

High-tech powerhouse

Pudong district in Shanghai mirrors modernization drive with pilot FTZ

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CHINA DAILY

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Xi sends condolences to Iran over terror attacks

By MO JINGXI
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President Xi Jinping sent a message of condolence to Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi on Thursday, a day after the serious terror attacks in the country, saying that China firmly supports Iran's efforts to safeguard its national security and stability.

Xi said he was shocked to learn that serious terror attacks had taken place in the Iranian city of Kerman and caused heavy casualties.

On behalf of the Chinese government and people, he expressed deep condolences for the deceased and extended sincere sympathies to the bereaved families and the injured.

Xi emphasized in his message that China opposes all forms of terrorism and strongly condemns terrorist attacks.

Two bombs exploded and killed nearly 100 people at a commemoration for Qassem Soleimani, a prominent Iranian general slain by the United States in a 2020 drone strike, Iranian officials said.

The explosions struck minutes



Relatives of blast victims gather outside a hospital in Kerman, Iran, on Wednesday after two bombs exploded at a commemoration for a prominent Iranian general who was slain by the United States in 2020. SARE TAJALLI / ISNA VIA AP

apart on Wednesday, shaking the city of Kerman, about 820 kilometers southeast of Teheran, the Iranian capital. The second blast sprayed

shrapnel into a screaming crowd fleeing the first explosion.

The United Nations, the European Union and some countries, including

Russia, Türkiye and Germany, have strongly denounced the blasts.

AP contributed to this story.

Vision gaining ground among China's partners

Foreign affairs conference elaborates on building a community with a shared future

By ZHANG YUNBI
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The vision of "building a community with a shared future for mankind", first put forward by President Xi Jinping in 2013, has gained increasing popularity among China's partners at its doorstep and beyond.

At a once-in-five-years, high-level meeting held last week to set the tone for the country's diplomacy, China's top foreign policy makers officially named "building a community with a shared future for mankind" as the overarching goal of the nation's major-country diplomacy in the new era.

To boost awareness of this vision at home and abroad, the Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs, held on Dec 27 and 28, systematically elaborated for the first time on its connotations by defining its top goals, guiding principle, viable paths and supporting pillars.

Xi highlighted this vision on Dec 29 when he greeted Chinese officials attending another major foreign affairs meeting — the annual work conference for envoys based overseas.

He asked them to "fly high the banner of building a community with a shared future for mankind" and break new ground for the country's diplomacy.

"As I speak to you, conflicts are still raging in some parts of the world. We Chinese are keenly aware of what peace means. We will work closely with the international community for the common good of humanity, build a community with a shared future for mankind, and make the world a better place for all," Xi said in his New Year address on Sunday.

Wang Yiwei, a professor at the School of International Studies and director of the Institute of International Affairs at Renmin University of China, said Xi's latest speeches and the signals sent by the high-level meetings show that the vision "is a natural reflection of China's people-centered philosophy when it is approaching the rest of the global community".

This vision "defends the United Nations-centered international order and international system, it encompasses a wide range of goals set by the UN, and it transcends the narrow perspective of caring only about one country", he added.

Analysts and officials said the vision reflects the Communist Party of China's world view and perception of order and values, and it accords with the common aspiration of people in various countries.

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Economic upswing in cards as services sector grows

By OUYANG SHIJIA
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Despite the persistent challenges posed by a slump in the property sector and its impact on domestic demand, experts said they expect a notable economic upswing in China in 2024, fueled by a gradual recovery in services consumption and investment.

They said the government should promptly introduce policies that tap into the vitality of the services sector, such as further advancing the opening-up of the services sector, refining service supply and encouraging consumption of services.

Their comments came as a private survey released on Thursday showed that China's services activity in December expanded at the fastest pace in five months, indicating that economic recovery is gaining further momentum.

The Caixin China General Services Purchasing Managers' Index increased to 52.9 in December from 51.5 in November, media group Caixin said. A PMI reading of above 50 points to expansion, while one below that mark indicates contraction.

Caixin's composite PMI, which includes both manufacturing and services activities, came in at 52.6 in December from 51.6 in the previous month, recording the highest level since May.

"The latest figures signal the

China is moving closer to becoming the world's biggest tourism market by 2035."

Gary Rosen, CEO of Accor Greater China

continued economic recovery trend, especially with the services sector gradually regaining vitality after COVID-19 disruptions," said Hong Yong, an associate research fellow at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation's e-commerce research institute. "The services sector has become a crucial force bolstering the growth of the world's second-largest economy."

Expanding service consumption is an essential means of supporting economic growth, said Hong, adding that service consumption and investment are expected to become new growth engines.

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed that retail sales of services in China grew by 19.5 percent year-on-year in the first 11 months of 2023, outpacing the 7.2 percent growth in retail sales of products during the same period. Investment in high-tech services

jumped 10.6 percent in the first 11 months of last year, significantly higher than the 2.9 percent growth in fixed-asset investment, data showed.

Hong called for further steps to boost the development in services consumption and investment, including ramping up efforts for further opening-up of the services sector, improving service standards and enhancing service supply.

Wang Peng, an associate researcher at the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences, said he believes that expanding domestic demand and stimulating consumption will be key priorities among the nation's economic tasks this year.

"It is advisable for the government to take measures such as raising income levels, improving the consumption environment and strengthening the protection of consumer rights," Wang said.

