

Ecological balance

Influx of rare water birds creates challenge for lake in Hubei province

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Private economy to get support for major projects

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Shared goals

China, ASEAN countries strengthen cultural, economic bonds as neighbors

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Xi's address highlights global welfare

By XU WEIWEI, YANG HAN in Hong Kong and WANG XIAODONG in Nairobi

President Xi Jinping's New Year speech highlighted the Chinese path to modernization and a global community of shared future, which is destined to bring more opportunities and benefits to the rest of the world, experts said.

Shakeel Ahmad Ramay, chief executive officer of the Asian Institute of Eco-civilization Research and Development, a think tank based in Islamabad, Pakistan, said the speech shows that Beijing's commitment to the Chinese path to modernization is getting stronger.

"Modernization driven by innovation is turning China into a new hub of innovation and technology," he said. "It has started to deliver results like the C919 aircraft, space advancements, new energy sources, new energy vehicles, and technological revolution."

China is now more focused on cultivating talent to lead the modernization drive, he added.

Ramay said the country is not only celebrating achievements but is also keeping a keen eye on the future of the nation by focusing on children's education, jobs for young people, and innovation-driven development.

Moreover, Xi has assured the world that China is ready to share prosperity with the world by deepening reforms and opening-up, promoting peace and harmony among civilizations, and implementing a fair and just global system to achieve the goal of a global community of shared future for present and future generations, he said.

Chin Yew Sin, a Malaysian businessman and political analyst, said: "This is the most inspiring New Year message I have ever heard from a world leader. ... It covers areas such as the COVID-19 pandemic, international politics, economy, green energy and low-carbon lifestyles, innovation, Chinese modernization, and so on."

He said that Xi has clearly outlined the current and future economic development models of China, which will be based on smart, green, space and ocean technologies.

"China, through its Belt and Road Initiative, has helped many developing countries in Asia, Africa and South America to construct infrastructure to speed up their development process," Chin said.

Adhere Cavince, a scholar of international relations with a focus on China-Africa development cooperation, said the world, particularly the Global South, expects China to maintain a leadership role on the international stage in 2024 and beyond.

"Xi's assertion that China would carry forward the banner of shared prosperity for humanity as well as play a stabilizing role in the backdrop of intense global geopolitics is not only refreshing, it rekindles hope for a better tomorrow for the world," said Cavince, who is based in Nairobi, Kenya.

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Travel chaos after tragedy



Top: Passengers crowd the check-in area of Terminal 2 at Haneda Airport in Tokyo, Japan, on Wednesday. A collision on the tarmac the night before between a coast guard plane and a Japan Airlines passenger jet killed five and shut down one of the main runways. This led to numerous flight cancellations and delays on one of the busiest travel days of the year. The incident is being investigated. Jiji Press / AFP
Above: An aerial view on Wednesday shows the charred Japan Airlines Airbus A350 aircraft that collided with a Japan Coast Guard aircraft at Haneda Airport in Tokyo, Japan. KYODO NEWS / VIA REUTERS
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There's cause for optimism, 45 years after China-US relations formalized

Forty-five years ago, at the end of January 1979, Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping traveled to the United States and met with then president Jimmy Carter. The two countries formalized the normalization of their diplomatic relations.

The normalization concluded a long process that began with the secret visit to Beijing in 1971 by then US secretary of state Henry Kissinger, a trip that led to the historic 1972 visit to China by then president Richard Nixon.

Over that period, the two countries had negotiated and reconciled their differences through numerous communications and ultimately achieved a principle of coexistence. This in turn forged what is the single most important diplomatic rela-

WORLD WATCH
By Tom Powdy

tionship in the world today.

Since that time, the world has changed significantly. The Cold War era during which the relationship was forged has passed on. The US' intention to open relations with China had been premised on the logic of countering the Soviet Union, but with it came a bridled optimism that engagement with US business, integration into the world and "opening-up" would be profoundly beneficial for both parties.

To this end, the foundation of US-China relations helped pioneer a mighty change in China that has

seen it develop into a global economic powerhouse, something that, contrary to the hostile rhetoric today, has been profoundly beneficial to the US, unlocking the bonanza of the Chinese market.

However, the US' ideas about China have long since changed.

A misleading train of thought that has become dominant in Washington, DC, posits that the relationship with China should not be viewed in interdependent, mutually beneficial and relative terms, but as a zero-sum game of "win" or "lose". This erroneously depicts China's gain as the US' loss, which subsequently rolls over into the idea that the US is locked in an uncompromising struggle for global hegemony with

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BYD overtakes Tesla in sales for 4th quarter

Carmaker's global presence a symbol of China's competitive edge in NEV sector

By LI FUSHENG
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Chinese carmaker BYD dethroned Tesla in the fourth quarter as the world's best-selling electric vehicle maker as a result of the growing demand for emission-free mobility in China, which is globally the largest vehicle market.

Tesla said on Tuesday that it delivered a record 484,500 electric vehicles in the last three months of 2023, which were roughly 40,000 less than those sold by Chinese company BYD.

This is the first time that BYD outsold Tesla in terms of battery-only vehicle sales on a quarterly basis. For the whole of 2023, Tesla still sold more, standing at 1.81 million units, while BYD sold 1.57 million electric vehicles, up 73 percent year-on-year.

BYD's rise to global fame is a symbol of China's growing competitive edge in the new energy vehicle sector. The nation started fostering the sector in 2009, when most other countries deemed it too early to do so.

The early mover advantage, coupled with favorable government policies and growing charging facilities, has seen China become the world's largest NEV market and one of the most important sources of innovation in the sector. Xu Haidong, deputy chief engineer of the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers, said, "The fast growth of the new energy vehicle sector and the rise of local Chinese marques are helping boost the automotive sector's overall development."

The association, which is scheduled to release collated figures in mid-January, said that NEV sales in China were expected to hit 9 million units in 2023. In the first 11 months, NEV deliveries in the country totaled 8.3 million units, up 36.7 percent year-on-year, it said.

The NEVs accounted for 30.8 percent of vehicle sales during the same period, indicating that Chinese car buyers are more inclined toward emission-free mobility. The figure is expected to rise to 40 percent this year, according to the

China Passenger Car Association. The NEV sales boom has prompted many technology companies to make forays into automobile manufacturing.

Huawei said on Monday that orders for its Aito M9, an SUV codveloped with Chinese carmaker Seres, surpassed 30,000 in seven days since its launch. The model's mass deliveries are set to begin in February.

Chinese smartphone maker Xiaomi unveiled its first vehicle in late December, a sedan with dimensions similar to BMW's 5 Series.

Xiaomi said the model, which is expected to hit the market early this year, outperforms Porsche's electric vehicle Taycan and Tesla's Model S in aspects such as acceleration and mileage on one charge.

International carmakers are making most of their presence in China.

Grace Tao, vice-president of Tesla, said that almost 100 percent of its Shanghai plant's workforce are Chinese, and 95 percent of components are locally purchased.

Tesla's Shanghai plant produced around 600,000 Model 3s and Model Ys last year for the Chinese market, accounting for roughly one-third of its total global deliveries.

Volkswagen has built a state-of-the-art hub that involves electric vehicle development and production in Hefei, Anhui province. It has also partnered with Chinese technology companies, including Horizon Robotics, to develop autonomous driving solutions and smart cabin functions for its models to be sold in China.

In late December, the German carmaker started to ship electric vehicles made in Hefei back to Europe, which is one of the major destinations for China's vehicle exports.

Statistics from the automobile manufacturers' association show that 1.09 million China-made NEVs were exported in the first 11 months of 2023, up 83.5 percent year-on-year. The number drove China's total vehicle exports to 4.41 million units in the same period, catapulting the nation to the top rank globally.



Workers assemble a chassis at the BYD solar panel and electric bus chassis production facility in Campinas, Sao Paulo state, Brazil, on Nov 14. JONNE RORIZ / GETTY IMAGES

NATION TAKES HUGE STRIDES ON CULTURAL STAGE

City of Shenzhen plays leading role in artistic endeavors

By WANG XU
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In-depth

The technology hub of Shenzhen, Guangdong province, which has risen from being a modest fishing village to becoming a beacon of modernity and cultural prowess, stands as a shining example of

Chairman Mao Zedong's vision. Mao once said: "As our economy grows, so will our culture. Gone are the times when we were considered uncivilized, and we will reemerge on the world stage as a

sophisticated, advanced culture." Mao made the remarks in late September 1949, shortly before the founding of the People's Republic of China.

Now, in the bustling heart of Shenzhen, where innovation converges with cultural dynamism, a pioneering spirit is taking root.

Zhang Ling, head of Shenzhen's municipal publicity department,

said, "The city is determined to be a pioneer in the cultural aspects of reform and opening-up, a pioneer in the integration of Chinese and foreign cultures, and a pioneer in cultural inheritance and innovation, with the goal of building a window for modern Chinese civilization."

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INSIDE
Sun, sea and symphony strike a chord with visitors at Hainan music festival
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There are numerous ways to position Shenzhen as a trailblazer in the cultural dimensions of reform and opening-up, Zhang said. One of them is a global urban civilization exchange plan which highlights the city's commitment to cultural exchanges.

"Meanwhile, we will use our identity as an economic and technological hub, and seek to make Shenzhen's products and enterprises global ambassadors," Zhang added.

"Companies such as Huawei, BYD and Tencent will play a crucial role in amplifying Shenzhen's influence on a global scale in this respect."

Zhang said that as the core engine of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, Shenzhen is also developing cultural exchange centers, promoting the internationalization of Chinese culture, and working with the Hong Kong and Macao authorities to stage major cultural events. All these factors are contributing to Shenzhen becoming a global hub for art trading, entertainment and tourism.

As a pilot demonstration area for socialism with Chinese characteristics, Shenzhen has made ceaseless efforts to make a substantial contribution to exploring a new approach to building a modern socialist country in all respects, including culture.

In September, when the dance drama *Wing Chun*, produced by the Shenzhen Opera & Dance Theatre, made its highly anticipated overseas debut in the vibrant city-state of Singapore, it epitomized the profound observation of United States theorist Ken Wilber: "When diverse cultures converge, they give rise to a unique and splendid creation."

The show, one of the year's most successful and best-selling Chinese dance dramas, was staged in Singapore at the Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay for three consecutive nights, with one performance receiving seven encores.

The drama follows the story of Chinese kung fu master Ip Man, set against the backdrop of a movie set during the 1990s. Using a play-within-a-play format, the show centers around the thrilling encounters between leading kung fu masters by merging the movements of modern dance and traditional martial arts to create a unique feature for the production.

Five types of Chinese martial arts are featured in the drama - wing chun, tai chi, baguazhang, bajiquan and praying mantis.

Fights in the show are charged with lots of emotion, while the plot and characters are used to tell the story of ordinary people and heroes supporting each other in the pursuit of justice and equality.

Birthday treat

Don Low, a university lecturer in fine arts in Singapore, watched a performance of the show with his family, including his mother, who was celebrating her 83rd birthday.

"My mother has been doing kung fu for the past 30 years, so I thought she would enjoy the show. We also took the opportunity to catch up with cultural performances, because we had not attended one for a while," he said.

Chi Shu Na, another audience member from Singapore, said: "Watching this beautiful audio and visual feast gave everyone a touching and beautiful sense of enjoyment. Truly, art has no borders."

In an attempt to build a city culture characterized by openness and inclusiveness to strengthen its position as a global innovation hub, Shenzhen is focusing on decarbonization and digitalization for its industrial future. Last month, the city also unveiled a 30-point plan to attract top talent from around the world.

The plan includes a wide range of initiatives and incentives to foster an ecosystem that encourages entrepreneurship, research, and technological advancement.

Leading professionals who settle in Shenzhen will not only be provided with a



Top: A dance drama is performed at the Poly Theatre in Shenzhen, Guangdong province. CHEN WEN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE
Above left: The Dafen oil painting village in Shenzhen. Above right: An actor performs during the first Shenzhen cultural exhibition at the city's Convention and Exhibition Center in August. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Visitors are attracted to artworks at the Shenzhen Art Museum last month. MAO SIQIAN / XINHUA

"policy package", including career platforms, research funds, team support, and living subsidies, but will also have full authority to make decisions regarding personnel, finance and technological directions.

The plan states that to cultivate a culture of innovation that embraces failures and fosters tolerance toward them, Shenzhen will establish a talent utilization mechanism based on trust, and which allows for mistakes.

David Poon, president of Infineon Greater China, a German chipmaker, cited the company's recent collaboration in Shenzhen as an example of the innovative potential in China.

Infineon is partnering with a major client in the city to develop cutting-edge drone technology, a project recognized globally for its industry-leading innovation and technology.

"The next 10 years will be a new era characterized by the dual drivers of decarbonization and digitalization. These two factors are expected to become the critical

engines for economic growth and societal progress, especially in China," Poon said.

He added that Infineon, which has the expertise and technology to provide essential semiconductor technological support for decarbonization and digitalization, will empower China's ongoing push for a low-carbon, green-driven digital transformation.

As a global leader in semiconductor solutions for green and efficient energy, and clean and safe mobility, Infineon's largest market is China. For the 2023 fiscal year, the Chinese market accounted for about one-third of the chipmaker's revenue of 16.3 billion euros (\$17.54 billion).

"The current business environment in Shenzhen and China as a whole is excellent, healthy, and well-aligned with Infineon's strategic goals. We are committed to building a collaborative innovation system that brings together industry partners, universities, research institutions and end customers to jointly accelerate innovation toward a better future," Poon said.

However, Shenzhen's cultural initiatives are not solely confined to elite circles.

Rather, they offer a platform for the public to excel and actively take part in the city's cultural endeavors. Shenzhen's commitment to inclusivity ensures that everyone, regardless of their background or expertise, can play a role in shaping and celebrating the city's diverse and dynamic cultural identity.

Viral footage

In May, construction worker Yi Qunlin, 57, became the first person to perform in the new concert hall at the Cultural and Art Center in Guangming district, Shenzhen, a venue he helped build.

Video footage of Yi, clad in a helmet and reflective vest, playing a public piano in Huaqiangbei, one of the world's largest electronics markets, went viral online, quickly trending on Sina Weibo and X, formerly known as Twitter.

In less than a month, the footage had been viewed at least four million times

worldwide, with attention focusing not only on Yi, but also on the determination of the Shenzhen authorities for the city to embrace a culture characterized by "openness and inclusiveness".

Asked why the footage proved so popular, Ye Xiaogang, chairman of the China Musicians Association, said: "Music transcends borders. It is a form of spiritual and auditory art uniquely equipped to resonate with people."

"From grassroots artistic endeavors to community-driven initiatives, music can be understood by everyone, and Shenzhen's cultural sphere thrives on the collective spirit of its people, establishing the city as a true cultural melting pot for all."

In embracing Shenzhen's vibrant cultural atmosphere, Ye took on the role of directing the organizing committee for the Belt and Road International Music Festival in Shenzhen.

He said his commitment stems not only from his musical background, but also from a genuine appreciation of the city's unique cultural landscape, which has strengthened Ye's dedication to fostering a harmonious convergence of global artistic expression in Shenzhen.

During the six-week festival, which opened in September, more than 30 artists and groups from 39 countries and regions performed in Shenzhen. They included Chinese American violinist Cho-Liang Lin, Argentinian bandoneonist (a type of concertina) player Walter Rios, talented French trumpeter Lucienne Renaudin Vary, the New York Metropolitan Opera House's baritone Yunpeng Wang, and Chinese vocalist Lei Jia.

Ye said: "A nation or a people cannot be strong or prosperous without a thriving culture. Likewise, we cannot achieve the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation without a vigorous socialist culture."

In the spirit of "each appreciating the best of others, and all appreciating the best together", he believes that contacts between different cultures lead to exchanges, mutual learning and development.

"As a result, we have never stopped such contacts, and we have learned and absorbed from the best of other nations and peoples," Ye said.

In recent years, as evidence of Chinese culture's enhanced soft power, a cultural renaissance has unfolded, marked by a wave of artistic expression and a proliferation of sophisticated platforms for cultural dissemination.

A diverse range of activities and products now cater to the public's ever-expanding tastes, and the cultural landscape has become a powerful force, enhancing China's soft power and global influence.

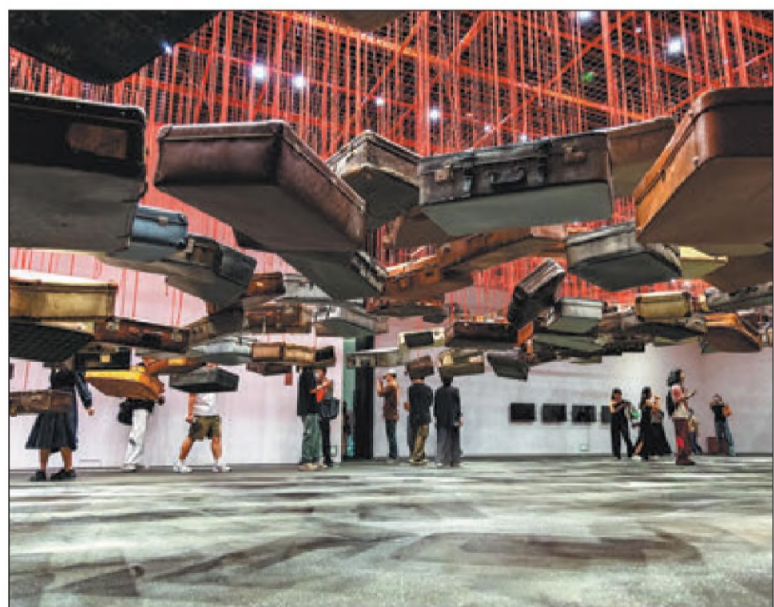
The nation is a front-runner globally in the production of television shows and books.

Ministry of Commerce data showed that in 2021, the import and export volume of China's cultural products reached \$155.8 billion, a year-on-year rise of 43.4 percent. The value of the nation's cultural services rose by 24.3 percent to \$44.22 billion, with the US, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, the Netherlands and Japan as the main destinations for its online games and e-sports products.

China handed its movie box office crown back to North America last year after retaining its position as the world's largest film market in 2020 and 2021. However, in November, China saw box office revenue of 50 billion yuan (\$6.97 billion), signaling a remarkable recovery from the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ye said: "A country's essence and character are deeply embedded in its cultural fabric. In the past seven decades, we have cultivated a dynamic socialist culture that resonates strongly on the global stage."

"Through our artistic endeavors, we have narrated the stories of our monumental struggles and expressed our optimism for national rejuvenation. As we continue this journey, we anticipate further remarkable cultural achievements that not only resolve our internal issues, but also address the broader challenges faced by humanity."



“The city is determined to be a pioneer in the cultural aspects of reform and opening-up ... with the goal of building a window for modern Chinese civilization.”
Zhang Ling, head of the municipal publicity department in Shenzhen

Left and right: Exhibitions in Shenzhen attract visitors. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY AND BY LIANG XU / XINHUA



TOP NEWS

Beijing meets targets for air quality again

Capital recorded 192 consecutive days of good PM2.5 concentration last year, data shows

By DU JUAN
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32
micrograms per cubic meter

The average level of PM2.5 in Beijing last year

Beijing has met national air quality standards for the third year in a row, according to the municipal government, which released the city's annual average concentration of major airborne fine particulate matter on Wednesday.

The capital's average concentration of PM2.5 — fine particles in the air that are 2.5 micrometers or smaller in diameter — was recorded at 32 micrograms per cubic meter last year, the city's ecology and environment bureau said.

Beijing witnessed a significant improvement in air quality last year, according to the bureau. Approximately 90 percent of the days were classified as "good" in terms of air quality, with a record-breaking 192 consecutive days of good PM2.5 concentration, which was 20 days more than the previous year.

In 2013, there were only 13 days of "good" air quality. From 2013 to 2023, the concentration of PM2.5 in Beijing plummeted 64.2 percent, while the concentration of PM10 — particles in the air that are generally 10 micrometers or smaller in diameter — dropped 43.6 percent, data from the bureau showed.

The level of nitrogen dioxide dropped 53.6 percent and that of sulfur dioxide plunged 88.7 percent in the past decade.

Compared with 2022, the PM2.5 level last year increased slightly, by 2 micrograms per cubic meter, the data showed.

Zhang Qiang, professor and associate head of the Department of Earth System Science at Tsinghua University, said that three factors contributed to the challenges in maintaining and improving air quality in Beijing.

First, social and economic activities returned to normal levels in

2023, as China lifted its COVID-19 response measures, which led to an increase in emissions.

Second, the El Nino, or unusual warming of surface waters in the Pacific Ocean, had an unfavorable impact on the environment last year, increasing regional movement of pollutants and making their dispersion difficult.

"Additionally, the year 2023 saw an increase in the frequency of dust storms, which reached the highest level in a decade," Zhang said.

