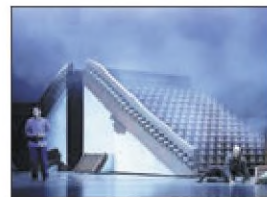
Last year, the Beijing People's Art Theatre put on 503 performances of 35 theatrical productions, including 11 new stage productions. Over 250,000 people attended performances.

He also spoke of some of the highlights of the 2024 schedule, from new stage productions to public events.

For example, the theater will present a new adaptation of *The Miser*, a five-act comedy by Moliere. Directed by Lin Cong, the Chinese version was well

“When the Beijing People's Art Theatre was born over 70 years ago, we adapted many works by Lao She ... We will continue to bring the great writer's works alive onstage to maintain our tradition.”

Feng Yuanzheng, actor and president of the theater



A scene from *Beneath the Red Banner*.

received when it was introduced to the audience during a script reading. The play will be staged to mark the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and France.

In October and November, some of the theater's principal artists will go to Shanghai to participate in the China Shanghai International Arts Festival, taking with them five productions, including *Teahouse*, *Sunrise* and *Du Fu*.

Feng says that the theater has made four large-scale tours to Shanghai in 1961, 1988, 2012 and 2014.

"Personally, the 1988 tour was unforgettable because I was a young actor at the time, and I traveled to Shanghai with established artists for the first time. We performed classics, such as *Teahouse*, which was very successful," he says, adding that after Shanghai, the theater will take additional shows to Suzhou and Nanjing, in Jiangsu province.

In May, it will tour Serbia with *Our Jing Ke*, which was written by winner of Nobel Prize in literature Mo Yan and directed by Ren Ming (1960-2022). Premiered in 2011, the play is a reimagination of the household story of Jing Ke, an assassin famous for his failed attempt to kill the king who later became China's first emperor over 2,000 years ago. It will be the first foreign performance by the theater after the pandemic.

In 2024, it will also stage the second round of performances of a new play, *Zhang Juzheng*, which premiered between Dec 22, 2023, and Jan 14. Directed by Feng and Yan Rui, it follows the story of Zhang Juzheng, the

famous politician who led the reforms to the economy and of official evaluations during the reign of Ming-Dynasty (1368-1644) Emperor Wanli.

Unlike big-budget presentations, the theater's smaller productions offer its young talent the opportunity to experiment. They will also be a highlight of this year, and include an adaptation of *My Poor Marat* by Aleksei Arbusov and directed by Lin Cong, *I Love Peach Blossom* by Zou Jingzhi and directed by Ren Ming, and *The Orphan of Zhao* directed by He Bing.

The theater also performed 12 shows at universities in 2023 for ticket prices of less than 40 yuan, in the hopes of appealing to young theater lovers. Feng says that students are an important part of the theater scene as many decide to make theater a their career after falling in love with it.

This year, to mark the 90th anniversary of Cao Yu's *Thunderstorm*, which was published when the playwright was in his final year at Tsinghua University and was just 24 years old, a series of events will be held at universities.

*Thunderstorm* has been described as one of China's most enduring dramas of the 20th century and Cao Yu has earned the title of "father of the country's modern drama". He was appointed director of the Beijing People's Art Theatre in the early 1950s and elected chairman of the Chinese Dramatists' Association in the early 1980s.

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*Zhang Juzheng*, a new play by Beijing People's Art Theatre, featuring actor-director Feng Yuanzheng, will be staged with the second round of performances in Beijing this year.



BELGRADE — Serbia will celebrate the Chinese Spring Festival from Monday until Feb 19, welcoming in the Year of the Dragon with a series of cultural events in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Nis, and Smederevo, organizers announced at a news conference on Jan 26.

Organized by the Serbian government, the Chinese embassy, and the Belt and Road Institute, the celebration will include a variety of cultural events, including opera performances by the Zhejiang Wu troupe in Nis and Novi Sad, interactive exhibitions, tea ceremony presentations,

## Lunar New Year to be celebrated in Serbia

and martial arts and puppet shows in Smederevo.

The festivities in Belgrade will include events at the Galerija shopping center and a spectacular fireworks display on the Belgrade Waterfront, culminating in a concert by the Chinese National Traditional Orchestra at the Ilija M. Kolarac Endowment on Feb 19.