The tone-setting Central Economic Work Conference, which was held in Beijing last month, called for efforts to stimulate consumption and expand productive investment to create a virtuous cycle of mutual promotion between consumption and investment.

Lin Xianping, secretary-general of Hangzhou City University's cultural and creative research institute, said the country should take more steps to tackle issues related to employment and boost new types of consumption.

Bai Wenxi, vice-chairman of the China Enterprise Capital Union, said that China's economy will likely register steady growth this year, given the continuing economic recovery trend, improved consumer sentiment and stronger policy support.

Gary Rosen, CEO of the China division of Accor, a French hospitality group, said that China is expected to become the world's biggest tourism market and he expects increasing growth opportunities in the market.

"China is moving closer to becoming the world's biggest tourism market by 2035," Rosen said. He added that while people are spending less on certain items, they have continued to act on their pent-up demand for travel after COVID-19.

He said that Accor plans to expand its footprint in the country and further diversify business growth in the region.

During the three-day New Year holiday, 135 million domestic trips were recorded, up 155.3 percent year-on-year, marking an increase of 9.4 percent compared with the same period in 2019.

During the holiday, domestic tourism revenue reached 79.73 billion yuan (\$11.14 billion), triple the figure of last year and an increase of 5.6 percent over the same period in 2019, according to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

Country rising as key player in shaping intl order

After its success in weathering wind and rain in 2023, China's economy in 2024 looks even more encouraging in numerous aspects, as explained by President Xi Jinping in his New Year address.

Unlike quite a few Western projections of economic collapse, China's economic journey in 2023 was a story of strength, adaptability and facing challenges head-on. China again turned challenges and roadblocks into chances to evolve, grow and build a better future, with determined and smart leadership setting the stage.

China was feeling the economic impact of COVID-19 in early 2023. While economic data might have seemed worrisome, the whole world witnessed how China adjusted to these challenges and stabilized. The government worked hard to fix economic problems and help the country recover. As President Xi said in his

WORLD WATCH
By Syed Ali Nawaz Gilani

address on the evening of Dec 31, China forged ahead with "resolve and tenacity" in 2023, marching forward with solid and robust steps, in high spirits and with great confidence.

It's crucial to understand that the government made careful decisions about spending money wisely during the tough times of the pandemic, and this helped keep the country's economy stable.

The property market had some serious issues, but the government took steps to prevent home prices from causing chaos. Understanding the complexities of this problem and the delicate balance needed for a healthy property market is essential.

Amid this transformative landscape, China's proactive steps in building a unified national market cannot be overlooked. The State Council's policy measures, the focus on fundamental system improvement, and reforms in fiscal policies showcase a commitment to fostering a dynamic and integrated economic landscape. Dismantling barriers and addressing issues such as market segmentation are vital in creating a more open and accessible market, not just for domestic enterprises but also for foreign businesses.

China is expected to continue in 2024 to focus on stable progress, strengthen the progress of economic recovery, and promote high-quality development, according to Xi. The just-released New Year holiday statistics show trends of more consumer spending,

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Double joy



Panda twins Rui Bao and Hui Bao meet the public on Thursday at the Everland Resort theme park in Yongin, South Korea. Ai Bao, their mother, gave birth to the female cubs on July 7 at the park, making them the first panda twins born in the country. Ai Bao and her mate, Le Bao, arrived at Everland in 2016 under a loan agreement between China and South Korea. YONHAP NEWS AGENCY

NATION ACHIEVES CRUCIAL TECHNOLOGICAL BREAKTHROUGHS

Companies eager to cash in on AI to boost global competitiveness

By MA SI
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Yu Zhongyuan, a 59-year-old businessman engaged in foreign trade in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, is a loyal user of Huawei Technologies Co's smartphones.

But he never expected the company's phone business to spring back to life so quickly.

After being subject to technology restrictions imposed by the United States government for four years, Huawei made a high-profile comeback to the 5G smartphone arena last year.

The company surprised the world

in-depth

with its Mate 60 series of smartphones, which are equipped with chips that support 5G technology. The phones made headlines worldwide and triggered an enthusiastic response from Chinese consumers.

Yu said: "Having witnessed Huawei emerge stronger from mounting challenges, I am confident that China's technology industry can overcome any future difficulties. This is a symbolic moment."

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PAGE TWO



The C919 takes to the air.
ZHOU GUOQIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Tech: Innovation helps set milestones

2023
year in
Review

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The recovery in Huawei's smartphone business offers an insight into how China's innovation-driven economy is scrambling to achieve breakthroughs in crucial technologies through long-term input into research and development, and by using a robust industrial support system.

Officials, company executives and experts said that despite geopolitical uncertainties and lackluster global demand, Chinese companies are eager to ride the latest technological wave, which includes artificial intelligence, or AI, to sharpen their global competitiveness and strengthen the security of key industrial chains.

The past year has seen innovation helping to set milestones in China's manufacturing industry.

The first commercial flight of the C919, China's self-developed large passenger aircraft, took off last year. The nation's first domestically produced large cruise ship, *Adora Magic City*, was delivered, and China surpassed Japan to become the world's largest exporter of automobiles.

Meanwhile, with AI set to unleash enormous potential in reshaping the world, Chinese companies are coming up with new applications to rival ChatGPT, a chatbot developed by the US company OpenAI, which has taken the world by storm. Such progress was made despite Washington's restrictions on exports of high-end AI chips to Beijing, the officials, company executives and experts said.