Li Xiang, director of the Atmospheric Environment Division of the city's ecology and environment bureau, emphasized the regional nature of particulate matter causing air pollution, which can traverse cities and be transported between provinces.

"Last year posed significant challenges for air pollution control in Beijing. Despite various unfavorable factors, we have actively cooperated with neighboring provinces and cities to jointly prevent, control and manage air pollution," Li said.

Regional collaborative efforts are crucial for improving air quality, she said. "After a decade of efforts, the concentrations of PM2.5 in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region and its surrounding areas have seen steady improvement," Li said.

"In the future, Beijing will continue to cooperate closely with neighboring provinces and cities to reduce emissions, contributing to our efforts to improve regional air quality," she added.



Bouammouch Kheira (left) and her "Chinese mother" Li Jinrong speak during an event at the Optics Valley branch of the Hospital of Stomatology affiliated with Wuhan University in Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province, on Dec 19 to mark the 60th anniversary of sending China's first foreign aid medical team, which went to Algeria in Africa. XIAO YUJU / XINHUA

Heartwarming reunion raises toast to China's medical aid missions in Algeria

By LIU KUN in Wuhan
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“This is my first visit to China, but I didn't feel the journey was arduous at all, because I was so excited to meet Professor Li, my Chinese mother.”

Bouammouch Kheira, Algerian woman who underwent a total nasal reconstruction surgery conducted by a Chinese medical team 39 years ago

When 89-year-old Li Jinrong heard someone calling her "mom" at an event in Wuhan, Hubei province, she immediately rose from her seat.

A foreign woman ran toward her before hugging her tightly and saying, "Mom, mom." With tears of joy, Li gently patted her back and said, "Bonjour!"

The woman, Bouammouch Kheira, who is from Algeria, underwent a total nasal reconstruction surgery — the first such operation in Africa — that was done by Li and other members of a Chinese medical team 39 years ago.

Li and Kheira reunited last month at an event marking the 60th anniversary of China's first foreign aid medical mission, which was sent to Algeria. Kheira, 50, traveled 10,000 kilometers from Algeria to arrive in Wuhan the day before the anniversary event on Dec 19.

"This is my first visit to China, but I didn't feel the journey was arduous at all, because I was so excited to meet Professor Li, my Chinese mother," Kheira told Xinhua News Agency last month.

In November 1984, Li, then a surgeon at the Hospital of Stomatology affiliated with Wuhan University, joined the 11th Chinese medical aid mission to Algeria. She helped a hospital in the North African country carry out oral and facial surgeries, enhancing the standard of medical care there and strengthening the friendship between the two countries.

In March 1985, Kheira, then 12, visited a hospital in Algeria's Mascara Province to seek treatment for a stomach infection. Li and her colleagues were providing medical assistance at the hospital. One of the Chinese team's doctors noticed Kheira's badly disfigured nose, the tip of which was bitten off by a donkey when she was just 2 years old. The doctor took Kheira to see Li.

"Had she not been disfigured, she would have grown up to be a great beauty," Li said. "The surgery could accept nothing less than full victory."

The hospital in Wuhan where Li worked had conducted nasal reconstruction surgeries since the 1960s. However, the conventional method required skin grafting from the forehead, which left a scar

on the patient's face.

After consulting medical literature and taking the Algerian hospital's limited medical capabilities into consideration, Li devised a comprehensive treatment plan and decided to transplant skin from one of Kheira's upper arms, because it matched her facial skin tone and was only a short distance from the nose.

Kheira admitted that she was scared at first, but Li's earnest attitude when inquiring about her symptoms and hands-on approach to changing her dressings reminded her of her mother and gave her hope.

The reconstruction of Kheira's nose required four surgeries over a period of two months, including elaborate procedures that involved cutting the skin and subcutaneous fat, transferring a skin flap, immobilizing the repaired nose with plaster, and trimming and reconstruction.

Many people visited the hospital to witness the first such surgical procedure in Africa. After its successful completion, Kheira ran from ward to ward, telling everyone she met that she now had a nose identical to theirs, courtesy of her "Chinese mother," and sniffing to prove she could breathe easily and smoothly.

"Without my Chinese mother, my life would be darker than death," Kheira told Hubei Television in Wuhan last month.

The Algerian Ministry of Health praised the Chinese team's handling of Kheira's surgery and told all the hospitals in the country to refer patients with facial deformi-

ties to the hospital in Mascara.

"As a member of a Chinese foreign aid team, I knew that my duty was not only to help local residents with common illnesses, but also to find remedies for long-standing and challenging diseases," Li said.

Contribution hailed

During her two years in Algeria, Li once performed six surgeries in a row without sleep, helping people with sinus problems and neck tumors live normal lives. She also established Algeria's first oral and maxillofacial department at the hospital in Mascara, and passed her skills and knowledge on to Algerian doctors.

When Li left the hospital in October 1986, many people gathered to bid farewell to her and other members of the Chinese team, showering them with local specialties to express their gratitude.

Since China sent its first foreign aid medical team to Algeria in 1963, nearly 30,000 medical workers have given treatment to nearly 300 million patients in 76 countries and regions around the world, the National Health Commission said.

In September, Wuhan sent its 28th foreign aid medical team to Algeria.

"Foreign medical teams play an important role in promoting health-care services in developing countries and striving for world peace," Li said. "We are fulfilling a glorious internationalist obligation."

Li Menghan contributed to this story.

Panic buying



Motorists line up for fuel in Amritsar, India, on Tuesday. A nationwide strike by truck drivers against a new hit-and-run law has sparked fears that the truckers' protest would hurt the supply of essential items, including fuel. NARINDER NANU / AFP

Speech: Nation's proactive initiatives seen as inclusive

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“With a world increasingly pushed into political hostilities and economic uncertainties, China's stabilizing role is imperative.”

Adhere Cavince, Nairobi, Kenya-based scholar of international relations

China is the largest trade partner for over 120 countries, Cavince said. He added that in Africa, China is a leading source of foreign direct investment, and that Chinese companies have created jobs, and modernized Africa's infrastructure. Also, Beijing remains a leading source of development financing for a majority of African economies.

China's inclusive and sustainable development ideas, as manifested by the BRI, the Global Development Initiative, and the Global Security Initiative, reflect a proactive approach to leverage both multilateral and bilateral channels for the betterment of humanity, Cavince said.

"With a world increasingly pushed into political hostilities and economic uncertainties, China's

stabilizing role is imperative," he said, adding that Beijing is a guarantor of world peace and economic rejuvenation.

Noting that Xi, in his speech, mentioned the problems faced by

businesses amid a tough operating environment, and issues such as employment and livelihoods, Henry Chan, visiting senior research fellow at the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace, said this bodes well for solving economic and social problems in 2024.

"The idea of people-centered focus in 2024 permeates throughout the speech, and seeking social harmony can ease concerns of over ideological focus in policy formulation and implementation," said Chan, noting it was a warm speech that touched the ground.

Dicky Budiman, a public health researcher at Griffith University in Queensland, Australia, was impressed that Xi mentioned the issue of medical services and elderly care in his New Year speech.

"This is an issue that not only concerns China but also has influence around the globe, including many Asian countries, which will also face this elderly challenge," he said.

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Ties: Two sides can certainly coexist

From page 1

China, and that this ought to require the rollback of globalization, the cutting up of supply chains, the forcing of countries to take sides, and the formation of confrontational coalitions. The idea that both countries could get along and coexist is treated by many as taboo.

In spite of this, 2023 was overall a more reasonable year in China-US relations, ushering in more stability. President Xi Jinping made an official visit to the US at the APEC Summit in San Francisco and met with US President Joe Biden. While the results of this meeting cannot be called a substantial breakthrough, it was nonetheless a "cooling off" that gave more assurance and provided more room for engagement.

Critics might argue that this provides little assurance for 2024,

a year that will perhaps be another unpredictable period because of the international situation, which continues to deteriorate.

In addition, the US presidential election is looming, and one should expect China-bashing, which could disrupt relations and political decision-making. Therefore it is even more important to promote conciliatory relations and compromise between the two countries and avoid creating situations that would promote the escalation of tension. For this reason, the year should be a period of diplomatic caution and restraint.

However, the bigger picture should not be lost, China-US relations have thrived and succeeded for 45 years now. Both countries have, in spite of many differences, learned to accept and manage their differences, so why should that change now? And why should all those years be squan-

dered through pursuit of ideological and hegemonic goals?

The US and China absolutely can coexist, and the two are capable of navigating global challenges together and finding a position for the greater good. We should look back on these fond memories and also be prepared to be optimistic that things can get better, and in turn challenge the "fatalistic" view that assumes that both countries must struggle against each other until one side is victorious.

US-China relations were built on the premise that two countries with very different ideologies can in fact get along, that there does not need to be an existential struggle, and that the two nations can benefit from each other.

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

CHINA



Jiang Yuhe displays the national flag during the award ceremony of the WorldSkills competition in Salzburg, Austria, in November 2022.
PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

WorldSkills gold medalist keen to nurture future champions

Competition turned teacher now honing talent at her old technician college

By CHENG SI
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After winning a gold medal at a WorldSkills competition in Austria in 2022, 22-year-old Jiang Yuhe, a former assembly line worker, embarked on a career as a vocational school teacher last year.

Jiang, then 20, won China's first gold medal in the chemical laboratory technology event at a special edition of the WorldSkills competition in Salzburg in November 2022. Tears welled up as she stood on the podium and recalled the hardships she had experienced in life and skills training.

She was born in a small village in Nanyang, in Central China's Henan province, and her father and other members of the family were farmers. She found a job as an assembly line worker at an electronics factory in the southern province of Guangdong after finishing junior high school.

"I could only do some ordinary work because I didn't have much knowledge or skills," she said. "The boring existence then made me doubt the meaning of my life. I really knew at the time that it wasn't the life I truly wanted. I wanted a life full of hope, and I was afraid that the dreary work might ruin my ambition and dreams. I wanted to continue my education and get some skills."

Her parents supported her idea of



Jiang attends the WorldSkills competition in Salzburg.

giving up the job in the factory and she was admitted to Henan Chemical Technician College to study chemistry and chemical engineering in March 2018.

Her return to school was full of surprises, which she likened to opening an "amazing blind box." Thirsty for knowledge, she always sat in the front row of every class.

"I heard of the WorldSkills competition for the first time and got to know He Jiangtao, who won a bronze medal in industrial control at the 45th WorldSkills (in Kazan, Russia, in 2019)," Jiang said. "I wished to be as good as him and took him as a model at the time."

Jiang was selected for the college team for the WorldSkills trials in 2019

and then the national team for the special edition of the 46th WorldSkills competition in December 2020 after winning a bronze medal in China's first State-level skills competition that month.

The WorldSkills chemical laboratory technology event requires contestants to analyze natural and synthetic materials by using various tools and methods, and perform qualitative and quantitative tests using modern analytical methods.

"It was a regular routine for me to repeat a single gesture thousands or millions of times when preparing for the WorldSkills for three and a half years," Jiang said. "I used to train for 14 hours a day during that period, and kept company with chemical reagents during Spring Festivals when other people had family reunions."

She said the event required contestants to conduct chemical titration with only 0.01 of a milliliter of a solution in a test tube each time.

"Even a slight hand tremble would waste all the previous efforts," Jiang said. "I spent almost 14,000 hours in training and stayed up until 2 am each day during the month of intensive training before the WorldSkills competition in November 2022."

Language was also a big challenge, as the event required contestants to write a test report in English.

"It's a hard nut to crack for many students with bachelor's or master's degrees, let alone for me, who only finished junior high school," Jiang said. "But thankfully, I got help from my teacher. I took a dictionary with me and recited words at meals, before sleeping and during walks."

"I finished an 11-page English test report at the competition, winning thumbs-ups from competitors from English-speaking countries and regions."

Jiang began teaching chemical laboratory technology at her alma mater in January last year.

"The transformation from competitor to schoolteacher has brought me greater responsibility," she said. "Teaching is an honorable and respectable profession, and also a job I've dreamed of."

"I'm still young and have a long way to go to become a good teacher. I will do my best to help more young people with skills shine on the WorldSkills stage."

The WorldSkills Competition 2022 Special Edition — comprising 62 events — was organized in 15 countries and regions including France, Switzerland and Austria from September to late November that year. Chinese competitors won 21 gold medals and three silver ones in the 34 events the nation entered, topping the gold medal tally.

Traditional Tibetan dance gains fans in Chengdu

CHENGDU — At a public square in Chengdu, a bustling city of over 20 million people in southwestern China, 24-year-old Tibetan dancer Yanggyi prepared for her performance, adjusting her traditional attire and her hair.

As the tune of a Tibetan love song permeated the night air, she entered the dance floor, initiating a vibrant Guozhuang dance party.

Guozhuang, which means singing and dancing in a circle, is a traditional Tibetan dance. During their leisure time, Tibetans of all ages often gather in circles, gracefully dancing to the rhythmic beats.

Since the 1980s, Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province, has become a preferred destination for people relocating from within the province and neighboring regions, thanks to its favorable climate and vibrant economy.

While embracing urban life, an increasing number of Tibetans also brought the Guozhuang dance as well as other cultural heritage to the city. As a result, the art form began to make its way into the lives of many city dwellers.

In 2014, Yanggyi, at the age of 15, moved from Jinchuan county in Aba Tibetan and Qiang autonomous prefecture to Chengdu. After completing her university studies, she became a kindergarten teacher in the city.

Nine years of life in Chengdu has seen her transition from a teenager in the Tibetan community to a young adult pursuing a career in the city, with Guozhuang serving as the enduring link to her hometown.

Although not professionally trained in dance, Yanggyi considers Guozhuang an intrinsic part of her cultural identity. "Dance is,

in my view, the mother of all languages as it can express so many emotions," she said.

In 2021, Yanggyi, along with like-minded people, formed a Guozhuang dance group. Starting with just seven members, the group gained popularity through word-of-mouth and the power of the internet, attracting a large number of dancing enthusiasts.

Today, Yanggyi's dance group has become one of the most popular Guozhuang dance troupes in Chengdu, boasting 420,000 followers on social media. People travel from Beijing and Shanghai, and even foreign countries, to see their performances.

During each dance performance, Yanggyi and her teammates wear Hadras, traditional Tibetan silk scarves symbolizing purity and auspiciousness, with the dance floor flooding with flowers from the appreciative audience.

"We aim to bring joy and relaxation while allowing others to experience the charm of our Tibetan culture," Yanggyi said.

In today's Chengdu, Guozhuang is becoming a new cultural phenomenon, creating waves on social media. Liu Rongping, a 60-year-old resident, is a fervent Guozhuang enthusiast who has enrolled in three dance classes and owns six sets of traditional Tibetan costumes.

"Keeping dancing Guozhuang and refraining from mahjong is my recipe for happiness," Liu said.

Looking ahead, Yanggyi said she hopes her teammates maintain their love for Guozhuang. "I hope I can take the team to bigger stages for more people to appreciate and enjoy," she said.

XINHUA



Tibetan dancer Yanggyi (front) leads a Guozhuang dance party in Chengdu, Sichuan province, on Dec 25. SHEN BOHAN / XINHUA

'Significant snowfall' turns Xinjiang desert white for a third winter

By LI HONGYANG
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The Taklimakan Desert, China's largest desert, has experienced significant snowfall for a third consecutive year.

Spanning about 1,000 kilometers east to west and around 400 km north to south in the Tarim Basin in the south of the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, the desert, known as the Sea of Death, averages no more than 100 millimeters of precipitation a year, with up to 3,400mm of evaporation, the China Meteorological Administration said.

Xinjiang's meteorological service said the five days from Dec 11 brought snow and a cold wave to Xinjiang, with northern regions experiencing an exceptionally strong cold wave. On Dec 14, Korla in Bayingolin Mongol autonomous prefecture recorded heavy snow, breaking the December precipitation records for the region.

Wu Xiulan, deputy chief forecaster of the monitoring and evaluation desk at the Xinjiang Climate Center, said: "Under the influence of cold air and suitable moisture conditions, snowfall in the Taklimakan Desert is not uncommon."

"Historical meteorological records reveal that, although infrequent, significant snowfall in the desert has occurred not only in the past three winters but also in the

Under the influence of cold air and suitable moisture conditions, snowfall in the Taklimakan Desert is not uncommon."

Wu Xiulan, deputy chief forecaster of the monitoring and evaluation desk at the Xinjiang Climate Center

broader historical context, such as during the severe ice and snow disaster in 2008."

The desert is no stranger to extreme weather events, including rain, thunderstorms and hail, the administration said.

Wu said global climate change had resulted in more frequent extreme weather events in the region. Winter precipitation in southern Xinjiang has also been on the rise in recent years.

Data from 1991 to 2020 showed that winter precipitation in the Tarim Basin increased by 0.6mm compared with the period from 1981 to 2010, rising by 11.8 percent. The northern part of Xinjiang experienced a 7.6 percent increase in winter precipitation during the same period.

Freight train's arrival in Zhangjiakou establishes international trade corridor

By ZHANG YU in Shijiazhuang
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Zhangjiakou in North China's Hebei province is becoming part of a comprehensive international trade corridor following the opening of a railway route to Europe and Central Asia.

A freight train loaded with barley from Kazakhstan arrived in Zhangjiakou's Xiahuyuan district on Dec 13 after a journey that passed through the Horgos railway port in Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

It was the first freight train from overseas to arrive in Zhangjiakou since the launch of the China-Europe (Central Asia) route at the end of August, and took 10 days to travel more than 4,000 kilometers.

Its cargo, 50 containers of imported barley, weighed about 1,391 metric tons and was worth more than 3 million yuan (\$423,200), the city government said.

It said the train's arrival signified the official opening of the Zhangjiakou section of the China-Europe (Central Asia) route in



One of the "Jingzhang" China-Europe (Central Asia) freight trains arrives in Zhangjiakou's Xiahuyuan district on Dec 13 from Kazakhstan. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

both directions, enabling two-way trade and establishing an important foundation for the development of Zhangjiakou as a multimodal transportation and logistics hub.

It also marked a significant step forward in constructing a comprehensive international trade corridor in Zhangjiakou, enhancing its level of openness and expanding the logistics network around Beijing.

The imported barley on the train originated from the main grain-producing region of Kazakhstan, characterized by high latitude, significant temperature differences between day and night, and fertile land.

With crops maturing once a year, the grains produced in the region have a high protein content and are less prone to pests and diseases, an import company in Yuxi county, Zhangjiakou, said.

The name of the trains combines characters representing the cities of Beijing and Zhangjiakou.

The first China-Europe (Central Asia) freight train to depart from Zhangjiakou left the freight railway station in Xiahuyuan district on Aug 29, carrying 59 containers with 1,322 tons of cargo.

As the China-Europe freight train network continues to expand, more cities in Hebei, including Shijiazhuang, Handan, Langfang and Zhangjiakou, are joining the cross-border railway transportation system.

Editor's note: As protection of the planet's flora, fauna and resources becomes increasingly important, China Daily is publishing a series of stories to illustrate the country's commitment to safeguarding the natural world.

Influx of rare water birds creates challenge

By LIU KUN in Wuhan and CHEN MEILING

In recent years, Tanghu Lake in Wuhan, Hubei province, has become a new breeding ground for jacana, a rare water bird, following local government efforts to improve the ecology of ponds and lakes in the city.

However, the return of the bird, which is under second-class national protection, has presented local authorities and bird watchers with another challenge.

The birds fly to Wuhan in May and their reproductive period is from June to August, with a month for incubation. After the juvenile birds learn to fly in late September they move south, said Yan Jun, president of the Wuhan Bird-Watching Association.

The birds have high requirements for water quality and a living environment, and mainly inhabit freshwater lakes, ponds and marshy areas with emergent and floating plants.

"Ten years ago, jacanas were hardly seen in Wuhan. With the deepening of ecological environment protection in recent years, the number of places where they can be observed in Wuhan is increasing," Yan said. "It shows that the ecology of the lakes is getting better."

As part of efforts to keep the lakes clean, aquatic plants are removed from the lakes from July to September every year.

Li Peng, a technician from the Wuhan Forestry Workstation, said the annual clearance was a necessity as an overabundance of plants on the water's surface can obscure sunlight needed by underwater microorganisms and lead to an imbalance in the aquatic ecosystem. Rotting roots and water plant stems leave heavy deposits, creating silt problems and leading to foul-smelling water, Li added.

However, some of the plants due to be removed this year contained jacana nests as the breeding season overlapped with the scheduled annual clearance of the aquatic plants.

The bird-watching association reported the situation to the Wuhan Forestry and Parks Bureau.

Similar disputes over protection of nesting birds' habitats occurred elsewhere in the city, such as at Beitaizi Lake, where a number of nests of gray-winged gulls were found in late June. "More than 100 nests were among the water

plants, occupying half of the lake's area," said Yan.

