

Innovative masks

Inheritor of distinctive tradition brings touch of tech to makeup

CHINA, PAGE 5



Xi's New Year address brings brighter hopes

WORLD, PAGE 7



Robust growth

Country's solar sector has climbed to new heights, but challenges loom

BUSINESS FOCUS, PAGE 10

CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中国日报 WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 3, 2024



Reduced to rubble

Above: People walk past earthquake-hit homes in Wajima City, Ishikawa Prefecture, Japan, on Tuesday. At least 48 people died after a magnitude 7.6 earthquake hit western Japan on New Year's Day. KUNIHICO MIURA / REUTERS Right: A severely damaged building in Wajima, Japan, on Tuesday. KYODO NEWS / VIA AP See story, page 3



Open approach to ties offers mutual benefits

China's neighborhood diplomacy gives strong impetus to cooperation

By ZHANG YUNBI zhangyunbi@chinadaily.com.cn

China valuing its neighbors is not an empty slogan, as President Xi Jinping met with leaders or senior officials from neighboring Asian countries in each of the 12 months of the past year.

Beijing's great focus on its neighbors could also be seen in the fact that two of Xi's four trips abroad last year were to neighboring countries — to Russia in March and to Vietnam in December.

China's neighborhood diplomacy has secured more opportunities in the post-pandemic era to spur mutually beneficial pragmatic cooperation and economic growth with Asian countries in the past year, observers said.

As a host nation, China greeted a number of leaders from neighboring countries at bilateral, international and regional-level events, giving a strong impetus to bilateral and regional cooperation.

Vice-Foreign Minister Sun Weidong said at a seminar last year that head-of-state diplomacy "plays an irreplaceable, leading role" and "navigates and charts China's relations with its neighbors".

China is now the largest trading partner of 18 neighboring countries, according to the Foreign Ministry.

In 2022, the total annual amount of commodity imports and exports between China and its neighboring countries exceeded \$2.17 trillion.

Xu Liping, a senior researcher on Southeast Asian studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences,

said that China's neighborhood diplomacy policy "is open, transparent and could stand the test of history".

"Beijing is action-oriented and fully sincere in developing its friendly relations with its neighbors", and its clear policy gesture and emphasis on neighborhood diplomacy could help minimize misjudgment and misunderstanding and advance political mutual trust, he added.

Last year also marked the 10th anniversary of Xi proposing the landmark concept that guides the nation's neighborhood diplomacy — "amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness".

When celebrating this concept in October, Xi and senior Chinese diplomats highlighted Beijing's fresh pledge to jointly advance Asia's modernization with neighbors and to build on "Asian values" featuring peace, cooperation, inclusiveness and integration.

Beijing also issued a policy paper titled "Outlook on China's Foreign Policy on its Neighborhood in the New Era", the first official document focused on elaborating China's neighborhood diplomacy policy.

Acting on the concept of "amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness", China has played a key part in maintaining peace and stability in Asia, and in the last year, it worked on constructively mediating a temporary cease-fire in Myanmar and promoting a political settlement to the Afghanistan issue.

China has also contributed to the latest progress in China-Japan-Re-

public of Korea trilateral cooperation and the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation, experts noted.

Zhang Jie, a veteran researcher at the Institute of Asia-Pacific and Global Strategy of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said this evolving concept helps China and neighboring countries direct more focus on development, so they could reach more consensus.

"Also, it is extremely relevant to global pursuits for openness, inclusiveness, connectivity and common prosperity," she added.

More than 10 years ago, Kazakhstan and Indonesia — China's close neighbors by land and sea — witnessed President Xi for his first time put forward the initiative to co-build the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, respectively, in September and November of 2013.

Last year marked the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative, and China's joint efforts to build the Belt and Road with its neighbors yielded new fruit.

Yasiru Ranaraja, director and co-founder of Belt and Road Initiative Sri Lanka, an international development organization in Sri Lanka, said, "In the last 10 years, the redirection of investments under the BRI, which included Hambantota Port, Colombo Port City and Colombo Port, is a testament to the visionary leadership not only for Sri Lanka but also for regional development".

"The critical infrastructure assets constructed under the BRI are expected to drive long-term economic growth," he added.

See *Diplomacy*, page 3

Thailand to permanently waive visa for Chinese tourists starting in March

By YANG WANLI in Bangkok yangwanli@chinadaily.com.cn

28 million

Number of foreign tourist arrivals in Thailand last year, including 3.4 million from China

Thailand will permanently waive visa requirements for Chinese tourists starting on March 1, Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavasin announced on Tuesday after a Cabinet meeting in Bangkok.

Thailand had previously granted a temporary visa waiver for visitors from China and Kazakhstan, which is set to expire on Feb 29.

After negotiations with related Chinese authorities, the Thai government has now opted to adopt a permanent visa-free policy for Chinese tourists starting on March 1, Srettha said at a news conference following the Cabinet meeting.

"This will not only boost Thailand's tourism industry but also signify further improvement in the friendly relations between the two countries," he added.

In Beijing, Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin confirmed that authorities on the two sides are in close communication

regarding the matter and China looks forward to the arrangement's early implementation.

"The further strengthening of people-to-people exchanges and the mutual visa exemption policy (once implemented) will conform to the fundamental interests of both peoples," Wang told reporters at a regular news briefing on Tuesday.

Tourism plays a crucial role in Thailand's economy, with 28 million foreign tourist arrivals recorded last year, including about 4.4 million visitors from Malaysia, and 3.4 million from China.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinese nationals comprised the biggest group of foreign tourists to Thailand, with 10 million visits each year.

Thailand now plans a 3.5-trillion-baht (\$102 billion) boost for its economy via the tourism sector in 2024, aiming to establish the nation as an all-season tourist destination.

During the Tourism Authority of Thailand's recent promotion activity targeting the Chinese market, Sudawan Wangsuphakijkosol, Thai minister of tourism and sports, said that China has been a key source market for Thailand and has had a significant impact on the Thai economy.

"The Thai government is committed to providing high-quality tourism experiences for Chinese tourists. Our strategies include the development of new attractions in tandem with the promotion of Thai soft powers and meaningful travel experiences," she said.

"Equally important is the safety measures to ensure that Chinese tourists can enjoy peace of mind throughout their travels in Thailand," she added.

Mo Jingci contributed to this story.

ECONOMIC RECOVERY EXPECTED TO CONTINUE THIS YEAR

Nation places significant emphasis on maintaining reasonable GDP growth rate

By ZHOU LANXU zhoulanxu@chinadaily.com.cn



At first glance, the situation faced by China's economy may not appear to offer hope for a strong recovery.

The slump in the property sector continued to linger, while sentiment on the stock market appeared to be lukewarm, with the Shanghai Composite Index ending last year's trading below the key 3,000-point benchmark.

However, a rational look at the

situation shows there is plenty of potential amid the current difficulties.

With governments at different levels well aware of the challenges faced by the property sector, measures to resolve the problem have been stepped up, and international investment banks are

now predicting only a narrowing contraction for the sector.

The investment banks are forecasting that household consumption and services activity will further normalize this year after the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic. Exports may strengthen as global trade recovers, while manufacturing and infrastructure investment is expected to remain buoyant due to industrial upgrading and policy support.

See *Economy*, page 2

Country's strategic priorities reflect Chinese wisdom

The economic evaluations and valuable suggestions of the annual Central Economic Work Conference and the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee during recent meetings have successfully mitigated false propaganda from the West against China's economy and its so-called poor prospects.

This has further enhanced the confidence of investors, business owners and even manufacturers in the region and around the world.

WORLD WATCH By Mehmood Ul Hassan Khan

It also has rightly disseminated a message of economic stability, sustainability and healthier prospects to local, regional and international markets.

In addition, the nation's recently announced strategic priorities — science technology, innovation,

development of a modern industrial system, the boosting of domestic demand, support for agriculture and rural farmers, integration of urban-rural development, coordinated regional development, immense social development, high-level opening-up and prevention of risks in key areas — vividly reflect the economic wisdom of Chinese policymakers.

Moreover, the advancement of ecological conservation and green, low carbon development will

hopefully further enhance China's economic productivity in the next year and beyond. This would be a value addition in fighting global warming in the days to come.

It is a good omen that upward revision of China's GDP growth forecast for 2023 by numerous international financial institutions, including the International Monetary Fund (5 to 5.4 percent), the Organization for Economic

See *Efforts*, page 3

Knife attack



South Korean opposition leader Lee Jae-myung is attended to after being attacked in Busan on Tuesday. Lee was stabbed in the neck by a man who pushed through a crowd pretending to be his supporter. XINHUA



INSIDE Tapping RCEP's potential Global Views, page 13

www.chinadailyglobal.com Member of ANN Asia News Network

Newsstand prices: US \$1, Canada C\$1, UK £1, EU €1, Kenya 50 Kenya Shilling, Asia Pacific: Thailand 120 THB, Philippines 120 PHP, Myanmar 2000 Kyat, Japan 210 Yen, Dubai 10 Dirham, Pakistan 300 Rupee

PAGE TWO

Economy: Fiscal expansion likely to be bolstered



From page 1

The economy is considered to have bottomed out in the middle of last year, and the recovery momentum is poised to continue this year, helping secure GDP growth of around or slightly less than 5 percent, economists and experts said.

Such a pace would be largely on par with that of last year, when China's economy is forecast by the World Bank to have grown by 5.2 percent. Individuals and enterprises will likely fare better this year, experts said, as growth will be driven more by the economy's underlying momentum, rather than a favorable comparison base.

In other words, the Chinese economy is poised to see further improvements in 2024.

Last month's tone-setting Central Economic Work Conference called for efforts to continuously consolidate and promote the positive momentum of economic recovery, while recognizing that some difficulties and challenges must be tackled to achieve this goal. Such hurdles include a lack of effective demand, overcapacity in some industries, weak social expectations, and numerous hidden risks.

As a result, the conference underlined the necessity of adhering to the general principle of seeking progress while maintaining stability, promoting stability through progress, and establishing the new before abolishing the old.

Zhang Ming, deputy director of the Institute of Finance and Banking at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, or CASS, said the expression "promoting stability through progress" indicates that policymakers are placing significant emphasis on maintaining a reasonable GDP growth rate this year.

The policy stance of stepping up growth stabilization efforts, coupled with the unfolding recovery momentum and ongoing efforts to resolve financial risks associated with the real estate sector and local government debt issues, have laid the foundation for China's economic performance to improve in 2024, Zhang said.

"Even though the GDP growth rate for 2024, which is expected to be around 5 percent, may be lower than that of 2023, the actual economic momentum and the perceptions of entities at the micro level will significantly improve," Zhang added.

The Chinese economy hit the bottom in July, and has been recovering gradually since August, with retail sales and exports improving, and such momentum is expected to be sustained this year, Zhang said.

The nation's economic growth stood at 5.2 percent for the first three quarters of last year. There was a strong rebound in the first quarter due to adjusted COVID-19 policies, but weaker growth in the second quarter amid sluggish domestic and external demand, renewed property sector weakness and rising local government debt pressures.

Growth solidified in the second half of last year as policy support was stepped up. In November, export growth turned positive at 0.5 percent year-on-year in dollar terms, while retail sales rose by 10.1 percent amid a broader pickup in business as services activity and industrial output also accelerated, official data showed.

Zhu Haibin, chief China economist at JPMorgan, forecasts the economy to grow by 4.9 percent this year, in line with what he expects will be an official 2024 growth target of around 5 percent.



The Central Economic Work Conference decided that proactive fiscal policies should be strengthened appropriately and their effectiveness improved, while prudent monetary policies should be flexible, moderate, precise and effective.

Experts said China will likely strengthen fiscal expansion and take accommodative monetary steps to jointly address the challenge of sufficient demand this year, helping further anchor price levels nationwide.

Support for demand

China's consumer price index, a key gauge of inflation, dropped by 0.5 percent year-on-year in November, following a 0.2 percent dip in October, indicating that demand remained weak.

Pointing to policymakers' emphasis on bringing price levels to a more reasonable range, Pan Gongsheng, governor of the PBOC, said late last month that the central bank will match the growth of social financing and money supply with the expected targets for both economic growth and price levels.

Zheng Houcheng, chief macroeconomist at Yingda Securities Co, said the PBOC will likely cut interest rates or the reserve requirement ratio — the proportion of money lenders must keep as reserves — in the first quarter of this year, when the economy needs support amid global economic downward pressures, while low inflation provides room for easing.

Last month, China's major banks reduced interest rates on deposits, a move experts see as heralding cuts in benchmark lending rates. Such reductions are considered essential for easing the debt servicing costs for businesses and households, thus bolstering their willingness to invest and consume.

Positive signals are also evident on the fiscal front.

Last month, the annual work conference of the Ministry of Finance vowed to maintain a proper fiscal expenditure level, set the scale of government investment smartly to give full play to its effects, and optimize tax and fee policies by making them more accurate and target-oriented.

Wen Bin, chief economist at China Minsheng Bank, said the nation may set this year's budgeted deficit-to-GDP ratio at about 3.5 percent, and this figure could be raised further if economic growth misses expectations.

Last year, the deficit-to-GDP ratio was raised from 3 percent to about 3.8 percent in October, following approval for the issuance of special treasury bonds worth 1 trillion yuan.

Wen said the annual quota of local government special-purpose bonds may rise to 4 trillion yuan this year, up from 3.8 trillion yuan in 2023.

With the economy expected to further normalize this year, Wen said China's annual consumer price index growth may recover to 1 percent, up from an estimated 0.2 percent last year, as spending strengthens, global commodity prices increase, and domestic food prices edge up.

Kristina Hooper, chief global market strategist at Invesco, a worldwide investment management company, said she is positive about the performance of Chinese equities this year, as more macroeconomic support looks to be forthcoming.

Ivan Gonzalez, CEO of reinsurance and country president at Swiss Re China, said the Chinese government has some flexibility from a policy perspective to cope with external and domestic challenges, which will help the economy grow by around 4.5 percent this year based on the reinsurer's forecast.

"Although this growth could be below the level China has experienced in the past few years, it will still be the highest growth among emerging and developed economies in 2024," Gonzalez added.

ILLUSTRATION BY LI MIN / CHINA DAILY AND ART BY LU PING / CHINA DAILY

As incomes improve, consumption is expected to be the primary driver — contributing about two-thirds to this year's GDP growth, Zhu said. The household savings rate may also move lower, meaning that consumers tend to spend more of their income.

The investment will contribute about one-third of growth, while the net export contribution will be minor, he said. Manufacturing and infrastructure investment activity will continue to outperform, but the growth rate may moderate.

Real estate investment will be the swing factor, Zhu said, with the decline possibly narrowing to about 2 percent to 4 percent this year, compared with almost 10 percent in 2023.

The narrowing decline is based on a forecast that the People's Bank of China, or PBOC, the central bank, may use pledged supplementary lending (PSL) and other policy tools to provide about 1 trillion yuan (\$139.8 billion) in funding support for affordable housing and shantytown redevelopment projects, Zhu said. "This move should be very helpful for growth reaching nearly 5 percent," Zhu added.

The Central Economic Work Conference emphasized the need to ensure stable and sound development of the real estate market and advance the construction of affordable housing and public infrastructure for both normal and emergency use, along with the renovation of shantytowns in cities.

Focus on property

In the first 11 months of last year, China's total fixed-asset investment in real estate development fell by 9.4 percent year-on-year, while the total area of properties sold declined by 8 percent, the National Bureau of Statistics said.

Experts said the property market downturn has had a negative spillover effect on the nation's economic health due to the sector's extensive links to upstream and downstream industries, and local government revenue. Weakening housing prices also eroded

household wealth, which in turn dampened consumer spending.

Zhang Bin, deputy director of CASS' Institute of World Economics and Politics, said measures aimed at stabilizing the real estate sector are now the "No 1 policy" for macroeconomic stability, as the sector has overshot to the downside, dragging down overall demand.

"The property market has reached a tipping point, as not only should some purchase restrictions be lifted, but some incentives are also needed for home buying," said Zhang Bin, who is also a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the country's top political advisory body.

As part of the latest steps to stabilize the real estate market, Beijing and Shanghai reduced down payment ratios and mortgage rate floors in the middle of last month,

after Guangzhou and Shenzhen in Guangdong province eased housing market policies.

Lu Ting, chief China economist at Nomura, a leading international financial institution, said measures to bolster housing demand would be more effective in stabilizing the market if the critical issue of presold home delivery was fully resolved.

Recovery in the property sector still faces a key obstacle, as many presold housing projects are not delivered on time, which has discouraged families from buying properties, and made it even harder for real estate developers to secure sufficient funding to deliver such homes, Lu said.

It is necessary for the central government to break the negative cycle and strengthen support for the delivery of presold homes this year, perhaps with a monetary and fiscal package worth about 3 trillion yuan based on preliminary estimates, he said.

Lu added that the scope for China to ease monetary and fiscal policies is expanding, as downward pressures on the renminbi against the dollar have eased, with the US projected to enter a cycle of interest rate cuts this year.

TOP NEWS

Railway turns Laos from landlocked to land-linked

By AN BALJIE and HOU CHENCHEN

China and Laos are collaborating to facilitate quicker cross-border customs clearance between the two countries to enhance railway transportation efficiency, said a diplomat of the Lao embassy in China.

Chindavong Xaiyasin, counselor of education and culture at the Lao embassy in China, disclosed in an exclusive interview with China Daily that Laos' deputy minister of foreign affairs visited Beijing last week to explore ways to further reduce the time taken to clear customs when traveling by train.

The ongoing discussions focus on cutting border port clearance time from two hours to one, Xaiyasin said.

The China-Laos Railway began operations in December 2021, and cross-border passenger services began in April 2023. The 1,035-kilometer electrified line links Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province, with Vientiane, the capital of Laos.

When passenger services started in 2023, it took a combined three hours to clear customs at the railway ports of Mohan in China and Boten in Laos.

Mohan port established an office and initiated a 24-hour green channel dedicated to expediting clearance procedures for the China-Laos Railway.

By July, due to collaborative efforts between China and Laos, the total clearance time was reduced from three hours to two. This resulted in a 64-minute reduction in travel duration, with the total journey time from Kunming to Vientiane now taking 9 hours and 26 minutes, according to the train schedule of China Railway Kunming Group.

The increasingly efficient China-Laos Railway is fueling Laos' growth and revitalizing trade and economy in Southeast Asia, Xaiyasin said.

Laos, a landlocked country in Southeast Asia, had long struggled with expensive transportation that limited its trade and development.

"Laotian people had never seen trains. Until I went to school in China at the age of 15, I had not seen a train car," Xaiyasin said during a meeting at the Communication University of China last week.

Ever since the country became independent in the 1960s, a railway network has been the demand of the people of Laos. President Xi Jinping responded to this demand in 2015,

when leaders of the two countries made a major decision to build the China-Laos Railway.

"With the railway, the mountain from Kunming to Vientiane is no longer high, and the road no longer long," Xi said at the railway's opening ceremony. He expressed the hope that the railway would develop into "a golden line for the benefit of the people of both countries".

Benefiting from the project under the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative, the people of Laos are seeing opportunities being created by the railway that links the country with China and the rest of the world, according to Xinhua News Agency.

A World Bank estimate said the China-Laos Railway could reduce domestic transportation costs by 20 to 40 percent in Laos, and cut cross-border transportation costs between Kunming and Vientiane by 40 to 50 percent.