Ambassador of China to Serbia Li

“The Serbian government takes pride in showcasing different aspects of Chinese culture each year.”

Danijel Nikolic, assistant to the general secretary of the Serbian government

Ming says that the Lunar New Year festival is a time of family reunions and happiness, and adds that the universal values of humanity and the well-being of people are values shared both by the Chinese and Serbian people.

"The Serbian government takes pride in showcasing different aspects of Chinese culture each year," says Danijel Nikolic, assistant

to the general secretary of the Serbian government.

Bojan Lalic, director of the Belt and Road Institute, says the objective of the festivities is to strengthen cultural bonds and foster mutual understanding, friendship, and cooperation.

"We have planned a variety of activities, including artistic performances, operas, concerts, exhibitions and workshops about traditional arts and Chinese culture," he says.

XINHUA



## CULTURE

An extraordinary mind was born in Fuzhou, capital of Fujian province, 170 years ago. Not far from his birthplace, the meandering Minjiang River runs into the East China Sea. In the course of his 67 years, Yan Fu (1854-1921), or Yen Fuh as he called himself, both witnessed and contributed to the dawn of modernization in his home country, as well as the change in its people's minds from "China as the world" to "China in the world".

Yan had a solid educational background in both classical Chinese and modern Western thinking, and from the many books he read, chose and translated a variety of Western authors, including Thomas Henry Huxley, Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, Montesquieu and Herbert Spencer.

He is also believed to have been the first scholar to have systematically introduced classical German philosophy — that of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, to be specific — to Chinese youth.

In his monograph, *In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West*, historian Benjamin Schwartz of the United States describes Yan's effort as one to "find the true secret of Western wealth and power", and in the introduction, US political scientist Louis Hartz presents Yan as "a new foreign observer of Western thought as a whole".

Yan lived at a time when the feudal Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) was being shaken by Western powers, and intellectuals were struggling to seek a way out and ensure the country could survive, maintain its independence and prosper.

He also emphasized the need to improve the physical strength, moral standards and education levels of individuals, and was once in charge of then avant-garde universities including today's Peking University and Shanghai's Fudan University.

Apparently, Yan's endeavors meant something, as he prioritized the science, technology, social and political theories of the West as key references for rescuing his then impoverished and weak homeland.

Max Ko-wu Huang, a historian from Taiwan, believes that Yan's introduction to Western thought comprised four interconnected parts — scientific concepts based on logical reasoning, political ideology based on liberal democracy, capitalist economic theory, as well as social doctrine centered on the theory of evolution.

However, Yan was also aware of the destructive side of Western civilization and was cautious about the trend toward wholesale Westernization prevailing in the country at the time. To the contrary, the great thinker raised his voice in support of the quintessence of traditional Chinese culture, and insisted that China's survival would ultimately depend on its millennia-long civilization.

In October 1921, when he realized he was dying, he said in his will to his family: "You should know, China will not perish. Its existing traditions will be reformed, but should not be dropped completely."

In retrospect, Yan's words and deeds had their limitations, but it's still fair to say that he was ahead of his time.

Historically, influential figures with different political views and from different parties, like Liang Qichao, Cai Yuanpei, Hu Shi and Mao Zedong, all spoke highly of him and his contributions.

During his period of leadership in the city of Fuzhou and later at the provincial level in Fujian, President Xi Jinping placed great importance on the study and promotion of Yan's thinking.

In December 1997, Xi commended Yan for his "rigorous scholarship, pioneering reform, pursuit of truth, patriotism and efforts to revitalize the nation". In November 2001, he praised his patriotic sentiments and enlightened thinking, stating that, "to this day, Yan's idea of science and patriotism remains relevant".

In 2021, he paid a visit to the thinker's former residence in Sanfang Qixiang, or the Three Lanes and Seven Alleys area of Fuzhou, to mark the 100th anniversary of Yan's death.

In 1920, Yan wrote a poem to celebrate his grandson's birth. The last sentence goes, "when our country has got peace and prosperity, don't forget to come to my grave and tell me".

### Creative interpretation

Born the son of a doctor, Yan studied under sophisticated Confucian scholars largely influenced by the Neo-Confucianism from the Song (960-1279), Yuan (1271-1368) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties.



# The master of translation

Yan Fu's informed adoption and adaptation of modern Western and classical Chinese ideas changed the way a generation thought, Fang Aiqing and Hu Meidong report in Fuzhou.