Wei Jianguo, former vice-minister of commerce, said, "Some countries attempted to contain China's economic development by promoting decoupling, but our progress proved that their efforts have failed."

China boasts the world's most complete industrial system, and its highly efficient industrial clusters, with close upstream and downstream connections, make Chinese companies extremely competitive on the global stage, Wei said.

"Meanwhile, China's development in high-tech sectors has promoted development of its digital economy. The nation is now closely intertwined with other countries in high-tech industries," said Wei, who is also vice-chairman of the China Center for International Economic Exchanges.

Data from the World Intellectual Property Organization show that China is now home to 24 of the world's top 100 science and technology innovation clusters, making it the country with the most such clusters.

Progress made

Huang Hanquan, head of the Academy of Macroeconomic Research, said China has made progress in key technologies in strategically important sectors, showing that scientific innovation plays an increasingly bigger role in driving economic growth. The academy is part of the National Development and Reform Commission, or NDRC.

As the innovation-driven development strategy gains traction, technological innovation continues to empower the real economy and new industries, and driving forces continue to develop and grow, Huang said.

Denis Depoux, global managing director of consultancy Roland Berger, said: "China has demonstrated its

innovation capability. It is leapfrogging in several fields, gaining leadership globally in areas like the electric vehicle chain — from batteries to charging infrastructure, photovoltaic panels, wind turbines, nuclear and telecommunications equipment."

The nation's industrial modernization, huge consumption potential, and growing innovation prowess are three strong points that create a new China story for the world, he added.

Last month, the tone-setting Central Economic Work Conference made the construction of a modern industrial system through technological innovation the top priority for economic work this year.

The conference called for efforts to develop new productivity boosters, and produce new industries, models and impetus with cutting-edge technologies.

Chen Zhichao, an assistant researcher at the Xi Jinping Thought on Economy Study Center, which is part of the NDRC, said the call will inject strong impetus into the country's high-quality economic development.

Compared with traditional productivity tools driven by elements such as labor, land and capital, Chen said new productivity boosters are led by technological innovation, which will promote the transformation of the economic growth mode.

"Challenges still exist, and more efforts, including higher fiscal investment and stimulation of social capital, are needed to increase investment in fundamental and applied research, and cultivate high-end innovation-oriented talent," Chen added.

Jin Zhuanglong, minister of industry and information technology, the country's top industry regulator, said China will step up the development of a number of strategic emerging industries such as biomanufacturing, commercial aerospace, and the low-altitude economy.

The ministry will also open up new paths for future industries such as quantum and life sciences, and make extensive use of digital intelligence and green technologies to accelerate the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries, Jin said.

"Technologies such as AI can empower China's new industrialization push, and their applications in industries such as man-

An intelligent robot dances at an expo in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, in June. HUA XUEGEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

“China's strength right now is that it is at the cutting edge of many of the most important technology innovations for the future.”

Jeffrey Sachs, an economist and director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University in New York

ufacturing and healthcare will be an important symbol of a new round of technological revolution and industrial transformation," he added.

Goldman Sachs Research forecast in a report that breakthroughs in generative AI, represented by applications such as ChatGPT, can drive a 7 percent, or almost \$7 trillion, increase in global GDP and raise productivity growth by 1.5 percentage points over a 10-year period.

Well aware of the opportunities ahead, established tech heavyweights such as Alibaba, Tencent, Baidu, ByteDance and Huawei, as well as thousands of startups in China, are scrambling to develop and embrace large language models. Such models are computer algorithms fed with huge amounts of data, which are key to supporting ChatGPT-like applications.

A report, released by the Beijing Municipal Science & Technology Commission, said that as of October, China had developed at least 254 AI large language models.

Chi Xiannian, a senior engineer at the China Center for Information Industry Development, a think tank affiliated with the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, said finance, manufacturing, governance and transportation are the top industries in China to use AI large language models.

Vital impact

Liu Qingfeng, chairman of iFlytek, a Chinese AI pioneer, said: "Chinese companies must devote big, real money to research and development of fundamental science to achieve breakthroughs in AI. The impact of this generative AI technology is no less important than that of the birth of the PC or the internet."

In October, iFlytek unveiled the latest version of its AI large language model, SparkDesk V3.0. A test and evaluation report by the Guoyan Institute of Economic Research, which is affiliated with the Development Research Center of the State Council, said SparkDesk V3.0 has an overall capability stronger than that of ChatGPT.

The model's core capability is evaluated in seven dimensions — text generation, language understanding, Q&A knowledge, logical reasoning, mathematic ability, coding ability, and multimodal ability, Liu said.

The ongoing AI boom is also spurring surging demand for AI chips, which are vital to enabling ChatGPT-like applications. Experts said Washington's restrictions on exports of US company Nvidia's advanced AI chips to

Beijing last year have left plenty of room for competitive Chinese rivals to emerge.

For example, Huawei has launched its 910B AI chips, which have already been bought by major Chinese internet companies to support their large language models. The performance of Huawei's AI processor Ascend 910B can be roughly compared with that of Nvidia's A100 chip, iFlytek said.

Jensen Huang, CEO of Nvidia, said recently that Huawei is among a field of "very formidable" competitors to Nvidia in the race to produce the best AI chips.

Wei Shaojun, president of the integrated circuit design branch of the China Semiconductor Industry Association, said, "This is the latest evidence that Washington's restrictions hurt the interests of US companies hard and accelerated Chinese companies' efforts to make technological breakthroughs."