Last month, the integration of the China-Laos Railway and the China-

Europe Railway Express project established a new international logistics route, reducing transportation time between Southeast Asia and Europe to approximately 15 days.

"The railway fulfills Laos' strategy, transforming the country from landlocked to land-linked," Xaiyasin said at the sharing session.

He said that Laos and China are now paying close attention to personnel training to ensure the sustainable operation of the railway network.

In 2022, Laos sent 40 students to Kunming Railway Vocational and Technical College in Yunnan. They have now returned to Laos after completing 18 months of study, and are ready to guide the next generation of transportation professionals, Xaiyasin said.

Bai Wengang, a professor of government and public affairs at the Communication University of China said, "The China-Laos Railway tells us that the Chinese path to modernization is not just about China's own development, but also about fostering the development of our neighbors."

He added that the country should embrace all ethnicities and cultures to create what President Xi called a shared future for China-Laos community, for Asian community and for global community.

Contact the writers at anbaijie@chinadaily.com.cn



Chindavong Xaiyasin

Star performer



A performer dressed as a Stormtrooper dances on Monday during the New Year's Day Parade in London, the United Kingdom. HOLLIE ADAMS / REUTERS

Quakes in Japan cause radioactive water spills

Widespread devastation kills dozens, halts power supplies

By JIANG XUEQING in Tokyo jiangxueqing@chinadaily.com.cn

Radioactive water from the fuel pools of two reactors at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa Nuclear Power Plant in Japan's Niigata prefecture spilled over after a magnitude 7.6 earthquake and multiple aftershocks rocked the country on New Year's Day.

Plant officials said on Monday no abnormalities in operation had been detected.

The plant, owned and operated by Tokyo Electric Power Co, has been offline since the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami destroyed TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi plant and caused its Fukushima Daini plant to cease operations.

Monday's powerful temblor and series of aftershocks killed at least 48 people, with rescue teams struggling on Tuesday to reach isolated areas where buildings had been toppled, roads wrecked and power cut to tens of thousands of homes, Reuters reported.

In Beijing, Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said at a regular news conference that China extends its condolences to Japan over the loss of lives and "sympathies to the families who have lost loved ones and to those who have been injured".

He said the Chinese embassy in Tokyo and the consulates in Nagoya and Niigata immediately activated the emergency response

mechanism and released consular notices.

"So far, there has been no reports of Chinese casualties," he added.

The quake with a preliminary magnitude of 7.6 struck on Monday afternoon, prompting people in coastal areas to flee to higher ground as tsunami waves hit Japan's western seaboard, sweeping cars and houses into the water.

A 3,000-strong rescue team comprising army personnel, firefighters and police officers has been sent to the quake site on the Noto peninsula in Ishikawa prefecture, according to Reuters.

The Japan Meteorological Agency said it has detected around 200 tremors between Monday and

Tuesday, and warned of more aftershocks in the coming days.

The Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant is one of the world's largest nuclear plants in terms of output. It is about 400 kilometers from Noto.

TEPCO said that about 10 liters of water containing radioactive materials spilled from the fuel pool of the No 2 reactor and about 4 liters from the fuel pool of the No 7 reactor at around 6:45 pm on Monday.

After the 2011 earthquake triggered a triple meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi plant, Japan introduced a maximum operating life of 60 years for its nuclear reactors.

However, the limit was scrapped in May as the nation shifted its policy to promote nuclear energy, aiming for an early restart of nuclear power plants, The Yomiuri Shimbun reported.

Critics said it is unacceptable for the Japanese government to reverse its policy without seeking a path to resolve problems caused by damaged nuclear power plants.

Mo Jingqi in Beijing contributed to this story.



Dancers welcome passengers from China at the Vientiane station in Laos on April 13 following the launch of passenger services of the China-Laos Railway. The train runs from Kunming, the capital of China's Yunnan province, to Vientiane, the capital of Laos. XING GUANGLI / XINHUA

Diplomacy: China to deepen friendship with neighbors

From page 1

In October, the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway — China and Indonesia's BRI flagship project — went into operation, making the Southeast Asian country the second in the world to have a high-speed railway, with a maximum speed of 350 kilometers per hour.

Chinese Ambassador to Indonesia Lu Kang said in a local media opinion piece last month that he is pleased to hear that the number of tourists in and around Bandung has risen rapidly, and retail stores have emerged around several high-speed rail stations, boosting the incomes

and employment of local people.

Stressing that Asia is the region with the greatest economic dynamism and potential in the world today, Lu said, "We will never allow Cold War thinking, bloc-based confrontation and external interference to undermine the hard-won development environment in Asia, and we must always put the future of Asia's long-term stability in our own hands."

In recent years, neighbors such as Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Indonesia, Thailand, Mongolia and Malaysia have each signed up to building a bilateral community of shared future with China, and

observers have taken the number of such countries as a key indicator for evaluating China's mutual trust with its partners.

Vietnam joined this group during Xi's state visit in December, as it agreed to work with China to build a community of shared future that carries strategic significance.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi told reporters last month that this "marks the full coverage" of building a community of shared future between China and Indochina Peninsula countries and "is another important step in promoting the building of a global community of shared future".

Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said that in the future, China will "deepen its friendship, cooperation and integration of interests with neighboring countries" and carry forward Asian values, providing a fresh boost to the region's unity, openness and progress.

"We are ready to deliver more benefits to neighboring countries through Chinese modernization, jointly advance the modernization drive in Asia, and build a peaceful, safe and secure, prosperous, beautiful, amicable and harmonious Asian home with other countries in the region," Mao said at a news conference last week.

Efforts: Nation embraces policies of openness, modernization and intl cooperation

From page 1

Cooperation and Development (5 to 5.2 percent), Morgan Stanley (4.8 to 5.1 percent) and Citigroup (5 to 5.3 percent), clearly demonstrated the real strength and diversification of the Chinese economy during 2023.

These published reports have also expressed optimism about China's growth outlook for 2024, as the institutions believe that domestic consumption will continue to recover, investment will continue to increase and exports will improve. So, all in all, the Chinese economy will be in good shape, creating lots of good things for the global economy and productive channels in 2024 and beyond.

China's macroeconomy remained resilient, strong, stable and sustainable during 2023. Hopefully, it will

be further developed and diversified in 2024 and beyond because of its huge base and productivity channels.

According to China's official figures released in December, the nation's economy has again contributed about one-third to global economic growth, showing again its global outreach and comparative advantage in industrial supply chains, green energy and electric vehicles.

The comparative study of the latest Chinese statistical data shows that it achieved its agriculture targets — 695 million metric tons of grain output in 2023, further enhanced by 1.3 percent from last year — and thus its food security is intact. In the first three quarters of 2023, expenditure of end consumers contributed 83.2 percent of economic growth, and the total exports

of electric passenger vehicles, lithium-ion batteries and solar batteries reached 798.99 billion yuan (\$112 billion), up 41.7 percent year-on-year.

The increase in the amount of foreign direct investment that China received in 2021 and 2022, to 12 percent and 15 percent of the global amount, respectively, showed global confidence in China's vast market. In the first nine months of 2023, new foreign invested enterprises registered in China increased 32.4 percent year-on-year to 37,814. Last but not least, China-Europe freight trains made 16,145 trips during the first 11 months of 2023 reconfirming China's passion for greater transregional connectivity and its positive role in the global economy.

It seems that China's economic diplomacy, transregional connectiv-

China's economic diplomacy, trans-regional connectivity, numerous free trade agreements, integrated regionalism ... and, above all, the Belt and Road Initiative are successfully mitigating propaganda from the West about China's so-called economic collapse.

ity, numerous free trade agreements, integrated regionalism, qualitative industrialization, digitalization, green transformation and, above all, the Belt and Road Initiative are successfully mitigating propaganda from the West about China's so-called economic collapse.

Luckily, China possesses business- and investment-friendly policies, innovative apparatus, a big and vibrant consumer market, advanced infrastructure, a complete industrial chain and unlimited, high-quality human resources. This, along with policies of openness, modernization, qualitative industrialization, international cooperation and economic globalization, counter Western propaganda of a so-called slowdown or soft landing of China's economy during 2023.

The implementation of 25 measures to boost financial support for private enterprises, including efforts to diversify financial channels for private businesses, has further enhanced the capacity and growth of the private sector.

China's colossal market, complete industrial system, advanced infrastructure and enhanced supply chain will continue to contribute to economic resilience and digital transformation.

Chinese policymakers should continue to implement proactive economic structural reforms, proactive fiscal policy and prudent monetary policy.

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

CHINA

Page
turners

Shoppers browse books related to *A Dream of Red Mansions*, one of the four classics in Chinese literature, during a book fair in Wangfujing, Beijing, on Monday. Numerous bookstores participated in the event, offering discounts on popular publications.
CHENG GONG / FOR CHINA DAILY



Aid project diversifies crop cultivation in Xinjiang

By YAN DONGJIE in Altay, Xinjiang
yandongjie@chinadaily.com.cn

Despite the frigid -20 C winter temperatures, more than 30 varieties of fruit and vegetables are growing at the agriculture expo park in Altay, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

Such cultivation is made possible through the use of large-scale heated greenhouses, allowing for the growing of fruit and vegetables that originate from much warmer climes. There are even pomelos ripening on the trees.

Yang Xiaojie, a cultivation technician at the park, worked for decades as a farmer in Jilin province in Northeast China. Four years ago, she moved to the Lasite township in Altay to be part of an agricultural aid project for Xinjiang.

In 2019, 19 paired provinces and cities invested more than 18 billion yuan (\$2.5 billion) and implemented nearly 2,000 projects, supporting various initiatives in Xinjiang, including poverty alleviation, improvement of people's livelihoods and economic development, accord-

ing to the central government.

Yang has taught the local herdsmen how to cultivate vegetables, and her apprentices of various ethnic groups take care of 35 greenhouses.

"In the past, during winter, there was no place in this area where vegetables could be grown. People mainly relied on other regions for their vegetable supply," Yang said.

"Now, not only can everyone eat fresh vegetables grown here, we often have students around Xinjiang coming to the greenhouses for educational activities, where they get to see plants and fruits from the southern regions in person, like waxberry trees and loquat trees," she said.

In Yang's view, Altay's farming conditions, including the soil and the temperature, are not too different from Jilin's. However, the sunlight hours here are especially long, so the vegetables and fruit grown here taste better than those in the northeast, she said.

"The texture and flavor are similar to what I used to eat in the countryside during my childhood, juicy and sweet, different from what you might buy in big cities' supermar-

kets," she said, describing the tomatoes grown here.

Kuribahati Saillikebai, a villager from Lasite township, is in charge of three greenhouses that grow tomatoes, peppers and eggplants.

"In the past, we used to grow some corn mainly to feed the cows, but we never had any experience with vegetable cultivation," she said.

Last year, Kuribahati joined the agricultural park and learned greenhouse cultivation techniques under the guidance of Yang. She has no problem managing the entire greenhouse, as she has a good grasp of temperature and humidity.

Zhang Xiang, the director of the agriculture expo park, said that it produces 127 metric tons of vegetables and 37 tons of fruit annually.

"Despite the outdoor temperature being below -20 C today, the greenhouses are heated through sunlight exposure and a patented underground heat storage technology, which can help maintain a suitable temperature and humidity," he said.

Since 2019, the aid team from Jilin has invested over 20 million yuan in

leasing land and profit-sharing for the expo park. The park not only supplies vegetables to the residents throughout the year, but also allows more possibilities for the development of the economy in the surrounding area.

"The farmers have a stable income through land transfer, and also utilize their spare time to work in the greenhouses, including those still engaged in animal husbandry," Zhang said.

Ma Jinhua, a 54-year-old from Lasite village, transferred her family's land and works in the greenhouses.

"The income is similar to before, but it's much less hard work, and now I can talk to my colleagues every day and we've become good friends. Life is much more pleasant," Ma said.

Zhang Xiaolin, the Party secretary of Lasite, said that over the past few years, the agriculture park has trained over 500 farmers, and provided nearly 50 jobs.

"Next, by developing tourism products such as picking tours, study trips and shared vegetable sheds, the park can further drive the increased income and prosperity of the surrounding communities."

Ancient horsehide ski-making lives on in Altay

By YAN DONGJIE in Altay, Xinjiang

The people of the Altai Mountains in the north of the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region have for countless generations been doing something remarkable — racing down the slopes on homemade skis made with wood and horsehair.

Slanbek Shahash, who is turning 70, is the fourth generation in his family to make horsehair skis in Xinjiang's Altay prefecture, and whose son is carrying on the family tradition.

Altay's population mainly consists of the Kazak ethnic group, and many of them rely on livestock herding for their livelihood — so skiing comes in handy across a landscape that is covered in snow much of the year.

For thousands of years, the nomads in Altay have been tying horse fur to wooden skis. In thick snow in the long winters, horsehide skis are essential tools for people wanting to work and get about.

"When sliding downhill, the fur

sticks to the ski, increasing the sliding speed. When going uphill, it goes against the board, increasing friction and providing an anti-slip function. The horsehide ski embodies the wisdom of our ancestors," said Slanbek.

Slanbek's son, Juanbek, has returned to his hometown to learn the craft of making horsehide skis from his father.

"My father has been doing this for 50 years, and now I'm inheriting this craftsmanship. I have trained a group of young people in the village who can make horsehide skis. This skill can be passed down," he said.

Altay, known as the "City of Snow", has rock paintings in Dundebraik Cave, depicting ancient people skiing and hunting. According to some experts, these rock paintings were created in the late Paleolithic period, over 10,000 years ago.

Compared to the previously confirmed skiing histories of 4,500 years in Sweden, 5,000 years in Norway and 8,000 years in Russia, Altay

is believed by some to be the birthplace of skiing.

"Even until now, many nomads in Altay still use these skis in their daily lives," Juanbek said.

He explains that horsehide skis are all handmade, involving 10 steps from material selection and board cutting to the final shaping and making the accompanying poles, which takes about 15 days.

The skis are usually made of red pine or birch with a diameter of around 20 centimeters and an age of around 15 years. The fur is typically selected from the forelegs of horses aged over 3 years, with hair that grows in the same direction, and is short and brittle, making them suitable for sliding and climbing.

"It takes about six to 10 pieces of horsehide to assemble a pair of skis," he said.

Since the beginning of this winter, Juanbek's family has already received orders for 60 pairs of horsehide skis of varying sizes.

"A pair of horsehide skis sells for over 1,000 yuan (\$140), and can bring in nearly 100,000 yuan in income to our family in one winter," said Juanbek.

Previously, he worked as a taxi driver in a different city, earning around 5,000 yuan per month. In 2021, he sold his taxi and returned home.

"In addition to regular-sized skis, we have also designed and made small skis as souvenirs for tourists. These small skis are convenient to carry home and have more ornamental value," said Juanbek.

In December, the 7th Jilin Ice and Snow Industry International Expo was held in Changchun, Jilin province, and Slanbek was invited.

"Our horsehide ski-making technique received a lot of attention at the expo. The trip to Jilin showcased our horsehide ski-making technique to everyone, allowing more people to understand and experience the exquisite craftsmanship. My family is very happy," said Juanbek.

Traffic grows on Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge

By QIU QUANLIN in Guangzhou
qiuquanlin@chinadaily.com.cn

A steady flow of vehicles passed through the Zhuhai port of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge during the New Year holiday.

With the guidance of customs and transportation officers, the clearance process was smooth and orderly.

It is becoming an evermore common scene for private vehicles, mostly cars registered in the Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions, to enter or exit the Chinese mainland via the 55-kilometer sea crossing each day, especially during public holidays and weekends.

The number of inbound and outbound passenger vehicles passing through the bridge has increased significantly, with a total clearance volume exceeding 2.68 million vehicles last year, a 1.35-fold year-on-

year increase, according to the customs.

Among them, nearly 1.4 million were vehicles only registered in one of the SARs, or single-plated vehicles, according to data released on Tuesday from the Gongbei Customs in Zhuhai, Guangdong province, which oversees the bridge.

Since the implementation of policies to allow single-plated vehicles to head north into the mainland through the bridge early in 2023, there has been a strong demand from residents of Hong Kong and Macao to drive into the mainland during public holidays and weekends, according to customs.

Before the policies, only dual-plate vehicles — those registered both in the mainland and in Hong Kong or Macao — could make cross-border journeys.

On Christmas Day alone, the overall volume of inbound and out-

bound passenger and cargo vehicles reached 16,000, of which more than 14,000 were passenger vehicles, setting new records for daily vehicle traffic at the bridge port.

Single-plated vehicles from Hong Kong have become the main force driving the increase of inbound and outbound vehicle traffic flow at the ports, according to the customs.

"The passage through the bridge port is very convenient. Since we have a holiday, I decided to take my family to the mainland for a tour, visiting some attractions and trying out the local cuisine in Zhuhai," said an owner of a single-plated car from Hong Kong, surnamed Lau.

Further integration of software and hardware facilities in the GBA has provided greater convenience for residents of Hong Kong and Macao to travel north for consumption and leisure, according to Liu Yanjun, deputy director of the customs of the

Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge.

"Driven by the policies to allow vehicles from Hong Kong and Macao to head north to the mainland, economic and trade exchanges, as well as personnel exchanges between Guangdong and the two special administrative regions have become increasingly close — day tours to cities in the GBA have also become a new trend," said Liu.

To ensure smooth traffic flow, Gongbei Customs has strengthened emergency cooperation with customs authorities from Hong Kong and Macao, according to Liu.

"We have strengthened information exchange, video sharing and mutual assistance in security, especially during the traffic peak period, allowing for effective management of the high-volume vehicle traffic and ensured a seamless experience for travelers crossing the bridge," said Liu.

Cross-Strait
peace, stability
promoted

Mainland's top island affairs official calls for opposing secession in new year speech

By ZHANG YI
zhangyi1@chinadaily.com.cn

The Chinese mainland will strongly oppose "Taiwan independence" secession and interference by external forces, maintain peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, and promote the peaceful development of cross-Strait relations in the new year, the mainland's Taiwan affairs authority said.

Song Tao, head of the Taiwan Work Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, made the remarks in a New Year message published on Tuesday in Relations Across the Taiwan Strait magazine.

Song said the mainland firmly maintained its dominance in steering cross-Strait relations last year, steadily promoting the peaceful and integrated development of the two sides and advancing the process of national reunification.

Efforts were made to resume and expand cross-Strait exchanges, Song said.

"More Taiwan compatriots have recognized the importance of communication among family members and the value of harmony," he said.

The mainland also continued to deepen the integrated development of both sides, and in September a policy was issued by authorities to support Fujian province to build a demonstration zone for integrated development across the Taiwan Strait to push forward the peaceful reunification of the two sides.

"Taiwan compatriots and enterprises have confidence in the mainland market and have a positive view of the prospects for development and establishing roots on the mainland," Song said.

Adhering to the policies of peaceful reunification and "one country, two systems", the mainland maintained peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, and resolutely opposed "Taiwan independence" separatist activities and external interference in the past year, he said.

Taiwan leader Tsai Ing-wen, who will leave office upon the completion of her second four-year term in May, gave her final New Year's Day address on Monday. She said that Taiwan strengthened its military force and maintained the "status quo" over the Strait during her eight years in office.

Chen Binhua, spokesman for the Taiwan Affairs Office, said Tsai's actions, including intensified pursuit of "independence" through military means and implementing "de-Sinicization" policies contradicted her words.