After his father's death, he enrolled in the Fuzhou Shipbuilding Institution when he was 14. There, he studied Western science and technology in English, using imported textbooks. The subjects included algebra, geometry, calculus, electromagnetism, optics, thermodynamics and chemistry.

He later entered the Old Royal Naval College in Greenwich, London, where he studied the natural sciences knowledge that is needed to translate Western books. He valued research methods like specialization, generalization and experimentation.

Yan continued to read English books and newspapers for the rest of his life. He stressed that advanced scientific and technological knowledge at the time was mostly written in Western languages, resulting in the need to learn them to be able to read Western newspapers and journals in their original languages.

His fellow townsman and classmate Sa Zhenbing (1859-1952), a renowned navy commander, once said that Yan read a lot, and some books over and over again, learning parts of them by heart and summarizing his reflections.

Yan compared and selected titles from his "mental shelf" before deciding which to translate, and which should be translated first, Sa added.

When Yan returned from the United Kingdom, he continued to study classical Chinese culture and thinking with renowned Confucian scholar Wu Rulun, a representative of the Tongcheng school of literature, which is known for practical, well-structured, simple and elegant essays. He also took the *keju* (imperial civil service examinations) four times, but failed each time.

However, the experience left him with a deep understanding of traditional culture and literature, laying a solid foundation for his later success in translating and introducing Western knowledge to China.

One of his best-known translations is of British naturalist T. H. Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics and Other Essays*, which advocates Darwin's theory of evolution and natural selection.

He translated the first two chapters, *Prolegomena* and *Evolution and Ethics*, and published them in 1898 as *Tianyanlun* (On Heavenly Evolution). More than 30 editions were published over a decade.

Yan avoided translating word by word, and when paraphrasing a text, he allowed it to serve his purpose of raising awareness of the country's crisis, says Wang Gangfeng, a professor at Fujian Normal University's School of Marxism, who attended a commemorative event to celebrate the 170th anniversary of Yan's birth in Fuzhou on Jan 5.

In his translation notes for *Tianyanlun*, Yan quoted British sociologist Herbert Spencer's thinking on



**From top:** Scholars review calligraphy works of modern Chinese translator and thinker Yan Fu, who is also known for his handwriting that's often used as a model for learning calligraphy. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY Yan's childhood residence at Yangqi village in Fuzhou, Fujian province. FANG AIQING / CHINA DAILY A copy of Yan's translation of Scottish economist Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*. A local Minju Opera performance to commemorate Yan's contribution and patriotism debuts at the great translator's former residence in Fuzhou's Three Lanes and Seven Alleys area on Jan 6. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

social Darwinianism to complement Huxley's views, arguing that weak countries should strengthen themselves, and fight and not wait for their demise. In the end, "the one that's most adaptable to change survives".

Yan's translation, with its elegant prose and rhythm, belonged to the writing style of the pre-Qin period (before 221 BC), a time of prosperity in thought. The era remains a profound source of thinking today.

According to Wang, this was Yan's way of attracting the attention of the conservative intellectuals and

the social elites. Because the great translator saw many similarities between the East and the West, he would sometimes replace Western mythology and legends with ancient Chinese stories for easier understanding, and frequently made reference to classical Chinese texts and applied their ideas to explain Western concepts.

In notes that are comparable in length with the translated text itself, Yan introduced the lives and deeds of ancient Greek and Roman thinkers as background informa-

tion to help readers understand the original text.

Tao Youlan, director of Fudan University's translation and interpretation department, says that Yan's ancient-style prose is so beautiful and concise that, like salt dissolving in water, the meaning of the original text is properly conveyed.

She has initiated a program, inviting eight scholars of translation studies from eight universities across the country, in which they will guide students to read and appreciate eight of Yan's translated works. They will explore in detail how Yan polished the translated text by using his particular rhetoric and strategies, and how he conveyed the original ideas in his translation.

The focus of the program is not only on language itself, but also on the ideas Yan's words contain and the social impact of his translations, Tao adds.

It was Yan, in his translation notes for *Tianyanlun*, who initially elucidated the three norms of translation — faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance — that professionals pursue today as their ultimate goal, and *Tianyanlun* is a reader-oriented model.