In addition to AI and chips, China also recorded rapid growth last year in the production of new energy vehicles, or NEVs.

In the first quarter of last year, China replaced Japan as the world's largest vehicle exporter. The China Association of Automobile Manufacturers estimates that the nation's total vehicle exports for last year will exceed 5 million, a record high.

Xu Haidong, the association's deputy chief engineer, said, "Chinese automobile brands have accurately grasped the emerging opportunities in NEVs, and the trend of integration with intelligence and connectivity."

A report from consultancy KPMG said Chinese carmakers are expected to capture about 15 percent of Europe's electric vehicle market by next year, as established players such as BYD and emerging companies, including NIO and Li Auto, gain popularity among European consumers.

This would mark a big step forward, as Chinese marques accounted for less than 10 percent of the 1.1 million battery-powered electric vehicles sold in Europe in 2022, KPMG said.

Kevin Kang, chief economist at KPMG China, said, "Chinese brands have huge potential in the European market and could contribute the most to future sales increases there."

Ding Yuqian, head of China Autos Research at HSBC, said China has the world's most competitive electric vehicle battery supply chain.

The single most expensive item for such a vehicle is its battery, and carmakers based in China have access to high-quality batteries produced at a relative cost advantage, with manufacturers continuing to improve this technology.

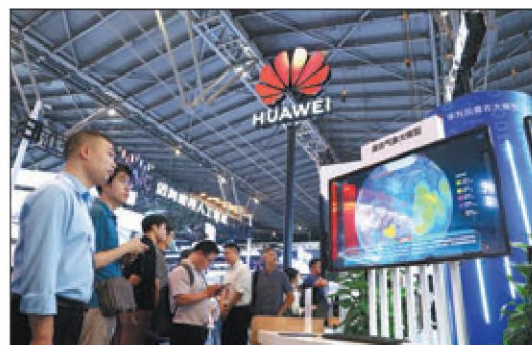
Hans-Paul Burkner, global chair emeritus of Boston Consulting Group, said electric cars are a typical example of China moving up in the value chain. Chinese companies have become highly competitive, not just because of costs, but also due to quality and innovation, he added.

"When I look at some of the new cars on the streets of Beijing and Shanghai, the electric vehicles are really impressive. This is what makes Chinese companies competitive," Burkner said.

"We see quite a lot of Chinese companies being the top producers of patents and really good products, which are witnessed all over the world."

Jeffrey Sachs, a renowned economist and director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University in New York, said, "China's strength right now is that it is at the cutting edge of many of the most important technology innovations for the future."

"These include low-carbon energy solutions, electric vehicles, batteries, supply chains, artificial intelligence, high-speed trains, and many other sectors. All of these will be very good for China's future growth."



Clockwise from top left: Children visit the sixth World Sound Expo in Hefei, capital of Anhui province, in October. ZHOU MU / XINHUA Customers purchase Huawei Mate 60 Pro smartphones in Shanghai in August. WANG GANG / FOR CHINA DAILY A woman interacts with a robotic dog in Tianjin in May. JIA CHENGLONG / FOR CHINA DAILY Huawei displays its Pangu pre-trained deep learning AI model in Shanghai in July. CHEN YUYU / FOR CHINA DAILY

TOP NEWS

Beijing urges end to conflict in Myanmar

By ZHOU JIN
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China strongly objected on Thursday to the landing of artillery shells from across the border in Myanmar that left five people injured in Yunnan province, calling for an immediate end to the ongoing conflict in northern Myanmar.

Five people in Zhenkang county of the Southwest China province, which borders Myanmar, were reportedly injured on Wednesday by stray artillery shells from across the border. They were being treated in hospital.

Online video footage showed that shops were damaged by the shelling in the region.

China is closely following the conflict in northern Myanmar and has lodged serious demarches with the relevant side over the incident, Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a daily news conference.

China once again demands that all parties in the conflict take concrete actions and avoid another outward incident that endangers the peace along the China-Myanmar border and the life and property of Chinese citizens. The country will take necessary measures to ensure the safety of Chinese citizens and their property, he added.

Last week, China's embassy in Myanmar reminded all Chinese nationals in Laukaing in Northern Myanmar to evacuate immediately due to the severe and complex situation in the Kokang self-administered zone and urged Chinese citizens to avoid travel to the region. The Foreign Ministry has repeatedly called on relevant parties in Myanmar to exercise maximum restraint while dealing with the situation in northern Myanmar.

Zhenkang is located in Southwestern China, bordering the Kokang self-administered zone. Running adjacent to the "Golden Triangle" region of Southeast Asia, the borderline stretches 96.358 kilometers without natural barriers.

This is not the first time that such incidents have taken place. In 2015, two shells from Myanmar landed in Zhenkang, injuring one Chinese and four Myanmar nationals.

Marooned homes



Holiday homes at the Billing Aquadrome, a leisure park in Northampton, the United Kingdom, are surrounded by floodwater on Wednesday following heavy rain triggered by Storm Henk. A severe flood alert, indicating danger to life, had been sounded for River Nene in Northampton. The UK Meteorological Office issued a yellow rain warning for the south of the country until 3 am Friday. JACOB KING / AP

45 years on, desire for China-US friendship bridges differences

By LIA ZHU in San Francisco
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Without economic figures or political jargon, a simple letter from an 8-year-old American girl to the Chinese consul general in San Francisco speaks volumes about the true foundation of the 45-year journey of China-US relations.