After discussions with multiple departments, the association put forward a solution. It proposed volunteers observe water birds and their nests at about 70 spots across the city and report the situation so that the water plants could remain while the birds are hatched.

The association identified 19 nesting and gathering sites for water birds at which culling of the aquatic plants was agreed to be delayed.

"We rescheduled waterweed harvesting times to avoid the breeding period of water birds," said Liu Ai, director of the bureau's wildlife and wetland protection department.

"We also avoided using machines. Instead, workers were instructed to temporarily suspend harvesting in areas where nests are found until the water bird chicks have hatched."

Liu said in the past, there was no such problem as water birds were rarely seen at the lakes. As the water quality of the lakes had improved, the number of water birds breeding there also increased, she said.

"Wuhan is an international wetland city. Water birds are indicative species of wetland environmental quality, and an important component of biodiversity," she said, adding that both the government and associations have worked to observe and protect birds.

Yan said the species and number of migratory birds visiting and breeding in Wuhan had seen significant growth this year. "Refined management of the city provides a safer space for birds so that they can live in harmony with humans for a long time. It will, in return, improve the city's landscape," he said.

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Top: A gray-winged gull flies above Wanji Lake carrying grass for its nest in Wuhan, Hubei province. **Above:** A jacana is seen on Wanji Lake in Wuhan. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Clockwise from top: A herdsman drives his cattle and sheep onto the grassland in Weining Yi-Hui-Miao autonomous county in Bijie, Guizhou province. Cattle and sheep wander and graze on the grassland. Wind turbines generate clean energy on the grassland. PHOTOS BY LI JINGCHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Zhuofu grassland revived and thriving

Balanced approach ensures healthy ecology, while boosting rural economy

By YANG JUN in Guiyang and WANG SONGSONG

More than 30 years of ecological restoration work has transformed Zhuofu's barren hills into grassland and boosted economic development in Weining Yi-Hui-Miao autonomous county, Bijie city, Guizhou province.

In the 1980s, after conducting a thorough investigation, Ren Jizhou, a grassland ecologist and academician with the Chinese Academy of Engineering, proposed improving both the ecology and productivity of the grassland.

In 1986, Zhuofu grassland was established as a testing, demonstration and promotion base for a grassland animal husbandry system project. The theory and practice developed from the experiment have since been widely applied in pastoral areas and resulted in huge economic benefits.

Ren, now in his late 90s, founded the "animal product unit" index for assessing grassland productivity, putting an end to the difficulty of comparing different animal by-products.

After aerial seeding of Zhuofu was undertaken, the sparse hills gradually became covered with grass shoots and the area eventually gained the appearance of a prairie.

Covering an area of nearly 600 hectares, the grassland now boasts around 2,000 cattle and 5,000 sheep. Animal husbandry has become a pil-

lar industry in Weining county, Bijie, and brings prosperity to local residents. Many of them have bought cars, People's Daily reported.

Wen Zhongcheng, a 73-year-old herder, takes care of cattle in pastures for Guan Shaogang, a major cattle producer.

Wen is quite satisfied with his annual salary. "My job is to take care of 110 cattle from May to the end of October. I can earn 25,000 yuan (\$3,416) every year," he said.

"When I was a child there was only weed, and overgrazing leads to grassland degradation," Wen added. To avoid such an ecological disaster from happening again, local residents are herding according to the grassland's carrying capacity.

Guan said, "My family ranch adopts scientific farming methods by restricting herding periods in a section every three to five days, and controls the number of cattle and sheep." The improved environment makes the cultivation of cash crops possible. In Xiejia village, Lyu Yongkun is in charge of an apple orchard.

"The orchard covers about 67 hectares and its overall output value can reach 4.5 million yuan. Thanks to better transportation facilities, it takes only one hour from Weiyuan's urban area to here. Now we can attract hundreds of tourists to pick apples every day," said Lyu.

Huang Yi, a tourist from Xiaohai township, said: "We took a group trip and picked 400 to 500 kilograms of apple. Now the trunk is full of apples."

The high-quality apples produced at the plantation are also sold in Shanghai and Beijing. Under Lyu's technical guidance, dozens of households can earn over 100,000 yuan a year in Xiejia village.

With the help of local government, each village in the Xueshan township, Weining, has its own specialty industry, including tobacco growing, chicken farming and beekeeping.

An Qingyi, director of the forestry station in Xueshan, said since 2013, the township has implemented a project to return farmland to forest and grassland. To achieve this it has planted more than 3,670 hectares of Huashan pine, 3,870 hectares of apples, 467 hectares of Sichuan pepper and over 330 hectares of walnuts.

"The key to afforestation lies in management. Otherwise, it won't be effective," An said.

To ensure the long-term and stable development of forests and grasslands, the station has formed a 267-person patrol team that conducts regular patrols to protect the mountains and grasslands throughout the year, regardless of wind or rain.

Meanwhile, the grassland has also become an ideal place for generating clean energy. It boasts the largest wind-solar hybrid power station in Guizhou that generates 450 million kilowatt-hours of energy every year. Compared with thermal power, it can save 135,000 metric tons of standard coal and reduce 350,000 tons of carbon dioxide emission, Weiyuan Daily News reported.

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Forest farm worker leaves behind proud legacy

By YUAN HUI in Hohhot and ZHANG XIAOMIN

Jia Dorj, a 63-year-old retiree, often returns to Ejin Horoo Banner forest farm in Ordos, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, where he worked for over four decades.

He started working at the Khoroo branch of the State-owned farm in 1980, when he was 19. By Jia's rough reckoning, he planted over one million tree seedlings and walked nearly 100,000 kilometers around the farm.

Ejin Horoo Banner is located at the northeast end of the Mu Us Desert where large-scale afforestation was carried out in the late 1970s.

"Through the tireless efforts of generations, what used to be a flowing sand dune has been transformed into this lush forest farm," said Jia. "In the beginning, we mainly

planted *Salix*. Since the farm had no large machinery at that time, we could only rely on manpower," Jia recalled.

During planting season, Jia and his fellow workers went out before dawn, each carrying over 50 kilograms of tree seedlings, and walked for about an hour to reach the planting area. They then dug with a shovel until they saw wet soil — usually about 70 centimeters deep — inserted a seedling in the hole, back filled it with soil and trampled it down.

They repeated this procedure until the sunset, only taking a break for lunch to eat corn cakes that they carried with them.

"I told myself to keep planting. I was thinking that if we cover this area with bushes and trees, we will not suffer from sandstorms anymore," said Jia, who still remembers when the sandstorms were severe,

and sand piled up higher than their houses overnight.

After finishing planting one area, Jia and his fellow workers would continue to the next one. With no fixed abode, he said he made a decision not to marry as he did not want his family to share his hard life.

However, he finally met his wife who was willing to stay with him despite their transient existence.

Their two daughters were both born and grew up at the forest farm. Later, when they moved to live in an urban area, Jia took his family back from time to time, telling them stories about the past, and reminding them how difficult it was to achieve the green environment.

In the early 1990s, the Khoroo branch farm's Khalaash operating area, where Jia worked, was almost fully covered with *Salix psammophila* and other sand-fixing plants.

With the reduction in sandstorms, the native plant *Sabina vulgaris* expanded rapidly.

Jia later became a forest ranger and changed from fighting sand to fighting illegal logging.

"It was very hard. The surface temperature could reach 60 C during the day but it was pitch black and cold at night," Jia recalled. "But I was determined to protect these trees no matter what happened."

At that time, there was no video surveillance or transportation at the farm. Jia walked more than 10 km every day to check every corner of his operating area.

After the forest farm built cement and asphalt roads, Jia could finish inspecting the area within an hour by riding a motorcycle.

However, he found a new problem: many of the *Salix* that had lived for many years had died.

After several coal mines were built and put into production at the Khalaash operating area, the groundwater level began to drop. Jia anxiously reported the situation to Li Xiaoguang, head of the Khoroo branch farm, who came up with a solution.

They began planting Mongolian scotch pine, which requires less water, has a higher survival rate and has more ecological benefits than *Salix*.

They also communicated with coal mining companies and asked to use the treated wastewater from the mines to irrigate the forest farm.

In recent years, the forest farm has installed cameras.

Watching the young forest rangers surveilling the forest on their computers and mobile phones gives Jia a feeling of gratification. "Forest protection is no longer hard work. It has become meticulous work," he said.

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Rescued spotted seals sent back into the wild

By ZHANG XIAOMIN in Dalian, Liaoning zhangxiaomin@chinadaily.com.cn

Twenty-three rescued spotted seals were released into the Bohai Sea off Liaoning province on Dec 12 after being trained for release into the wild.

"They have reached the release standard after wild training," said Tian Jiashen, an associate researcher with the Liaoning Ocean and Fisheries Science Research Institute.

"This is a suitable time and location to release them, as it enhances their chances of successful re-wilding and reintegrating into the wild population," he said.

Near the release site in Lushunkou district, Dalian, lies Huping Island, one of the four major haul-out sites — a place where seals leave the water and rest — for spotted seals in China. It accommodates about 200 spotted seals every year.

Under first-class national protection in China, the spotted seal is the only pinniped marine mammal to breed in Chinese waters. Every November, they come to Liaodong Bay from cold northern waters and go back in May.

According to Tian, each of the 23 spotted seals was tagged with an identification code to minimize the risk of recapture and being illegally caught and traded. Four of the seals were fitted with satellite tracking markers to support conservation and scientific research efforts.

The spotted seals were illegally poached and sold in various parts of the country. They were rescued by law enforcement agencies and transferred to the fisheries authorities. After receiving wild training from professional research institution staff that was organized by fisheries authorities, they developed the necessary skills to survive in the wild.

The release of the spotted seals was organized by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, the Supreme People's Procuratorate, the Ministry of Public Security, and the Liaoning Provincial People's Government and hosted by the Dalian Municipal People's Government.

Since 1992, when the provincial-level Dalian Spotted Seal Reserve was established, rescue and release work has been conducted every year. The reserve was upgraded to national level in 1997.

In recent years, Dalian has been expanding the core area of the national spotted seal nature reserve and implementing measures such as fishing bans and breeding and release programs to increase food resources for the seals.

Special law enforcement operations are also conducted during winter to safeguard the seals' migration and breeding.

Lu Zhichuang, deputy director of the Liaoning Ocean and Fisheries Science Research Institute, expressed confidence in the success of the conservation efforts.

"Our investigations in recent years indicate a stable and gradual recovery trend in the spotted seal population," he said. "The protection is relatively effective. With the arrival of spring each year, stranded or orphaned seal pups always receive the necessary assistance."



A spotted seal about to be released in Liaoning province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

WORLD

By PRIME SARMIENTO
in Hong Kong,
YANG WANLI in Bangkok and
LEONARDUS JEGHO in Jakarta

Vianca Encarnacion believes that studying renewable energy engineering in China will allow her to help her home country, the Philippines, against climate change.

She was a survivor of super typhoon Haiyan 10 years ago and saw how it devastated her hometown, Tacloban city, in the central Leyte Province.

"I don't want (that disaster) to happen again," she said.

Encarnacion is one of 18 Filipino students who won a scholarship from Jiuquan Vocational Technical College in northwestern China's Gansu province. The scholarship was made possible with the efforts of veteran environmental activist Wang Xiaojun.

"We need to send young talent from climate vulnerable countries (such as the Philippines) to be educated and trained, so that they can actually build a more climate-resilient future for themselves," said Wang, adding that China can provide such training because it is among the world's biggest developers of clean energy.

The scholarship program is just one of the many examples on how Chinese and Filipino citizens have joined hands to solve a pressing global challenge. More importantly, it shows how China and its nearest neighbors — Southeast Asian countries — have been building a community with a shared future for the past few years.

Experts said geographical proximity, combined with cultural, economic and diplomatic ties, has strengthened relations between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

"Community building in the ASEAN context is an endless process of understanding differences and similarities between ASEAN member states, stocktaking where our interests converge and diverge," Muhammad Habib Abiyani Dzakwan, a researcher from the Jakarta-based Center for Strategic and International Studies, said.

He said China is a stockholder in ASEAN's community-building efforts, noting how it has invested and helped ASEAN through the years. He cited China's accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, or TAC, on Oct. 8, 2003. This made China the first among major countries to join the treaty and establish a strategic partnership with ASEAN.

By acceding to the TAC, China has elevated the value of the treaty as the "rule of the game" in the community-building process, Dzakwan said. China has also sent a signal to other ASEAN dialogue partners that the TAC is valuable and credible, encouraging them to accede to it as well, he added.

The TAC, launched in 1976, aims to uphold the principles of peaceful coexistence and friendly cooperation among ASEAN members.

In a forum held in Jakarta to mark the 20th anniversary of China's accession to the TAC, Hou Yanqi, Chinese ambassador to ASEAN, said in her closing remarks that it is "even more crucial to carry forward the spirit of the TAC today."

"We should firmly support ASEAN community building and its greater role in regional and international affairs instead of treating us as an arena for major power rivalry



Passengers take a selfie with a model train of the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway at Halim Station in Jakarta, Indonesia, on Dec 17. The railway has delivered more than 700,000 passengers since its official commercial operation on Oct 17. XU QIN / XINHUA



Workers load freshly harvested durians at an orchard in Chumphon, Thailand, on Sept 18. China was the largest export market for Thai durians in 2022, accounting for more than 96 percent of the total export volume, Thailand's Ministry of Commerce said. WANG TENG / XINHUA



Vehicles line up at a toll station on the Phnom Penh-Sihanoukville Expressway in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, on July 23. The first Chinese-invested expressway has been giving a significant boost to Cambodia's economic growth and tourism development. PPSHV EXPRESSWAY VIA XINHUA

or forcing ASEAN to take sides," Hou said.

Korn Dabbaransi, former deputy prime minister of Thailand and current president of the Thai-Chinese Friendship Association, said the TAC is ASEAN's first legally binding instrument that stipulates universal principles on interstate relations and has served as a guide for ASEAN-China relations that are based on mutual trust, mutual respect and mutual benefit.

The treaty provides a "stable foundation upon which a closer ASEAN-China community with a shared future can be built", Korn told China Daily. The TAC serves as a code of conduct to enhance cooperation among peace-loving nations both within and outside ASEAN for maintaining regional peace and stability.

Beyond the TAC, Korn said rela-

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year in
Review

tions between both sides have been enhanced by their decision to elevate bilateral ties to a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2021.

"The (comprehensive strategic partnership) has also contributed to the building of ASEAN Community and a wider region which is open, inclusive and sustainable," he said.

Under the comprehensive strategic partnership, ASEAN and China

have reaffirmed the importance of maintaining ASEAN centrality in the evolving regional architecture; their mutual respect for each other's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity; and their commitment to the open, free, inclusive, transparent and nondiscriminatory rules-based multilateral trading system.

RCEP welcomed

Both sides also vowed to strengthen cooperation on climate change, biodiversity conservation, environmental protection, low-carbon solutions, clean energy, sustainable cities and rural development, and welcomed the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, which entered into force on Jan 1, 2022.

As the world's biggest free trade agreement, the RCEP covers nearly one-third of the world's population

and about 30 percent of its gross domestic product. The pact's signatories are the 10 members of ASEAN together with Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea.

Lyu Daliang, spokesman for the General Administration of Customs of China, said the RCEP is one of the reasons behind the 15 percent increase in China-ASEAN trade in 2022.

"The effective implementation of the RCEP has brought trade creation effects and facilitated cooperation among industrial chains. Over the past year since the implementation of the RCEP, the policy dividends have continued to be unleashed, contributing to closer economic and trade exchanges among countries in the region. ASEAN is an important trade partner of China in the RCEP," Lyu said in a briefing in January last year.

In 2022, China's imports and exports with ASEAN reached \$910 billion and accounted for 50.3 percent of China's total imports and exports with other RCEP members, he said.

Aleksius Jemadu, an international relations lecturer at the Universitas Pelita Harapan in Indonesia, said China and ASEAN have long been united by shared economic interests.

"Through the repeated practice of economic interdependence, the two sides go through process of mutual learning that will make them realize that they need each other," Jemadu told China Daily.

Even before the launch of the RCEP, ASEAN had been China's largest trading partner for a few years, the ASEAN Secretariat said. Trade volume between ASEAN and China has more than doubled from \$235.5 billion in 2010 to \$507.9 billion in 2019. China is also among the biggest sources of foreign direct investment for ASEAN, with inflows amounting to \$15.4 billion in 2022.

The RCEP "has helped to connect China with ASEAN countries even closer", Thailand's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Commerce Phumtham Wechayachai said.

He appreciated China's efforts to promote the sustainable development of ASEAN, not only through the RCEP, but also through the Belt and Road Initiative. The BRI, which marks its 11th anniversary this year, has spurred an infrastructure boom and economic growth in the region.

Significant strides

"The economic integration between China and ASEAN has made significant strides over the past decades, which were marked by intensified collaboration within industrial and supply chains," Phumtham said.

China and ASEAN are also advancing negotiations of the 3.0 version of the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area, or ACFTA, this year, with a focus on incorporating new growth points in the digital and green economies, he said.

The ACFTA is ASEAN's oldest free trade pact among its dialogue partners. Current negotiations in ACFTA 3.0 cover different areas, including digital economy, green economy, supply chain connectivity, competition, consumer protection, and micro, small and medium enterprises.

Moving forward, experts said ASEAN-China relations are expected to endure despite tensions over the South China Sea, weaker global economic outlook and geopolitical conflicts.

Aloysius Lele Madja, a former Indonesian diplomat, said the future of ASEAN-China ties will depend on each party balancing their respective interests and how they each view the idea of shared prosperity and promoting global justice and peace.

Dzakwan said the relationship between the two parties will get stronger even amid external headwinds.

"Competition and disagreement, if not tensions, will undoubtedly take place. That is the consequence of living side-by-side as neighbors and the rise of both parties as leading economies," he said. "But the good thing about the ASEAN-China relationship is that we always manage to find our way of resolving disagreements and stabilize the relationship."

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Experts call for joint efforts to address South China Sea issue

By YANG HAN in Hong Kong
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China and ASEAN members should work together to address the South China Sea issue calmly by focusing on cooperation among the claimants, experts say.

The South China Sea is the most complex and sensitive issue in the Asia-Pacific region, and it has become a stage for major-power competition, said Chheang Vannarith, former president of Asian Vision Institute, a think tank based in Phnom Penh.

"Addressing this in a peaceful way is a matter of necessity. It's not a matter of choice for ASEAN and China," said Chheang, adding that a new narrative for the issue should be built by focusing on cooperation among the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, China and claimant states.

The past year marked the 10th anniversary of China's proposal to foster a closer China-ASEAN community with a shared future and the

20th anniversary of China's accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia.

In 2022, China and ASEAN celebrated the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea.

In a joint statement, they recognized the benefits of having the South China Sea as "a sea of peace, friendship, and cooperation", and appreciated the progress in the Code of Conduct, or COC, negotiations. They also reaffirmed that the adoption of the COC in the future would further promote regional peace and stability.

Although negotiations on the COC have been slow, Chheang said the process is on the right track as it can highlight common interests and provide a political view for all sides to maintain peace and stability.

"The claimants hold the key position and responsibility of not provoking the situation," Chheang said. "If you invite an external power, you

need to ask whether that would help you solve the problem or further complicate the problem."

It is obvious that moves by external parties, such as the United States, to stir up conflict between China and ASEAN over the South China Sea issue are part of an encirclement strategy against China, Chheang said.

Anna Rosario Malindog-Uy, vice-president for external affairs at Asian Century Philippines Strategic Studies Institute in Manila, said, "The United States is obviously keen on maintaining, preserving and pursuing its hegemony in the waters of the South China Sea and the broader Asia-Pacific region."

The US is using the Philippines as a pawn and proxy in the South China Sea dispute as part of its strategic competition and containment strategy against China, Malindog-Uy said.

The US meddling can also complicate diplomatic efforts to resolve disputes peacefully, she said, noting that it undermines ASEAN's unity

and centrality in managing the South China Sea issue.

"It is crucial for all parties involved, particularly the Philippines and China, to pursue diplomatic channels and peaceful dispute resolution mechanisms to manage and mitigate the risks brought about by the heightening tensions in the South China Sea between the Philippines and China," she said.

In the case of Vietnam, the territorial dispute with China over the South China Sea is a historical problem, but this does not mean it cannot be resolved, said Nguyen Vinh Quang, vice-president of the Vietnam-China Friendship Association and senior adviser at the Center for Strategic Studies and International Relations Development in Hanoi.

"It is possible to resolve the issue, but it will take time," Quang said.

Noting that it is important to uphold the principle of maintaining stability, Quang said the two countries should resolve the issue through consultations and exercise

restraint to prevent the situation from getting out of control.

"It is not only a matter of regional security but also the security of both countries as we both need stability to promote development," Quang said. "We should resolve the issue through a peaceful and friendly manner."