Since the Democratic Progressive Party came to power in Taiwan in 2016, Tsai's administration has been promoting and selling the "two-state theory" and forcibly obstructing and restricting cross-Strait exchanges and cooperation, thereby continually raising tensions in the Taiwan Strait, Chen said.

"The so-called Tsai Ing-wen route

More Taiwan compatriots have recognized the importance of communication among family members and the value of harmony."

Song Tao, head of the Taiwan Work Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council

is a separatist route, a route of confrontation and a route that harms Taiwan. It is the biggest source of chaos, which endangers Taiwan's security, jeopardizes the interests of the Taiwan people and disrupts regional stability," he said.

Stressing that continuing Tsai's route would only push Taiwan closer to war and recession, Chen called on Taiwan compatriots to recognize the harm that the DPP would bring and make the right choice at the crossroads of cross-Strait relations.

With Taiwan's leadership election, which takes place every four years, and in September a policy was issued by authorities to support Fujian province to build a demonstration zone for integrated development across the Taiwan Strait to push forward the peaceful reunification of the two sides.

Zou Zhiqiang, deputy secretary-general of the Alliance for China's Peaceful Reunification, which is based in the US, said, "People in Taiwan do not want a war, but hope that cross-Strait relations will ease, and maintain peace and stability."

Starting on Monday, 12 chemical products from Taiwan no longer enjoy the preferential tax rates stipulated in the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement agreed between two sides in response to the discriminatory trade restrictions the island has imposed on products from the mainland.

Zou said that under the governance of the DPP, the political foundation for cross-Strait exchanges and negotiations has been undermined, and if the DPP continued to stay in power and the ECFA was terminated by the mainland, the economy of Taiwan would be greatly impacted.

That would have an impact on the consumption and employment of young Taiwan people, therefore only by removing the DPP from power can the next generation of Taiwan see a future, he said.

Song Tao from the mainland's Taiwan Affairs Office said the reunification of the two sides is inevitable and a clear trend in the development of cross-Strait relations.

He called on Taiwan compatriots to stand on the right side of history and promote the return of cross-Strait relations to the correct track of peaceful development.

Blue bloods



Winter swimming enthusiasts celebrate the arrival of the New Year with a frigid dunk in Urumqi, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, on Monday. China designated New Year's Day as a national day for winter swimming in 1996. LIU XIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

CHINA

Dam cleanup team helps protect Yangtze

By LIU KUN in Wuhan and ZOU SHUO

For the past 17 years, Zhou Gonghu and his team have been the Yangtze River's final guardians above the Three Gorges Dam, the world's largest hydropower project.

They are in charge of cleaning up floating objects in the section of the river that flows down to the dam.

They have removed more than 45,000 metric tons of floating objects from the river as it passes through Hubei province's Zigui county, safeguarding the dam and the environment.

Zhou, 61, said all his ancestors lived along the Yangtze, so he has a special feeling for the "mother river".

After graduating from high school in 1980 at the age of 18, he decided to join the army to realize his childhood dream of becoming a soldier. He received seven awards for good performance before ending his time in the army in 1985 to return to his hometown and work for a local company.

But the company went bankrupt in 2000 and he was laid off. Two years later, he founded a construction team that allowed him to earn around 100,000 yuan (\$14,000) a year, a high income for villagers in the county.

As the dam started to store water for generating electricity, the water flow slowed and a large quantity of floating objects circled around the reservoir.

The local government decided to organize a team to remove them before they reached the dam.

After learning about the plan, Zhou thought about joining the team. However, his family opposed the notion as the construction business was going well.

"I told my family that I was born and raised along the Yangtze River," he said. "I eat its fish and drink its water, so it is my responsibility to protect the river."



Zhou Gonghu (left) cleans up floating objects with his teammates on the section of the Yangtze River in Zigui county, Hubei province.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Removing floating debris from river safeguards environment at world's largest hydropower project

"People cannot only think about making money in their life, but also need to do something meaningful."

He said his two daughters were already grown up and the family's expenses were not so high, which meant the salary from cleaning the river was sufficient.

In April 2006, he gave up the construction business, bought a boat with friends and founded the dam's first debris removal team with a dozen villagers.

Since then, he has risen at 5:30 am and returned home after dark. In order to motivate his team members, he always does the hardest job.



From left: Zhou after a long work day. During summer, temperatures on deck can rise to well above 50 C.

During winter, he is the first to jump into the freezing water to remove sticks obstructing the boat's propeller.



"As I managed a squad of soldiers well in the military, I can also manage a team of cleaning 'frogmen'," he said. During peak times, there are

almost 100 frogmen removing objects from the river in Zigui, and more than 20 retired soldiers have joined Zhou's team.

He admits that removing the floating objects is hard work. During summer, temperatures on deck can rise to well above 50 C. Meanwhile, he needs to remove almost 20 kilograms of objects from each scoop of river water, a process he repeats nearly 1,000 times a day.

In November 2020, due to a change in wind and current, almost 40,000 cubic meters of floating objects were found at a river bend in the county, equal to the amount normally

scooped up by the team in a whole year.

Zhou organized more than 30 boats and 100 people to remove the objects. They worked for more than 40 days and removed more than 2,000 tons of objects.

During that time, his mother had a cerebral hemorrhage, but Zhou stayed at his post. His mother stayed at the hospital for three months, and was looked after mostly by his wife and brothers. Zhou only had time to check up on her at night after work.

He said he felt indebted to his wife, who had taken on most of the responsibility for managing the family's affairs.

Fu Min, a member of the floating object removal team, said Zhou works very hard and is very understanding.

When the team is removing floating objects in faraway places, Zhou brings them lunch, she said.

Zhou said he had noticed a marked improvement in the local environment.

"When the dam first started to store water, there was a large amount of floating objects in Zigui county — almost about one meter thick — but now there's only a thin layer," he said.

The county has invested 40 million yuan to build a waste disposal device to deal with floating objects in the river and the local government has also built two automatic mechanical boats and a floating crane to remove heavy objects.

Zhou said his daughters often give him money and try to persuade him to retire and live a more relaxed life, but he has continued to refuse their entreaties.

"I do not choose the work for the money and as long as the Yangtze River needs me, I will continue until I cannot do so physically," he said.

Contact the writers at zoushuo@chinadaily.com.cn

Inheritor of century-old tradition brings touch of tech to makeup

By ZHANG YU in Shijiazhuang zhangyu1@chinadaily.com.cn

A young man in Langfang, Hebei province, has found a unique way to blend traditional culture with modern elements by infusing technology into the production of painted masks based on the facial makeup designs used in Peking Opera.

Jiao Xuefeng, a seventh-generation inheritor of his family's facial makeup techniques in Langfang's Gu'an county, said combining them was "both challenging and promising". Recognized as provincial intangible cultural heritage, Jiao-style facial makeup boasts a history of nearly 200 years.

Refined over the years, it has developed a distinctive style by incorporating advanced technology that makes it more vibrant and allows for unique creations.

Born in 1990, Jiao has had a strong interest in facial makeup since he was a child and began learning to draw and create the makeup from his father at the age of six.

In the 2000s, Jiao started to use computers and became an enthusiastic programmer.

He later combined his computer skills with his passion for creating facial makeup, injecting new vitality into the inheritance and development of traditional culture.

One day last month, Jiao was working in his Beima village studio, in the town of Gongcun, carefully



From left: Jiao Xuefeng paints a mask in his studio at Beima village in Gu'an county, Hebei province. A mask painted by Jiao on display in his studio. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

painting a mask. After dipping a brush in paints, he delicately applied them to a specially designed facial model, gradually layering colors from light to dark.

After some time, his work yielded the vivid red facial makeup of Guan Yu, a general from the late Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220) known for his courage and faith.

"The batch of masks I was making was custom-made for use as corporate souvenirs and will soon be exported," Jiao said.

He said every mask he creates is first generated as a three-dimensional picture on a computer and then carved using a sculpting machine.

"This approach helps produce facial makeup molds that are full and three-dimensional, with clear lines that can be directly painted using a brush," Jiao said.

He added that developing products through modern methods such as the use of machinery and computers allows for more precise molds than traditional ones.

Jiao-style facial makeup is popular because of its innovative creations and has captured about 80 percent of the market in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region.

In a corner of Jiao's studio are some whole figures with facial makeup.

"In the past, traditional craftsman-



ship only focused on the facial part, but now, with the use of modern technology, we can present the entire figure," Jiao said.

The headwear, clothing, and even body movements of the characters can be meticulously depicted, conveying the emotions and unique features of the characters, he said.

This combination of tradition and modern aesthetics has made Jiao-style facial makeup highly sought after domestically and internationally.

To further promote the culture, Jiao has kept exploring the fusion of tradition and modernity.

He promotes and sells his creations online and has also ventured

into using techniques such as stone carving and bas-relief to depict facial makeup.

He has also developed games, software and toys centered around facial makeup.

"Artistic innovation is the soul of Jiao facial makeup and a new challenge for my generation," Jiao said, adding that young inheritors of intangible cultural heritage need to innovate while preserving tradition.

He hopes to empower facial makeup culture through the use of information technology and scientific advancements, allowing traditional intangible heritage products and culture to be promoted worldwide.

Heritage authorities strengthen protection of Great Wall

By LIANG SHUANG liangshuang@chinadaily.com.cn

In response to growing concerns over the deteriorating state of the Great Wall, China's cultural heritage authorities issued a circular recently outlining enhanced measures to safeguard the iconic structure.

The Great Wall faces multifaceted threats from human factors such as improper protection methods, illegal industrial projects and disorderly tourism development, as well as the impact of natural weathering.

The National Cultural Heritage Administration has directed lower-level authorities to collaborate with other local government departments in conducting comprehensive surveys, categorizing Great

Wall resources and devising specific coordinated protection plans.

Emphasizing the preservation of sections that still feature buildings, the directive urges efforts to maintain their structural integrity and preserve historical information. For areas where buildings have collapsed or disappeared, the focus should be on preserving the site as it stands, clearly marked, with strict prohibitions on rebuilding or large-scale restoration.

Concerning tourism development, the administration calls for cautious planning, discouraging haphazard infrastructure projects like footpaths, parking lots, tourist centers and museums. Ticket revenues generated from Great Wall tourism should be dedicated entire-

ly to preservation efforts, ensuring a sustainable approach.

The administration has ordered more management efforts, including increased monitoring, patrolling and stringent project approval processes. Timely reporting of actions that may jeopardize the Great Wall is compulsory, and those responsible for damage should be held accountable.

Sections of the Great Wall have suffered damage recently, with the Ministry of Ecology and Environment uncovering five cases during ecological inspections. In one of the cases, the government of Xinxiang in Henan province was accused of inadequate oversight of sand and stone mining, resulting in damage to sections of the Zhao Great Wall,

dating back to the Warring States Period (475-221 BC).

The Zhao Great Wall, believed to be the oldest existing section — predating Emperor Qinshihuang's large-scale construction in 214 BC — holds significant historical value despite its current state of ruin.

However, only 855 meters of a 3-kilometer section remained standing in Weihui, Xinxiang, due to illegal mining, according to a report by China Environment News, which is managed by the ministry.

Investigations revealed that the local government had approved the mining without consulting cultural heritage departments, and the company involved had failed to report that the location included the important historical site.

In a similar case in 2018, an illegal wind power project damaged 756 meters of the Zhao Great Wall in Huixian, another city in Xinxiang. More than 20 local officials were punished, and four people were given prison terms.

In September, two people were detained in Shanxi province for damaging a section of the Great Wall with an excavator. A man and a woman used the excavator to widen a gap in a section of the No 32 Great Wall in Youyu county in late August. The wall, which dates back to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), was damaged beyond repair.

The duo, who had been contracted to work on a construction project nearby, admitted to using the excavator to make it easier to pass through the wall. They have been charged with destroying a cultural relic.

Nepalese student donates blood

TIANJIN — Nepalese student Shekhar Dongol has donated blood 18 times, including twice in China last year.

Dongol, a postgraduate student at Tianjin University, most recently donated blood at a mobile blood collection site in Tianjin on Dec 28.

The arrival of winter has led to an increase in demand for blood transfusions from people in Tianjin with cardiovascular or cerebrovascular diseases.

"I hope to help those in need in China in this way," Dongol said.

Soon after he enrolled at Tianjin University in March, Dongol contacted the school and asked for information on donating blood. Within a month, he had made his first donation, said Zhao Zhipeng, a teacher with Tianjin University's School of International Education.

"Dongol told us that regular blood donation is not only beneficial for society, but also helps the donor develop scientific and reasonable dietary and lifestyle habits," Zhao said. "It is a healthy practice worth maintaining."

Dongol started donating blood at the age of 19 through events organized by the Red Cross Society of Nepal, and has continued the habit ever since.

"In Nepal, we have a saying that donating blood saves lives," he said.

Dongol is pursuing a doctoral degree in architecture at Tianjin University. Focusing on cultural heritage protection, Dongol hopes to apply his knowledge to research on the ancient Silk Road trade corridor in Nepal.

"Love knows no borders," he said. "I will continue donating blood in the future while I'm staying in China."

He said he hopes that his life and studies in Tianjin will contribute to building a bridge of friendship between China and Nepal.

XINHUA

WORLD



Carsten Linnemann (right), Christian Democratic Union's secretary-general, and Ottlil Klein, secretary-general of CDU Berlin, hold a campaign poster reading "Berlin, your chance. Show the traffic lights the stop sign!" in Berlin on Dec 19. CHRISTOPH SOEDER / ASSOCIATED PRESS



An installation in Milan, Italy, is displayed at the Darsena del Naviglio canal on Oct 5 in memory of a fishing boat packed with about 500 African migrants which capsized in 2013 off the shores of the Sicilian island of Lampedusa. LUCA BRUNO / ASSOCIATED PRESS



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz (left) attends a news conference with Giorgia Meloni, prime minister of Italy, after talks that focused on issues of European security, migration and the future of the European Union in Rome, Italy, on June 8. MICHAEL KAPPELLER / ASSOCIATED PRESS

By CHEN WEIHUA in Brussels
chenweihua@chinadaily.com.cn

Populist parties' rapid rise shakes up EU political landscape

Experts attribute increasing support to economic concerns, migration issues, and predict major ramifications on group's policies

The European Union has witnessed a rapid rise of populist parties in 2023, a change that was caused largely by economic and migration issues and a change that will affect the EU's political landscape and China-EU relations, experts say.

So far, about one-third of seats in the European Parliament are occupied by parties that are viewed as populist or radical, and the trend is likely to continue in the next European elections in June.

According to research led by political scientist Matthijs Rooduijn at the University of Amsterdam, 32 percent of Europeans now vote for populist, far-right or far-left parties, compared with 20 percent in the early 2000s and 12 percent in the early 1990s.

For the first time in France, more French people say far-right leader Marine Le Pen's National Rally party, now headed by her right-hand man Jordan Bardella, is capable of participating in government than not, according to an annual survey by Le Monde and Franceinfo last month.

Just 54 percent of respondents said they disagreed with the party's ideas, the lowest since the poll first began in 1984.

A EuroTrack poll conducted by OpinionWay in November showed the National Rally would win 28 percent of the vote if the 2024 European elections were held a few days later, ahead of the 19 percent for President Emmanuel Macron's Renaissance party.

National Rally is now the largest opposition party in the National Assembly, the lower house of the French parliament. The party got 89 seats in the 577-member parliament in the 2022 election, up from a previous total of only eight.

On Dec 20, Le Pen claimed an "ideological victory" after Macron's government reached a compromise over an immigration bill, a bill that divided Macron's centrist coalition but echoed Le Pen's tougher immigration policies, such as excluding foreigners from state benefits and council housing.

In Germany, the Alternative for Germany, or AfD, regarded as a far-right party in Europe, won its first mayoral election in December in Pirna, Saxony, a victory that party co-chair Alice Weidel described as "historic."

The victory has also been seen across Germany as a sign for key state and local elections in this coming year.

In June, AfD leapfrogged to surpass



Migrants arrive at Lampedusa Island in Italy on Sept 16. The rise of the far right, including in core EU countries such as France, Germany and Italy, is largely associated with the persisting migration crisis that has worsened over the past years, according to experts. VALERIA FERRARO VIA GETTY IMAGES

Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Social Democrats, or SPD, to become the second-largest party in Germany, behind former chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union.

A Forsa poll on Dec 19 showed that AfD received a record high of 23 percent of support, behind the 31 percent for CDU but way ahead of the 14 percent for SPD, 13 percent for the Greens and 5 percent for the Free Democrats.

After major election victories in the

states of Hesse and Bavaria in October, Weidel said AfD is "no longer an eastern phenomenon, but has become a major all-German party."

"So, we have arrived," she said, referring to the party's high popularity in former East Germany's states.

In Italy, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni worried many after she took power in October 2022 because of her Brothers of Italy party's reputation as a post-fascist party. But so far, her

coalition has been widely viewed as right-wing on domestic policies, such as family, civil rights and immigration, but moderate on international relations and some EU affairs.

"Since becoming Italy's prime minister, Giorgia Meloni has been something of a surprise for Brussels-based skeptics," Anthony Constantini, who studied populism at the University of Vienna, wrote in an opinion piece for the Politico website.

"As leader of the post-fascist Brothers of Italy, many had expected her to be a firebrand a la Hungary's Viktor Orban. But she has instead sought a different goal: to become the first populist-right leader to forge a genuine Pan-European alliance.

"And if she's successful, it could change the game in Brussels forever."

Besides the EU's three biggest economies, populist leaders have also claimed election victories and gained popularity in the past year in Austria, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Sweden and several other EU states.

Yan Shaohua, an associate professor in the Institute of International Studies at Fudan University in Shanghai, said the rise of the far right, including in core EU countries such as France, Germany and Italy, is largely associated with the persisting migration crisis that has worsened over the past years because of heightened geopolitical tensions in the EU's neighborhood, particularly in Ukraine and the Middle East.

"With an election year coming in 2024, the rise of far-right populism is expected to further transform the EU's political landscape that has been increasingly fragmented and polarized over the years," he said.

Yan said he believes the far rights' anti-immigration stance and nationalist rhetoric will pose serious challenges to the EU's established policies in areas of migration, internal reform and support for Ukraine.

'More pragmatic' approach

"For China-EU relations, the picture will be a mixed one. While the rise of right-wing populism has led some EU member states to take a more pragmatic approach toward China, such as Hungary's Eastern Opening policy, it could also push some countries to take a tougher approach in different sectors," he said.

He Zhigao, a researcher at the Institute of European Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said he believes the rise of populism in Europe is caused by the growing division among member states during globalization and EU integration as well as the resistance to elite politics.

"They support political and economic protectionism ... and on the other hand, the frequent transfer of power in some countries means a lack of consistent policy on China, making the relationship more complex and challenging," he said.

But he said he believes it still will not change the fundamental landscape of "mutually beneficial win-win cooperation" between China and the EU.

Bloc eyes strategic autonomy amid escalating challenges

By CHEN WEIHUA in Brussels

The European Union has continued its search for strategic autonomy amid greater challenges on both geopolitical and economic fronts.

French President Emmanuel Macron has been a passionate advocate when he pushed the EU's strategic autonomy in his speech at the Sorbonne University in Paris in 2017, a concept that first appeared in the EU defense document in 2013 and was then incorporated into the 2016 European Union Global Strategy document.

Macron caused a stir in early April when he said Europe must reduce its dependence on the United States and avoid getting dragged into a confrontation between China and the US over Taiwan.