"Dear ambassador: I'm eight years old. I think China is really cool. Your friend," said Consul General Zhang Jianmin as he read the letter he received before Christmas at a news conference Wednesday night at the consul general's residence.

He shared the heartwarming anecdote as a symbol of the shared desire for connection between the people of the two countries.

"I do believe somewhere in China, an 8-year-old Chinese girl or Chinese boy also have the same spontaneous and genuine desire to forge friendship and make friends with their American peers," he said.

On Jan 1, 1979, China and the United States established diplomatic relations. On Jan 1, President Xi Jinping and President Joe Biden exchanged letters of congratulations to commemorate the 45th anniversary.

"Both presidents spoke highly of the benefits of the relationship. It has brought tangible benefits to

the people of our two countries. The relationship has also contributed to world peace, stability and prosperity," said Zhang.

"If you look at how far we have gone over the past 45 years, there are many examples to support the conclusion that the relationship is really important and beneficial," he added.

In 1979, China and the US had less than \$2.5 billion of trade; in 2022, the trade volume between the two countries reached almost \$760 billion. Two-way investment increased from almost zero in 1979 to more than \$260 billion in 2022.

The consul general's recent visits to Boeing and other US companies shed light on a crucial interdependency. "One sentiment that they repeatedly shared with me is that they'd like to see the Chinese economy recover. They'd like to see the Chinese economy succeed, because, for them, this will mean lots of business opportunities, and that is in the interest of both sides," Zhang said.

Taking Boeing for example, in the next 20 years, China is expected to require 8,560 new passenger planes, and that's about 20 percent of total global demand, according to Zhang. "No one airplane manufacturer is able to meet this huge global demand. If China is doing well, it would generate even bigger demand,

and it would be an opportunity for the whole world," he said.

Citing an International Monetary Fund report, Zhang said a strained China-US relationship could cost the global economy 2 percent of its growth. That figure is "a lot, especially at a time when we need to do more to expedite world economic recovery," he said.

The 45-year journey hasn't been without bumps. Zhang acknowledged the ups and downs, highlighting three guiding principles for the two countries to get along well: mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation.

He pointed out that adhering to those principles has led to progress, while violating them has led to setbacks. The consul general also spoke of the legacy of "Ping-Pong Diplomacy," which ended a 22-year estrangement between the two countries.

"When we look at how we manage to have such success in our relationship, I think the success can be attributed to the goodwill that exists on the part of people," said Zhang.

"Both people are hardworking people; they love their countries. They want to live a good life, and they like each other. So I think this reservoir of goodwill and friendship actually lays the ground for a strong relationship," he said.

Report shows China's robust IP progress

Innovators, tech firms make strides backed by strong collaborations, improved reviews

By CAO YIN
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921,000 invention patents

Number authorized by the China National Intellectual Property Administration in 2023, along with registration of 4.38 million trademarks

Achievements made by Chinese innovators have been noticeable worldwide as China's intellectual property made great progress in the past year, with strong international cooperation and deepened participation in global governance in this regard, according to the country's top IP regulator.

The National Intellectual Property Administration said on Thursday that the Global Innovation Index 2023 — a report issued by the World Intellectual Property Organization — showed that China overtook the United States for the first time last year to top the list of countries with the highest number of science and technology clusters among the top 100.

While China has 24 such clusters, the US follows with 21 and Germany ranks third with nine, according to the report. It also showed that the highest climbers in the ranking last year were three clusters in China — Zhenjiang in Jiangsu province, which went up 15 spots, and Hefei, the capital of Anhui province and Wuxi in Jiangsu, both of which climbed 13 spots.

In addition, two Chinese technology enterprises — Shanghai Westwell Technology and Xi'an KissFuture Network Technology — were among the seven winners of the 2023 WIPO Global Awards for their creative use of IP in logistics and the cultural sector.

The Shanghai company has a robust patent, industrial design and trademark portfolio that offers multi-scenario intelligent and green solutions in bulk logistics, while the Xi'an enterprise in Shaanxi province leads in augmented and virtual reality technology, and its patented motion platforms and hardware optimization offer comprehensive solutions to cinemas and cultural institutions.

Shen Changyu, head of the national IP regulator, said that over the past

year, China's international cooperation in intellectual property rights deepened and expanded, and its role in serving high-level opening-up became increasingly prominent.

"In 2023, we attended a series of conferences held by the WIPO and also organized some international IP activities, such as an exchange meeting on geographical indications, technologies and innovation support centers, which was jointly held with the WIPO," he said.

As China saw rapid IP-related growth, its protection of IP rights and efficiency in reviewing IP applications were also improved last year. Data released by the administration showed that it authorized 921,000 invention patents in 2023, with registration of 4.38 million trademarks.

IP regulators at all levels solved 14,000 patent disputes, up 50.1 percent year-on-year, and helped Chinese enterprises protect their IP rights overseas in more than 1,300 cases, according to the administration.

The average time spent on reviewing an invention patent was shortened to 16 months, while the average period spent on reviewing a trademark application remained at a good level of four months, the data showed.

Shen said the transformation and application of IP achievements were also accelerated. He said IP protection by the rule of law will be facilitated this year. "Specific rules for better implementation of the Trademark Law are expected to be amended, and the review standards for new fields and emerging businesses, will be improved," he added.

Outlook: More global benefits expected

From page 1

expansion of domestic and foreign trade, and greater innovative growth.