Lasting resolution

In a joint statement issued on Dec 13, China and Vietnam reached an agreement on seeking a lasting resolution to maritime disputes, which is mutually acceptable and conforms to the agreement on the basic principles guiding the settlement of sea-related matters between China and Vietnam as well as international laws, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, Xinhua News Agency reported.

The statement was issued during a state visit to Vietnam on Dec 12-13 by Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and Chinese president.

Chheang said China and ASEAN need a shared vision and commitment when it comes to the South China Sea issue, and can continue their nontraditional security cooperation to narrow the differences and gradually work toward the COC.

Other areas of cooperation include environmental cooperation, fishery and piracy, which can help elevate mutual confidence, Chheang said.

Noting that there is a need for a strategic shift in resolving differences over the South China Sea, Malindog-Uy said such a move needs to have a long-term perspective filled with goodwill and pragmatism, while moving away from a Western-oriented confrontational way of resolving disputes to a more Asian way of dispute resolution.

"The South China Sea should be treated as a zone of peace, cooperation and joint development," said Malindog-Uy, adding that the issue should not be a stumbling block to bilateral relations.

WORLD

Envoy: Attacks in Red Sea need to stop

UN representative Geng Shuang of China calls for vessels' safe navigation

By MINLU ZHANG
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A Chinese envoy to the United Nations on Wednesday called for a halt to the attacks and harassment of civilian vessels and to respect and safeguard the freedom of navigation of all countries in the Red Sea.

China is concerned about the repeated attacks and seizure of merchant ships in the Red Sea over a period of time, said Geng Shuang, China's deputy permanent representative to the UN.

Geng spoke at a Security Council open meeting about Houthi rebel attacks in the Red Sea, amid a growing threat of spillover from the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict.

Geng said the Red Sea is an important corridor for the transportation of goods and energy. Ensuring the smooth flow of the waters and the safety of passing ships not only helps to maintain regional peace and stability but also contributes to the security of the global supply chain and international trade order, which is in line with the common interests of the international community, he said.

"China believes that all parties, especially influential powers, should play a constructive and responsible role in maintaining the safety of shipping lanes in the Red Sea," Geng said.

Geng noted that at present, the issue in Yemen, where the Houthis are based, is at a critical juncture. The tense situation in the Red Sea has brought new challenges to the political process in Yemen and added new complexities to the already volatile Middle East region, he said.

"China calls on all parties concerned to remain calm and restrained, adhere to dialogue and consultation, promote a political solution, refrain from any acts that aggravate the situation, and do their best to maintain the positive momentum of the political process in Yemen," Geng said.

Geng pointed out that the current tense situation in the Red Sea is one of the manifestations of the spillover effects of the Gaza conflict.

"The early realization of a cease-fire in Gaza and the alleviation of

the humanitarian crisis there will help prevent further escalation of the situation in the Red Sea and the rest of the Middle East from being dragged into conflict and war," Geng said.

"China is ready to work with all parties to continue to make unremitting efforts to promote the cooling of tensions in the Red Sea, the political settlement of the Yemeni issue, the realization of a cease-fire in Gaza, and long-term peace and stability in the Middle East," he emphasized.

UN Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East Khaled Khairi told the council that "no cause or grievance" could justify continuing Houthi attacks against freedom of navigation in the Red Sea.

He said the UN encourages all concerned parties to avoid further escalation and de-escalate tensions and threats.

"This is critical so that traffic through the Red Sea can return to its normal state and the risk of Yemen being dragged into a regional conflagration be avoided," said Khairi, adding that incidents originating from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen must stop.

Since the outbreak of the latest round of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Houthi group in Yemen has used missiles and drones to attack targets in Red Sea. The group on Wednesday launched more missiles targeting a cargo ship in the Red Sea, Xinhua reported.

The Houthi group confirms that it will continue to prevent Israeli ships or those bound for Israel from sailing in the Red Sea and Arab Sea until food and medicine aid are allowed to enter the Gaza Strip, the group's military spokesman Yahya Sarea said in a statement.

A significant number of companies already are rerouting their ships around South Africa to reduce their risks, representing an additional 10 days to journeys on average, and negatively impacting international trade and freight costs, Arsenio Dominguez, secretary-general of the International Maritime Organization, told the council.

He reiterated his call for de-escalation "to ensure safety of our seafarers, freedom of navigation and stability of supply chains".



A ship washed ashore is pictured in the city of Suzu, Ishikawa Prefecture, on Wednesday, after a massive earthquake hit the region. FRED MERY / AFP

Premier says China ready to provide aid for Japan after deadly earthquake

By MO JINGXI
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Premier Li Qiang said on Wednesday that China is ready to provide necessary support for Japan's earthquake relief after strong quakes struck Ishikawa Prefecture on the west coast of Japan's main island of Honshu, killing at least 73 people and trapping dozens under collapsed buildings.

In a message of condolence to Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, Li said he was shocked to learn of the strong quakes in the prefecture, which caused heavy casualties and property loss.

On behalf of the Chinese government, he expressed sincere sympathy for the deceased and offered deep condolences to the families who have lost loved ones and to the injured, Li said.

The premier said he believes that under the leadership of the Japanese government, the people in the disaster-hit areas will be able to overcome difficulties and rebuild their homes as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said in Beijing on Wednesday that "so far, there have been no reports of Chinese casualties", adding that the ministry and China's embassy and consulates in Japan will continue to follow the situation closely and provide timely and necessary assistance to Chinese nationals in Japan.

Japanese rescue workers and canine units urgently searched through rubble on Wednesday ahead of predicted bitter cold conditions and heavy rain, in what the Japanese prime minister called a race against time.

Ishikawa Prefecture and nearby areas were shaken by a magnitude 4.9 aftershock early on Wednesday, one of dozens that have followed Monday's magnitude 7.6 temblor, which was centered near Noto, about 300 kilometers from Tokyo. Monday's quake set off tsunami warnings, followed by waves measuring more than 1 meter in some places.

Weather forecasts warned of heavy rain in Ishikawa, leading to worries about landslides and further damage to already affected homes. Temperatures were expected to drop to around 4 C overnight.

Nearly 33,000 people were staying at evacuation centers, and some said they were hungry and cold, unable to sleep and afraid.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Names in Jeffrey Epstein case released

By AIHEPING in New York
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The names of nearly 200 friends, associates, victims and opponents of Jeffrey Epstein, the accused sex offender who hanged himself in a jail cell in 2019, were made public Wednesday by a US District Court judge.

Judge Loretta Preska of the Southern District of New York ruled last month that there was no legal justification for continuing to conceal more than 150 names of "John and Jane Does" mentioned in the records. Preska had ordered the unsealing to begin after Jan 1.

Being named in the documents doesn't necessarily indicate that a person participated in or was aware of the actions of Epstein or his girlfriend and accomplice Ghislaine Maxwell. The great majority of those whose names appear in the documents aren't accused of wrongdoing or have been mentioned previously in legal proceedings or news accounts.

But the list could show which prominent figures continued to associate with Epstein and Maxwell.

The documents stem from a 2015 civil lawsuit centered on allegations that Epstein and Maxwell facilitated the sexual abuse of Virginia Giuffre, an alleged trafficking victim. Maxwell was convicted in 2021 of

conspiring with Epstein and sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Giuffre is one of the dozens of women who sued Epstein, saying he had abused them at his homes in Florida, New York, the US Virgin Islands and New Mexico. Epstein's estate has since paid about \$150 million in settlements to more than 125 women.

Giuffre said that the summer she turned 17 she was lured away from a job as a spa attendant at former president Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago club to become a "massage" for Epstein — a job that involved performing sexual acts.

Giuffre also claimed that she was pressured into having sex with men in Epstein's social circle, including the UK's Prince Andrew. Those men said her accounts were fabricated. She settled a lawsuit against Prince Andrew in 2022.

That same year, Giuffre withdrew an accusation she had made against Epstein's former attorney, the law professor Alan Dershowitz, saying she may have made a mistake naming him.

Over the years, some names have come out.

Epstein's former pilot, Larry Visoski, testified in 2021 that former presidents Bill Clinton and Donald Trump had flown on Epstein's private plane. Other prominent passengers included Prince Andrew, violinist Itzhak

Perlman, former Senate majority leader George Mitchell, the late Ohio senator John Glenn and actor Kevin Spacey, he said.

Clinton hasn't been accused of anything illegal. One of Epstein's victims said in court papers that she met the ex-president on Epstein's private island in the Caribbean. Clinton has denied ever visiting the island.

Most of the names being made public — currently cited in the documents as John Does — have previously been identified in other court documents or in news reports as having been associated with Epstein.

A longtime friend of politicians, business executives and royalty, Epstein was accused of preying on girls as young as 14, bringing them to his homes and paying them for sex acts. He died at 66 by suicide in jail before he stood trial in Manhattan on federal sex-trafficking charges.

Dozens of other underage girls described sexual abuse, but prosecutors ultimately allowed Epstein in 2008 to a charge involving a single victim. He served 13 months in a jail work-release program.

Some famous acquaintances abandoned Epstein after his conviction, including former presidents Clinton and Trump, but many didn't. Epstein continued to mingle with the rich and famous for another decade, often through philanthropic work.

'Terrorist attacks' on Soleimani's burial site kill over 100

TEHERAN — Two explosions near the burial site of Iran's slain general Qassem Soleimani killed at least 103 people and wounded over 170 others on Wednesday, reported the official IRNA news agency and the semi-official Fars news agency, calling it "terrorist" attacks.

The blasts occurred as many people gathered at the cemetery in Iran's southeastern city of Kerman to mark the fourth anniversary of Soleimani's death in a US drone strike.

The first blast was about 700 meters from Soleimani's tomb and the second was a kilometer away, IRNA said.

IRNA quoted Rahman Jalali, the deputy governor of Kerman Province for political and security affairs, as saying that the explosions were carried out by "terrorists".

Babak Yektaparast, a spokesman for Iran's National Medical Emergency Organization, told the Islamic Republic of Iran News Network, or IRINN, that some of the injured were in critical condition and the death toll could rise.

The IRINN said the cause of the blasts was still under investigation and that rescue teams were at the scene. It added that most of the injuries were caused by overcrowding and panic.

Soleimani, one of the most powerful military commanders in Iran, was killed on Jan 3, 2020, near Baghdad's international airport in a drone strike ordered by then-US president Donald Trump.

Soleimani headed the Quds Force, the foreign operations arm of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, overseeing military operations across the Middle East.

He was buried in his hometown of Kerman after a funeral that drew millions of mourners across Iran. Iran denounced the assassination as "state terrorism" and vowed revenge.

Iran's Tasnim news agency, quoting unnamed sources, said "two bags carrying bombs went off" at the site.

"The perpetrators ... of this incident apparently detonated the bombs by remote control," Tasnim added.

The ISNA news agency quoted Kerman mayor Saeed Tabrizi as saying the bombs exploded 10 minutes apart.

"We were walking toward the cemetery when a car suddenly stopped behind us and a waste bin containing a bomb exploded," an eyewitness was quoted by ISNA as saying.

"We only heard the sound of the explosion and saw people falling. There was a bomb in the trash can," the witness added.

Online footage showed crowds scrambling to flee as security personnel cordoned off the area. Images on state television showed several ambulances and rescue personnel in the area.

Among the people killed were three paramedics who were dispatched to the area following the first explosion, according to Iran's Red Crescent.

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After Gay's resignation, spotlight on MIT president

By AIHEPING in New York

The resignation of Claudine Gay as president of Harvard University leaves Sally Kornbluth, president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), as the only one of three college presidents not to have stepped down following testimony before a congressional hearing last month that didn't unequivocally condemn antisemitism on their colleges' campuses.

After Gay's resignation on Tuesday, the spotlight for some of those who led the push for the ouster of Gay shifted to Kornbluth.

Bill Ackman — a billionaire investor, Harvard graduate and donor — an early critic of how Gay handled the university's response to the Oct 7 Hamas attack, applauded her resignation.

"President Gay resigned because she lost the confidence of the University at large due to her actions and inactions and other failures of leadership," Ackman posted on X on Tuesday, responding to criticism over his role in Gay's resignation.

"Gay resigned because it was untenable for her to remain President of Harvard due to her failings of leadership." And he wrote: "Et tu Sally?," which translates from Latin to "and you Sally?," suggesting Kornbluth should be the next to resign.

On Dec 13, Ackman, who is Jewish and married to an Israeli, wrote to the MIT board: "Let's make a deal. If you promptly terminate President [Sally] Kornbluth, I promise I won't write you a letter, a reference to his open letter to Harvard criticizing Gay's failure to condemn the deadly Oct 7 attacks by

Hamas on Israel.

Ackman claimed in social media posts that Harvard hired Gay only to fulfill diversity requirements, an accusation that Gay and Harvard denied.

"President Gay's resignation is about more than a person or a single incident," said the civil rights leader the Reverend Al Sharpton in a statement.

He said her resignation is "an assault on the health, strength and future of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI)".

"This is an attack on every black woman in this country who's put a crack in the glass ceiling. Most of all, this was the result of Bill Ackman's relentless campaign against President Gay, not because of her leadership or credentials but because he felt she was a DEI hire."

Sharpton's organization, the

National Action Network, is planning to protest outside Ackman's New York office on Thursday.

US Representative Elise Stefanik, a New York Republican who is also a Harvard alum and who grilled the three college presidents at the hearing, hailed Gay's departure.

Stefanik posted "TWO DOWN" on social media — seemingly referring to Gay and University of Pennsylvania President Liz McGill, who resigned on Dec 9 after an outcry against her legalistic and equivocal responses at the hearing.

The board at MIT swiftly supported Kornbluth when criticism of Gay and McGill mounted after their testimony.

"She has done excellent work in leading our community, including in addressing antisemitism, Islamophobia, and other forms of hate, all

of which we reject utterly at MIT. She has our full and unreserved support," a board statement said.

Faculty leaders, department heads and deans at MIT soon followed with their own endorsements of Kornbluth. Unlike Gay and McGill, Kornbluth, who is Jewish, didn't issue a formal apology after the hearing.

On Tuesday, when asked for comment on Gay's resignation, a spokesperson for MIT made no reference to Kornbluth and said the school's "leadership remains focused on ensuring the work of MIT".

Unlike at Harvard and Penn, donors didn't flock to social media to demand Kornbluth's removal. Students at the MIT campus in Cambridge were busy with final exams last month and paid little public attention to the hearings, Kornbluth's comments and demands that all three resign.

Students don't return to the campus until later this month. Also unlike the Harvard student newspaper The

Crimson, the campus newspaper of MIT, The Tech, had no coverage of the uproar over the hearings.

But a letter signed by hundreds of Jewish alumni and their allies, sent on Dec 13 to the university's administration and its governing board, the MIT Corporation, expressed alarm at Kornbluth's "disastrous" testimony and that she hadn't apologized for it. But they didn't call for her resignation.

The letter also criticized the board's endorsement of her leadership.

Without commenting on the plagiarism allegations against Gay, President Irene Mulvey of the American Association of University Professors said Tuesday that she fears plagiarism investigations could be "weaponized" to pursue a political agenda.

"There is a right-wing political attack on higher education right now, which feels like an existential threat to the academic freedom that has made American higher education the envy of the world," Mulvey said.

BUSINESS

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EHang air mobility mkt prospects taking flight

By FAN FEIFEI
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EHang Holdings Ltd, a Chinese urban air mobility (UAM) technology company, is ramping up efforts to bolster commercial operation of electric vertical takeoff and landing aircraft (eVTOL) in aerial sightseeing, tourism and logistics, as part of a broader push to expand its footprint in the emerging low-altitude economy sector.

The company recently announced its certified EH216-S pilotless passenger-carrying aerial vehicles have successfully completed maiden commercial flight demonstrations in both Guangzhou, Guangdong province and Hefei, Anhui province. The move marks another major milestone toward normalizing EH216-S flights for airborne sightseeing at local scenic spots.

The first EH216-S pilotless passenger-carrying aerial vehicle has been delivered to an intelligent aviation technology company in Guangzhou and was first deployed at an operating site in Jiulong Lake Park.

More operating venues and flight routes for aerial sightseeing and logistics are under development in Huangpu district, Guangzhou, EHang said.

In addition, Guangzhou Development District Communications Investment Group Co Ltd and Guangzhou Industrial Investment Capital announced they would jointly establish Guangzhou Development District Low-altitude Industry Venture Capital Fund with a target size of some 10 billion yuan (\$1.4 billion).

The Hefei demonstration was conducted in Luogang Central Park, which covers a total area of 12.7 square kilometers, and has been designated by the Hefei municipal government as an eVTOL aircraft operating site. The local authority plans to collaborate with EHang to expand aerial sightseeing flight routes and services to more scenic spots in Hefei.

The low-altitude economy, which was emphasized as one of

the strategic emerging industries during the annual tone-setting Central Economic Work Conference held in December, has gained strong support from many local governments across the nation. It has been recognized as a promising sector with strong potential to become a new engine for bolstering the country's economic growth.

Guangzhou, Hefei and Guangdong's Shenzhen have rolled out favorable policies, such as providing subsidies and incentives, to boost development of the low-altitude economy and build up related industrial clusters.

Yang Sumei, an associate professor at Guangzhou Maritime University, said the low-altitude economy serves as an important driving force for cultivating new productivity boosters, and has huge market potential.

Yang said more efforts should be made to establish applicable rules and standards to better regulate the fast-developing sector, as well as accelerate construction of low-altitude infrastructure, intelligent management and operating platforms.

According to a white paper released by the International Digital Economy Academy, the comprehensive contribution of the low-altitude economy to China's overall economy will reach between 3 trillion yuan and 5 trillion yuan by 2025.

EHang has also launched the nation's first UAM operation demonstration center in Bao'an district, Shenzhen. Covering approximately 4,600 square meters, the center hosts a helicopter for EHang's pilotless passenger-carrying eVTOL aircraft EH216-S, hangars, a command-and-control center, a passenger waiting area, a service center and other essential amenities.

Yu Zhanfu, a partner at Roland Berger, said eVTOLs need to undergo full verification regarding safety and technological stability in sparsely populated areas or scenarios, such as natural landscape tourist destinations in the early stages, before they can truly enter the urban air mobility segment.



A view of an FPSO vessel which is close to completion in Qidong, Jiangsu province.
XU CONGJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

China's shipbuilders lead global race

Supply chain growth, green shift, tech edge, market expansion are big factors

By ZHONG NAN
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China's shipbuilding industry will continue to lead the global race this year on the back of its supply chain growth, market expansion, and intelligent and green transition over the years, said analysts and industry sources.

The industry has become adept at constructing all types of main-stream vessels, reflecting its versatility and innovative capabilities, they said.

Their view is borne out by data. In terms of volume, orders for new ships across the global industry reached 41.49 million compensated gross tonnage in 2023, according to the latest data released by the London-based shipping services provider Clarkson Plc.

Chinese shipbuilders took the lead with a 59 percent share of the global share, accounting for 24.46 million CGT, while South Korean shipbuilders accounted for 24 percent, amounting to 10.01 million CGT. South Korea's shipbuilding industry trailed China for the third consecutive year in 2023.

The greatest strength of China's shipbuilding industry lies in its capabilities, said Huang Jiantao, an analyst at the Shanghai Merchant Ship Design and Research Institute, a unit of China State Shipbuilding Corp.

Chinese shipyards have been expediting their shift toward green and intelligent shipbuilding while bolstering independent design and industry-supporting capabilities,

especially in the areas of building liquefied natural gas (LNG) carriers, car carriers, core components and new materials, said Huang.

The shipbuilding industry is often referred to as the "crown jewel of integrated industries". It involves a multitude of components, a lengthy supply chain and high levels of industrial interconnectivity, encompassing over 50 different sectors, including steel, nonferrous metals, machinery and electronics, said the Beijing-based China Machinery Industry Federation.

China's shipbuilding industry has increasingly focused on domestic self-reliance, particularly in its industrial and supply chains. This approach has substantially cut construction times and costs during various projects, said Zeng Ji, a professor of shipbuilding at Shanghai Maritime University.

"In this market, efficiency is critical as shorter delivery times for vessels often attract more orders from shipowners," said Zeng, adding that by producing materials domestically, Chinese shipyards have not only stimulated the growth of their industrial chain but also increased their profitability. This strategy will continue to create a mutually beneficial scenario for both shipyards and their global clients.

China's ship exports were worth \$24.4 billion in the first 11 months of 2023, up more than 21 percent year-on-year, data from the Beijing-based China Association of the National Shipbuilding Industry showed.

Nantong, Jiangsu province-based Nantong COSCO KHI Ship

Engineering Co Ltd exported 12 types of ships in 2023, with export revenues reaching \$790 million.

"Among them, there are three 24,188 TEU (twenty-foot equivalent unit) mega containerships, for which we have full intellectual property rights. Each of these ships has a length of 400 meters and a deck area that surpasses the size of three standard soccer fields," said Chen Haoyu, head of the company's procurement department.