During an interview with the Shanghai Review of Books in 2019, Shen Guowei, a linguistics professor at Japan's Kansai University and author of two monographs on Yan's translations and thinking, called for attention to the fact that when Yan translated these Western works about social sciences, neither the subjects, nor the related concepts and terms, existed in China.

Yan once said that he would think for days, or even months, on the translation for a single term and often borrowed words from archaic Chinese expressions or created new words of his own. Then, there was still the issue of how to tackle the differences in sentence structure between the languages.

However, in his later academic translation efforts, Yan continued to explore and adjust his strategy, while facing self-doubt and setbacks — the inevitable fate of all pioneers. Shen says that research into Yan should view his translations as a whole, place him in the historical background and social environment of his time, and take his own changes of mind into consideration.

### Willful introduction

Each of Yan's translations has a clearly defined practical purpose and function, says Ouyang Zhen-sheng, a history professor at Peking University.

Yan's understanding of modern Western civilization reached an unprecedented level, and his introduction of the Western principles of the natural and social sciences was valuable and meaningful in guiding China's social and political reform in his time, Ouyang says.

Schwartz wrote that Yan pio-

neered advocating the notion that "the problem of China above all was a problem of science".

Yan believed that the Chinese should start by mastering the basic scientific principles of the West before promoting gradual, steady reform to avoid drastic sociopolitical upheavals.

He called his translation of *On Liberty*, by British philosopher and economist John Stuart Mill, *Qunji Quanjie Lun*, which translates as "On the Rights and Limits of Society and Individuals". He argued that given China's situation at the time, individuals should first and foremost strive for the group interest in order to protect themselves.

This idea of placing the interests of the nation and society above all is also evident in his translation of Scottish economist Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, and he also covered Spencer's *The Study of Sociology* under a cloak of Confucian thought to express the same idea, even though this partly contradicted with the author's viewpoint.

While translating French political philosopher Montesquieu's *The Spirit of Laws*, Yan sought to provide a reference for what he thought could serve as a reform of constitutional monarchy.

He fully evaluated Chinese and Western civilizations, on the basis of which he formed his own idea about mutual learning, Ouyang says.

"He was straightforward about facing reality and was targeted. He remained critical, and did not engage in empty talk," Ouyang says, adding that Yan's spirit represents the Chinese people's exploration and endeavor to transition Chinese culture from traditional to modern, which is still valued today.

Yan paid close attention to international affairs and recognized the importance of diplomacy. Based on extensive reading, he wrote articles analyzing the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) for the public, and provided information on World War I to policymakers.

He also endowed traditional culture with new connotations. For example, he reinterpreted the *I Ching* (Book of Changes), *Tao Te Ching* and *Zhuangzi*, by applying Western perspectives, in the belief that only in this way could classical wisdom be better applied to the society of his day.

Disappointed with Western civilization in his later years, Yan came to re-evaluate Confucianism and rediscovered the modern significance in the thinking of Confucius and Mencius.

Unlike Schwartz, who describes Yan as a Faustian figure who abandoned core Confucian values to embrace Western thinking, Huang says that Yan's outlook was rooted in Confucian and Taoist traditions, and was therefore the fruit of a convergence of the East and the West.

That determined his understanding and misunderstanding of the European works he translated and commented on, Huang adds.

The Taiwan scholar notes in particular that Yan was aware that his countrymen would tend to accept Western ideas that were consistent with their existing traditions, and his deliberation was obvious.

"China has marched along a different path to the West in establishing the authority of science. ... Heralded by importing evolutionary theories, the introduction of Western science didn't sever the origins of traditional Chinese values, nor did it lead to skepticism or moral relativism," Huang says.

"The uniqueness of Chinese modernization lies in the continuity of traditional ideology and its consistent pursuit of the combination of value rationality and instrumental rationality. Resulting from long-term historical evolution, this also prompts us to consciously build a modern civilization with Chinese characteristics today," he adds.

Yan's granddaughter Cecilia Yen Koo, who is 99 years old, wrote in her letter to the commemorative event on Jan 5 that there was no doubt that as a result of her grandfather's introduction, and after further comparison, review and integration by the later generations, the concepts and doctrines of the East and the West have been picked over and applied in different scenarios and environments in China, and have played a role in the country's development and modernization.

She suggests that it might be possible that the many precious legacies her grandfather left behind, after review and study, can provide fresh thinking for future solutions.

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