In the grand theater of global economics, the spotlight has undeniably shifted toward the East, with China emerging as a key player in shaping the future world order. The recent trajectory of economic growth, coupled with strategic policy initiatives, positions China as a force to be reckoned with. As we navigate the evolving dynamics of the global economy, it is crucial to recognize that China's continued rise is expected to bring more opportunities and benefits to people around the world.

The economic journey of China

over the past few decades has been nothing short of remarkable. Goldman Sachs' projections for a further shift in global GDP toward Asia by 2050 underline the sustained momentum of the region. It's not just about outperformance; it's also about rewriting the narrative of economic prowess.

With its robust economy and continuous technological advancements, China is positioned to uphold its status as a global economic powerhouse. The country's emphasis on innovation, research and growth has led to advances in various fields, such as artificial intelligence, renewable energy and biotechnology.

In terms of infrastructure development, the China-proposed Belt

and Road Initiative continues to expand, connecting continents and fostering economic cooperation. Following guidelines reached at the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing, this initiative has the potential to enhance trade and strengthen diplomatic ties between China and its partner nations.

Moreover, according to Xi, China "will deepen reform and opening-up across the board" in 2024, which should lift optimism about practical international cooperation, greater access to China markets by all businesses, and more benefits for all people.

While making life better for the Chinese people, China's sustained development and drive for mod-

ernization are destined to bring more opportunities to the rest of the world, with Asian neighbors likely to benefit most.

As we witness the rise of China and the broader Asian region, it is essential to recognize the potential for positive global impact. Balanced pursuit of economic power, coupled with strategic policies, can pave the way for collaborative and mutually beneficial engagements. The high-quality development of and choices by China in the coming years will undoubtedly shape the global landscape, fostering closer global cooperation and understanding.

The author is secretary-general of the Pakistan-China Friendship Association's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chapter. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Celebrating diversity



Revelers take part in the "Chant to the Earth" parade in Pasto, Colombia, during the Carnival of Blacks and Whites, the largest festivity in the country's southwestern region, on Wednesday. The carnival has its origins in a mix of cultural expressions, and it celebrates the ethnic diversity of the region. JOAQUIN SARMIENTO / AFP

Vision: Goal is 'lasting peace, universal security and shared prosperity'

From page 1

In addition, the international recognition of the vision is ever expanding, as it has been incorporated into United Nations resolutions and UN Security Council resolutions.

Han Chunlin, China's ambassador to Romania, wrote in an article published last month that building a community with a shared future for mankind "is a successful practice with fruitful results" and has formed a "scientific theory system" over the course of the past 10 years.

An official statement from last week's Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs explained the vision's "scientific theory system". The vision's goal is to "build an

open, inclusive, clean and beautiful world of lasting peace, universal security and shared prosperity", and the pathway for realizing it is through "promoting global governance that features extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefit".

Its guiding principle is "the common values of humanity", and its fundamental supporting pillar is building a new type of international relations.

The statement also said the platform for carrying out this vision is high-quality joint building of the Belt and Road, and the strategic navigation for it comes from efforts to roll out the three global initiatives proposed by Xi in recent years — the Global Develop-

ment Initiative, Global Security Initiative and Global Civilization Initiative.

Chen Xiangyang, director of the Center for a Holistic Approach to National Security Studies at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, said all six aspects of the vision specified at the conference — the goal, pathway, guiding principle, pillars, platform and strategic navigation — constitute a scientific architecture that supports the overarching goal of "building a community with a shared future for mankind".

"With these six aspects as a whole, the vision will usher in a bright future of peace, security, prosperity and progress for the world," he added.

Staying focused on the Belt and Road Initiative, the platform for carrying out the vision, China has signed BRI cooperative documents with more than three-fourths of countries around the world and with over 30 international organizations.

Over the past decade, commodity imports and exports between China and the countries participating in the Belt and Road have grown at an average annual rate of 8.6 percent, and the joint efforts helped lift nearly 40 million people overseas out of poverty, according to the Foreign Ministry.

Tep Ngorn, second vice-president of the Senate of Cambodia, said that promoting synergy between the BRI and Cambodia's Pentagonal Strat-

egy "will give a boost to the building of a China-Cambodia community with a shared future with strategic significance, mutual benefits and win-win results".

"The combination of the two visions will speed up Cambodia's development of connectivity infrastructure, logistics, industries, digital technology, energy and agriculture, among other things," the Cambodian senator told Xinhua News Agency last month.

Muhammad Zamir Assadi, a Pakistani political analyst and a journalist with the Islamabad-based Country Media Group, witnessed what he called "the incredible success story" of the BRI's flagship project, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, and the two

nations' joint efforts to build a China-Pakistan community with a shared future.

The CPEC "has brought China and Pakistan closer to each other with the physical economic bond of this mega initiative to form a community of indivisible common destiny," he said.

"Considering the Chinese and Pakistani economic systems, commercial projects related to the CPEC have been operated in a market-oriented way," he said, noting that non-commercial projects concerning people's livelihood have involved multiple participants and have been implemented through fair competition.

Benefits brought by the BRI "have transformed the socioeconomic landscape of Pakistan, and much more is yet to be generated in the next phase and decade of the CPEC," he added.