While Macron's remark triggered backlash on both sides of the Atlantic, European Council President Charles Michel came to his defense by saying that European leaders are becoming increasingly favorable toward Macron's push for strategic

autonomy away from the US.

Open strategic autonomy was the main topic of the informal meeting of EU heads of state and government in Granada, Spain, in October, during the six-month Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU, which ended on Sunday.

The goal was to move toward a more competitive and resilient EU in the face of geopolitical and technological challenges in the world, especially when the EU was viewed as increasingly lagging behind the US and China.

The bloc believes the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine conflict have taught a lesson that overdependence could pose a threat to its economy and the well-being of the 440 million EU citizens.

"Its aim is to find a new balance between security and competitiveness that will ensure the EU's future ability to act autonomously when and where required and to work with partners wherever possible," the Spanish presidency document said. The document proposed nine lines



Spain's King Felipe VI (center), Queen Letizia (center right), then-acting Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez (center left) and other heads of state pose for a group photo at the Alhambra palace during the Europe Summit in Granada, Spain, on Oct 5. IBRAHEEM ABU MUSTAFA / REUTERS

of action to "tackle the vulnerabilities identified in a systemic and realistic way", including boosting internal production capacity, monitoring and limiting foreign ownership of some

sectors and creating a contingency plan for future shortages.

While the document highlighted the need to rebalance economic relations with China, it stressed that

China is an essential trading partner for the EU and the fact that decoupling from its economy is neither a viable nor a desirable option, a message that EU leaders also delivered at the 24th China-EU Summit in Beijing in early December.

The EU has made some progress on strategic autonomy when the European Parliament and the 27 members reached a provisional deal in April on the European Chips Act that aims to boost its competitiveness in semiconductor industry against the US and Asia rivals. The goal was to double the EU's global market share in semiconductors from 10 percent to 20 percent by 2030.

In November, the European Parliament and EU member states reached a deal on Critical Raw Materials Act proposed by the European Commission in March, an act that also aims to compete with the US and China in making clean tech products.

The proposal said the EU should extract 10 percent, recycle 15 percent and process 40 percent of its annual needs by 2030 for 16 "strategic raw materials".

Wang Yiwei, director of the Institute of International Affairs at Renmin University of China, said the

EU's pursuit of strategic autonomy reflects its increasing distrust of the current world amid a reversal of globalization, and in a world that is dominated by the US and China such as in artificial intelligence.

While the bloc's strategic autonomy targets both China and the US, Wang said he believes it will be impossible for the EU to get rid of the US when it comes to its dependence on defense, AI and internet search engines.

He questioned the EU's ability to achieve its goal, saying the bloc is "a giant of ideas but dwarf of action", adding that the Franco-German axis no longer exists.

Eva Michaels, a research fellow at the Barcelona Institute for International Studies, said the EU needs to avoid overrelying on others for both the anticipation of and response to international security crises.

"Europe cannot afford to be a bystander when confronted with security threats and challenges in its neighborhood, especially when Washington's long-term priorities lie elsewhere and when (the 2024) US presidential election risks undermining NATO," she wrote on the Engage EU blog.

WORLD

Xi's address raises peace, unity hopes

Experts laud president's emphasis on global cooperation in New Year speech

By XU WEIWEI in Hong Kong, JIANG XUEQING in Tokyo, and YANG WANLI in Bangkok

Chinese President Xi Jinping's New Year address has brought brighter hopes for global cooperation and greater unity for world peace, analysts and scholars say.

In his New Year message on Sunday to ring in 2024, the Chinese president reiterated international cooperation for a better planet. "No matter how the global landscape may evolve, peace and development remain the underlying trend, and only cooperation for mutual benefit can deliver," Xi said.

Mehmood Ul Hassan Khan, executive director of the Center for South Asia and International Studies in Islamabad, said the speech offers the world a comprehensive model of community development. The president's commitments to work with the international community for the resolution of conflicts to achieve the optimal levels of the common good of humanity, build a community with a shared future for mankind, and make the planet a better place for all cover aspects like economic globalization, world justice, and economic recovery in the new year.

Xi's message emphasizes the ethical principle of efforts to build a community of all life on Earth, advocating the development and prosperity of both one's own country and others, and creating a win-win situation for a world of peaceful coexistence, said Takakage Fujita, secretary-general of the Association for Inheriting and Propagating the Murayama Statement — a Japanese civic group dedicated to upholding the 1995 Murayama Statement that admits Japan's wartime mistakes.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. On this significant occasion, China is committed to actively contributing to high, large and challenging goals, such as world peace, improving the lives of global citizens, and advancing the construction of a community with a shared future for humanity, Fujita said.

Shakeel Ahmad Ramay, chief executive officer of the Asian Institute of Eco-civilization Research and Development in Pakistan, said the address points to China being 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 community with a shared future for present and future generations.

Lawrence Loh, professor and director of the National University of Singapore's Centre for Governance and Sustainability, described Xi's message as "inspirational", setting the right tone for countries to unite and strengthen human welfare and social growth worldwide. Peaceful coexistence and, most importantly, mutual respect should

be the cornerstone of international interactions in 2024, he said.

Loh said 2024 will be a pivotal year for global progress amid geopolitical and macroeconomic challenges. As a major world power, China will have a critical role in advancing continued development across various continents and regions.

Responsibility fulfilled

Xi noted in his address that China has embraced the world and fulfilled its responsibility as a major country.

Narongsak Puthapornmongkol, president of the Thai-Chinese Chamber of Commerce, said the world has scaled new heights with dogged determination, and new creations and innovations are emerging every day. "China is speaking with facts that the country is pursuing its development while fulfilling its responsibility as a major power," Narongsak said.

In boosting green development in Southeast Asia, he highlighted China's contributions, such as new energy vehicles, lithium batteries, and photovoltaic products, as a new testimony to China's manufacturing prowess.

Thailand and Southeast Asia have confidence in future cooperation with China, and look forward to joining hands in building a community with a shared future for mankind, Narongsak said.

Hussein Maklad, professor of international relations at Damascus University in Syria, said Xi highlighted China's commitment to peaceful development and modernization drive.

The Chinese president said that China will work closely with the international community for the common good of humanity, Maklad noted.

A key message from the Chinese leader is that despite all the difficulties worldwide, China is still an open economy, said Digby James Wren, senior special adviser and director of the Mekong Research Center at the Royal Academy of Cambodia's Institute of International Relations.

He said Xi's speech also highlighted the main elements of Chinese public diplomacy and foreign policy. "It's clear that China will embark on a much larger, deeper diplomatic push through 2024 to resolve the existing problems," said Wren, noting he sees a real push toward a multipolar world.

Salman Bashir, former Pakistani ambassador to China, also found Xi's New Year message inspiring. Bashir was impressed that while recounting China's splendid accomplishments, Xi emphasized peace and development as the underlying trend, and that only cooperation for mutual benefit can deliver.

Yang Han and Jan Yumul in Hong Kong contributed to the story.

Contact the writers at vivienxu@chinadaily.com.



The inspiration for the *Dragon Music* float of Alhambra, California, came from Shannon Tan, 13. The float was in the Rose Parade 2024 in Pasadena, California, on Monday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Rose Parade features local artists

By RENALI in Los Angeles renali@chinadailyusa.com

The annual Rose Parade in Pasadena, California, also drew in some dragons — on a float, that is.

The Rose Parade has been a New Year's Day American tradition since the 1800s. It unwinds before the Rose Bowl college football game, which this year featured a thrilling playoff game at the Rose Bowl stadium Monday in which the Michigan Wolverines defeated the Alabama Crimson Tide, 27-20, in overtime in one of the most watched games in history.

A total of 39 floats took part in this year's parade — the 135th — and displayed symbolic and spectacular storytelling. Since its inception in 1890, the Rose Parade has been a dazzling showcase of creativity.

This year's parade featured several young Chinese participants, including some from Alhambra, California. The diverse community is home to an Asian American population of more than 45,000 and has strong ties to the Chinese community.

The inspiration for the city's *Dragon Music* float came from Shannon Tan, 13, a seventh-grader at Ramona Elementary School.

The giant dragon, surrounded by musical notes and instruments, clutched a globe in its claw by standing protectively over a sleeping baby dragon, which symbolized peace and unity, according to Tan.

A conceptual design titled *Lyrical Call of Nature*, a float from Torrance, California, depicted baby birds calling for their mother. While responding to their calls, the mother bird creates "a beautiful song found in nature," according to Jodie Cheng, a young artist from West High School.

Cheng's design was among 16 submitted to the Torrance Rose Float Association last fall when the group opened its design contest to students in all five high schools in the Torrance Unified School District.

Inga, a newcomer to the US, told China Daily that it was fascinating to see the design, as it brought her back to home.

"What remains fresh in my memory is that there used to be a similar bird's nest next to my house in my hometown," she said. "And everything of the design was made from natural trees, flowers and seeds. It's beautiful."

The parade themed *Celebrating a World of Music: The Universal Language* began with a performance featuring some popular singers and artists, making its way along the traditional 5 1/2-mile route, moving east along Colorado Boulevard to northbound Sierra Madre Boulevard, ending at Villa Street.

Alex Aghajanian, the president of the Tournament of Roses Association, who announced the theme a year ago, said that music is the one language that unites people across different cultures, and represents their beliefs, hopes and dreams.

After the parade, the floats were stripped to their chassis. Structural steel elements are reused where possible; organic materials and sculptural steel are recycled, according to the association.

Harvard University president resigns amid new allegations of plagiarism

By MINGMEILI in New York mingmeili@chinadailyusa.com

Harvard University President Claudine Gay announced her resignation on Tuesday, following new accusations of plagiarism and previous criticism over her response to antisemitism on campus.

"It is with a heavy heart but a deep love for Harvard that I write to share that I will be stepping down as president," she wrote in a letter to the community. "But, after consultation with members of the [Harvard] Corporation, it has become clear that it is in the best interests of Harvard for me to resign so that our community can navigate this moment of extraordinary challenge with a focus on the institution rather than any individual."

Gay's tenure as Harvard president, lasting only six months, was the shortest in the nearly 400-year history of the school in Cambridge, Massachusetts, since its founding in 1636. She was the first black president and the second woman to lead the university.

The resignation could potentially influence future donations to the school and affect students' intentions to apply there, according to The New York Times.

"In the face of escalating controversy and conflict, President Gay and the Fellows have sought to be guided by the best interests of the institution whose future progress and well-being we are together committed to upholding," Fellows of Harvard College, the university's governing board, wrote in a statement.

Dr Alan M. Garber, an economist and physician who is Harvard's provost and chief academic officer, will serve as interim university president. Gay will return to the Harvard faculty where she has served as a professor of government since 2006.

On Dec 12, the board had announced that Gay would continue as president. More than 700 faculty members



Claudine Gay

expressed their support for Gay to remain as president.

The latest accusations against Gay were circulated via an anonymous complaint published on Monday by The Washington Free Beacon, a conservative online journal. The 30-page complaint introduced further allegations of plagiarism, supplementing around 40 similar accusations that had previously been disseminated.

In December, the Republican-led House Education and Workforce Committee announced that it would review Gay's 24-year record. Following that, Jonathan Swain, a spokesperson for Harvard University, told CNN on Friday that in response to plagiarism allegations, Gay had submitted revisions to two of her academic articles, originally published in 2001 and 2017.

Facing increasing pressure from Harvard student organizations and social media criticism urging her to step down, Gay's position appeared more precarious due to ongoing congressional investigations into the plagiarism allegations, along with accusations of antisemitism.

Gay, along with two other university presidents, the then-president of the University of Pennsylvania, Liz Magill, and the president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Sally Kornbluth, faced criticism for ambiguously answering whether "calls for the genocide of Jewish people" amounted to bullying and harassment on campus. Magill resigned four days after she testified. MIT said it still supports Kornbluth as president.

The three didn't clearly answer the question by US Representative Elise Stefanik, a New York Republican.

Gay responded, "The rules around bullying and harassment are quite specific, and if the context in which that

language is used amounts to bullying and harassment, then we take — we take action against it."

Critics argued that the university presidents didn't adequately address incidents of antisemitism on their campuses following the Hamas attack on Israel on Oct 7, and 74 members of Congress wrote a letter demanding their immediate dismissal.

Virginia Foxx, a North Carolina Republican who heads a House committee investigating Harvard, said the inquiry would continue despite Gay's resignation.

"There has been a hostile takeover of postsecondary education by political activists, woke faculty, and partisan administrators," Foxx said in a statement. "The problems at Harvard are much larger than one leader, and the committee's oversight will continue."

"Harvard knows that this long overdue forced resignation of the antisemitic plagiarist president is just the beginning of what will be the greatest scandal of any college or university in history," Stefanik posted on X.

In a statement Tuesday, Stefanik, a Harvard alumna, said, "Claudine Gay's morally bankrupt answers to my questions made history as the most viewed congressional testimony in the history of the US Congress."

House Speaker Mike Johnson wrote on social media: "The resignation of Claudine Gay is overdue. Antisemitism has no place on campus — or anywhere in America."

"Her resignation is a symptom of Harvard being almost entirely beholden to external pressure," Sanaa Kahloon, a junior and pro-Palestinian activist told The Times. Khalil Gibran Muhammad, a professor of history, race, and public policy at the Harvard Kennedy School told The Times: "Republican congressional leaders have declared war on the independence of colleges and universities, just as Governor DeSantis has done in Florida."

Migrants bused to NJ to evade restrictions in NYC

By MAYZHOU in Houston mayzhou@chinadailyusa.com

Hundreds of migrants were dropped off in New Jersey over the weekend to bypass new restrictions recently imposed by New York Mayor Eric Adams aiming to curb the inflow of bused migrants to the city from the US southern border.

Adams issued an executive order last week requiring charter bus companies to provide 32 hours' advance notice of the arrival of migrants in the city and stipulated that buses can unload migrants only between 8:30 am and 12 pm.

At least four buses transporting migrants to New York arrived at the train station in Secaucus Junction, New Jersey. Secaucus Mayor Michael Gonnelli said in a statement "the migrants then took trains to New York City."

"It seems quite clear the bus operators are finding a way to thwart the requirements of the executive order by dropping migrants at the train station in Secaucus and having them continue to their final destination," Gonnelli said.

The New York Times reported that since Saturday, 13 buses from Texas and Louisiana carrying about 450 migrants have arrived in New Jersey, including Jersey City and Secaucus, Fanwood, Edison and Trenton. The buses had chaperones who assisted migrants to get on trains and buses heading into New York.

Tyler Jones, a spokesperson for New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy said the governor's office has tracked the recent arrival of a handful of buses of migrant families at various train stations.

"New Jersey is primarily being used as a transit point for these families — all or nearly all of them continued with their travels en route to their final destination of New York City," Jones said.

"Texas Governor Greg Abbott continues to treat asylum seekers like political pawns and is instead now dropping families off in surrounding cities and states in the cold, dark of night with train tickets to travel to New York City, just like he has been doing in Chicago," Kayla Mamelak, a spokeswoman for Adams, said in a statement.

However, migrants bused to New York City accounted for only a small portion of the total number of migrants arriving in the city. According to numbers provided by Abbott's office, Texas sent more than 28,700 migrants to New York City in 2023 (a total of 33,600 since August 2022). New York City has processed more than 161,500 asylum seekers in 2023, the Times reported.

Abbott's busing of migrants to a few Democratic-dominated cities has received wide criticism at first. However, the public's opinion has shifted somewhat since the program started in April 2022.

The top-voted comment by an anonymous reader to the Times reads: "Honestly, if NYC does not have the infrastructure to deal with this influx, how can the feds expect the small border towns to cope? As much as I detest Abbott, at least, this political stunt is keeping the crisis front and center and forcing the federal hand via NYC to some extent. This situation at the border is unsustainable and the more people on both sides of the aisle that realize this simple fact, the better."

A self-claimed "lifelong Democrat and liberal" reader named JD said that "the GOP/Texas ilk are 100 percent on point with respect to our insane and untenable southern border. It makes political and practical sense what the loathsome Texas governor is doing on the border." JD wrote, "Secure it. Build a wall if necessary. Deport. Disincentivize. Stop the madness. Ask questions later."

A record 2.47 million migrants crossed the Mexico-US border in 2023, and in December, a record of more than 10,000 migrants crossed in a single day.

CHINA DAILY USA

NEW YORK HEADQUARTERS

1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,
New York, NY 10036

Telephone: 212-537-8888

Fax: 212-537-8898

editor@chinadailyusa.com

readers@chinadailyusa.com

Subscription: 212-537-8899

Advertising: 212-537-8916

Follow us on:

twitter.com/chinadaily

facebook.com/chinadaily

usa.chinadaily.com.cn

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

WASHINGTON

National Press Bldg, Suite 1108

529 14th Street NW

Washington, DC 20045

Tel: 202-662-7249

Fax: 202-662-7247

SAN FRANCISCO

235 Montgomery Street, Suite 900

San Francisco, CA 94104

Tel: 415-348-8288

Fax: 415-348-8388

SEATTLE

800 Fifth Ave, Suite 4100

Seattle, WA 98104

Tel: 206-922-2868

HOUSTON

1001 South Dairy Ashford, Suite 100

Houston, TX 77077

Tel: 713-595-7660

CANADA | TORONTO

471 Yonge Street, 10th Floor

Toronto, Ontario, M2N 6K8

Tel: 416-481-5706

CHINA DAILY (ISSN 0748-6154) is published

daily except weekends by China Daily USA,

1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York,

NY 10036. Periodical postage paid at New

York, NY and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to

CHINA DAILY USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite

2800, New York, NY 10036.

Vol. 38 - No. 1232

BUSINESS

MORE NEWS WHENEVER YOU WANT IT · CHINADAILY.COM.CN/BUSINESS



Employees work on the assembly line of BYD in Xi'an, Shaanxi province. YUAN JINGZHI / FOR CHINA DAILY

NEVs seen revving up sales this year

By LI FUSHENG
lifusheng@chinadaily.com.cn

New energy vehicle sector is expected to gain greater momentum in China this year, after many companies in the sector garnered record sales in 2023, experts said.

Cui Dongshu, secretary-general of the China Passenger Car Association, expects NEVs, which include both fully electric vehicles and plug-in hybrids, will account for 40 percent of new vehicle sales this year.

Cui expects that their total sales this year will reach 11 million units, around 2.3 million more than in 2023, which saw fierce competition but ended sat-

isfactorily for many companies.

Of them is Warren Buffett-backed BYD. The NEV maker sold 3.02 million vehicles in 2023, up 62.3 percent year-on-year. In December alone, its deliveries hit over 340,000 units.

It was thus the best-selling automaker in China and also the most popular NEV maker in the world last year.

SAIC Motor came in second in China. As the Chinese partner of both Volkswagen and GM, the automaker sold 1.12 million NEVs in 2023, featuring marques from Roewe to LM.

Elon Musk's Tesla has not yet released its 2023 sales figures, but its deliveries in the first 11 months in

China already hit 527,000 units, more than the electric vehicle maker's global sales in 2020.

Nasdaq-listed Li Auto topped the list of Chinese startups last year, with 376,000 units delivered, up 182.2 percent year-on-year.

Like BYD, Li Auto also saw its highest monthly sales in December, delivering over 50,000 units.

Li Xiang, founder and CEO of Li Auto, said the firm will work to sell over 100,000 units a month this year, with its yearly sales goal standing at 800,000 units.

That is the ballpark sales figure of established giants like BMW and Mercedes in China, their largest market worldwide.