Based on its current order backlog and production schedule, the Chinese shipyard will commence construction, testing and delivery of eight more ships of the same class from this month.

Between January and November last year, China Merchants Heavy Industry (Jiangsu) Co Ltd, another Nantong-based shipyard, exported six ships, including polar expedition cruise ships and wind turbine installation vessels, with a combined value of nearly \$900 million.

If the company has to deal with the same type of ships, it can mass-produce, said Shi Liechao, a manager at the sales unit of the company. "With more orders, cost reductions become possible, enhancing the overall value of our production line."

China saw new shipbuilding orders surge nearly 64 percent year-on-year to 64.85 million deadweight tons (DWT) from January to November last year, taking up almost 66 percent of the world's total during the period, data from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology showed. China's shipbuilding output climbed more than 12 percent year-on-year to 38.09 million DWT, accounting for half of the world's total.

CNPC lead contractor of Iraq oilfield

By ZHENG XIN
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China National Petroleum Corp has further strengthened its presence in Iraq after it took over as the lead contractor of the country's West Qurna 1 oilfield from US oil giant ExxonMobil, industry experts said.

The company said on Wednesday that it has become the lead contractor for the oilfield — one of the largest such in Iraq — located about 50 kilometers northwest of Basra.

The oilfield has an estimated annual crude oil output of more than 25 million metric tons and recoverable reserves estimated at more than 20 billion barrels, CNPC said.

Holding the largest stake in a major oil project in Iraq will help China further secure energy resources and build stronger bilateral relations, said Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xi'an University.

By securing control over a significant oilfield, China has ensured a stable and long-term source of energy for its rapidly growing economy, Lin said.

According to the Middle East Institute, a Washington-based think tank dedicated to the study of the Middle East, Chinese companies are well positioned to participate in Iraq's capacity expansion efforts, as they are actively engaged in various energy-related undertakings throughout the country.

The think tank said China's energy ties with Iraq extend well beyond trade in crude oil, as China's leading State-owned energy enterprises have established a strong foothold in Iraq's upstream, midstream and downstream markets, while China's engagement with Iraq has continued to grow in recent years, mostly in energy and transport infrastructure.

China's leading energy enterprises, including CNPC, China National Offshore Oil Corp and China Petroleum & Chemical Corp, have been present in Iraq for years, it said.

CNPC said it expects China and Iraq to work together to make the oilfield project an excellent example of energy cooperation between the two countries, and it would adhere to the principle of mutual benefit and win-win cooperation to ensure a smooth handover and orderly transition.

Iraq's Deputy Oil Minister for Extraction Affairs Bassim Mohammed Khudair said he has full confidence in CNPC's manpower, strategy and vision, and that he believes the project will be completed within the stipulated time.



EHang's EH216-S pilotless passenger-carrying aerial vehicles perform their debut commercial flight demonstrations in Hefei, Anhui province, last month. HUANG YANGYANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Briefly

Guideline to improve processing trade

Chinese authorities have rolled out a guideline to improve the development of the processing trade. The guideline, released by the Ministry of Commerce and nine other government departments, puts forward 12 measures across six categories, involving efforts to encourage the processing and trade of high-value-added products, and provide improved financial and tax support for the processing trade.

Chery achieves 52.6% sales growth in 2023

Chinese automaker Chery Holding Group Co Ltd reported strong sales in 2023, according to the company's sales report. The company sold over 1.88 million vehicles in 2023, up 52.6 percent year-on-year. Among total sales, exports surged to 937,148 units, up 101.1 percent. In December alone, Chery sold 215,690 vehicles, achieving a month-on-month sales growth throughout the entire year.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

Leisure tea firms seek breakout via HK floats

By WANG ZHUOQIONG in Beijing
and LI XIAOYUN in Hong Kong

China's leisure tea market appears to be eyeing a breakout this year.

Zhengzhou, Henan province-based Mixue, a specialist in ice cream and tea beverages with 36,153 stores at home and abroad, has applied for an IPO in Hong Kong on Tuesday.

On the same day, Zhejiang province-based Guming, another tea-based beverage seller with more than 9,000 stores, applied for an IPO, also in Hong Kong.

Four months ago, Chengdu, Sichuan province-based ChaPanda, a tea beverage firm with about 5,000 stores, applied for an IPO in Hong Kong.

Market sources said all these three players hope to join Shenzhen, Guangdong province-based Nayuki as successful listed companies in the new tea beverage segment. Nayuki listed in Hong Kong in 2021.

Tea-based beverage players' IPO plans, they said, confirm that the already fierce competition among China's on-premise tea beverage play-

ers is intensifying further. The IPO plans also highlight the industry's emphasis on franchising and supply chain management, experts said.

Mixue mainly offers teas priced at an average 6 yuan (84 cents).

In December 2020, its A round investment attracted three investors — Longzhu Capital, the venture capital arm of Chinese internet giant Meituan Dianpin, Hillhouse and CPE-Fund.

At that time, the company's valuation was estimated at 23.3 billion yuan, giving the collective stake of 85.56 percent of Mixue's founder brothers Zhang Hongchao and Zhang Hongfu a valuation of nearly 20 billion yuan.

When he was still a student at the Henan University of Economics and Law in 1997, Zhang Hongchao founded the first Mixue store that sold ice cream.

The turning point came in 2005 when Mixue's ice cream, priced 1 yuan, became popular. In 2013, its introduction of iced lemonade priced 3 yuan was also received well as the drink used fresh fruits. The brothers invested in a supply chain to secure their own ingredients,

thereby exercising quality control and adopting a strategy that made their products affordable.

Mixue has five production bases, covering ingredients like sugar, milk, tea, coffee and fruit. As of Sept 30, the company's annual production capacity reached about 1.43 million metric tons.

Mixue has seen strong growth in revenue and profit in the past two years. In the first nine months of last year, revenue reached 15.4 billion yuan, up 46 percent year-on-year, generating a net profit of 2.5 billion yuan, up 51 percent. In 2022, revenue was 13.6 billion yuan, up more than 31 percent over 2021, yielding a profit of 2 billion yuan, up 5.3 percent.

Mixue said its strengths lie in standardization and scale. With a menu of 35 items, it focuses on teas with lemon and coconut ingredients, which helps lower costs.

Adoption of the franchise model helped Mixue to grow and achieve scale. By Sept 30, almost all of its stores ran as franchises, helping Mixue to penetrate 90 percent of China's county-level markets.

Jason Yu, general manager of

Kantar Worldpanel, a marketing research provider, said: "Mixue's business model primarily relies on franchise operations, with the majority of its revenue generated from selling goods and equipment to franchise stores, profiting from supply rates. This approach effectively mitigates the risks associated with directly operating individual stores."

Mixue differentiates itself through efforts like consistently strengthening its supply system, which enables the brand to expand its product categories from fresh ice cream and teas to coffee, achieving scalable expansion across regions and product categories, Yu said.

China Insights Consultancy predicted that the global on-premise beverage market will grow from \$721.8 billion in 2022 to \$1.11 trillion in 2028. The market potential has driven more established brands to eye IPOs.

Kenny Tang, chairman of the Hong Kong Institute of Financial Analysts and Professional Commentators, said that given Mixue's high brand recognition and its affordable beverages, its biggest advantage, its IPO application is

expected to be approved by Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing Ltd, which operates the local stock exchange.

Once listed, Mixue's shares are expected to perform well initially, but long-term prospects will depend on the overall development of the beverage industry, Tang said.

Kenny Ng, securities strategist at Everbright Securities International, said the investor community appears to be undervaluing leisure beverage categories like tea drinks and different types of coffee, compared to two or three years ago, as reflected in the stock performance of Nayuki.

Ng further said that with competition intensifying and brands expanding their stores, gross profit margins will likely decline more.

Looking ahead, the Chinese mainland, which is home to numerous leisure beverage brands, is expected to see market dynamics change as the pressure on consumption growth increases. Companies that fail to effectively implement unique branding or product differentiation strategies are expected to face more competition in the long term, Ng said.

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BUSINESS



A train leaves Halim station in Jakarta on Dec 25. The station is connected by the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway, a major cooperative endeavor by China and Indonesia under the Belt and Road Initiative. XU QIN / XINHUA

Pearl River transport facilities true gem of South China economy

By ZHENG CAIXIONG
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The economic vitality of waterborne transport along the Pearl River revealed an overall recovery and growth trend last year, thus playing an increasingly important role in supporting economic construction in the provinces and regions along the river, said a senior official on Wednesday in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong province.

Freight volume on the Pearl River is projected to have hit a record of over 1.5 billion metric tons in 2023, up 7.9 percent year-on-year, said Wang Canqiang, deputy director of the Pearl River Administration of Navigational Affairs under the Ministry of Transport.

Port throughput along the Pearl River and its estuaries and tributaries is expected to have reached 1.95 billion tons, a year-on-year growth of 7.3 percent.

Among the total, throughput of foreign trade commodities hit 529 million tons while throughput of containers stood at 69.82 million TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units), year-on-year increases of 6.9 percent and 2.3 percent, respectively, Wang said.

More than 45.3 million passenger trips took place along the river in 2023, approaching three times the total recorded in 2022, Wang said at a news conference on Wednesday.

"The Pearl River, the nation's second-largest river in terms of freight volume after the Yangtze, has played a big part in promoting economic development and cooperation among the provinces and regions along the waterway," Wang added.

Foshan, a major inland port along the Pearl River, is estimated to have reached cargo throughput of more than 100 million tons in 2023, indicating that it has become another inland port with annual freight volume surpassing 100 million tons.

Guigang in the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region saw its freight volume top 100 million tons in 2020, said Wang.

Foshan Port, which played a role in connecting the Pearl River Delta city with the special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macao, has become an important support for the city's industrial and foreign trade development.

Meanwhile, more than 27.5 billion yuan (\$3.93 billion) has been invested in construction of waterway transport infrastructure facilities along the Pearl River in 2023, more than twice the investment seen in 2022, said Wang, adding that last year, the Pearl River and

The Pearl River, the nation's second-largest river in terms of freight volume after the Yangtze, has played a big part in promoting economic development and cooperation among the provinces and regions along the waterway."

Wang Canqiang, deputy director of the Pearl River Administration of Navigational Affairs under the Ministry of Transport

1.95 billion tons

port throughput along Pearl River, its estuaries and tributaries in 2023

its tributaries had a total of 102 water transport engineering construction projects in operation, involving investment of more than 177 billion yuan.

The record high investment in the construction of waterway transport infrastructure facilities along the Pearl River has not only helped to promote the high-quality development of the waterway's transportation, but has also promoted optimization of the layout of industries along the river which links inland areas with Hong Kong and Macao, said Wang.

"And the advanced inland waterway transport system has helped transfer industries to the vast Chinese central and western regions with support for the implementation of major strategies, including construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area," Wang said.

He said his administration will continue to speed up construction of environmentally friendly "green model channels" along the waterway to protect the ecology of the country's third-longest river system through the introduction of more new high-technology and artificial intelligence breakthroughs in the new year.

The Pearl River's major tributaries are the Xijiang, Dongjiang and Beijiang rivers, with the main waterway running through Guangdong, Yunnan and Guizhou provinces, Guangxi, as well as Hong Kong and Macao.

Private sector to get active support for major projects

Nation to enhance communication with non-State players for 'real voices'

By ZHU WENQIAN
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China will roll out pragmatic measures to support the growth of the private economy, such as encouraging private enterprises to participate in the construction of major national engineering projects, officials said at a conference.

The government will encourage more private investors to take part in national projects, such as railways, nuclear power plants, water conservancy, and ecological and environmental protection, and help them in financing and project recommendations, said Zheng Shanjie, head of the National Development and Reform Commission, China's top economic regulator, during the conference in Jinjiang, East China's Fujian province.

The two-day event that concluded on Wednesday focused on promoting high-quality development of the private economy and drawing on the experience of Jinjiang, a city that became prosperous after its private economy boomed.

"China will accelerate the legislative process on the promotion of the private economy, and the government will improve multi-level communications and exchanges, and listen to the real voices of private enterprises," Zheng said.

"In addition, the country will strengthen analysis of the private economy's development, promote good practices and cases for mutual learning, and improve work mechanisms with a view to better serve the private economy's development," he said.

China will support private enterprises in jointly participating in the Belt and Road Initiative, and continue to enhance their international competitiveness, he added.

The country's private economy has shown long-term growth prospects.

The private sector has formed a growing proportion of the nation's GDP, and now accounts for more than 60 percent of the total, according to the National Bureau of Statistics.

Last year, several policies were introduced to promote the devel-

opment of the private economy, and it has shown steady progress.

In the first 11 months of 2023, the total import and export value of private enterprises grew by 6.1 percent year-on-year, which was 6.1 percentage points faster than the growth rate of the nation's total imports and exports by value.

During the same period, excluding investments in real estate development, private investment in the country increased by 9.1 percent year-on-year, said the NDRC.

Meanwhile, the NDRC released a national financing credit service platform during the conference.

The platform aims to assist in intelligent matching of financing needs of private enterprises and the products of financial institutions. It also recommended 200 key national projects for private capital participation.

Lu Lei, vice-governor of the People's Bank of China, said the central bank will increase tolerance for nonperforming loans of private enterprises and help them reduce financing costs, as well as support private enterprises in mergers and acquisitions and listing on stock exchanges.

Fujian is one of the earliest birth-

places of the private economy in China.

The private economy generates 70 percent of tax revenues and the GDP in the province.

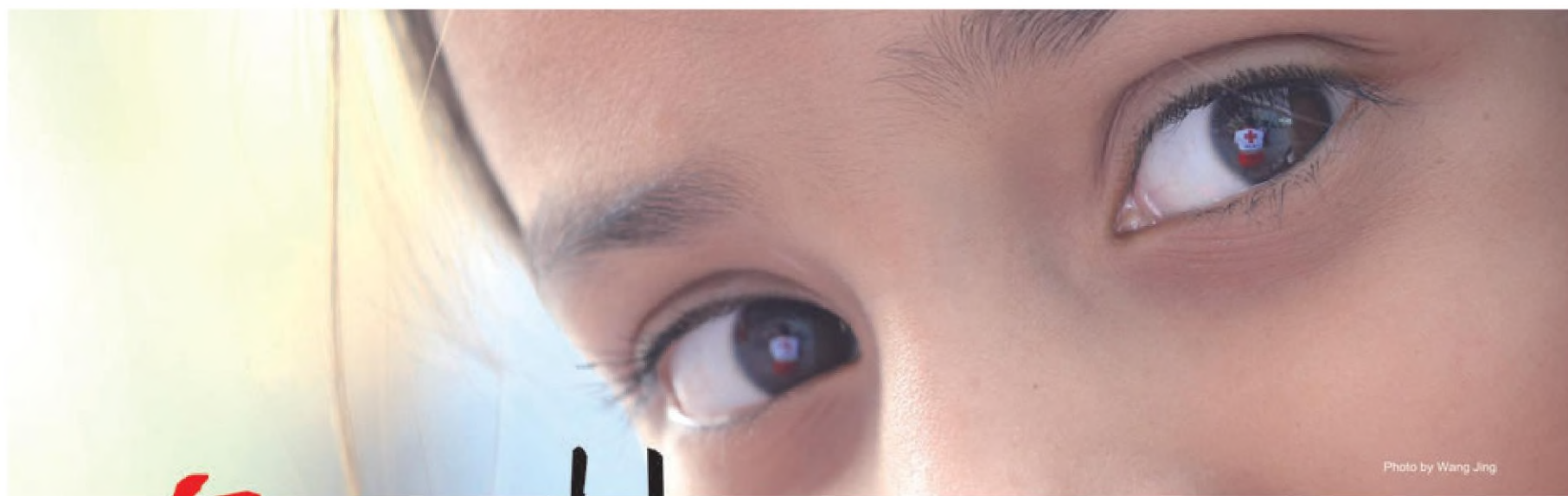
More than 90 percent of enterprises in the province are private, and they have created over 80 percent employment for the urban labor force, according to the local government.

"We will encourage private enterprises to help grow the real economy, build their brand reputations and develop century-old stores, and generate greater vitality," said Zhao Long, governor of Fujian.

In Jinjiang, private enterprises have formed new industrial growth points and competitiveness.

The output value of the private economy in the city has exceeded 800 billion yuan (\$112 billion), and it is expected to hit 1 trillion yuan by 2025, said the local government.

Jinjiang-based domestic sports giant Anta Sports Products Ltd, whose sales revenue has ranked tops among Chinese sportswear product makers for 11 straight years, said it will continue to help drive high-quality development through technological innovation and promote the upgrading of the real economy.



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AD

BUSINESSFOCUS

Tech eye makes biodiversity tracking easier

Intelligent platform leveraging key technologies to establish integrated sky-to-ground monitoring network



Migratory birds rest at the Yellow River Delta national nature reserve in Dongying, Shandong province, in December. ZHOU GUANGXUE / FOR CHINA DAILY

By LI JIAYING
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Facial recognition technology, which has found wide use in identifying or confirming an individual's identity, is now moving beyond human faces.

At a digital monitoring center of the Yellow River Delta national nature reserve in Dongying, Shandong province, a variety of data is on display on a large screen, showing the real-time status of the reserve's biodiversity.

The vast nature reserve, with an abundant and diverse bird population, used to pose challenges for scientists in tracking its biodiversity and conducting on-site monitoring.

Today, staff members at the reserve can monitor and tally the biodiversity situation in real time, simply through an intelligent monitoring platform.

As part of Chinese tech company Huawei's Tech4All digital inclusion initiative, the monitoring platform leverages information technologies such as big data, remote sensing and artificial intelligence to establish an integrated sky-to-ground monitoring network.

After terminal collection devices transmit data to the cloud via a well-covered 5G network, AI performs real-time identification and annotation, presenting results on the monitoring platform while conducting a series of data analyses.

This aids the reserve in intelligent species recognition and facilitates real-time monitoring free from excessive human intervention, effectively enhancing conservation management and decision-making efficiency.

"The use of science and technology not only mitigates the effect of human activities on the natural environment, but also opens up more possibilities for biodiversity conservation. Seeing without disturbing, guarding without interfering — that is the greatest respect humankind can show nature," said Shan Kai, a senior engineer at the ecological monitoring center under the Shandong Yellow River Delta national nature reserve management committee.

To date, the monitoring platform has collected more than 38,000 videos and 60,000 images, which have been used to train an AI system to recognize 47 species.

"Digital technologies have a significant role to play in the improvement of biodiversity monitoring efficiency. Integrating various collected information into a big data platform is essential to better serve the management ends for conservation areas," said Li Diqiang, a professor at the Chinese Academy of Forestry.

Currently, the platform can recognize species in motion and in flight, as well as perform group identification for bird species.

The identification accuracy for flagship species (species whose conservation is assumed to correlate positively with the protection of other unrelated species or communities) and large bird species has surpassed 90 percent.

With more materials brought onto the platform, the accuracy of AI identification is expected to improve, according to Huawei's Tech4All team.

In September, Huawei extended



A screenshot of an intelligent platform conducting on-site monitoring of a bird at the Yellow River Delta national nature reserve in Dongying in December 2022. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

its collaboration with the Yellow River Delta national nature reserve, reaffirming its commitment to safeguarding biodiversity through state-of-the-art technologies.

These will help broaden camera capture zones and optimize the functionality of the monitoring platform to better support relevant research activities.

"We carry out intelligent monitoring of migratory birds by deploying cameras in conservation areas and leveraging 5G network and AI analysis on the backend. As a tech company, we aim to advance the digitalization and intelligence process of biodiversity conservation through such solutions," said Zhou Jianguo, head of the brand division at Huawei's China strategy and marketing department.

Collaborative efforts from the government, research institutes and tech companies are important in

driving the standardization and development of digital biodiversity monitoring platforms, Zhou said.

The Chinese tech company has participated in various biodiversity conservation projects around the world, including in Europe, South America and Southeast Asia. It has also introduced a slew of initiatives, such as the protection of rainforests in tropical regions and the preservation of rare species in Northern Europe, Zhou added.

"With intensified global efforts, we are gaining a deeper understanding of our role in building an ecological civilization," he said. "At the forefront of global digital advancements, China has a distinct edge in this process, particularly in the construction and innovation of digital infrastructure."

As the government has set high goals for the comprehensive advancement of a green and intelli-

gent ecological civilization during the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) period, the country aims to establish an intelligent and efficient digital governance system for the ecology.

Meanwhile, the effect of China's technological efforts on sea creatures' living environment is also becoming obvious.

With the support of digital twin technology, Chinese scientists are offering innovative solutions for marine biodiversity conservation in Latin American countries.

At an exhibition hall inside the China (Hainan) Museum of the South China Sea in Qionghai, Hainan province, a large screen displays a digitalized underwater world of the Caribbean Sea.