CHINA

Dropping of GPA grading discussed

Students weigh up replacement system's impact when applying for study overseas

By ZHAO YIMENG
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A pilot reform of the grading system at Peking University and some other institutes of higher education in China has sparked discussion. While a large number of college students favor a relatively vague assessment of their academic achievements rather than precise points, some worry about the impact it might have on their application for further education.

The Peking University's School of Life Sciences has begun a pilot reform to "unbind" students from scores, abandoning the current GPA, or grade point average, ranking system and evaluating students' performances with a letter grade of A, B, C, D or F, according to a release from the university on Wednesday.

As the key indicator of college student assessment in China, GPA is an essential reference when applying for overseas master's programs or domestic postgraduate recommendations. Under high assessment pressure, many students were trapped in unnecessary competition for just a slight increase in exam points.

Wang Shiqiang, former vice-dean of the school, said the reform aims to leave students with more time for improving their abilities by attending more real-world activities. "We assume students have absorbed the knowledge well when they obtain 85 points or higher for a course. It is not necessary to deplete energy to reach 95 points," Wang said.

Students at the school need to grasp knowledge of both life sciences and other subjects such as mathematics and computer sciences, while most of them start to conduct experiments in laboratories early in their school life.

Tang Ping, deputy Party secretary of the school, said students are exhausted from earning a high GPA and barely have time for social practice or courses that interest them.

"Many review exam questions from previous years or even write letters to teachers begging for higher points," Tang said.

About 88 percent of students at the school supported the new five-grade evaluation system, according to a survey conducted before the reform.

"The new grading system is a relief for me and means I can better balance scientific research and schoolwork. No matter if I am pursuing further education at home or abroad, I will have more backup plans for the future," said Ma Qiwei, a student from the school.

College student Chen Jialu's curriculum choices were limited due to fear of a low GPA. "Although it's necessary and I'd love to learn math and physics, I had to choose as few of these courses as possible for a higher GPA. Now I can select

courses more freely after the GPA assessment has been canceled," Chen said.

Apart from Peking University, Tsinghua University, East China Normal University and Shanghai-Tech University have also tried the letter-based grading system while some still use a percentile system for grades.

However, as GPA is an essential factor in selecting students in terms of awards, further education overseas and postgraduate recommendation, college students are anxious about the impact of canceling the GPA system.

"Replacing GPA with a letter-grade system is acceptable within the school, but some other schools haven't recognized the grading system and higher institutes abroad only accept GPA," Chen said.

Wang, the former vice-dean, said the school will provide a certificate for students applying for postgraduate studies overseas to explain their new grading system.

"Once the first batch of students successfully receives offers from universities overseas with the new assessment method, students' doubts will be alleviated," Wang said.

Luo Jiayuan, a postgraduate student at Beijing Foreign Studies University, believes college students will still be competitive in the rankings despite the cancellation of GPA.

"GPA is only a part of general assessments when selecting students for awards and recommending them for further education," Luo said.

The general evaluation of students also includes extra points for attending activities on campus and conducting social practices, which students will attach more importance to after the cancellation of GPA assessment.

"Compared with other assessment standards like extra points for attending events, exam scores are more equal," she said.

Fan Xiudi, director of the Education Evaluation Research Center of Tongji University in Shanghai, said she doesn't agree with the comprehensive cancellation of the GPA system.

The positive meaning of replacing accurate scoring with grading evaluation is that students won't be lost in vicious competition to increase a small number of points, but implementing a relatively vague assessment system is not necessarily good for cultivating cutting-edge talent, Fan told Wenhui Daily, a newspaper published by Shanghai United Media Group.

"It's fundamental to build a solid foundation in nurturing exceptional innovative talent. It may not be fastidious for students to fuss about minor points, but rather show a scientific attitude and a spirit of dedicated research," she said.

Dinosaur tour



Elementary school students tour the dinosaur section of the Baoding Natural History Museum in Baoding, Hebei province, on Wednesday, the day it opened to the public. Part of the Paleozoological Museum of China, the venue features some 6,000 exhibits telling the stories of nature and evolution. WANG HAIJIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Nation's military mobilized for annual training

By ZHAO LEI
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The Chinese military has opened its annual training sessions for 2024, focusing on improving combat capability.

On Tuesday, the People's Liberation Army Ground Force held a launch ceremony at a training ground in Guangdong to mark the beginning of the annual training.

General Li Qiaoming, commander of the Ground Force, and General Qin Shutong, the force's political commissar, took part in the ceremony and addressed more than 3,000 troops from a combined brigade.

After the ceremony, Li and Qin and other top commanders instructed troops and also checked other units' training via video link.

Combat ships, submarines and aircraft from the PLA Navy have been mobilized for live-fire exercises. Sailors and naval aviators honed their skills in gunfire, missile launching, electronic warfare operations and air-defense and anti-submarine tasks.

The PLA Air Force said its aviation and air-defense units have taken part in intense drills since the beginning of the new year, publishing a video showing aircraft, radars and missile launchers in action.

The People's Armed Police Force also organized mass gatherings at its units' training grounds across the



People's Armed Police Force soldiers engage in combat training in Hezhou, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, on Tuesday, as the Chinese military opened its annual training sessions. ZHANG BIHAI / FOR CHINA DAILY

country, putting officers and soldiers in realistic battle scenarios.

Meanwhile, all of the PLA's regional theater commands — central, northern, eastern, southern and western — have ordered forces under their direct control to carry out training and exercises according to the latest annual plans. Commanders stressed that

troops must continue to improve their joint operational capabilities.