Li Auto was followed by Nio, the

only other startup that saw sales exceed 160,000 units in 2023.

The company, known for its battery-swapping technology, expects sales to further grow this year, following deals in December with Geely and Changan, both of which are revving up efforts to launch battery-swapping models.

Zhang Yongwei, secretary-general of China EV100, an industry think tank, said he is sanguine about China's NEV market, and expects sales to reach 2 trillion yuan (\$280.6 billion) this year.

But he was quick to add that despite the growing demand for NEVs, competition will be fierce.

"This year will prove a make-or-break year for many as we see an accelerated reshuffling in the NEV sector. For many, it means growth but for many others, it will be harder to even survive," said Zhang.

Private sector may see better legal scene

Experts expect steps like new law as enterprises' significance grows

By OUYANG SHIJIA
ouyangshijia@chinadaily.com.cn

China will likely take more steps to improve the legal environment for private sector businesses this year, including accelerating the formulation and promulgation of the law on promoting the development of the private sector, experts said on Tuesday.

They said the private sector accounts for over 60 percent of China's GDP, 70 percent of technological innovation and 80 percent of urban employment. Hence, more efforts should be made to boost the wavering confidence among private businesses, ensuring the sector's healthy development.

Their comments came after the country's top economic regulator pledged greater efforts to stimulate private investment and encourage more private capital to participate in the construction of major projects at the national level and projects that address weak links in the economy.

In an article published on Monday in Qiushi Journal, the flagship magazine of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, the Party leadership group of the National Development and Reform Commission vowed to promote the development of the private sector, requiring that legal and institutional arrangements must be made to ensure the equal treatment of private enterprises and State-owned enterprises.

"It is sending a clear signal that the country will continuously stimulate the vitality and dynamism of economic development, as part of its ongoing efforts to deepen reforms and opening-up, and spur innovation-driven growth," said Bai Wenxi, vice-chairman of the China Enterprise Capital Union.

"That indicates that the country will further promote market-oriented reforms, optimize the business environment and stimulate vitality and creativity of various market entities."

Bai said keeping policy consistent and stable will be key to promoting the healthy development of the private sector.

He further said supportive policy measures should be complemented by rule-of-law support for spurring the growth of private businesses.

"It is necessary to promptly draft and enact a law to promote the development of the private sector, providing stable and reliable legal support," he said, adding he expects to see new progress in efforts for the relevant legislation this year.

Pan Helin, co-director of the Digital Economy and Financial Innovation Research Center at Zhejiang University's International Business School, said the private sector is playing a key role in boosting innovation and spurring China's economic growth.

Looking ahead, Pan said more efforts should be made to boost confidence of private businesses, including stabilizing expectations on economic prospects, eliminating local protectionism and ensuring equal treatment of private enterprises and SOEs.

In 2023, China had made consolidated efforts to spur the growth of the private sector, including a series of measures to stimulate the vitality of private investment and boost confidence, and the establishment of an NDRC bureau for private sector development.

Yang Jinghao, chief economist at Concat Data Technology (Hangzhou) Co, said boosting the development of the private sector marks a key step in tackling challenges from both an external environment that has become more complicated in recent times and domestic structural problems.

"The healthy and sustainable development of the private sector will help foster smooth domestic circulation, spur innovation-driven growth and stabilize expectations," he said.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, fixed-asset investment by the private sector edged down 0.5 percent year-on-year in the first 11 months of 2023 but was flat with the reading in the first 10 months.

"The private sector will face various challenges and opportunities ahead," said Hong Yong, an associate research fellow at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation's e-commerce research institute.

"China's steady economic growth and ongoing technological advancement will provide vast opportunities for private sector development, while the sector's constituent businesses will also face pressures from the sluggish global economic recovery, the rise of trade protectionism and intensified market competition."

Hong further said the government should continue to optimize the business environment, strengthen property rights protection and create a better institutional environment for the development of private enterprises.

Briefly

PBOC adds liquidity via reverse repos

China's central bank conducted 137 billion yuan (\$19.36 billion) of seven-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 1.8 percent on Tuesday. The move aims to keep liquidity in the banking system reasonable and ample, the People's Bank of China said in a statement. A reverse repo is a process by which the central bank purchases securities from commercial banks through bidding, with an agreement to sell them back in the future.

China starts 5th national economic census

China on Monday formally started its fifth national economic census. Some 2.1 million enumerators will go into businesses and communities to collect and register economic data in 1.16 million census areas over the next four months or so, said the National Bureau of Statistics. China's national economic census takes place every five years. The NBS carried out its preliminary work in the second half of last year, and the census is entering the stage of full implementation in 2024.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

CNOOC's deep water oilfield project in Brazil starts production

By ZHENG XIN
zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

China National Offshore Oil Corp has further expanded its presence in Brazil's deep water pre-salt oilfields following the start of production of its Mero2 project on Tuesday, industry experts said.

Mero2 is one of the four production units of Mero, the country's third-largest pre-salt oilfield in the Santos Basin off southeastern Brazil. It is located at a water depth of between 1,800 and 2,100 meters, CNOOC said.

Sixteen development wells are planned to be commissioned, including eight production wells and eight injectors. The production capacity of the project is 180,000 barrels of crude oil per day, the State-owned company said.

Mero1 has consistently maintained a good production status since it was put into operation in May, with a daily crude oil production capacity of 25,500 metric tons, one of the most productive offshore oil fields in Brazil so far, said Huang Yehua, president of CNOOC Petroleum Brazil Ltda, a wholly

owned subsidiary of CNOOC.

"CNOOC's participation in the development of the mega deep water pre-salt oilfield in Brazil highlights its technical expertise," he said.

According to Huang, the floating production storage and offloading, or FPSO, used in the project, is one of the world's largest such FPSO facilities.

With a designed storage capacity of about 1.4 million barrels, it was constructed and commissioned in China in June and arrived in Brazil in September, he said.

FPSO, an offshore oil and gas processing platform capable of crude oil production, storage and export, has become the mainstream production facility for global offshore oil and gas development.

Deep water pre-salt oilfields constitute one-third of the world's petroleum reserves.

Development of an ultra-deep water pre-salt oilfield, where bountiful oil and gas resources can be found, is an emerging sector and a significant trend in the global petroleum industry, said Luo Zuoxian, head of intelligence

and research at the Sinopec Economics and Development Research Institute.

Actively participating in the development of global giant ultra-deep water pre-salt oilfields strengthens China's comparative advantages in the field of marine petroleum production, Luo said.

Data from consultancy BloombergNEF showed that Brazil's oil output growth over the past decade has been entirely driven by pre-salt production.

Wang Dongjin, chairman of CNOOC, said the start of production of Mero2 has further deepened energy cooperation between China and Brazil and that the company will actively collaborate with partners to further advance energy cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative.

CNOOC said it attaches great importance to its investments and collaborations in the Brazilian market, which has vast and rich oil and gas resources with numerous oilfields under construction or in production.

As of now, CNOOC owns five deep water oil and gas assets in Brazil, it said.

FTAs spur China's trade, partners' economies

By ZHONG NAN
zhongnan@chinadaily.com.cn

The expansion of China's free trade agreements with multiple countries will enhance the competitiveness of its products globally and facilitate its companies' entry into more markets this year, said analysts and exporters on Tuesday.

With the China-Nicaragua FTA — China's 21st free trade deal with another country — taking effect on Monday, they said multilateral and bilateral FTAs can be powerful tools to boost China's foreign trade. FTAs, they said, can help open up new markets, streamline trade procedures, bolster economic diversification and adapt to new global trade norms this year.

For instance, the China-Nicaragua FTA marks the first time China opened up its cross-border trade in services and investment through a negative list. This list specifies the industry sectors that are off limits to foreign investors. Global businesses

can operate in any sector that is not on the list, according to information released by the Ministry of Commerce.

The negative list facilitates greater economic liberalization, said Cui Fan, a professor of foreign trade at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing.

"As China and Singapore have made notable progress to further upgrade their FTA in recent years, the upgraded version of the China-Singapore FTA may become the second agreement to adopt a full negative list approach between China and other countries," Cui said.

About 60 percent of goods in the China-Nicaragua trade are now exempt from tariffs, and the tariffs on over 95 percent will be gradually reduced to zero.

Guo Fangkun, director of the administration office at Shandong Cachland Tyres Co Ltd, a Linyi, Shandong province-based tire manufacturer, said the China-Nicaragua FTA has lowered the tariff rate for

Nicaragua's tire imports from 10 percent to 9 percent, and will eventually reach zero.

"Based on our projected sales worth 4 million yuan (\$560,632) to Nicaragua in 2023, we can expect to save nearly 40,000 yuan in tariffs this year," said Guo.

China and Nicaragua saw their trade value surge more than 11 percent year-on-year to 88.62 billion yuan in the first 11 months of 2023, data from the General Administration of Customs showed.

Even though the size of the China-Nicaragua FTA does not compare with mega free trade deals such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership pact, the importance of FTAs with smaller economies cannot be underestimated, said Wu Hongmei, director of tariff department at the Ministry of Finance. China's trade volume with Serbia and Ecuador, she said, would grow after they finalize their domestic procedures for bilateral FTAs this year.

To further enrich bilateral busi-

ness ties, China signed FTAs with Serbia and Ecuador in 2023. Once these FTAs come into effect, as much as 90 percent of the goods traded between China and Ecuador will be exempted from tariffs, while 60 percent of them will immediately enjoy zero tariffs, data from China's Ministry of Commerce showed.

As for the FTA with Serbia, around 10,500 Serbian and 9,000 Chinese products are on the free trade list, meaning there will be no import duties on trading those items between the two countries.

To expand high-standard opening-up and make better use of the resources and markets both domestically and internationally, China started to implement provisional import tariff rates lower than the most-favored-nation rates on 1,010 items on Monday, according to a statement issued by the Customs Tariff Commission of the State Council.

China had signed 22 FTAs with 29



A view of a booth of Nicaragua during an expo in Beijing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

countries and regions, covering Asia, Oceania, Latin America, Africa and Europe by the end of 2023. The country's trade with these free trade partners accounts for one-third of its total foreign trade, said the Ministry of Commerce.

By combining unilateral tariff cuts with reciprocal tariff reduc-

tions through FTAs, China aims to expand its degree of opening-up, and further advance trade and investment liberalization and globalization, said Gao Lingyun, a researcher at the Institute of World Economics and Politics, which is part of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

BUSINESS



Ski enthusiasts gather at a venue in Harbin, capital of Heilongjiang province, on Dec 12. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Sizzling theme park biz ignites Harbin's ice, snow economy

Key related industry clusters driving more tourists to popular winter destination

By ZHENG YIRAN in Beijing and TIAN XUEFEI in Harbin

Ban Ruiqi and her family recently took a trip to Harbin in Northeast China's Heilongjiang province. Despite the extremely cold weather there, the tourists from Beijing skied, shopped and generally had a good time during the three-day New Year holiday.

"We went to the Chinese-Baroque Historic Block in the morning, and the Harbin Ice and Snow World in the afternoon, where I saw some local souvenirs and specialties. I bought some for my friends and relatives back home. I especially liked the hand-drawn postcards," Ban said.

As an increasing number of travelers show greater enthusiasm for winter tourism, Harbin's ice and snow economy is booming.

With the opening of various ice and snow-themed parks, the city has become popular among tourists.

In the two weeks since the opening of the Harbin Ice and Snow World on Dec 18, the city's popularity in searches on China's travel website Mafengwo surged 300 percent, making it an "internet celebrity" city, data from the online platform showed.

According to Harbin Taiping International Airport, the airport realized an annual throughput of 20 million passenger trips on Dec 20, setting a record for the Northeast China region.

A report released by online travel agency

Ctrip showed Harbin ranked on a list of hot New Year holiday tourism destinations in China this year.

During the three-day holiday period, air and train ticket bookings to Harbin grew by 631 percent year-on-year.

The Harbin airport added 11 domestic routes, and operated 463 flights, on Dec 22, transporting over 70,000 passengers, setting a record for passenger flow.

On Dec 26, hotel bookings in Harbin for the New Year holiday on Beijing-based online travel agency Qunar surged 2,570 percent on a yearly basis, while those for bed-and-breakfast stays on homestay platform Tujia soared 2,700 percent.

"Entering the winter peak season, especially after the opening of the Harbin Ice and Snow World, our room reservations have remained full, and the situation will last until the Spring Festival period," said Deng Yibo, general manager assistant at the Modern Hotel in Harbin.

"Tourism souvenirs have mostly been sold out, especially hand-drawn postcards. Postcards of various tourist spots are popular; so are candies and chocolates from Russia. The shelves are basically empty," said Meng Fanbo, a staff member at a gift shop in Harbin.

Wang Hongxin, head of the bureau of culture, broadcasting, TV and tourism of Harbin, said, "The winter tourism season in Harbin has been so popular that we expect such a 'heat' will last until the end of March."

In January 2023, the China Tourism Academy issued a report on the development of Harbin's ice and snow tourism.

It said that with a high concentration of ice and snow resources in China, Harbin has gone through the primary stage of serving human transportation through ice and

snow, and entered the advanced stage of using ice and snow resources to drive urban development.

In May 2022, Harbin launched a development plan for its ice and snow economy.

According to the plan, by 2025, total output value of the city's ice and snow industry should reach 75 billion yuan (\$10.5 billion), taking up over a quarter of the province's total in the sector.

By 2030, that should take up over a third of the province's total and surpass 150 billion yuan.

Huang Dawei, deputy head of the bureau of culture, broadcasting, TV and tourism of Harbin, said, "Through coordinating the development of four key ice and snow industry clusters — ice and snow sports, ice and snow culture, ice and snow equipment, and ice and snow tourism — Harbin was successfully granted the right to host the 9th Asian Winter Games 2025."

Hong Yong, an associate research fellow at the e-commerce research institute of the Ministry of Commerce, said: "Harbin's ice and snow economy is on the rise, bringing real benefits to the local merchants. To promote the long-term development of the industry, it is suggested that the government offer more favorable policies, such as helping lower merchants' winter operating costs, and providing marketing platforms. Meanwhile, enterprises should offer high-quality goods and services to meet consumer demand against the backdrop of a consumption upgrade."

Zhou Huiying contributed to this story.

Contact the writers at zhengyiran@chinadaily.com.cn

Riding booming demand, foldables to outperform overall smartphones

By FAN FEIFEI
fanfeifei@chinadaily.com.cn

The foldable smartphone market is expected to witness robust growth in the coming years, mainly driven by the gradual improvement of flexible screens and hinge-related technologies alongside continuous product price declines, experts said.

They added the burgeoning market is currently the only segment that continues to show an upward trend within the smartphone industry — one which has been mired in sluggish sales of late.

Global shipments of foldable handsets are projected to reach 100 million units in 2027 from 13.1 million units in 2022, with a compound annual growth rate of 51 percent during the period, said a new report released by China Securities.

Shipments of foldable smartphones in China hit 1.26 million units in the second quarter of 2023, surging 173 percent year-on-year, and this figure is likely to surpass 17 million units in full-year 2025, the report said. Currently, the penetration rate of foldable handsets worldwide only stands at 1 percent.

Counterpoint Research said global foldable smartphone shipments are expected to have continued their rising trend and hit 16 million units in 2023, an increase of 26.8 percent year-on-year, fueled by the continued growth of the Chinese foldable phone sector and accelerated competition among foldable products worldwide.

A survey conducted by the consultancy said 64 percent of high-end smartphone users in China are willing to purchase a foldable smartphone for their next purchase, and 89 percent of potential foldable handset buyers prefer book-type foldable designs for their wide and large displays and multitasking features.

The survey added that trying new form factors and owning bigger screens are key reasons driving preference for foldable options, while the durability and longevity of foldable smartphones is the top area where consumers want to see improvements.

The Chinese foldable smartphone market has shown exponential growth in 2023, registering a 106 percent year-on-year increase in the third quarter, said Counterpoint Research.

A string of handset makers, such as Honor, Oppo, Vivo and Samsung Electronics, rolled out their latest foldable smartphone models last year in a bid to grab a bigger slice of the pie in the highly competitive smartphone market.

Huawei Technologies Co has maintained its top position in the domestic foldable smartphone sector with a market share of 34 percent in the third quarter, while Samsung took second place at 21 percent. Honor secured a market share of 16 percent, ranking third, followed by Oppo and Vivo's foldable smartphones, the consultancy said.

“

The Chinese foldable smartphone market was poised for double-digit growth in 2023, even against an anticipated overall market contraction of less than 5 percent year-on-year.”

Zhang Mengmeng, a senior research analyst at Counterpoint Research

41.5 million units

expected global foldable phone shipments by 2026, according to International Data Corp

“The Chinese foldable smartphone market was poised for double-digit growth in 2023, even against an anticipated overall market contraction of less than 5 percent year-on-year,” said Zhang Mengmeng, a senior research analyst at Counterpoint Research.

With original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) enhancing the durability, design and affordability of foldables, these devices are set to captivate a broader consumer base, Zhang said, adding that unique software capabilities like advanced multitasking and seamless inner-outer screen integration are expected to further boost the appeal of foldable smartphones.

Global market researcher International Data Corp said 67.05 million units of smartphones were shipped in China in the third quarter, down 6.3 percent year-on-year. Nevertheless, a sign of the market bottoming out emerged as consumers were attracted by the social buzz led by the Huawei Mate 60 series, while key vendors put more focus and hope on the fourth quarter.

IDC estimates global foldable phone shipments will reach 41.5 million units in 2026, with a compound annual growth rate of 38.7 percent from 2021 to 2026. Although it still believes this use case remains a low priority, falling prices and new business use cases make the idea more appealing moving forward.

Nabila Popal, research director with IDC's worldwide quarterly mobile phone tracker, said foldables remain a niche and premium flagship device, and vendors should focus on improving user experience and boosting confidence in the category to generate long-term growth.

“I believe foldables are the future of premium Android devices even if, as a whole, they are only expected to capture less than 3 percent of global volume by the end of our forecast period,” Popal said.



国际爱护动物基金会



Between heaven and earth, together with other sentient beings, I live.

— Zhuangzi, Philosopher, Late 4th century BC



天地与我并生，而万物与我为一

——《庄子·齐物论》




AD

BUSINESSFOCUS

Solar sector readying for new challenges

Chinese PV firms lead the world, but overcapacity, price weakness loom

By LIU YUKUN
liuyukun@chinadaily.com.cn

China's solar industry climbed to new heights in 2023, with manufacturing, installed capacity and exports experiencing robust growth and reshaping the global landscape with continuous technological breakthroughs.

According to the China Photovoltaic Industry Association, China saw 163.88 gigawatts of new photovoltaic installations in the first 11 months, marking a remarkable 149.4 percent year-on-year growth. Most months saw triple-digit percentage surges, with March topping 400 percent.

Currently, over half of the nation's new installations of power generators are photovoltaic facilities.

The surge prompted the CPIA to revise its projections for China's new PV installations this year, raising the forecast from an initial range of 120-140 GW to 160-180 GW.

"China's solar power global market share has exceeded 80 percent. Technological prowess is evident in continuous breakthroughs, such as achieving a 33.9 percent conversion efficiency in crystalline silicon-perovskite tandem solar cells, setting yet another world record," said Wang Shijiang, secretary-general of the CPIA.

This rapid growth in PV installations had a significant effect on overall renewable energy capacity, which reached 1.45 billion kilowatts last year. Impressively, this capacity marked a new high and constituted over 50 percent of national power generation installed capacity, said the National Energy Administration.