Through the digital twin system showcasing marine biodiversity on the screen, visitors can witness the continuous growth of diverse sea creatures.

Carried out by a scientific cooperation platform jointly led by China's Beihang University and Colombia's Santiago de Cali University, the digital twin technology simulates marine ecosystems, contributing to research on the protection of marine ecological environments in Latin American countries.

"If we build a digital-twin fish model corresponding to a real fish species in the Caribbean Sea and provide real environmental data for the digital creature, we can easily acquire the species' simulated growth performance results just like that from nature," Luo Xun, Chinese director of the cooperation platform, said in a previous interview.

Both tropical oceans, the South

China Sea and the Caribbean Sea share similar latitudes and marine conditions and host a diverse array of sea species.

With the aim of collaborative innovation under the Belt and Road Initiative, the cooperation platform has partnered with various research institutions from the two sides to undertake marine biodiversity conservation research.

So far, the Chinese and Colombian researchers have collaborated to create digital models for over 100 species of fish, coral, and mangroves in the Caribbean Sea region, significantly improving the efficiency of marine ecological conservation and restoration efforts.

Meanwhile, the National Forestry and Grassland Administration and Chinese tech heavyweight Tencent signed a strategic cooperation agreement in May, aiming to develop the world's first photo-realistic digital panda model through cutting-edge digital technologies.

With Tencent's photo-realistic 3D model restoration and real-time cloud rendering tools, the digital panda has achieved millimeter-level precision in replicating an authentic panda's skeleton, muscles, skin, fur and other details, presenting a remarkably lifelike representation for education and research.

"All parties should pay more attention to solutions based on the protection of ecological species, promote technological innovation in the field of natural conservation, and establish effective and smart natural conservation plans with Chinese characteristics," said Yang Chao, chairman of the China Green Carbon Foundation.

'Agrivoltaics' lights up rural revitalization efforts

By LI JIAYING

Rural areas in China are seizing new opportunities brought on by the growth of the photovoltaic sector.

An emerging production model, known as "agrivoltaics" that combines the use of land for food production and PV for electricity generation, is paving the way for multifaceted rural development.

The edible mushroom industry has for long been a poverty alleviator in Gutian county of Ningde, Fujian province.

In recent years, the county has propelled the transformation and upgrading of its edible mushroom industry, with a focus on improving cultivation conditions.

Last year, a transition away from traditional mushroom fruiting rooms to photovoltaic mushroom farms increased yields by about 20 percent, with the price per pack rising by about 1 yuan (\$0.14) compared to the previous year due to higher quality, said Yu Xinkao, a local mushroom grower.

"The total income from a single crop of mushrooms is expected to increase by around 80,000 yuan," Yu said.

With advantages including higher

production efficiency, concentrated land use and optimized safety control, the mushroom agrivoltaic project has successfully led to a multidimensional development pattern, fostering increased income for mushroom growers and local enterprises while generating power.

Zheng Guidong, deputy Party secretary of Gutian county, said eight photovoltaic mushroom growing bases have been established in the county since May 2021, constructing 450 standardized mushroom production sheds with a total investment of 370 million yuan.

The overall installed capacity of the agrivoltaic project stands at 30,746 megawatts, with an estimated annual output of about 31.74 million kilowatt-hours and an annual power generation revenue of 13.5 million yuan, Zheng said.

Similarly, at an agrivoltaic demonstration area in Xinqiao township, Qianxinan Bouyei and Miao autonomous prefecture in Guizhou province, neatly arranged solar panels cast shadows on rows of red chili plants, and workers are busy harvesting and loading red chilies onto trucks.

He Yu, Party secretary of the Qianxinan subsidiary of SPIC



Villagers cultivate red chili plants under solar panels in the Qianxinan Bouyei and Miao autonomous prefecture, Guizhou province, in July. TAO LIANG / XINHUA

Guizhou Jinyuan Co Ltd, the operator of the agrivoltaic demonstration project, said the new energy company has — through cooperation with local agricultural firms — adapted to local conditions and cultivated economic crops such as taros, pumpkins, chilis, prickly pears, tobacco, Chinese cabbages and Chinese toon under the solar panels.

"The planting area has reached over 2,000 mu (133.3 hectares), with a total output of 750,000 kilograms and a production value of nearly 2 million yuan. It has also helped increase local farmers' incomes by

about 500,000 yuan," He said.

The company will continue to promote its agrivoltaic industry while keeping up with the development trends and policies of the new energy sector, He added.

"We will continue to expand the scale of agrivoltaic projects, create more job opportunities, and eventually push forward the process of rural revitalization."

With a total rooftop area of around 27.3 billion square meters and over 80 million rural households capable of photovoltaic installation, China's rural areas have demonstrated huge



A grower tends to his photovoltaic mushroom farm in Gutian county, Fujian province, in November. WANG DONGMING / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

potential for agrivoltaic development, said the National Energy Administration.

Integrating clean energy technology and rural revitalization can help create a powerful engine for the smart and green development of rural areas, said Yang Yongping, president of the North China Electric Power University, during a forum.

"The vast rural areas possess abundant biological resources, power supply and profit potential. We should tailor our efforts to local conditions and vigorously promote the development of new

energy sources," Yang said.

Currently, the cumulative number of rural households installed with distributed photovoltaics has exceeded 5 million, driving investment of over 500 billion yuan, data from the NEA showed.

As of end-September, the cumulative installed capacity of distributed photovoltaics nationwide had exceeded the 100 million kW threshold to reach 105 million kW.

This has taken the nation's total installed capacity of photovoltaic power generation to 520 million kW, according to the NEA.

COMMENT

Editorials

In Washington's chip-war accounting, allies' losses are counted as US gains

As the world's leading supplier of the advanced lithography equipment that "gives the world's leading chipmakers the power to mass produce patterns on silicon", Dutch company ASML has been pushed front and center in the US-led "chip war" against China.

When it comes to cutting off international supplies to China of both advanced chips and the chip-making equipment needed to produce them, nothing matters in the face of "US national security". It's the devil take the hindmost, even for those countries that are allies and partners of the US.

Dutch autonomy, ASML's business interests. Neither is of any concern to the US now that it is making all-out efforts to ensure China does not have access to the latest generation of chips or the equipment needed to produce them. The Netherlands, and other allies and partners of the US, have been left in no doubt that the US expects them to do its bidding if they want to remain in its good books.

ASML, which was due to ship three chip-making machines to China, had its export license revoked after the US president personally intervened, according to reports. The two models involved are not even ASML's most cutting-edge models, being its second-most advanced chip-making equipment. Yet the company was still subjected to Dutch government export control last year under US pressure, with the new rules coming into effect on Monday.

According to reports, Dutch acquiescence with the US' game plan came in response to the direct demand of US President Joe Biden. Both the Biden instruction and the Dutch government's compliance with it were pointedly not the norm.

Calling the US move "hegemonic and bullying behavior" at a regular news briefing on Tuesday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin urged the Netherlands to be impartial, respect market principles and the law, and take practical actions to protect the common interests of China and the Netherlands and their companies, and to maintain the stability of global supply chains. But those words are likely to fall on deaf ears given Washington's determination to stymie the Chinese semiconductor industry and ASML's reliance on US technologies.

US restrictions on ASML exports to China will certainly be a setback for the Dutch company. After all, China is not only its third-largest and fastest growing market, it became the largest in the third quarter of last year, with the Chinese mainland accounting for 46 percent of its sales. The Dutch company's economic losses, however, carry little weight in the US government's calculations of profit and loss.

But just as the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman observed, for the US this is not about economic considerations. It is another brick in the US' technological blockade targeting China based on its universalized, abusive interpretation of "national security". The US' coercive behavior is in clear violation of international trading rules, and obviously undermines the international semiconductor industry and global supply chains. The kind of long-arm jurisdiction the White House has practiced is annoying even some of the US' closest allies and partners.

But at the end of the day, as proved time and again, Washington will do whatever it takes to achieve its objectives, regardless of the collateral damage.

Window of opportunity should not be wasted

If the pullout of thousands of Israeli troops from the northern Gaza Strip starting from Monday can help to effectively reduce the intensity of the fighting in the Palestinian enclave, it merits a reserved welcome.

If it leads to a cease-fire with Hamas that heralds the Palestinian issue returning to the negotiation table, then it is to be warmly welcomed.

However, neither of those prospects appears likely. Shortly after Tel Aviv announced the withdrawal of the five brigades, senior Hamas official Saleh al-Arouri and two leaders of Hamas's elite al-Qassam military brigades were killed in an explosion in the southern Beirut suburb of Dahiyeh, reportedly caused by a targeted Israeli drone strike. Although Tel Aviv has not accepted responsibility, it said "whoever did this ... it was a surgical strike against the Hamas leadership".

That prompted Hezbollah to say that its finger "is on the trigger" as it promised vengeance for Arouri's death. With the conflict between the United States and Houthi forces escalating in the Red Sea, it appears more likely that the Gaza hostilities will expand into a broader conflict rather than reach a turning point.

The withdrawal of the troops can be regarded as a strategic compromise of the Benjamin Netanyahu government. None of its objectives, ranging from pressing Hamas to release the remaining hostages it is holding to turning Gaza into a buffer zone after

uprooting Hamas, has been realized or looks likely to be. It has also come under mounting pressure from the world, including the US, which is still putting tremendous inputs into supporting Ukraine in its conflict with Russia, as well as growing domestic opposition. All of which have prompted it to make the decision.

In particular, the softening support of the enough-is-enough US in the face of the rising civilian death toll has been a major factor influencing its decision. Were it not for the US' support, Israel would not have been able to sustain its military operations in Gaza with such intensity for so long.

That the US started withdrawing its USS *Gerald R. Ford* aircraft carrier strike group from the Israeli coast in the Eastern Mediterranean on Monday, where it will be replaced by the amphibious assault ship the USS *Bataan* and its accompanying warships, the USS *Mesa Verde* and the USS *Carter Hall* that had been in the Red Sea, sends the signal that the Gaza conflict will enter a new phase of low-intensity campaigns, featuring surgical strikes against remaining Hamas strongholds and "pockets of resistance".

The international community should seize the opportunity of the Israeli withdrawal to deliver humanitarian aid to the besieged civilians in Gaza. At the same time, the US should take advantage of its unique influence on Tel Aviv to prevent the conflict from expanding further into the southern Gaza Strip and help broker a cease-fire at an early date.

Solid commitment to engagement with world

Inbound visitor numbers have been slow to recover after the COVID-19 pandemic, with the number of foreign visitors to China well down from the pre-pandemic level. Leaving no doubt that the country is still welcoming visitors from other countries, a little more than three months ago, on Sept 27, the State Council, issued a notice outlining measures aimed at unleashing the potential of tourism consumption and promoting the high-quality development of the tourism industry.

Among these was a commitment to increase the number of flights to overseas destinations, the resumption of various visa-free policies, and measures to simplify travel and payment procedures for foreign visitors. The notice was swiftly followed by the introduction of a unilateral visa-free policy for ordinary passport holders from France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Malaysia, which took effect on Dec 1 last year.

According to the National Immigration Administration, there were around 214,000 visitors from these countries in December, an increase of 28.5 percent compared with November. Of these inbound trips, 118,000 were made by holders of ordinary passports without a visa, accounting for 55.1 percent of all inbound trips from these countries during the month. This highlights the significant boost the visa-free policy can give to inbound visitor numbers.

Having signaled its intent to extend the visa-free policy to more countries, visitors from Thailand are also expected to be beneficiaries of the visa-exemption policy, with Thailand announcing a historic reciprocal permanent "visa-free" agreement with China, effective from March 1. With this year being designated as the ASEAN-China Year of People-to-People Exchanges, it seems likely that other ASEAN members besides Malaysia and Thailand will be among the future beneficiaries of the policy.

A rebound of inbound tourism would spur the Chinese economy's post-pandemic recovery, benefiting various associated sectors. But just as importantly, it would reinforce China's commitment to opening-up and global engagement. Beijing has repeatedly emphasized the importance of exchanges and communication between people from different countries and cultures so as to clear misperceptions of one another and so lay a solid foundation for inter-country relations.

By the end of June 2023, China had signed cultural and tourism cooperation documents with 144 countries under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative. Cities from 60-plus other countries involved in the BRI have formed more than 1,000 pairs of friendly cities with their Chinese counterparts. What China has achieved in its endeavors in promoting the BRI cooperation suggests how important it is for people from different cultures to conduct exchanges.

Song Chen



Opinion Line

Quake highlights safety issues for Japan's nuclear power plants

Japan has once again caught worldwide attention with the latest earthquake causing spent fuel pool water to overflow in a number of nuclear power plants. This comes even as the aftereffects of nuclear radiation from the Fukushima nuclear power plant following an earthquake 13 years ago still remain unaddressed.

On the day of the latest quake, the Japan Nuclear Regulation Authority said that one set of external power supply systems at a nuclear power plant in Ishikawa Prefecture had broken down, but because another set of such systems was running as normal, the cooling of the spent fuel pool was still going on. Because of the quake, water from the plant's spent fuel pool spilled into surrounding areas, but no radioactive material was involved. The Tokyo Electric Power Company also claimed that water

from the spent fuel pool of some units of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa Nuclear Power Plant's units 1 to 7 in Niigata Prefecture had overflowed and the water's radioactivity level was being ascertained.

It will take time to evaluate whether the spillover will have an impact on people or the environment. And the incident once again raises questions about the safety of nuclear power plants. Given that current technologies cannot fully guarantee the safety of nuclear power plants, the first thing all countries should consider is whether nuclear power plants can effectively withstand natural disasters such as earthquakes and avoid the disasters caused by human negligence.

The safety of nuclear power plants hinges on their ability to withstand natural disasters and a swift response to human errors, as

well as the safe disposal of nuclear waste. All nuclear power plant reactors produce spent fuel, which needs to be disposed of at all times.

Being short on fossil energy, Japan is dependent on nuclear power. But the latest incident exposes that strengthened supervision of nuclear power plants should be a top priority for the country that is affected by around 2,000 quakes of various magnitudes each year on average. The spillover of nuclear wastewater this time also indicates that the wet storage method and technology adopted by Japan's nuclear power plants are problematic.

The earlier tsunami-inflicted nuclear leakage incident and the latest quake-caused spent fuel pool overflow should remind Japan that it is time to rethink its nuclear power management approach from the perspective of nuclear safety.

— BEIJING NEWS

Rules needed for AI-related copyright violation

In most modern societies a strong mechanism exists to protect people's intellectual property rights. While copying or publishing content created by someone else, be it text, art or video, will surely invite charges of plagiarism, those who read someone else's creative idea and create a similar story without giving due credit to the original author also risk being sued and made to pay compensation.

However, what happens if the entity that copied or reproduced content was an artificial intelligence? What if an AI model makes use of the large amount of content it is fed from online sources to write a story? Does that also amount to copyright infringement?

The lawsuit filed by The New York Times against OpenAI and the agreement between Apple and National Broadcast Company have put the spotlight on these questions. While the NYT claimed OpenAI's "unlawful copying and use of The Times' uniquely valuable works" led to "billions of dollars in statutory and actual damages", Apple got NBC's approval for collecting their data by paying \$50 million, both of which lead to the same conclusion that data is money and the author's right should be respected and paid for if someone wants to profit from it.

That being the basic principle, how to divide interests between the original writer and the AI developer and how should one side pay the

other? After all, AI is a tool created by human intelligence to make life convenient for everyone, not just the AI developer. If the profit margin for AI developers dims, the emerging industry might find it difficult to sustain itself. However, if it cuts into the interests of original writers, reporters, composers and other creators, people might be discouraged from creating content in the first place.

In a deeper sense, the NYT versus OpenAI case is very relevant to the times we live in. The lawsuit will definitely not be the last one, but it will help decide how to share interests between the original writer and the AI developer.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Farmers' interests central to urbanization

The central authorities have recently urged local governments to take concrete measures to advance "people-centered" urbanization, with the focus on turning farmers into new city residents, providing equal basic public services for all urban residents alike, reducing the rural-urban development gap and promoting growth of the county economies.

As of the end of 2022, about 913 million people of the country's 1.4 billion population, 65.22 percent, lived in cities. The comprehensive carrying capacity of cities has been effectively improved through the transformation of shantytowns.

But new challenges have arisen as well. Due to the low birth rate, particularly in cities, the size of the urban population in the country looks set to contract in the long run. And about 27 percent of the urban residents, at least 245 million, are those called migrant workers who live and work in cities yet lack a

local hukou, or household registration permit. Having a hukou is a prerequisite for them to enjoy the welfare provided by a city.

Although there are 21 major city clusters nationwide, they siphon all kinds of economic resources from neighboring regions, turning the situation into a zero-sum struggle for limited resources between major cities and the rest of the province. And the excessive concentration of production factors in cities have not only boosted the fast expansion of some megacities but also caused many "urban diseases" such as pollution, traffic congestion and poor city management.

The key to advancing "people-centered" urbanization is in the first place to turn the 245 million migrant workers into true city residents with local hukou, but even before that objective is realized local governments are obliged to provide them with basic public services in housing, medical care, edu-

cation and pensions, in the city where they work and live.

Also the satellite towns and counties adjacent to major city clusters deserve more inputs to transform them into new growth drivers attracting talents, technology and capital back from the already overcrowded big cities. Some industries can be relocated from the cities to the counties to boost the rise of county economies and ease the "urban diseases" of big cities.

The central authorities should do more to pave the way for the free flow of production factors between cities and the countryside by first making breakthroughs in the difficult rural land reform in a bid to ensure farmers can enjoy their share of the overdue property right income of land they collectively own in the village. For too long it is the local governments that have been enjoying the bonus of land value appreciation rather than the farmers.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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COMMENT

Wang Zhen

Criticizing Israel's Gaza action not anti-Semitism

By Jan 2, Israel's military adventurism in the Gaza Strip had claimed the lives of more than 22,000 people, the majority being women and children, inviting a wave of criticism and condemnation from around the world. But some Israeli and Western media outlets have chosen to target Chinese netizens, accusing them of "anti-Semitism" for criticizing Israel's military policy. Such criticism, if not an attempt to confuse right and wrong and to call a stag a horse, is an attempt to deny history or misrepresent it.

The term "anti-Semitism" refers to prejudice, discrimination and hatred against Jews, their religion and culture. Since the time of the Diaspora, Jews scattered across the world have faced anti-Semitism. They have been discriminated against, expelled from different lands and even massacred because of their ethnicity and religion. They have been forced to wear special markings, move into ghettos and pay extra protection fees to governments. The Holocaust, perpetrated by Hitler in the 1930s and 1940s, is the worst genocide in history and a tragic irony of modern Western civilization.

In contrast, a thriving Jewish community once flourished in Kaifeng, capital of China during the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127). The Jews, known locally as the "blue-capped Huihui", eventually integrated into

Therefore, it's unreasonable to label China as anti-Semitic or equate the criticisms of Israel's military adventurism with anti-Semitism.

Chinese society, making it the only anthropological case of Jewish assimilation in a non-Jewish society.

Even in modern China, there is no place for anti-Semitism. Among the Jews who came to China in modern times were both Sephardic Jews, who followed in the footsteps of the Western colonizers, and Ashkenazi Jews, who fled the anti-Semitic persecution in Europe, and Russia following the October Revolution and the subsequent Russian Civil War.

During World War II, when the Nazis were killing Jews by the millions in Europe, Shanghai, which faced Japanese imperialist aggression, became for some time the proverbial Noah's Ark for many Jewish refugees, with a group of Chinese left-wing leaders led by Lu Xun and Soong Ching-ling taking to the streets to protest against the fascist policies of Nazi Germany.

More importantly, He Fengshan, a Chinese diplomat in Vienna, risked everything to issue "life visas" to thousands of Jews so they could escape Hitler's murderous persecution. The Chinese national government at the time even planned to settle the Jews in Yunnan province but could not do so because of the Japanese military's pressure.

Back to the Gaza conflict, Chinese netizens have mainly criticized the military adventurism of Israel which has claimed more than 22,000 lives. Such criticisms cannot be equated with hatred or discrimination against the Jewish people. Confronted with images of children's corpses, destroyed homes, bombed hospitals and damaged United Nations humanitarian agency offices and compounds in Gaza, anyone would criticize the perpetrators.

Regardless of the pretexts cited by Israel, such military operations are unacceptable and go against the very reason why the international community supported the creation of the state of Israel in the first place — Israel was created based on the UN Partition Plan (Resolution 181) in November 1947.

Even in the light of international political realities, Israel's military operations in Gaza cannot be justified. The ruling Hamas dispensation in Gaza is both an armed non-

state actor and a transnational ideological and social movement. And the policy of "de-Hamasization" pursued by Israel in Gaza is not a viable military objective. In other words, no matter how much Israel achieves militarily in Gaza, it will be difficult for it to rid itself of the moral stigma of carrying out the military operation, and thus weaken the moral basis of the policies of Israel and its allies.