Solar power alone reached 557.6 million kW as of the end of November, significantly exceeding the NEA's year-end target of approximately 490 million kW set in 2022.

Surges in output, exports

Data from the association further revealed a substantial year-on-year increase of over 70 percent in PV manufacturing output — which encompasses silicon materials, wafers, cells and modules — from January to October. The manufacturing output, including approximately 1.14 million metric tons of polysilicon, around 460 GW of wafers, 404 GW of cells and 367 GW of PV modules, contributed to an output value exceeding 1.3 trillion yuan (\$182 billion).

"China holds a dominant position in the global PV supply chain. Benefiting from a complete life-cycle supply chain and rapid advancements in PV power generation technology, China has emerged as a leader, achieving significant cost reductions and shaping the landscape of solar energy on a global scale," said Jiang Yali, a solar sector analyst at BloombergNEF.

Such strong production capacity spurred a remarkable surge in PV exports, with a 90 percent increase in wafers, a 72 percent jump in cells and a 34 percent rise in modules, from January to October, supported by resilient global demand. Because of rapid price declines, PV product exports totaled approximately \$43 billion during this period, reflecting a marginal 2.4 percent year-on-year decrease.

Li Shuo, a Ministry of Commerce official, said PV products had become new drivers for exports in 2023. Li said PV exports to economies involved in the Belt and Road Initiative, ASEAN and nations in Africa saw significant growth.

Wang Bohua, honorary chairman of the CPIA, also highlighted the increasing diversification of the PV export markets, with Europe still holding the largest share at 52.9 percent, albeit slightly down from the previous year.

Breakthroughs in efficiency

According to the global solar cell laboratory's highest efficiency chart published by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, as of Dec 15, Chinese entities broke records five times, and maintained



A view of a solar power facility in Tongchuan, Shaanxi province, in August. YUAN JINGZHI / FOR CHINA DAILY

2023
year in
Review



China has emerged as a leader, achieving significant cost reductions and shaping the landscape of solar energy on a global scale."

Jiang Yali, a solar sector analyst at BloombergNEF

seven current records.

Notably, the highest efficiency record for silicon-based solar cells was again broken by Longi Green Energy, standing at 27.09 percent on Dec 19, certified by the Institute for Solar Energy Research in Hamelin, Germany. The previous record was also set by Longi at 26.81 percent.

The company broke another world record of 33.9 percent conversion efficiency for crystalline silicon-perovskite tandem solar cells in late November.

Cao Renxian, chairman of the CPIA, said: "China saw accelerated technological iterations in PV components, with cutting-edge battery technologies gaining industrial traction. The efficiency of novel cells has repeatedly set world records, positioning China at the forefront of such global technology."

Expansion of applications

The robust PV manufacturing industry has facilitated the continuous expansion of application scenarios.

The development of residential PV has progressed rapidly, with China's cumulative installed capacity surpassing 100 million kW by the end of September. Rural areas in China have witnessed over 5 million households installing residential PV systems, driving investment exceeding 500 billion yuan, said the NEA.

Looking at regional distribution, provinces including Shandong, Henan and Hebei led in cumulative installed residential PV capacity as of September, accounting for 60 percent of the country's total, the NEA said.



A worker inspects battery quality at a Longi Green Energy factory in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, in February. SHAO RUI / XINHUA

According to the administration, rural areas in China that have the potential to install PV panels on roofs cover approximately 27.3 billion square meters, and there's huge potential for further development.

Although distributed PV slightly surpassed centralized large-area PV in capacity, the latter's growth was faster, the CPIA said. In the first three quarters of 2023, centralized PV saw installations of 61.79 GW, a year-on-year growth of 257.8 percent.

"The first batch of wind and solar power installations in the Gobi Desert and other arid areas was required to be connected to the grid by the end of 2023, which contributed to the sector's rapid growth," said Wang.

Overcapacity, price concerns

While PV development has yielded impressive results, concerns about fiercer competition and overcapacity loomed over 2023.

Wang highlighted a continuous decline in PV module prices since February, with several companies' bidding prices per watt falling below 1 yuan beginning in October.

"While the new energy industry saw continued high growth in 2023, it faced a series of challenges. Prices in the PV and energy storage industry chains were consistently decreasing, indicating periods of temporary overcapacity," said Zhu Gongshan, chairman of Golden Concord Holdings Ltd, a major solar power firm.

Experts said the primary reason for the price decline is the imbalance in supply and demand, together with market expectations of a reduction in silicon material

prices. In addition, large global inventory stockpiles make it challenging for module prices to rise.

Under the low-price scenario, PV enterprises face considerable challenges. In the secondary market, the PV sector experienced a decline throughout the year. As of Dec 18, the total market value of the PV sector shrunk by nearly 1.2 trillion yuan. The largest PV exchange traded fund, Huatai-PineBridge CSI Photovoltaic Industry ETF, plummeted by over 40 percent, and nearly 30 stocks in the sector had seen declines exceeding 40 percent.

Longi's third-quarter report indicated that, despite year-on-year growth in production capacity and sales supporting revenue and net profit for the first nine months, the performance in the third quarter fell significantly below market expectations. The main reasons cited were reduced investment income, foreign exchange losses, increased inventory write-downs, and heightened research and development expenses, among other factors.

Liu Yuxi, the China region president of Longi, said last year's decline in module prices exceeded the company's earliest expectations, almost reaching a "panic drop". Liu emphasized that prices below 1 yuan/watt for modules would truly mean falling below production costs, indicating it may be difficult for some companies to make ends meet.

Industry insiders said the overall operating capacity of silicon wafer plants may be less than 80 percent at present, making destocking increasingly pivotal. Many manufacturers are eager to offload inventory at low prices, and the current price of silicon



Technicians conduct safety checks on rooftop photovoltaic panels in Yiwu, Zhejiang province, in December. SHI BUFA / FOR CHINA DAILY

wafers has touched some companies' breakeven points. Although top-tier companies like Longi are less affected by declining operating capacity, the sustained low prices have squeezed bottom lines.

Experts said the industry has entered a restructuring phase, with old product inventories facing destocking campaigns, and sustained low prices testing companies' cash reserves.

Intensified efforts

Against this backdrop, PV companies are actively seeking innovative ways to reduce costs and improve efficiency. Liu of Longi said that the company is willing to focus more on exploring cutting-edge technologies in industrial development.

In its third-quarter financial report, Longi reiterated its strong commitment to developing back-contact structure crystalline silicon solar cell technology, aiming to enhance the production yields and conversion efficiency of hybrid passivated back contact products. With the in-depth R&D of efficient BC technology and advancing production capacity, higher-level performance HPBC Pro cells are expected to begin production by the end of 2024.

BC cells, promoted by Longi, are a general term for various back-contact structure crystalline silicon solar cells. They can be combined with various technologies such as TOPCon, HJT and tandem cells.

However, in the current competition for technological dominance among third-generation N-type cells, the TOPCon camp has shown a better performance.

According to recent financial reports released by major PV com-

panies, the "flagship" of the TOPCon camp, Jinko Solar, saw an income of 85 billion yuan in the first three quarters, a year-on-year increase of 61.25 percent, and a net profit of 6.35 billion yuan, up 279.14 percent.

The company said that the increase in the proportion of N-type solar cell delivery is one of the main reasons for the net profit growth. TOPCon solar cells can be manufactured as N-type or P-type solar cells.

Another PV giant, Trina Solar, whose major products are TOPCon solar cells, also achieved a doubling of profit in the first three quarters to over 5 billion yuan.

It seems that although overcapacity is dragging down prices, profits for leading companies are still on the ascent.

Qian Jing, vice-president of Jinko Solar, said: "For any industry, the right amount of overcapacity and moderate competition are necessary to drive technological progress. Otherwise, there will always be a supply-demand mismatch, leading to corporate complacency. Efficient products are never sufficient, and inefficient overcapacity persists. This is the essence of the market."

Zhu of Golden Concord said: "Overcapacity is a natural phase in market economies. Facing competition while being prepared for potential elimination is an integral aspect of industry evolution."

Zhu said that as the renewable energy industry gears up for a shakeout, those hinged on specialized products and high-quality development driven by technological innovation will stand out, and enterprises hoping to survive, let alone thrive, should intensify research efforts.

COMMENT

Editorials

Joint efforts required to ensure China hawks are unable to sabotage future of Sino-US ties

New Year's Day marked the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the United States. Despite the dramatic changes that have transformed the international geopolitical landscape in the intervening years, China-US relations in general maintained an upward momentum until relatively recently. The increasing interaction brought huge benefits to the two peoples and contributed to world peace and prosperity.

The exchange of congratulatory messages between the leaders of the two countries marking the occasion indicates their shared desire to maintain that positive momentum despite the current headwinds.

In his message to US President Joe Biden, President Xi Jinping said history has already proven and will continue to prove that mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation are the right way for China and the US to get along with each other.

While in his message to the Chinese leader, Biden said that the establishing of official relations facilitated the prosperity and opportunities enjoyed by the two countries in the following years. He reaffirmed that he is committed to managing the influential relationship responsibly.

The importance of properly handling China-US ties in these times of great volatility cannot be over-emphasized. Bilateral relations have become increasingly strained in recent years, as a result of the US' inability to break the Cold War prism through which it views international affairs. Because of this, the two sides spent much of last year trying to keep their relationship on an even keel after the US repeatedly threatened to upset it by steering it from storm to storm.

As the saying goes, those who sow the winds will

reap the whirlwind. Thanks to the US' increasingly combative unease at the prospect of a less patronizing relationship than it had with China in the past, the China-US relationship has faced notable difficulties and it even risks veering into conflict if the US cannot adopt a more amiable demeanor.

With the shortsightedness born of their Cold War mentality, China hawks in Washington, who have been able to grab the reins of the US' China policy, have been constantly straining relations to breaking point. They have indulged themselves with one provocative move after another, ranging from trying to throttle China's science and technology development to decoupling the two economies and worsening China's security environment, all in a bid to ensure that Washington can declare itself master of the global house.

In this regard, the US House Select Committee on China deserves a special mention as it has done its utmost to spoil all the good work that has been done in the past by people on both sides to strengthen relations despite a number of spats along the way. Mike Gallagher, chair of the committee, has defended the committee's anti-China stance by alleging "There are certain things that require a machete". To prevent China-US relations from snapping, which carries the real risk of mutually damaging conflict, such machete wielders in Washington need to be restrained.

Navigating China-US relations demands wisdom, foresight and courage, not hostility, shortsightedness and fear of the future. China and the US should join hands to build upon the important common understandings and outcomes reached by the two heads of state in their meeting in San Francisco and take concrete actions to promote the stable, healthy and sustainable development of bilateral ties.

Tsai's New Year speech rings only bells of alarm

Secessionist-minded Tsai Ing-wen took advantage of her last New Year address as the head of the Taiwan authorities to brag that she had made the island "the world's Taiwan" rather than China's Taiwan.

To cover up the fact that the island has never been so close to conflict with the Chinese mainland as it has since she took office, Tsai played one word game after another in her 15-minute televised speech.

Despite their refusal to uphold the 1992 Consensus and repeatedly buying arms from the United States to strengthen "national defense", she alleged her authorities have honored the commitment of maintaining the status quo of the Taiwan Strait.

In spite of such blatant provocations as invitations to former US House of Representatives speaker Nancy Pelosi and attempts to inveigle independent status for the island in UN organizations, she claimed to have never taken the initiative to provoke the mainland.

That nearly two-thirds of her speech was dedicated to defending her and her authorities' actions serves to show how little importance she has given to Taiwan people's well-being and livelihoods. Instead the focus of her work has been how to leverage Washington's support for her secessionist goal — it being regarded as an injurious thorn in Beijing's side — without pre-

cipitating a forceful response from Beijing.

In a bid to put her eight years on the moral high ground and cover up the fact that the island has been downgraded to be a pawn in Washington's geopolitical game with Beijing, Tsai sought to portray the island as a symbol of "democracy and freedom". She portrayed it as being on the front line in the fight between good and evil, in the hope that the Taiwan people will regard the economic woes and regional tensions that have resulted from her speculating on Washington's support as being worthwhile.

Moreover, by paralleling the Taiwan question with the Ukraine crisis and the Palestinian issue, and highlighting the necessity and inevitability of upholding "value diplomacy" in the global industry and supply chains, Tsai again sought to mislead the world about the nature of the Taiwan question by trying to deny the reality that it is an internal affair of China, and justify the US' "decoupling" in economy and trade.

That Tsai openly promoted Lai Ching-te, her right-hand man and a DPP candidate in the forthcoming local election of the island in less than two weeks, as the "right choice" who can lead the island down the "right path" in the address should raise Taiwan people's full alert. Her speech reveals clearly the dangerous direction in which her earmarked successor will lead the island if elected.

Argentina's shift not a rejection of BRICS

The decision by Argentina to not join the BRICS group of developing economies came as no real surprise given the pronouncements to that effect by the country's new president during his election campaign.

The populist, self-defined "anarcho-capitalist", Javier Milei had previously said that his foreign policy would differ "in many aspects from that of the previous government" and "some decisions made by the previous administration will be reviewed".

BRICS membership would have likely helped Argentina tap the "possibilities of joining new markets, of consolidating existing markets, of raising investment coming in, of creating jobs and raising imports", as the previous administration said when giving the reasons for it seeking Argentina's membership of the group.

That Milei, in his letter to his counterparts of the five original BRICS members — Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa — proposed to "intensify bilateral relations" and increase "trade and investment flows" indicates that he is not looking to cut economic ties with the BRICS countries and that he is still hoping to release the immense potential that stands to be tapped in economic cooperation between Argentina and the BRICS members, old and new.

Some in the West, however, are trying to use Argentina's rejection of BRICS membership as ammunition

to attack China and other BRICS countries. A Fox News report crowed that Milei's decision was a "set-back" for the global ambitions of China and Russia. Rather than viewing it as part of Milei's promise-for-votes and subsequent balancing act, they can only view it from the perspective of Washington's zero-sum "competition" with China and Russia.

Argentina's economy is experiencing immense difficulties, with inflation reaching 150 percent and 40 percent of its population living below the poverty line. As some of Milei's policy changes aimed at revving up the economy have proved unpopular, the possibility of Argentina's new leader adjusting its foreign and economic policies to appease the public was always on the cards.

BRICS now accounts for about 40 percent of the world's population and more than 25 percent of the world's GDP, and it contributes 50 percent of the world's economic growth. As an open and inclusive mechanism, it welcomes like-minded partners to join the big family. That Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates have now become formal members of BRICS, starting Jan 1, underscores the aspiration among developing countries and emerging economies for a shared future of mutually beneficial cooperation.

The door of membership to BRICS will always remain open to Argentina. It is welcome to join when it feels the time is right.

Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Development to remain the focus in 75th year of nation's founding

China's first domestically built large cruise ship, *Adora Magic City*, set off from Shanghai on its maiden voyage on Monday. The delivery and operation of the large ship, built after eight years of scientific research and five years of design and construction, has been called a "milestone" in China's shipbuilding industry.

"Our goal is both inspiring and simple. Ultimately, it is about delivering a better life for the people," as the top leader said in the New Year message. The pursuit of a better life is China's simple aspiration for development, and also bears the expectations of people around the world.

In the past year, China has worked hard for peace, for development and for mutual learning among civilizations, as it knows full well that peaceful development is

always the main theme and win-win cooperation the top priority.

That explains why China has sent envoys for mediation, be it to find a political settlement of the crisis in Ukraine or to end the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Such efforts by China have won wide recognition from the international community.

Development holds the key to solving all problems. Over the past year, the recovery of the world economy has remained sluggish, and food and energy crises and rising prices have put great pressures on the people of many countries. China's economy realized a 5.2 percent growth in the first three quarters of 2023, making it the largest engine of the world economy. By hosting various expositions, China aims to set up cooperation platforms and share with the rest of the world its devel-

opment opportunities.

From the successful hosting of the China-Central Asia Summit and the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, to the inclusion of new members in the BRICS family and the San Francisco meeting between the heads of state of China and the United States, China has worked hard to maintain international order and strengthen the Global South, injecting certainty and stability into a volatile and changing world.

As 2024 marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of New China, the country will continue to shoulder its responsibility for world fairness and justice, open wider to the outside world, and promote the common development of all countries while promoting its own development.

— CHINA MEDIA GROUP

Educational public welfare the way forward

In the past two months donations received by the domestic education sector exceeded 3 billion yuan (\$421.59 million). Zhejiang University received more than 1 billion yuan, the University of Science and Technology of China 200 million yuan and Wuhan University 1.3 billion yuan.

Over the past decade, universities have begun to attach importance to donations while companies and entrepreneurs have shown a greater sense of social responsibility. According to a 2022 report, from 2015 to 2020, around 78 university foundations received a total amount of 30.36 billion yuan in donations.

However, the institutions that

provide basic and preschool education receive limited donations.

Compared to universities, which can develop alumni donations, the ability of basic education schools to attract donations is limited. There is a need for public welfare organizations to mobilize enterprises and entrepreneurs to donate to these schools and institutions, which can use the funds for curriculum development, teacher training, etc.

As the nation increases investment in education, domestic education donations have shifted their focus from providing student subsidies in the less-developed regions to improving the quality of education and research in major universities,

and enhancing the fairness and justice in the allocation of educational resources in the country.

This sets higher requirements for the public welfare organizations. Instead of just providing funding to schools, they now need to engage in teacher training, develop school-based curricula, design campus activities, offer guidance on family education and more. All of this broadens the space for educational philanthropy, making it more challenging.

However, it's worth expanding this sphere to drive educational reform and development, as it has a bearing on the nation's future.

— THE PAPER.CN

What They Say

Colombo bows to New Delhi's coercion

It is a pity that Sri Lanka has imposed a one-year ban on Chinese research vessels from docking in its ports or operating in its exclusive economic zone starting from Monday, according to a *Hindustan Times* report. The move came after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe to respect India's "strategic and security concerns" during their meeting in July last year.

That it took nearly half a year for Colombo to issue the controversial ban, without providing any evidence to substantiate New Delhi's "speculation" that the Chinese vessels sailing there are used to "track Indian military tests and survey strategically important waters", demonstrates how much pressure India has exerted on Sri Lanka. And the logic underlying Modi's appeal

is that the military activities of India in Sri Lanka's EEZ contributes to the island country's security.

It is the close economic and trade cooperation between China and Sri Lanka, an important participant in the Belt and Road Initiative, that has prompted New Delhi to try and drive a wedge between the two. New Delhi considers China to be India's rival, which is evidenced in India's presence in almost all the US-led anti-China cliques in the region, including the Quad.

By bullying its neighbors, including Nepal, to take a tough stance toward China, New Delhi has set a very bad example. Its coercive practice will seriously undermine regional peace and stability. By hyping up a China "threat", the Modi government is attempting to divert public attention from India's domestic woes, which range from government

corruption to the economic recession and unemployment issues.