Any attempt to distort such criticisms and claim they are "anti-Semitic", or to weaponize "anti-Semitism" without regard for the facts will hurt those who love peace, and benefit those who are not. Chinese people are genuinely concerned about peace being restored in the Palestine-Israel conflict.

Therefore, it's unreasonable to label China as anti-Semitic or equate the criticisms of Israel's military adventurism with anti-Semitism. China is against all kinds of anti-Semitism, including the irresponsible and meaningless weaponization of anti-Semitism.

The author is a professor at the Institute of International Relations of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences and deputy director of the Center for Jewish Studies in Shanghai. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Shen Dingli

No end in sight for conflict in Ukraine

Despite many countries calling for Russia and Ukraine to resolve their sovereign and security disputes through peaceful talks, the two sides are still locked in a conflict. Both Russia and Ukraine have deployed heavy weapons against each other. But the Ukrainian army risks suffering heavy casualties for lack of proper air force protection. As for Russia, it has long abandoned its over-ambitious plan to take over Kyiv, so it is relatively easier for it to defend the areas under its control.

Also, this is perhaps the first time that both sides engaged in a conflict have been using artificial intelligence (AI) in military operations. For example, any detection of concentration of manpower or mechanized force by AI could instantly invite fire from the enemy.

This is also a conflict between two former republics of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics — Russia as its only legal but much weakened successor, and Ukraine boosted by the support of the US and its allies.

What could decide the fate of the conflict is the US' domestic politics in 2024. Although the US lacks the resources to continually replenish Ukraine's arsenal, it has continued to support Ukraine with weapons and funds. The Republicans, given their majority in Congress, could hijack the agenda and upset Democratic President Joe Biden's strategy of supporting Ukraine, but they have not done anything of that sort so far.

This will deal a direct blow to the transatlantic alliance, further demoralizing Ukraine's leaders and people.

The US' European allies, on the other hand, are working hard to assure Ukraine that it would be included in the European Union, even if it means forcing opponents like Hungary to agree to this idea. And once Ukraine joins the EU, its passage to NATO will become easier.

Perhaps the major European members of NATO are also preparing to take over NATO's reins from Biden if he cannot work out the next phase of US military aid to Ukraine. Therefore, 2024 could see deepening global divide. In the US, bipartisan politics seem to have intensified with the upcoming presidential election. In fact, there is infighting even within the Republican Party. This will deal a direct blow to the transatlantic alliance, further demoralizing Ukraine's leaders and people.

In contrast, Russia is likely to continue the "special military operation" in Ukraine to rid that country of "fascists".

The US-led NATO's expansion, in the name of boosting defense for all its members, obviously enhances its defensive capability, and its purpose may actually be to deter potential aggressors. But as per standard definition of threat, it is made up of threat capability and intent, and NATO's expansion, even in case it is mistakenly used for offence, could be an enhanced source of threat.

NATO's endless expansion to minimize any potential threat from Russia has forced Russia to assume that its future security might depend on the benignity of an expanded NATO, which is unacceptable to a nuclear superpower.

Russia and Ukraine can resolve their conflict only if they start to find a desirable but non-military way of safeguarding national security. For Russia, to keep Ukraine away from NATO, it has to resolve the crisis through talks as early as possible. For Ukraine, joining a multilateral defense alliance should make sure such a move is not misjudged or poses a threat to another country and does not bring harm on it.

Unfortunately, Russia is unlikely to stop its military actions to such an extent in the short term, and Ukraine and its military backers are not expected to regret what they have done. As such, 2024 is likely to be another gloomy year without major conflicts being settled.

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Guan Lixin

The young lead new trends in consumption market

With the post-1990 generation becoming a vibrant force in society and the post-2000 generation gradually entering the workforce, the purchasing power of the new generation of consumers has been steadily growing.

In fact, young people are slowly becoming the main force in the consumer market. Growing up in the internet era, the young consumers generally have higher education levels and a broader global outlook, and come from a relatively strong economic background. As such, their consumption behavior is different from that of the earlier generations.

In terms of consumption pattern, online shopping has become the top choice for young people. Young people not only comprise a comparatively high percentage of internet users but also are more inclined toward and adept at shopping online. They excel in using mobile devices and social media for getting information, making them more susceptible to product promotions and influencer endorsements on social media.

And yet a trend toward rational consumption has been growing. Young consumers no longer blindly chase trendy or luxury items. Instead, they focus more on product quality and functionality. They tend to compare products and services, and do some research before making purchasing decisions, in order to get the best out of their purchase.

According to a study conducted by the Social Survey Center of China Youth Daily, 90.1 percent of the 1,000 young respondents said their consumption decision is based on the "spending where necessary and saving where possible" principle.

As for consumer preferences, self-indulgence and experiential consumption are gaining popularity. Young consumers seek more personalized and diversified products, reflecting their

There is also a need to facilitate the integration of online and offline realms, and leverage digital technology to enrich consumer experiences in physical businesses.

emotional needs and increasing sense of self-worth. They are willing to pay a premium for products with unique features and innovative services. Their inclination toward self-indulgence and experiential consumption has catalyzed the development of products and services such as pets, collectibles, wearable devices, smart home appliances, medical aesthetics, virtual reality experience, performing arts, exhibitions, outdoor activities and immersive theater experiences.

When it comes to brand cognition, young consumers seem to favor domestic products. Thanks to the plethora of information available online, young consumers no longer blindly pursue foreign brands and instead prefer local brands, highlighting their confidence in Chinese-made products. From Li-Ning, Anta and Warrior shoes to White Rabbit and Liushen, domestic brands in various fields are being warmly embraced by young consumers.

With per capita GDP of more than \$12,000, China is poised to enter the ranks of middle- to high-income economies, and accordingly, its consumer market is transitioning toward high-quality goods and services. And to promote high-quality consumption, it is essential to adapt to the changing consumer behavior, promote innovation in production and distribution, better meet the diversified and personalized demands of young consumers, and ensure demand drives supply and supply creates demand at a higher level.

First, there is a need to propel the development of the consumer market, so as to cater to new consumer demands, by aligning with the changing trends in consumer behavior and more intensively applying advanced and digital technology, such as 5G, artificial intelligence, and autonomous driving to the consumer sphere, fostering online shopping, education and entertainment, promoting remote working, and tapping into emerging consumption potential. There is also a need to facilitate the integration of online and offline realms, and leverage digital technology to enrich consumer experiences in physical businesses.

Second, it is necessary to boost supply to increase consumption. Maintaining a

steady supply of diversified and personalized goods is essential to meeting the demands of different demographic groups based on age, and income and education levels. Also, to improve product quality, production quality standards should be upgraded and supervision tightened.

Third, service-related industries should be further developed to meet the growing demand for service consumption, by strengthening research, finding innovative ways of applying new technologies such as the internet of things and AI to the service industry, facilitating the development of service sectors such as aviation, retail tourism, creative cultural activities, healthcare and sports, improving the quality of services such as housekeeping, eldercare and catering, and introducing high-end services including finance and insurance.

And fourth, domestic brands need to take measures to become more competitive by enhancing their product value, fostering innovative development, expanding their product range, strengthening their presence in different markets, and promoting special local products to meet consumer demands through branding and differentiation.

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JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL VIEWS

DONALD RAMOTAR

China increases hope for 2024

The world is a safer place because of the initiatives Beijing has undertaken over the years, particularly in 2023

The year 2023 was, by all accounts, a very eventful one. While we saw great prospects for the future advancement of humankind, at the same time there were great challenges and dangers that threaten our own destruction.

It was against this backdrop that China urged countries to act on the Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative that it has proposed.

The Global Development Initiative calls for an action-oriented approach that closely addresses the most pressing livelihood needs of developing countries and promotes practical cooperation in key areas such as poverty reduction, food security, industrialization and connectivity. The initiative has received positive reactions from the international community.

The Global Security Initiative aims to work with the international community to carry forward the spirit of the United Nations Charter, advocate the spirit of solidarity to adapt to the profoundly changing international landscape and adopt a win-win approach to traditional and non-traditional security risks and challenges, so as to find a new security path featuring dialogue rather than confrontation, partnership rather than alliance, and win-win results rather than zero-sum outcomes.

The Global Civilization Initiative reflects China's specific vision and future direction in addressing global challenges. China stands for promoting the common values of all humankind and advocating the inheritance of civilizations. At the same time, China pays attention to the modernization of civilizations, and takes people-to-people exchanges and cooperation



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

between countries as the means to learn from each other.

The three initiatives have captured the imagination of the world. They particularly take into consideration the specific circumstances of each country. This is brought out strongly in the Global Civiliza-

tion Initiative, which was able to show the interconnections between world peace, socioeconomic development and national security.

China was heavily involved in making efforts at the diplomatic level to solve several serious and

knotty problems of our time in 2023.

In early 2023, China proposed a 12-point measure to resolve the Russia-Ukraine crisis. Those measures captured some very important aspects of the crisis and principles — such as territorial integrity;

mutual security in which no country should seek greater security at the expense of another; and no use of nuclear weapons (indeed China insists on the principle that nuclear weapons should never be used, and a nuclear war never fought) — that could be applied generally for their resolution.

However, as the Ukraine crisis drags on, we are beginning to witness some realism on the part of the Western powers. China's proposal is a good basis to begin talks.

The most burning issue in the international arena at present is the devastation of Gaza and the slaughter of the people there, including a large amount of children and babies. Here, too, China has made very sound proposals to end the offensive launched by the Israeli forces against the people of Palestine.

At the UN Security Council, China called for an immediate cease-fire, as an indispensable step toward resolving the tragic killings in Gaza. To find a permanent settlement to the conflict, China emphasized on the two-state solution, with a viable Palestinian state being created taking into consideration its borders in 1967.

Unfortunately, the United States used its veto powers at the Security Council and the General Assembly of the UN to allow Israel to continue its carpet bombing of Gaza. In addition, it has supplied Israel with the most sophisticated weapons for use against the Palestinians.

In recent times, we saw many countries calling for a cease-fire and a two-state solution. Millions on the streets are calling for this demand. We are thus optimistic that a permanent solution in line with China's proposal will emerge. China has been working tirelessly

to ease the tension in the Middle East, which is one of the most volatile regions in the world.

Its endeavors have met with much success. The most notable was its mediation that led Iran and Saudi Arabia to resume diplomatic relations. Already the two countries have assigned ambassadors to each other's capital cities. This would bring great benefits to the people of the two countries and to the region as a whole. The role of China in facilitating this has been welcomed and lauded.

China has displayed remarkable restraint in the face of the provocations by the US in relation to its internal affairs, especially on the Taiwan question.

The US has been encouraging separatist forces on the island to seek independence. It has even been arming the island and taken several provocative steps against the mainland. These included the visit by the speaker of the US congress.

However, China has stood firm in frustrating those measures. It continues to work for the reunification of the Chinese mainland and Taiwan in a peaceful manner. It encourages dialogue and had long ago made one of the most creative proposals, of "one country, two systems". That will prove to be a viable path.

The world is a much safer place because of the work that China has been pursuing over the years, and particularly in 2023. We are certain that 2024 will bring even greater successes.

The author is a former president of Guyana. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

MOHID IFTIKHAR

Driving force

China is playing a major role in accelerating the global development of the electric vehicle industry

The choice of words concerning fossil fuels "phase-out" or "phase-down" bore significant weight at the 28th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28).

The essence of the challenge to realize a climate consensus on the elimination of fossil fuels lies in states' varied economic experiences, politics, resources and technological capacity. It is not surprising that for most states there is a trade-off in both the short- and long-term policies for climate adaptation, mainly because policy choices on climate revolve around opportunity costs such as manufacturing, trade, household consumption, conservation and so forth.

The promises of finances made to the developing countries by the wealthy nations proved to be an utter disappointment at COP28. As rightly pointed out by Safa' Al Jayoussi, climate justice adviser at Oxfam, "developing countries are dealing with a lot of loans from the World Bank and other institutions that are causing more austerity. Adding more pressure to the countries ... will impact those most vulnerable to climate change". A recent report by the UN estimates that \$387 billion is required annually by developing countries in order to implement domestic climate adaptation priorities. On top of this, most suitable climate solutions should not be generalized across developing countries as they vary in geography and social, economic and political fabric.

Importantly, to address climate change, one area of agreement is the transition to electric vehicles as 60 percent of the global oil demand comes from the transportation sector. It is estimated that cars and vans account for 48.5 percent of global transport emissions.

EVs are not the perfect nor a stand-alone solution, but they will certainly help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the long run.

Many participants at COP28 were enthusiastic in announcing best practices and policies for their EV industry. The United Kingdom, for example, announced a 70 million pound (\$88.9 million) pilot program for ultra-rapid EV charging points. Indonesia committed to an EV ecosystem, and Nigeria announced "local assembly capacity for electric vehicles, establishing charging infrastructure, and enabling private sector participation". According to the International Energy Agency, EV's share in global vehicle sales was 14 percent in 2022 and is likely to increase threefold by the end of the decade.

The World Resources Institute stresses that the share of EVs in the global market needs to be between 75 percent to 95 percent by 2030 in order to stay in line with the global warming target of 1.5 C.

China offers valuable lessons to the developing world through its expanding EV industry. In 2022, the Chinese share of global EV sales was 60 percent. The International Energy Agency chief recently noted that "China is the champion of clean energy. They are the world's number one in solar, electric cars, nuclear, hydropower — everything". Estimates by UBS suggest that China will have a 33 percent share of the EV global market by 2030. Chinese companies such as SAIC

Motor, Geely and BYD alongside startups such as Nio, Xpeng and EHang are leading the domestic market and catering to customers' demands with a growing variety of models and variants. For instance, BYD offers both luxury and affordable variants catering to the domestic market across the board.

In 2022, the EV share of the light vehicle market in China increased to 24 percent from 13.5 percent in 2021. A study published in Transport Policy found that a 2009 Chinese policy to promote EVs has resulted in "lowering urban transport emissions by an average of 16.3 percent". In addition, China is also a major EV components supplier to companies such as Tesla and Toyota.

Regionally, China is eyeing major EV investments in both raw materials and production. In the long run, China will benefit from lithium supplies from Africa and play a major role in strengthening the international EV market. For instance, Chinese EV companies have promised to invest \$1.44 billion in Thailand and to convert 30 percent of the country's car production to EVs by 2030. This has brought about new opportunities for developing countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America. However, this cooperation should not only be confined to EV production. Trade in essential parts and raw materials, technology transfer, as well as training of manpower should also be explored as new pathways of opportunity.

One study estimated that sales of EVs in Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda and Uganda may reach 340,000 to 820,000 units by 2025. Ghana announced its EV policy at COP28 and highlighted "EV penetration rate will be around 35 percent". By 2027-35, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations member states such as the Philippines



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

and Indonesia aim to incentivize their EV market through low-cost ownership and tax incentives. A study by the Center for Strategic and International Studies noted that 20 percent of vehicles in Southeast Asia will be electric by 2025. Pakistan's EV policy 2020-25 aims at making 30 percent of its vehicles electric by 2030. Morgan Stanley noted that "EVs' share of global auto sales is likely to grow ... to nearly 90 percent by 2050". In short, China's profound experience in the EV industry offers promising avenues of cooperation for developing countries.

At this point in time big questions also prevail concerning sources of energy and electricity supply

for EV charging. Developing countries are constrained by limited choices. The International Finance Corporation estimates that \$2.8 trillion is required by emerging and developing countries by 2030 for clean energy investments to meet climate goals set under the Paris agreement. In essence, these finances are required from a combination of domestic expenditure, international and private sector finance. Reliable platforms such as the World Economic Forum, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the International Atomic Energy Agency and the IEA highlight that abundant energy investment opportunities exist in the developing

countries in areas of nuclear, hydro, solar, wind etc. Perhaps, advanced economies may look deeper into some of these energy projects because of their past industrial policies and pledges made at earlier COPs. EVs are not the perfect nor a stand-alone solution, but they will certainly help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the long run.

The author is a postdoctoral fellow at the Department of Government and Public Administration at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

LIFE



Dancing to the tune of creativity

University competition sponsored by sportswear giant gets in the groove to showcase talent, **Xing Wen** reports.

The tables are turned in a street dance performance when 14 arrogant self-entitled bullies disdainfully toy with a leopard as if it were their plaything.

The narrative takes a dramatic twist when the wild spirit of the leopard is stirred awake. Capitalizing on the moment, the leopard breaks free from its confinement, reversing the roles and making prey of its former captors, who are, unsurprisingly, not as arrogant as before.

The performers, all from Password, a dance crew at the Communication University of China, skillfully utilize stage choreography, dynamic formations and layered musical elements to propel the story through its twists and turns.

The dance piece recently won a golden prize in the Beijing station of the Nike National University Street Dance Competition.

The event is the first national competition held by the sportswear giant for university street dance enthusiasts, aimed at offering students and dance communities a platform for self-expression and an opportunity to showcase their creativity.

"Through this piece, we seek to illustrate the contrasting and colliding forces of human and animal instincts," says Pan Zhixi, a junior student from the Communication University of China, who portrayed the leopard in the dance performance.

"It underscores the sorrowful consequences that arise when greed becomes a prevailing trait."

More than 6,000 dancers representing 115 university dance clubs nationwide took part in the event, where nearly 70 elite dancers were also invited to conduct master classes for all participants.

Of all the dance crews, Password stands out for its proficiency in choreographing group dance performances that narrate compelling stories and delivering emotionally charged and intricately expressive acts onstage. Their originally choreographed pieces have frequently earned acclaim in street dance competitions among Beijing's university dance clubs.

"Everyone in our club is adept at expressing emotions and feelings," says Pan, who is also the leader of Password.

"We are generous in offering praise and encouragement to all. And we spend a great amount of time together, fostering a strong bond and understanding in our dance routines. This deep connection and emotional foundation plays a crucial role when creating our works," she says.

This was the first time that Pan had led the creation of an original dance piece.

"Initially, we spent a lot of time exploring different themes and music, which was the most challenging period, and I remember we were all on the verge of a collective breakdown," she recalls.

As the team leader, the pressure was immense.

"I had to regulate my own emotions while soothing the emotions of other team members. Through this experience, I feel that both my choreography skills and leadership have improved," she says.

Stylists have been invited to create unique street dance outfits for the competition's finalists. Additionally, Pan was also given the opportunity to model in a promotional



From top: Dance enthusiasts from Peking University perform at the recent Nike National University Street Dance Competition. Students from the University of Macao take to the stage at the competition in Beijing. A professional dancer delivers a master class during the event.
Above left: A dance crew from Sichuan University of Media and Communications at the competition.
Above: Zeng Yige, a doctoral candidate from Tsinghua University, relishes competing in the event.
PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"Consequently, I have good friends from Peking University, Communication University of China, Beijing Sport University and Beijing Institute of Technology with whom I frequently hang out," she explains.

In the school of medicine, where research pressures loom large, Zeng somehow managed to carve out around two hours every day for her true passion — street dance.

She will arrive at the laboratory by 9 am, immerse herself in her study and conducting experiments until 10 pm. Then, she will slip out of her white lab coat and, in the laboratory restroom, she undergoes a metamorphosis from a diligent researcher into a streetwise dancer, with bold eyeliner and vibrant eye shadow applied, and emerges clad in a fashionable, oversized outfit. It's time to get her groove on as the beats of hip-hop music reverberate in the university's dance studio.

"In a campus environment as academically intense as Tsinghua's, where everyone is engrossed in their studies, one might wonder why anyone would persist in dancing," Zeng explains. "Amid the rigor of learning, why take on an additional demanding pursuit? For me, it's because dancing brings me back to my roots and the essence of who I wanted to be — someone cool, good-looking, expressive, and capable of radiating energy and positivity to others."

"If I couldn't dance, I couldn't continue with my research. In my life on campus, both research and dance are indispensable," she emphasizes.

According to Zeng, she completed her undergraduate studies at Wuhan University, where her focus was primarily on learning how to become a dance performer capable of delivering polished routines, developing her body and enhancing her expressiveness through dance.

While in Tsinghua University, under the influence of a veteran dancer within the DK5 crew, Zeng began delving into freestyle and deepening her understanding of music.

"Now, I want to gradually explore and develop my own style," she says.

Her favorite dance genre is Afro, characterized by its energetic rhythms and dynamic movements.

"As an outgoing person, this dance style resonates with me. Every time I dance, I envision myself as a cheetah on the African savannah."

Michelle Yau Sin-yan from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University is also among the contestants.

This is Yau's first time in Beijing and competing in a national-level street dance competition. Her club has made thorough preparations for the competition and started practicing diligently as far back as September.

"It's a great chance for us to learn from different dancers coming from different places," says Yau. "We hope to showcase a powerful, groovy and energetic piece that shows our potential and diversity."

"Normally, we are very busy with academics and part-time work. The competition has brought us together for a longer time," she adds. "Street dance is a part of my life, and I've learned a lot from it."

Yan Bingjie contributed to this story.
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TCM gives the Swiss a healthy option

GENEVA — "After taking acupuncture and massage therapies, I feel comfortable and relaxed," Mogel says, giving a thumbs-up after receiving treatment in traditional Chinese medicine at a clinic in Schaffhausen.

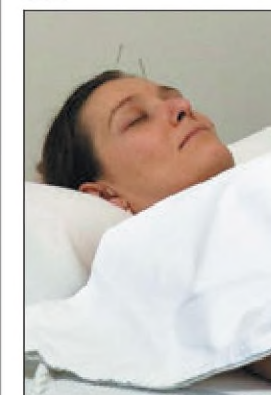
TCM has become increasingly popular with people in Switzerland. In Schaffhausen, an old town in the country's northernmost canton with the same name, there are seven TCM clinics. Mogel got his treatment from one of them called "TCM-City".

Mogel is a frequent visitor to the TCM-City clinic due to his sports injuries. "I believe in natural therapies," he says.

According to TCM practitioner Jia Kejie who runs the clinic, most of her patients are from Schaffhausen and the neighboring cantons of Zurich and Thurgau.

Over 20 years ago, TCM began being popularized in the Swiss health resorts of Bad Ragaz and Baden, and then gradually spread throughout Switzerland. Nowadays, many patients are referred by doctors in hospitals and other Western medicine clinics to TCM clinics for complementary treatments.

"While I was receiving acupuncture therapy, I fell asleep, even though I was nervous at the beginning," says Miroslava, who has been suffering from physical and mental disorders for a long time.



A woman receives a TCM acupuncture treatment at a clinic in Schaffhausen, Switzerland.
WANG QIBING / XINHUA

Miroslava, who works in early childhood education, says that she had tried treatment elsewhere, but it did not work. "Finally, I accepted my friend's recommendation and decided to try this clinic."

At the clinic, Jia and her colleague Zhang Zhitai communicate with patients in fluent German.

At 10 am local time, the first patient finished his treatment, leaving the clinic. The next patient was on the way. In this cold and damp weather, many patients came here for the treatment of rheumatic diseases. Jia was scheduled to treat 14 patients that day.

"TCM practitioners in Switzerland regularly conduct business online or offline," says Jia, who graduated from a traditional Chinese medicine university in China and has practiced TCM in Switzerland for more than 20 years.

Jia, also vice-president of a local association involving TCM and Western medicine, estimates that her clinic in Schaffhausen has treated some 60,000 patients since its opening in 2002. About a total of 5,000 people came to the clinic and received TCM treatment.

"TCM is the natural medicine with a complete medical theoretical system," she says, adding that its unique properties are also the source of its vigorous development in Switzerland.

Jia's clinic establishes a medical file for each patient and keeps detailed records of each treatment. "In accordance with Swiss law, we keep all patient cases for at least 10 years," she says.

XINHUA

LIFE



A classic tale returns

Russian musical *Anna Karenina* goes back to its story of origin as it begins a tour of Chinese theaters, **Chen Nan** reports.

In 2022, when the performing arts scene in China was facing the unprecedented challenge posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinese and Russian artists worked together to bring out a Chinese version of the Russian musical *Anna Karenina*, which toured China and became a hit.

Now, as everything returns to normal and live performances are booming once more, the original version of the Russian musical is on tour in China.

From Dec 1 to Jan 27, the Russian musical visits nine cities, including Beijing, Harbin in Heilongjiang province, Hangzhou in Zhejiang province and the Sichuan provincial capital, Chengdu.

"We released the Chinese version of the musical *Anna Karenina* during the pandemic," says the Russian director of the musical, Alina Chevik.

"I could not come to China, so I attended rehearsals online. That was the main difficulty of the work, which was an unforgettable experience."

"I believe that art has no boundaries. We may speak different languages, but when we become one team, burning with one idea and dedicated to one task, all our differences become insignificant. We have many differences in understanding the work process, but the fact that we are willing to meet each other in solving any problems is very valuable and is the main thing in any collaboration."

The musical, *Anna Karenina*, was adapted from Leo Tolstoy's iconic novel, and follows the dramatic and ill-fated love story between the married protagonist and a dashing military officer, Alexey Vronsky. The characters struggle with overwhelming love and betrayal, passion and duty, hope and desperation.



Top: Russian musical *Anna Karenina*, adapted from Leo Tolstoy's iconic novel of the same title, is touring Chinese cities. Above: The musical, directed by Alina Chevik and choreographed by Irina Korneeva, premiered in 2016 and uses various high-tech visual elements. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Directed by Chevik and choreographed by Irina Korneeva, the Russian musical premiered in 2016 in Moscow with a score by Roman Ignatyev and a libretto by Yuri Kim. Over 40 songs of the musical feature a wide range of genres, such as pop, rock and opera. The choreography also covers different styles, such as classical ballet and contemporary dance.

The main location of the musical is a train and many scenes take place against the backdrop of the train and the railway station. Throughout the performance, a huge wheel suspended from the ceiling turns, which serves as a reminder of the destiny and fate of the protagonist.

The director says that she first read the novel in school and the inner struggles of the married and in-love *Anna Karenina* were



"incomprehensible" to her at that time.

"Several years later, I read the novel again. Then, every one of her actions irritated me, and I hated her with all my soul. Before the staging, I read the novel once more, and suddenly I felt sorry for Anna. It seemed to me that I understood her passionate protest. I felt as if I sensed her desire to be happy. I understood that there is a bit of *Anna Karenina* in

every woman. I understood, accepted, and loved her," Chevik says.

"Tolstoy's novel is vast. Of course, we had to sacrifice some characters and plotlines," the director adds. "Our librettist and poet Yuri Kim did an excellent job. We strengthened *Anna's* storyline, bringing her to the forefront, which allowed for a greater understanding of her tragedy."

As a director, Chevik says that she is a "sincere follower" of Stanislav-

sky's system (highly influential system of theater training developed over years of trial and error by the Russian actor, producer, and theoretician Konstantin Stanislavsky).

"For me, the most important thing is the truthful existence of the actor onstage, the honesty of their experiences and emotions. In my musicals, I try to combine the classical Russian school of experiential theater with the visual effectiveness and technological sophistication of the show," Chevik says.

Anfisa Kirillina, who plays the titular role in the musical, says that "Anna is sensitive and brave. Before she met Vronsky, she didn't understand love, even though she got married and became a mother. Love means the whole world to her so she decided to leave her husband and her child to pursue her true love. At the same time, she is fearful and struggles inside. Her fate is tragic, but that's her choice. Her character is rich in complexity."

During the Beijing stop, six shows were staged within four days, from Friday to Monday, attracting packed audiences who celebrated the new year by having a theater experience.

"The most striking part of the production was the sets and costumes, which evoked the lavish excess of the 19th-century Russian aristocracy," says an audience member surnamed Mo, who watched the original version of the Russian musical in Beijing on Friday.

"The scenery in the musical transitions seamlessly from the train station to the concert hall and the ice rink. I really enjoyed this reimagining of the timeless classic," Mo adds.

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Festive events highlight New Year celebrations in Macao

MACAO — Festive events, such as countdown parties, performance galas and interactive community installations, lit up the New Year celebrations in Macao Special Administrative Region.

At the Sai Van Lake Square and the Taipa Houses Museum, crowds gathered on New Year's Eve for songs and performances by local and international musicians alike, cheering "Happy New Year!" as fireworks blossomed over the landmark Macao Tower at midnight.

The New Year countdown gig, staged for the seventh time in Macao by Jiangsu Satellite Television, again saw pop stars from home and abroad elicit screams and thunderous applause from fans.

"To me, Macao has truly lived up to its reputation as a city of performances," says a college student surnamed Sun from southwest China's Chongqing municipality who came to Macao specifically for the shows.

During the three-day New Year holiday, tourists from home and abroad flocked into Macao for its



Left: Fireworks celebrating New Year's Day illuminate the Macao Tower. Right: Visitors soak up the New Year atmosphere at the Senado Square. PHOTOS BY ZHANG JINJIA / XINHUA



festive welcome, with long queues at border ports between Macao and its neighboring mainland city of Zhuhai.

Data from the Macao Government Tourism Office shows visi-

tor arrivals in Macao on New Year's Eve reached 175,030, a record high daily number since the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Total visitor arrivals in 2023 reached 2.23 million, recovering to around

70 percent of the 2019 level.

The office says visitor arrivals in Macao kept rising in 2023 after customs clearance fully recovered, which proved Macao's attractiveness as a world tourism

and leisure destination.

The tourism office also joins hands with major local enterprises to present romantic and colorful, interactive light installations, illuminating the entire city with dazzling

and charming shows and turning it into a unique late-night paradise.

At the Mount Fortress garden in the city center, multiple large-scale festival installations and dazzling lighting decorations, including a flashing giant bear and a 7-meter-tall Santa Claus — accompanied by romantic snowfall, colorful light shows and live music performances every night — captured the hearts of visitors and residents alike.

"I found Macao very busy and lively this holiday, with rich festive decorations and food," says one tourist from Zhuhai.

Warm weather also returned to Macao during the holiday after the cold snap of previous days, encouraging more locals to go out and enjoy the sunshine along the city's long coastline.

"I wish for a better year ahead, not just for my family, but also for Macao and our country," says a resident surnamed Qu who was busy barbecuing on Macao's unique black sand beach.

XINHUA

CULTURE

Sun, sea and symphony

Hainan music festival strikes a chord with visitors, **Chen Bowen** reports in Haikou.

This December, sea breeze lent a romantic touch to the coconut groves in South China's Hainan province. Soft and warm, it added to the joy of the musical gathering.

Under the theme of "Making Cultural Dialogue, Boosting Cooperation through Music", the first Hainan International Music Festival was held from Dec 10 to Dec 24 in Haikou, capital city of Hainan.

Every weekend for a month, international artists, Grammy Awards winners and world-class orchestras gathered in the tropical city, where both classical and modern music were performed by musicians old and young alike. The concerts were held at the city's many natural and cultural landmarks, turning Haikou into a city where melodies strengthen its ties with the rest of the world.

"We seek to promote Hainan's cultural prosperity and build an international cultural exchange platform, in an effort to enhance the international caliber of the Hainan Free Trade Port and make Haikou a city of music," said renowned pianist Wan Jieni, who is also the artistic director of the Hainan International Music Festival.

Around 100 top musicians from all over the world, including Jaap van Zweden, current music director of both the New York and the Hong Kong Philharmonic orchestras, and one of the top conductors in the world, gathered to perform the opening concert held on Dec 10 at the Haikou Bay Performance Center. Van Zweden led the festival orchestra with Wan in a Ludwig van Beethoven-centric program: *Egmont Overture*, the *Third Piano Concerto* and the monumental *Fifth Symphony*.

Van Zweden said after the concert that he liked the encore piece very much, which is a work featuring Hainan elements, *The Happy Woman Soldiers Suite* from the ballet *The Red Detachment of Women*, and that he was quite moved by the audience's enthusiasm. He believed that the opening concert was a success. "I enjoyed my time in Hainan, particularly the natural scenery of Haikou. I look forward to coming back to the Hainan International Music Festival next time," the conductor said.

When asked why the opening concert focused on the works of Beethoven, Wan said that many Chinese people are very familiar with the composer. "We chose Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*, also known as *Symphony of Destiny*, in the opening concert, because it is from C minor to C major. The musical development process also indicates that we can overcome difficulties in life, as long as we never give up and have perseverance," she explained.

Wan comes to Haikou every year to both perform and rest. She has witnessed the city's fast development, including that of its coastline, where a number of fashionable and well-designed high-rises have sprung up.

Wan noted that every time she runs along the coastal path under the Haikou Century Bridge at sunrise, she always thinks of the classical melodies of Beethoven, Johannes Brahms, Sergey Rachmaninoff and others.

She said the idea of holding an international music festival in Haikou dawned on



Clockwise from top: Wan Jieni, renowned pianist and artistic director of the Hainan International Music Festival, is congratulated by conductor Jaap van Zweden at the opening concert held on Dec 10 at the Haikou Bay Performance Center; a flash mob activity is held in the Temple of Five Lords in Haikou on Dec 16; the Wave Jazz Party on the center lawn of Sky Mountain, Haikou Bay, on Dec 23. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

her three years ago. "Haikou has a unique natural landscape, Hainan island is a famous international tourism destination, and music is the language of the world. It is really romantic to present an international festival centered around music, culture and artistic dialogue by the sea, combining the trend of art, local culture and the marine landscape of Haikou."

Xu Mo, a 39-year-old classical music enthusiast from Shanghai, has often traveled to Berlin and Salzburg to attend music festivals. "I'm amazed to see the world's top conductor and pianist tonight. For locals and tourists, the opening concert is definitely a grand musical and cultural feast. I think the continuous applause is the best praise and gratitude to the musicians," he said.

Lyu Sijing and Major Ensemble concert brought the *Eternal Four Seasons*, which comprises Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* and Astor Piazzolla's *Four Seasons of Buenos Aires*, to music fans in Haikou on the evening of Dec 12. After the performance of Vivaldi's and Piazzolla's works, Lyu and the orchestra returned three times to the audience's enthusiastic applause and wrapped up the whole concert performing the classic *The Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto*.

Xing Boshen, 25, a local music fan, admitted that he immediately burst into tears when he heard Lyu perform his rendition of *The Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto*, pushing the concert to its climax.

"It was said that Hainan is a cultural desert. But under the construction of Hainan Free Trade Port, the tropical island has

"We seek to promote Hainan's cultural prosperity and build an international cultural exchange platform, in an effort to enhance the international caliber of the Hainan Free Trade Port and make Haikou a city of music."

Wan Jieni, pianist, artistic director of the Hainan International Music Festival

quickly developed culture and art industries, and now it has successfully held international music festivals, film festivals and exhibitions," he said.

Xing added that he noticed some interesting details while attending the concert. The locals like to wear slippers and shorts throughout the year on the island, but for the concert, they all dressed formally to learn and appreciate the music.

He was more than happy to see such an international music festival held in the city. "For young people, after a whole day's work, we can release ourselves by listening to and appreciating the beautiful music which reso-

nates with our feelings," he said.

Liu Bingqian, 29, came to Hainan from the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region in 2016. She attended the Wave Jazz Party of the festival on Dec 23 and 24. While Grammy-winning Cameroonian multi-instrumentalist Richard Bona and his Asante Trio performed, Liu and her friends danced in front of the stage along with the jazz. "I've practiced swing dance, which goes perfectly with the jazz music, and I sincerely hope that Hainan will have more music events like this," she said.

During the festival, there were also flash mob activities across the city. For example, in the Qilou Old Street, which features a stylish fusion of European, Southeast Asian and traditional Chinese architecture, a music flash mob is "a perfect collision of Eastern and Western cultures," Xing said. "The historical street and the music is a perfect combination."

He is looking forward to seeing that the next festival will have more Hainan culture and music elements like folk songs of the Li and Miao ethnic groups and Hainan Eight Tunes, referring to the eight types of musical instruments made of materials cultivated in the province, in the performances.

"When music kisses the waves and the coconut grove, it will certainly spark our imagination. In December, we give free rein to the tons of imagination that music brings in Haikou," Wan said.

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Chinese art exhibition in US bridges hometowns and hearts

The photograph that greeted me at the entrance to a special exhibition at the Cleveland Museum of Art had a startling familiarity.

The water bristled with the umbrella-like leaves of lotus plants, a grand gathering of bright green parasols under the summer sunlight. Behind them, the gentle slope of a long stone arch bridge balanced a white car and a handful of pedestrians. Willow trees bowed before the shoreline, while a mountain silhouette traced the horizon.

Excitement stirred within me as I realized I had gazed upon that lotus

field, walked that

bridge, wandered under those willows, and hiked those mountains. "Look, that's the West Lake! That's in Hangzhou, where I live!"

I lingered before the image, sharing my amazement with the family members who had accompanied me — my father, stepmother,

uncles and aunt — and with a volunteer at the museum.

How did my hometown of Cleveland, Ohio, just happen to lead a special exhibition titled *China's Southern Paradise: Treasures from the Lower Yangtze River* with a photograph from my adopted hometown in China? Hangzhou had captured my heart as the region where I met my husband and experienced many coming-of-age moments, including my Chinese-style wedding ceremony. Never did I imagine that Hangzhou would join hands with the city of my childhood to share some of its greatest treasures with my fellow Clevelanders.

But on reflection, none of this should have surprised me. After all, the Cleveland Museum of Art had quietly kindled my passion for China many years ago.

The museum boasts one of the West's most acclaimed collections of Chinese art, spanning over 5,000 years with many notable works. While visiting the museum as a young adult, I was invariably drawn to the scrolls painted with fantastical mountainous landscapes, solemn statues of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, and fine porcelain wares, from celadon green to classic blue and white.

Viewing these Chinese art collections brought me an inexplicable sense of solace, at a time when I was still nursing grief from the untimely loss of my mother. Was it serendipity or evidence of a greater destiny? Regardless, these artifacts offered a different window into China, beyond the politics and posturing that dominated news I encountered about the country.

And once I made the decision to live and work in China, which eventually became a lifelong commitment, complete with a husband and family in Hangzhou, I found myself straddling two countries and cultures that don't always agree.

But the Cleveland Museum of Art, in building a bridge between Cleveland and Hangzhou through this special exhibition, renewed my hope as an example of an American institution that values cultural exchanges with China, even at a time when over 80 percent of my fellow Americans harbor negative views of the country, according to a 2023 survey by the Pew Research Center.

At the special exhibition, I was delighted to show my family in Cleveland renowned artifacts from Hangzhou, including a ceremonial jade disk from the Liangzhu Culture, and the names of museums I frequented there, such as the Zhejiang Provincial Museum. It reminded me of how art has the power to forge connections across cultures and highlight our shared humanity.

My father snapped a picture of me and my stepmother standing in front of that photograph at the start of the exhibition. For one fleeting moment, I stood together with my family in Cleveland before an image of Hangzhou's West Lake, bridging the gap between the two cities that lay claim to my heart. For me, it was truly a cross-cultural work of art.

The writer is a freelancer for China Daily.

Historians book a place on roll for top awards

By WANG RU wangru1@chinadaily.com.cn

A total of 41 books and 20 journals of historical studies have been awarded at the ceremony of the Guo Moruo Chinese History Awards, which was held in Beijing on Dec 20.

Award winners included books of general history, dynastic history, archaeology, paleography and paleoanthropology. For example, *Study on the Form of Ancient Chinese Villages* makes a systematic analysis of the birth, form and evolutionary traits of ancient villages in China, providing insights into the relationship between villages and the ruling dynasties, as well as the power structure within the villages themselves.

The book was written by Ma Xin, a professor at the Shandong University's School of History and Culture, who mainly studies village society during the Qin (221-206 BC) and Han (206 BC-AD 220) dynasties.

"In academic research, we must make clear the relationship between the whole and the parts. Without an understanding of the overall development of village society, we cannot thoroughly understand the Qin and Han village societies," says Ma, explain-

ing why she wrote the book.

Other award winners include *History of Social Life in the Early 20th Century*, a book about the many facets of people's lives, like diet, clothes, festival celebrations and entertainment in early 20th-century China, and *Organization and Study on Ancient Bronze Vessels in China*, a collection covering the development of various types of bronze vessels from Erlitou Culture, which existed from the 18th to 16th century BC to the late period of the Warring States Period (475-221 BC).

Three books that popularize history knowledge to the public were honored as well, including *Uninterrupted History of Civilization: Archaeological Interpretation of Five Thousand Years of Chinese National Identity*, written by Liu Qingzhu, a researcher with the Institute of Archaeology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

According to Liu, China is the only nation with an uninterrupted civilizational history of 5,000 years. The dynasties established by different people in various times have a shared national identity.

That can be shown in layouts of capitals from the Erlitou site in Luoyang, Henan province, widely believed to be the capital of the late period of the Xia Dynasty (c. 21st



Xu Lan (right), a professor at the Capital Normal University, receives a Guo Moruo Chinese History Award in Beijing on Dec 20. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

century-16th century BC), to the Palace Museum in Beijing, China's imperial palace from 1420 to 1911; and in tomb systems from those at Yinxi Ruins in Anyang, Henan, capital of the late Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century-11th century BC) to the ones of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), as he demonstrates in his book.

According to Gao Xiang, president of the CASS, the award-winning works are intellectually profound, academically cutting-edge, reflecting the rigorous and practical academic character of historians, each of

whom dare to innovate, are willing to take responsibility, and relentlessly pursue the truth.

They fully demonstrate the new progress, achievements and atmosphere of Chinese historical studies in the new era, he adds.

Named in honor of Guo Moruo (1892-1978), a Chinese historian and writer, the award was initiated in 1998 to promote the development of the nation's history studies. It is regarded as one of the most authoritative prizes in domestic history circles.