An exclusive economic zone, as prescribed by the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, does not define the ownership of any maritime features (islands, rocks and low-tide elevations) within it. Considering that many EEZs of different countries overlap with busy international shipping lanes and key marine research waters, if all countries copy the wayward ban imposed by Sri Lanka on certain categories of vessels of a particular country, the normal marine transport and scientific research activities that are protected by international laws and conventions will be subjected to the will of certain countries. That will greatly increase logistics costs and increase regional frictions.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

Contact us at:

China Daily
15 Huxin Dongle Chaoyang District,
Beijing 100029
News: +86 (0) 10 6491-8366
editor@chinadaily.com.cn
Advertisement: +86 (0) 10 6491-8631
ads@chinadaily.com.cn
Subscription: +86-400-699-0203
subscription.chinadaily.com.cn
App: www.chinadaily.com.cn/mobile/daily.html

China Daily UK
90 Cannon St, London EC4N 6HA, UK
+44 (0) 207 398 8270
editor@chinadailyuk.com

China Daily Asia Pacific
China Daily Hong Kong
Unit 1818, Hing Wai Centre, 7 Tin Wan
Praya Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong
+852 2518 5111
editor@chinadailyhk.com
editor@chinadailyasia.com

China Daily USA
1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,
New York, NY 10036
+1 212 537 8888
editor@chinadailyusa.com

China Daily Africa
P.O. Box 27281-00100, Nairobi, Kenya
+254 (0) 20 242 8589 (Nairobi)
editor@chinadailyafrica.com
enquiries@chinadailyafrica.com
subscription@chinadailyafrica.com

COMMENT

Tom Watkins

Sino-US people-to-people exchanges matter

The world needs much more understanding than what it has now. China and the United States, as the world's two major powers, should lead the way in restoring people-to-people, cultural, educational, governmental and non-profit exchanges to promote sound US-China relations while building a better collective future.

The results of the dialogue the two countries' leaders hold must have a trickle-down effect, helping other countries feel confident that there is a positive, prosperous future ahead for all. People-to-people exchanges are an integral part of President Xi Jinping's foreign policy. And I wish there was an equally big champion of people-to-people exchanges in the US, too.

Some would argue for "decoupling", disengaging or "de-risking" the US from China, but perhaps a bigger risk would be allowing domestic political pressure to drive the two countries apart. China-US economic and trade cooperation has brought benefits to the people of both China and the US for half a century. While we need to continue to work toward building sensible economic ties, it is vital that China and the US continue to follow the "Seven Cs" — communication, collaboration, cooperation, coordination and competition while avoiding unnecessary confrontations and conflict. This would allow the world to sleep well and prosper.

We also need to strengthen our people-to-people educational, cultural and sub-national collaborations and exchanges that have receded in recent years. These connections are the founda-

tion of understanding and mutual respect, which in turn fuel the most important bilateral relationship in the world today.

Too much of the current political narrative is vilifying more than amplifying the cooperation aspect of the US-China relationship on both sides of the Pacific. Today, roughly two-thirds of Americans hold a negative view of China and some politicians would like to drive up that number.

Recent years have seen some heartening progress in facilitating travel and people-to-people exchanges. China has resumed group tours to the US, and the two sides have agreed to increase passenger flights. Yet student exchanges remain significantly below pre-pandemic highs. The number of American students studying in China is frighteningly low. Going forward, we need to continue taking concrete steps no matter how minor they may be to rebuild these vital exchanges.

As the 21st century unfolds, both the US and China should be the beacons for building bridges rather than "Great Walls". As the China-US Heartland Association proclaims in its mission, "Not all bridges are built of concrete

and steel. Equally important bridges are built on friendship, culture, communication, cooperation and where these bridges exist, communities flourish." This approach would cement the people-to-people relationship between these two great nations in the hope of shaping a 21st century that benefits all of humanity.

In a world fraught with tension and uncertainty, a concerted effort to address the problems and existential threats facing both countries, rather all of humanity, is needed. It is imperative that we find ways to develop a shared vision and common agenda in areas that are in our collective national interests while we have open dialogue on topics where we disagree.

I call on philanthropists, not simply governments in the two countries, to join forces to create and endow a robust international exchange, a people-to-people organization that connects students, (from grade school to lifelong learners) artists, writers, athletes, tourists, educators, health and behavioral healthcare professionals, poets, sub-national government officials and NGOs between our two countries to listen, to understand and build bridges that will help sustain peace and prosperity for all.

I propose calling it the "Deng-Carter Exchange Bridge for International Peace and Prosperity" for the vision our respective leaders had. Former US president Jimmy Carter and late Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping looked

beyond our countries' many differences, found common ground and saw the value of connecting our people. We need to super charge this vision today. They believed rapprochement and interaction between our people would make the world safer and benefit both the US and China. They were as visionary as they were wise. We need this enlightened thinking more than ever before.

The global connections formed through these exchanges and personal interactions are vital for fostering understanding and unity. They lay the groundwork for meaningful dialogues, thoughtful synergy, mutual respect, joint prosperity and peaceful collaborations. It's inspiring to see the positive impact these exchanges can and have had, shaping a better tomorrow for both our nations and the world.

Going forward, all major global issues will intersect at the corner of Beijing and Washington. Building mutual understanding and respect today will assure we can celebrate the 100-year anniversary of this vital relationship in the future. The thought of the alternative is unthinkable.

Our children, grandchildren and all of humanity will thank us for our efforts.

The author is the former Michigan State Superintendent of schools. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



Kang Bing

The author is former deputy editor-in-chief of China Daily. kangbing@chinadaily.com.cn

Education funds need to be spent on improving teaching quality

I have made it a habit to visit a couple of university campuses when traveling to other Chinese cities. While enjoying the beautiful sceneries and artistic architecture free of charge, I can't help comparing today's campuses with those of my university years.

Campuses today are mostly huge — so big that students need bicycles to shuttle between different departments and the administrative building — and dotted with gorgeous sculptures, beautiful lakes, gardens, lawns, and forested areas. Many teaching buildings are unique, designed by renowned architects.

While enjoying all these, I visualize my campus of 45 years ago — a campus with one six-story teaching building, two four-story dormitory buildings, an auditorium and a playground.

Times have changed so have campuses. With governments at different levels continuously investing funds in education over the past decades, university campuses have expanded by up to ten times. When there is no more room for expansion at their existing location, some departments are shifted to a new campus at another place or the entire campus is moved to a new location in the suburbs. As a result, most major cities now have one or two "university towns" like Shahe in Beijing, Songjiang in Shanghai and Chang'an in Xi'an.

The expansion of campuses has also been necessitated by the ever-increasing number of students enrolling in universities. When I sat for the college entrance examination together with nearly 6 million other students in 1977, only 270,000 youngsters were lucky enough to enroll in colleges. For the past few years now, higher education institutions have been enrolling more than 10 million new students every year, with about 60 percent of examinees getting admission.

But efforts should be made to improve teaching quality instead of building humungous campuses and/or beautifying their outward appearance.

Behind the increase in the size of campuses and number of new admissions is the huge government investment in education. The State Council, China's Cabinet, recently announced that investment in education in 2022 reached 6.13 trillion yuan (\$858.06 billion), up 5.97 percent year-on-year.

Despite the current economic difficulties, investment in education will likely keep increasing because in 2013 the national education policy mandated that "education investment make up more than 4 percent of GDP".

The ever-increasing investment has improved the world's largest educational system — China now has about 290 million students studying in more than 500,000 schools and universities. With more than half of the funds injected into compulsory education — 12 years in developed areas and nine years in less-developed, rural areas — primary and high schools are now equipped with up-to-date teaching facilities and better-qualified faculties. Even schools in remote, mountainous areas have been providing free boarding and/or free lunch for students.

I am a bit envious of today's students for the education facilities they are provided with. During my college days, students of two classes had to use one classroom — one in the morning, the other in the afternoon — while a bench for two had to be shared by three students because schools then didn't have enough rooms and benches to accommodate all the students in one session, morning or afternoon. But when I see today's students toiling with their heavy homework and attending numerous after-school courses, I feel lucky to have escaped the ordeal. I barely have any memory of doing homework during my primary school years.

Despite being fascinated by the beautiful sceneries and fantastic buildings on campuses, I sometimes ask myself if investments in such things are worth it, especially when teaching quality in some universities has much room for improvement.

In 2022, for the first time in decades, China witnessed negative population growth, a trend that is likely to continue. That means the number of students entering schools and universities will keep shrinking from now on.

I will keep visiting universities to enjoy the beautiful sceneries and admire the architecture despite the increasing difficulty in doing so because of entry restrictions imposed by almost all universities due to various reasons.

But efforts should be made to improve teaching quality instead of building humungous campuses and/or beautifying their outward appearance. Investments will be worthwhile only when they are spent on recruiting or paying talented teachers, improving teaching quality, imparting skills and education to students, purchasing equipment for scientific research and/or supporting innovative projects.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

Zhong Houtao

Taiwan paying a big price for DPP's wrong policies

In her recent "new year address", Taiwan's current leader, Tsai Ing-wen, has conveyed worrying signals that could lead to disastrous consequences for the island. The so-called "Tsai Ing-wen path" represents a path towards "Taiwan independence" and confrontation, which poses a significant threat to Taiwan's security, the interests of its people, and regional stability. Since the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) assumed power in 2016, they have rejected the 1992 Consensus that recognizes one China and instead adopted a "pro-Taiwan independence" stance, exacerbating tensions in the Taiwan Strait.

In stark contrast, the authorities on the mainland have been making continuous efforts to enhance cross-Strait exchanges, aiming to genuinely improve the well-being of Taiwan residents. For instance, the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council, the country's Cabinet, have unveiled a decision on supporting Fujian province to explore a new path for cross-Strait integration and build a demonstration zone for improving cross-Strait ties. And 10 concrete measures have been implemented since Jan 1. The move can help maintain peace and promote prosperity across the Taiwan Strait.

However, the DPP, in a bid to strengthen its political position, has intensified its provocative moves, adding fuel to the fire. In fact, it is playing the "double independence" card by selecting "Taiwan independence advo-

The mainstream sentiment in Taiwan favors peace over conflict, development over upheaval, dialogue over animosity, and cooperation over confrontation.

cate" Lai Ching-te and "hardcore Taiwan independence proponent" Hsiao Bi-khim to seek power of the island.

Lai has a history of advocating "Taiwan independence", and is a self-proclaimed "pragmatic advocate of independence", and Hsiao is a die-hard supporter of this ideology. This pair of two staunch "Taiwan independence" advocates is likely to intensify separatist tendencies and push Taiwan onto an irreversible path to doom.

Despite a record-high 2024 defense budget of NT\$606.8 billion (\$19.7 billion), nearly 3 percent of the island's GDP, Taiwan is not becoming safer. The island's defense spending continues to rise, yet it finds itself "sitting on a powder keg". The island's emphasis on military buildup, aligned with the United States' provocative plans, is aimed at positioning Taiwan as a hedgehog against the Chinese mainland, but the outcome is a sense of increasing danger and concern among Taiwan residents, especially youths.

If the pro-independence forces con-

tinue to grip power on the island, they will make greater efforts to please the US, potentially sacrificing Taiwan's key industries, such as semiconductor manufacturing. This risky move could hollow out Taiwan's industries and cause a brain drain as talents would follow relocating industries to the US.

Since 2016, the DPP has neglected the island's economic and social development. Rather than focusing on people's economic well-being, the DPP has been indulging in political vendetta, wrongly believing that eliminating political opponents would help it remain in power.

The DPP's mismanagement and corruption have taken a toll on the island's economy, with the expected GDP growth rate in 2023 being a dismal 1.4 percent, a 14-year low.

The recent "2023 Chinese character" poll results in Taiwan reveal the public's sentiment. "Que", or "lack" secured the top spot in the poll with 8,565 votes, followed by "dan", or "egg". The combination of the two Chinese characters for "lack" and "eggs" highlights the pressing issue of shortage of eggs, symbolizing the DPP's governance failures. In fact, the discontent among Taiwan residents is palpable, with many of them openly expressing their frustration.

Shortages in Taiwan go beyond eggs to water, electricity, land, labor, talents and, most critically, peace. As an export-oriented economy, Taiwan relies heavily on a stable regional environment for import of raw materials and export of finished products.

It is this fear that prompted many Taiwan residents to say that the island won't thrive unless the DPP falls.

The DPP's pursuit of foreign alliances and its military ambitions have escalated tensions across the Strait. This is not surprising because DPP leaders have been advocating "Taiwan independence", which amounts to a call to military conflict.

At this critical juncture, Taiwan has to choose between peace and military conflict, and prosperity and decline. The mainstream sentiment in Taiwan favors peace over conflict, development over upheaval, dialogue over animosity, and cooperation over confrontation. It is important therefore that Taiwan residents adhere to the 1992 Consensus, oppose "Taiwan independence", and recognize the dangers posed by the DPP's separatist agenda.

The Taiwan patriots should fully understand the destructive nature of the DPP's scheme, do their part in steering cross-Strait relations back onto the right track of peaceful development, and safeguard peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait as well as their own safety and wellbeing. Making the right choices at this pivotal moment will contribute to maintaining peace across the Strait and foster peaceful cross-Strait relations.

The author is an associate professor at the school of national security, University of International Relations. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

GLOBAL VIEWS



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

LUXINHONG

Consolidated gains

Actively promoting the expansion and upgrading of the RCEP will enable its potential to be further tapped

Against the backdrop of the rise in anti-globalization sentiment and the sluggish global economic recovery, the implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement is giving an effective boost to the economic development of its member countries and contributing to the prosperity and stability of the regional economy and global free trade.

The RCEP, through measures such as tariff reductions, cumulative rules of origin, trade facilitation and investment liberalization, and market access for the trade in services, has effectively enhanced economic development in the region.

With the RCEP agreement taking effect for the Philippines in June 2023, the pact entered a new phase of comprehensive development.

By integrating the free trade agreements among its member countries, the RCEP has successfully addressed the lack of such agreements between some member countries, making it a victory for "open regionalism". The RCEP is the world's largest and most promising free trade zone, covering 15 countries in the Asia-Pacific region and representing nearly 30 percent of the global population, GDP and total trade in goods.

According to estimates from the Peterson Institute for International Economics, a think tank based in Washington DC, the RCEP is expected to drive a 10.4 percent increase in member countries' exports, a 2.6 percent increase in outward foreign direct investment, and a 1.8 percent increase in GDP by 2025. The agreement is also expected to create a net increase of \$519 billion in member countries' exports and a net increase of \$186 billion in national income by 2030, when the share of the RCEP bloc in the global economy is expected to increase to 50 percent.

Since the signing of the RCEP agreement, China has taken the initiative to formulate action plans to align its systems with the RCEP, refine relevant policies and advance its high-level and institutional opening-up. It has fulfilled its tariff reduction commitments, improved its business environment, opened up markets to share opportunities, strengthened economic and trade cooperation with the RCEP member countries, and facilitated the comprehensive implementation of the RCEP.

According to China's General Administration of Customs, the country's total imports and exports with RCEP member countries reached 12.95 trillion yuan (\$1.82 trillion) in 2022, up 7.5 percent year-on-year and accounting for

30.8 percent of its total foreign trade volume.

China has also applied to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement, promoting the alignment between the RCEP and higher international trade rules, and driving the high-level development of Asia-Pacific regional economic integration.

Currently, the sluggish global economic recovery, the rise of trade protectionism, the volatility in the financial markets and geopolitical risks have intensified the uncertainties and instability plaguing the global trade environment, which has increased the economic risks for countries worldwide, and raised higher requirements for the security of supply chains.

The trend of overstretching the concept of national security and de-risking is hindering economic globalization and international trade. Regional cooperation within the RCEP should be advanced to address the uncertainty in global economic development by fully leveraging the role of the RCEP in promoting global free trade.

In the context of the rising anti-globalization and protectionist sentiments, the implementation of the RCEP is a significant and positive development for global free trade. Accelerating the high-quality implementation of the RCEP can drive member countries to achieve higher levels of openness, enhance the depth and breadth of economic cooperation, jointly tackle global economic challenges, and provide vital support for the prosperity and development of global free trade.

Further strengthening cooperation in the digital economy, green economy, technological innovation, and other areas within the RCEP region can facilitate the establishment of an open economic system, and promote global economic globalization and greater economic integration within the Asia-Pacific region, achieving win-win and shared benefits for all parties.

Actively promoting the expansion and upgrading of the RCEP will deepen economic ties between regions, promote a more open and inclusive free trade network, and propel a new wave of global free trade progress.

Enhancing cooperation in value chains and supply chains within the RCEP region is a crucial guarantee to better cope with external risks and shocks. It is necessary to advance the division of labor and cooperation among the RCEP countries with different levels of economic development, so as to optimize the allocation of resources, drive the economic growth of

all the RECP members, narrow development gaps, and achieve common prosperity and sustainable development.

Transformation and upgrading of industrial and trade structures should continue. Building on the cooperation in conventional industries, there should be more collaboration in areas such as high-tech, advanced manufacturing, and modern services. Promoting the establishment of RCEP industry alliances is also important to accelerate the transition from an expansion of quantity to a leap in quality.

Cooperation in digital transformation and technological innovation should be strengthened to build smart and digital supply chains, in order to adapt to new technological changes. Infrastructure and information channels should continue to be built to promote the interconnectivity of value chains and supply chains.

Enhancing the RCEP's core competitiveness and influence is a crucial driving force for the development of global free trade. The RCEP members should strengthen institutional development, including establishing a sound intellectual property protection mechanism, effective dispute settlement mechanism and a secretariat to improve the operation of the RCEP, as well as enhancing policy communication and coordination mechanisms among member countries. These measures are key to consolidating the sustainable and effective operation of the RCEP, and further improving the regional economic competitiveness and sustainable development.

It is also imperative to strengthen the capacity building and infrastructure development of the RCEP member countries; promote technological cooperation, innovation exchanges and knowledge sharing so as to enhance the technological and innovative capabilities of the member countries. Digital infrastructure is also necessary to facilitate liberal trade and investment, as is strengthened education and training cooperation to enhance workforce skills. These will raise the development capabilities of the RCEP member countries and ensure that countries at different levels of development can adapt to the changing world and benefit from it.

The author is a researcher at the World Economic Research Department at the China Center for International Economic Exchanges. 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.

YU NANPING AND LUAN XINWEI

Changing paradigm of global competition

The global value chain is a victim of geopolitical risks, but it is also fueling and amplifying the risks

The technological revolution is changing the pattern of supply chains and the global production network. Geopolitical tensions and coercive economic policies are amplifying uncertainty and distrust in the global value chain, which in turn reflect and affect the paradigm of global political and economic competition, leading to new changes.

In the context of the new round of the technological revolution, the value chain of cutting-edge technologies has become a key focus of geopolitical games. Technology plays a key role in economic, military and other forms of power, and the dissemination and sharing of technology can endow competitive power.

The international political and economic competition featuring technological control has shifted its focus to decoupling and reshoring the global value chain. Due to new technological advancements such as information and communications technology, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, semiconductors, and aerospace, which have redefined the technological boundaries of national security, the strategic importance of the semiconductor industry, known as the "cornerstone" of technology, is destined to be pushed to the highest peak. So far, two noteworthy concepts have emerged in the global value chain embedded in the technological and geopolitical competition. One is the "strategic value chain" in the field of cutting-edge military-civilian dual-use technology; the other is the strategic part of the global value chain, which means controlling leading technological nodes or hubs that have strategic significance for controlling the global value chain. Therefore, the global value chain will not only become a victim of geopolitical risks, but also fuel and amplify such risks.

The expansion of the global value chain has not stopped countries from weaponizing it to achieve their foreign policy goals. On the contrary, the global value chain has improved some countries' ability to strategically use economic means, while also increasing the vulnerability of other countries. This not only includes the high dependence of some countries on other ones for imports of key materials and intermediate goods for finished

products, but also reflected in the desire to control key knowledge and technology, including through the use and mining of data. In this sense, the global value chain is more precisely a strategic value chain wherein some countries can use economic dependence as a political weapon to drive a shift in the paradigm of global political and economic competition.

In fact, the trade war between China and the United States has had an extremely strong impact on the structure of the global value chain, coupled with the embedded background of the new technological revolution; the global value chain is currently undergoing the largest restructuring over the past 40 years.

Therefore, the uncertainty of geopolitics is driving some countries to try and break the interdependence that has been established in the value chain. At the same time, geopolitical interests are also changing the pattern and organizational structure of the global value chain to interpret national strategic significance through mandatory economic measures such as export controls, boycotts, sanctions, and cyber attacks. Moreover, the adjustment and restructuring of key supply chains has become a tool for geopolitical competition for technological powers such as Europe and the United States to create new "asymmetric dependence" by leveraging their strengths.

The energy transformation has readjusted and reshaped the global value chain. The asymmetric dependence on resources and imbalanced technological development have produced new threats, which will also transform into a new geopolitical risks in the energy field. At present, the US and the European Union heavily rely on China for certain key minerals, which is seen as a significant geopolitical risk for the realization of their green transformation, although this risk can be partially offset through vertical supply chain control, investment in specific technologies and infrastructure, and innovation of other green energy sources. However, the geopolitical competition and games centering on these resources brought about by the transition to renewable energy is an unavoidable strategic issue.

Judging from the current

strategies formulated by the EU and the US, it can be seen that they will in the future make large-scale investments in clean energy and technology research and development, with a focus on strategic projects in supply chains. In addition, the US is developing a geopolitical and geo-economic strategy for energy transformation in the 21st century, promoting the "re-returning, re-orientation, and rebalancing" of the clean energy and technology value chain. In fact, global technology competition in the field of renewable energy has begun, and economies will seek to control high-end technologies to ensure their competitive edge, and strategically restructure the global value chain through low-carbon technologies.

The complex characteristics of contemporary technology make it difficult for any advanced industry amid the fourth industrial revolution to independently complete and achieve a whole industrial chain nationwide, and allied partnerships have become a key choice for the EU and the US to strengthen supply chain resilience, with the premise of ensuring stable access to critical inputs through political alliances. "Friend shoring" has been included in the US trade policy. US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen described it as deepening relations with allies, establishing supply chains between "friendly" countries to reduce the risk of disruptions.

At present, a Western alliance for industrial and technological cooperation is being initiated, especially in the semiconductors and green energy transformation. Commercial interests and fair trade are becoming things of the past. This will inevitably lead to fragmentation of the global value chains, weaken the stability of value chains in some countries, especially developing countries, and hinder the flow of global economic factors.

Yu Nanping is a professor at the School of Politics and International Relations, East China Normal University. Luan Xinwei is a doctoral student at the School of Politics and International Relations, East China Normal University. The authors contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

Z WEEKLY

All about Gen Z

Z WEEKLY

Youthful reflections and 2024 aspirations

Young minds from diverse corners converge to unveil China's narrative in 2023, laying the groundwork for a promising 2024 and beyond, **Meng Wenjie** reports.



Young people from seven countries gathered in the latest episode of *Youth Power*, which aired on Dec 30, to discuss their reflections on 2023 and expectations for the new year. **DONG MING / FOR CHINA DAILY**



When reflecting on the year 2023, what comes to your mind?

In the latest episode of the China Daily *Youth Power* series, titled "Timeless Tales from China," aired on Dec 30, eight young people from France, Germany, Indonesia, Pakistan, Russia, the United States and Cape Verde shared their stories. Some of them had recently arrived in China for further studies, while others held a deep passion for the country. Throughout the program, they recounted their experiences in China during 2023 and extended a warm and hopeful welcome to 2024.

Susan St. Denis, a US student at Tsinghua University, chose the word "potential" to summarize the year 2023. She highlighted the important discussions between the leaders of China and the US during the China-US summit meeting and the 30th APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting.

"I think with these conversations, we see the potential for collaboration between our two countries. We can really accomplish many wonderful things when we work together," she said.

Denis has a personal connection to China through her father, a law professor in the country in the 1980s and 1990s. Having grown up with many Chinese friends, she was inspired to follow her father's footsteps to come to China.

She observed the increasing availability of flights between the US and China during her time here. "Previously, there were not many flights between the two countries. I had to fly through Dubai if I wanted to come to China for school," she said.

With the recent increase in flights, she acknowledged excitedly that many of her friends and family members in the US have expressed an interest in visiting China to learn more about the country.

Denis is also recognizing that as China has risen as a leading power, there have been significant changes in the global perception of the country.

"China is facing a lot more pressure on the global stage," she said. "I really appreciate how much effort China has put into



Maybe developing countries can learn a lot from China, like tackling climate change and pursuing sustainability."

Yusrin Zata Lini, an Indonesian student

engaging in open dialogue on the global stage. It shows China's desire for neutral and respectable communication."

Yusrin Zata Lini, an Indonesian student at Tsinghua University, echoed Denis's sentiments about China's receptiveness to other countries and cultures. "Maybe developing countries can learn a lot from China, like tackling climate change and pursuing sustainability," she said.

Lini's initial exposure to China was in 2019 for a brief three-day visit, which left a profound impression on her. After being awarded a scholarship by the Indonesian government in 2022, she promptly chose to pursue further studies in China.

To sum up 2023, Lini selected the word "sustainable", emphasizing the significant ties between China and Indonesia. "Indonesia is one of the major countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative, and a lot of infrastructure projects are underway between China and Indonesia," she said.

Lini also expressed her hope for continued and enhanced sustainability in the future for the friendship and cooperation between the two countries, extending beyond just government-to-government relations to include people-to-people con-



I really appreciate how much effort China has put into engaging in open dialogue on the global stage."

Susan St. Denis, a US student

nections. "Many of my friends in Indonesia listen to Chinese music and watch Chinese dramas, which are very popular in my country," she added.

Nafees Nawaz, a Pakistani student pursuing a degree in educational psychology at Beijing Language and Culture University, chose "era of new friendship" as his keyword for 2023.

"The relationship of Pakistan with China has been very strong for decades, with extensive collaboration in technology, agriculture, and education. Additionally, there has been a growing number of intermarriages between people from the two countries. So, I think this is a new era of our friendship," he explained.

Having lived in China for eight years, Nawaz is currently focusing on the study of oracle bone script, an ancient form of Chinese writing found on bones and tortoise shells from the Shang Dynasty (1600-1046 BC).

With eight years of experience in Chinese language and culture, Nawaz aspires to become a Chinese language teacher in the future. "Teaching Chinese is much more than just a language. You need to broaden the culture to your students," he said. "When I have the opportunity, I will take part in some Pakistani cultural activ-



I believe that Chinese people truly appreciate Russian culture, and we Russians also have a fondness for Chinese culture."

Anna Yuschenko, a Russian student

ities where I can introduce Chinese people to Pakistani culture."

Ivan Sa Nogueira, hailing from Cape Verde, pursued his master's degree in teaching Chinese to speakers of other languages at Beijing Language and Culture University. He selected the word "friendship" to characterize the year 2023.

"I think the relationship between the two governments of China and Cape Verde is always associated with 'friendship', and I believe that this is the way the two countries develop together for international relationships," he said.

According to Nogueira, China not only provided essential medicines to Cape Verde during the COVID-19 pandemic but also played a crucial role in the construction of a new campus for the University of Cape Verde, now the largest university in the country. Beyond infrastructure development, China also contributed to the establishment of the first Cape Verde Confucius Institute.

"I got the chance to teach Chinese there at that time. In the past, most of us foreigners believed it might be impossible but now it is quite possible," Nogueira said.

"There's a Chinese saying, 'You should adhere to your original aspiration'. It sig-

nifies that one should not forget their origins," he added. "So my perspective for the new year is to engage in business in China to connect China and my country in this way and to endeavor to improve the economy of Cape Verde."

Anna Yuschenko, a Russian student at Tsinghua University, selected the phrase "partners & relatives" for 2023. "I believe that Chinese people truly appreciate Russian culture, and we Russians also have a fondness for Chinese culture. We just support each other," she said. "I feel like we're not just friends. We're like relatives."

Yuschenko also recalled some online videos depicting the China-Russia border. In these videos, thanks to the visa-free policy, many Russian residents are seen enjoying breakfast and indulging in steamed buns with beer in the morning market at Chinese border city Heihe in Heilongjiang province. "Now, you don't need a visa to travel in Russia, and Russians don't need a visa to travel in China for two weeks, which I think is really convenient," she said. "We are like a family from two neighboring countries."

At the conclusion of the program, the young guests also selected their keywords for the new year of 2024. The chosen words and phrases included "inclusivity", "economic boom and peace", "love and respect", "communication", and "interdependence", among others, embodying their well-wishes for China and the world in the new year.

"All of the keywords that we've shown here for our expectations for 2024 are all connected in one way or another," said Dylan Austin Walker, the host of this episode of *Youth Power*. "We can see what we should do as youth in order to realize these expectations and aspirations in the new year and the years beyond."

Contact the writer at mengwenjie@21st.cn



Online
Watch the video by scanning the code.

Z WEEKLY

Navigating 2023 through 12 neologisms

AI breakthroughs, cultural milestones, environmental concerns, and evolving social dynamics — explore the highs and lows of the year 2023 through 12 impactful words and phrases.



"City walk" emerged in 2023 as a popular mode of travel because it's affordable and relaxing. TUCHONG



The year 2023 marked the 10th anniversary of China's Belt and Road Initiative. vcg



The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, or MBTI, became a social token in 2023, especially among Gen Zers. vcg



Live concerts have become a driver of local economies as many people are willing to travel across town to see their favorite musicians. vcg



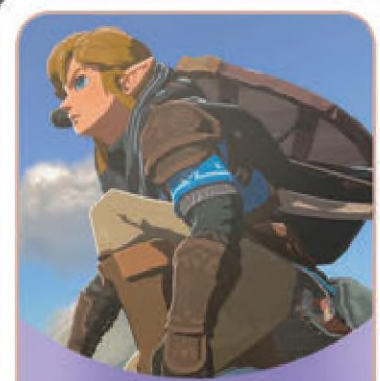
"Dopamine dressing" is characterized by vibrant colors, bold patterns, and expressive designs. TUCHONG



Many young people today prefer to go shopping with a "shopping dazi" instead of a long-time friend. TUCHONG



Creation of the Gods I: Kingdom of Storms was among the highest grossing films in China in 2023. PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom was one of the most popular video games in 2023. PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Japan's discharge of nuclear wastewater into the Pacific Ocean caused concern worldwide. TUCHONG



A child reacted as people salvaged belongings amid the rubble, following strikes in the southern Gaza Strip, on Nov 12. vcg



China's swimmer Zhang Yufei celebrated with all the medals she had won at the 19th Asian Games. vcg



AIGC has become increasingly popular around the world in 2023, but it's also facing heated debates. vcg

Please turn to page 16 for stories behind the photos.

Z WEEKLY

The infographic features a light blue background with decorative elements like stars, dashed lines, and geometric shapes. Each topic is presented in a white box with a dashed border and a pair of scissors icon at the top, suggesting it's a cut-out. The text is in a clean, sans-serif font.

Live concert

According to data released by the China Association of Performing Arts, there were 1,137 large-scale concerts and music festivals nationwide in the first three quarters of 2023. They accumulated 11.45 million in audience attendance, and over 60 percent of attendees came from outside of town.

CAPA's data also showed that Jay Chou's concert in Haikou, Hainan province, in the summer of 2023 attracted a total of 154,600 audiences, leading to 976 million yuan (\$136.90 million) of tourism revenue. This figure exceeded the city's tourism revenue during the Labor Day holiday, and was three times that of the Dragon Boat Festival holiday. These numbers show that concerts are a powerful driver of local economies.

The popularity of concerts has also brought problems, including scalping issues and smaller cities coping with a surge in tourist numbers.

"I" or "E"

While the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, or MBTI, has been around for almost 80 years, it became a social token in 2023, especially among Generation Z. It is common for Gen Zers to ask each other which of the 16 MBTI personality types they fall into when they first meet.

This concept has proven to be highly effective in terms of commercial promotion. Beyond the availability of cups, hats, and phone cases adorned with various MBTI labels, businesses like the hotpot chain Haidilao even divide the waiting area into "E" and "I" in some of their restaurants in Beijing.

However, there are concerns that dividing people into 16 clear-cut groups could lead to habitual labeling and stereotyping of others. Some, on the other hand, believe that MBTI is simply a social tool that contributes to a certain degree of self-confirmation and a sense of belonging.

Belt and Road Initiative

In 2023, the Belt and Road Initiative celebrated its 10th anniversary, marking a decade of transformative global infrastructure development.

Launched in 2013, the policy aimed to enhance cooperation among countries, focusing on economic development, infrastructure connectivity, trade facilitation, and cultural exchange.

As the year unfolded, the BRI continued to evolve, leaving a lasting impact on participating countries. When President Xi Jinping addressed a banquet during the Third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing on Oct 17, he said: "As long as we remain steadfast in our commitment to cooperation and common development, we will accomplish new feats in high-quality Belt and Road cooperation that reflect the spirit of the times and will create a better future for humanity through our joint efforts."

City walk

Since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism industry has experienced a robust recovery, with "city walk" emerging as a new and popular mode of travel.

The participants could be tourists from outside of town or locals rediscovering their own city through this affordable and relaxing activity. There are even official routes designated by the local government.

According to data from Tongcheng Travel, a travel agency based in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, most popular city walk routes in China among young travelers include those in Beijing, Xi'an in Shaanxi province, Chengdu in Sichuan province, and Changsha in Hunan province.

According to Lonely Planet's *1000 Ultimate Adventures*, some of the world's best city hikes include the Great Coastal Walk in Sydney, Australia; the Thames Path, in London, UK; and the Seawall walk in Vancouver, Canada.

The Legend of Zelda

Nintendo's *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom*, released in May, stood out in 2023 as a captivating and immersive gaming experience. As the sequel to *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (2017), the action-adventure game once again enchanted players with its rich narrative and breathtaking visuals.

"The level of attention to detail and care put into all of these different interactions, given the sheer scale of how many interactions you can have, it's just a degree of diligence and artistry that you don't see very often," said William Armstrong, a video game developer in an interview with Bloomberg.

In *Tears of the Kingdom*, players keep exploring the landscapes of Hyrule, but this time with an added vertical dimension — ascending into the sky, which is filled with floating islands, and descending into an entire underworld beneath Hyrule.

Creation of the Gods

According to the box office data platform Maoyan, as of Dec 18, China's box office revenue was 52.9 billion yuan, almost double that of the previous year's 30 billion yuan. Moreover, the top 10 box office films were all domestic productions.

Among the highest grossing films, *Creation of the Gods I: Kingdom of Storms*, released on July 20, secured over 2.63 billion yuan in the Chinese mainland and was shown in theaters overseas, including the US, Canada, Australia, and Malaysia.

The film is an adaptation of a famous Chinese legend, and the traditional cultural elements in the movie have attracted significant attention. "Seventy percent of our inspiration comes from Taoist landscape paintings, and 30 percent comes from the history of the Shang Dynasty (1600-1046 BC)," said the film's director Wuershan during a promotion event.

Dazi

The Chinese term *dazi*, translating to "activity partners", captured the essence of contemporary social dynamics in 2023. One can have a "meal dazi", "shopping dazi" or "working out dazi", among others.

While the strength of interpersonal relationships was traditionally measured by factors like endurance and emotional connections, *dazi* challenges these metrics, existing only for the immediate satisfaction of shared activities without heavy commitments.

"This signifies an increased emphasis on personal time and space," wrote an opinion piece in *Guangming Daily*. "People are intentionally filtering out less cost-effective and less efficient social interactions, along with the associated stress and anxiety. Instead, they are channeling their limited time and mental energy into constructing a life centered around a 'me-first approach'."

Dopamine dressing

Characterized by vibrant colors, bold patterns, and expressive designs, "dopamine dressing" goes beyond the aesthetic appeal of clothing, focusing on the idea that our outfit choices can influence the neurotransmitters in our brain, including dopamine, which is associated with pleasure and reward.

The concept suggests that by selecting and wearing clothes that make us feel good, it can positively impact our mental well-being in turn.

"Typically, we're dressing for external factors — the weather, other people, special events," said Dawnn Karen, a psychology professor at New York's Fashion Institute of Technology, in an interview with TODAY. "During the pandemic, there was a shift that occurred. Since no one was around to tell you what to wear, you gave yourself permission to find styles that make you happy."

AIGC

The application of artificial intelligence-generated content, or AIGC, has become increasingly popular globally in 2023.

According to the video platform Bilibili, as of October, video content related to AIGC has exceeded 9 billion views.

"If we can effectively utilize this technology, it can significantly improve the user experience, enhance the content creators' experience, and also boost the efficiency of business conversion," Chen Rui, chairman and CEO of Bilibili, said at a scientific event held by the platform in October.

Videos like Taylor Swift speaking Mandarin and *Harry Potter* series characters posing for the Balenciaga fashion show have gone viral globally.

However, as AIGC gains popularity and attention, it is also facing heated debates and rejection regarding copyright issues due to its strong text, audio, and image-generation capabilities.

Hangzhou Asian Games

The 2023 Hangzhou Asian Games, held from Sept 23 to Oct 8, were a grand celebration of athletic prowess, cultural exchange, and technological innovation.

Esports debuted as a medal event, mirroring the evolving landscape of competitive sports. The event also showcased groundbreaking initiatives, including a digital torchbearer, electronic ID registration, and the use of robot dogs to retrieve sports equipment, demonstrating a commitment to a smart Asian Games.

The competition witnessed unforgettable moments, such as tennis player Zhang Zhizhen's triumph in the men's singles final. The diving competition saw China securing all 10 gold medals, exemplifying a perfect performance in the discipline. The women's basketball final added to the excitement as China secured the championship in the closing moments against Japan.

War and peace

As we bid farewell to 2023, the world remains entangled in the complexities of conflict, with two hot spots capturing global attention: the Russia-Ukraine war and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Multiple countries in Africa and South America are also facing potential conflicts due to regional disputes.

While wars persist globally, China's commitment to stability and peace provides a valuable lesson in diplomacy and internal cohesion. As the world navigates uncertain waters, the importance of dialogue, cooperation, and a commitment to peace becomes increasingly evident.

"Conflicts drive record numbers of people from their homes," said Antonio Guterres, the secretary-general of the United Nations, in a speech on the 2023 International Day of Peace on Sept 21. "This year's theme reminds us that peace is not automatic. Peace is the result of action."

Nuclear wastewater discharge

On Aug 24, 2023, Tokyo Electric Power Company officially announced the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant's plan to discharge nuclear wastewater into the Pacific Ocean. On Dec 18, TEPC announced that the fourth round of nuclear wastewater discharge, estimated at 7,800 tons, will begin in February of 2024.

Chinese representative Liu Jing, vice-chairman of the China Atomic Energy Authority, voiced China's concerns and opposition against Japan's nuclear wastewater discharge plan at the 67th General Conference of the Atomic Energy Agency in September in Vienna, Austria. Liu insisted that nuclear-contaminated wastewater is not only harmful to the ocean but also poses a threat to human lives and health.

To prevent the risks of radioactive pollution, China issued a clear order for the complete suspension of imports of aquatic products from Japan.