In another development, the PLA Southern Theater Command announced that it has organized naval and air forces to conduct routine patrols in the South China Sea on Wednesday and Thursday.

It said its forces always remain on

high alert and will resolutely defend national sovereignty, security, and maritime rights and interests.

Any military activities by foreign forces aiming to cause disturbances and tensions or sensationalize regional situations in the South China Sea are under close watch by the armed forces, the command noted.

Universities look for misconduct in retracted papers

By LIANG SHUANG
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China's Ministry of Education has asked universities to look for possible academic misconduct following "massive" retractions of research papers submitted by Chinese researchers at some foreign publications last year, according to the websites of several universities.

Henan Finance University, based in Zhengzhou, Henan province, is among the universities. It said in a notice last week that the university is launching a campaign to check for possible breaches of academic ethics among retracted papers.

According to a circular the university had put up, the Henan Provincial Department of Education told colleges in the province that since

last year, multiple foreign publications, such as Hindawi, retracted Chinese research papers "in large amounts", which led to "severe negative influence" on academic credibility and atmosphere.

Sending a short list of retracted papers to the provincial department, the Ministry of Education said that the main reason for the retractions included suspected peer review manipulation, fabricated experiments and ghostwriting, which suggested the involvement of so-called paper mills — underground companies that "manufacture" academic papers in large quantities and sell them to researchers.

The provincial department told universities to thoroughly investigate the list of retracted papers on the whole process of paper writing,

such as how the research idea came to be, how the data was obtained and how the paper was submitted.

Henan Finance University asked its researchers to comb through various academic databases and make a full list of retracted papers since 2021. Authors of these papers will be told to verify the reason for the retractions, and sign a document declaring their academic integrity if no misconduct is found, or deal with the misconduct in accordance with existing rules.

Although the Ministry of Education did not reveal the content of the circular on its website, similar inspection campaigns have also been announced by institutions such as Wuhan University and Shandong University.

Retractions of academic papers, especially those involving medical research, have been reported by the

media, and authorities have been taking steps to punish the misconduct and look for a long-term mechanism to prevent similar actions.

The Ministry of Education's bureau on scientific education publicized about 100 cases involving misconduct in medical research papers in 2021. Individuals exposed in the cases received punishments such as fines, and restrictions in project application and in promotion.

The Henan Provincial Department of Education also said in the notice that a long-term mechanism should be established, including reforms on the professional ranking system to "turn around the inclination of only focusing on the quantity of published papers and ignoring the quality", and to "restrict low-quality papers".

New methods used to monitor rare gibbon population

By CHEN LIANG
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Living in a single patch of subtropical karst forest covering less than 50 square kilometers between China and Vietnam, the cao vit gibbon is the second-rarest primate in the world, only behind the Hainan gibbon, which has a wild population of 37 individuals in six groups.

The critically endangered species, also known as the eastern black-crested gibbon, has an estimated population size of around 120 individuals.

However, in a paper published on Jan 4 in Scientific Reports, an open-access journal publishing original research, scientists from China, Vietnam and the United Kingdom estimated that the wild population of the gibbon was even smaller, according to a 2021 survey.

"We estimate it was comprised of 74 individuals in 11 family groups," said Fan Pengfei, professor with Sun Yat-sen University's Life Science College, who is one of the article's co-authors.

According to the researcher, whose team has been monitoring the gibbon's population within China for years, it doesn't mean that the population has declined. "In fact, the population appears to be growing, with new groups having formed in recent years," he said.

The recent result came from a revised method for monitoring gibbons.

Traditional methods, involving triangulation of groups from their songs, are relatively subjective and likely lead to measurement errors.

During the 2021 population survey, the scientists combined traditional observations made by survey teams with concurrent passive acoustic monitoring by recording devices, and assistance from an unmanned aerial vehicle with a mounted thermal camera.

"Through the method, we managed to use vocal fingerprinting to distinguish the different singing males in the population," Fan said.

Since the cao vit gibbon was rediscovered in 2002 in Vietnam and reconfirmed in China in 2006, Fan said, two protected areas have been established. One is the Cao Vit Gibbon Species and Habitat Conservation Area in Cao Bang province, Vietnam and another is the Bangliang National Nature Reserve in Jingxi county, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region.

Other conservation measures include regular patrols by rangers and community groups; habitat restoration; support for sustainable livelihoods; awareness-raising about the plight of the gibbon; and educational events with local schools. Alongside these activities, periodic surveys of the wild population have been done.

However, for a long time, surveys have been aware of substantial subjectivity inherent in population survey methods for gibbons. Most gibbon surveys have estimated density or abundance by triangulating group locations from multiple survey posts that are monitored simultaneously. "Gibbons are sometimes watched directly but, most often, are detected indirectly from their songs," Fan said.

If two groups sing close together at different times, he said, there is a risk that they are identified as one group and the total population size is underestimated. If a single group moves quickly to a new location and sings again, or moves a far distance between survey days, there is a risk that the group is identified as two groups, and the total population size is overestimated.

"We had long been thinking to revise the method," Fan said.

A key characteristic of a family of gibbons is their singing behavior. Like in other gibbon species, cao vit gibbons in family groups sing during most mornings. Community monitoring teams in Vietnam, as well as Fan's team in China, have often reported that individual gibbons have distinctive songs.

"The cao vit gibbon has shown that songs, in particular the male



A female cao vit gibbon (right) and her baby are seen in the forest canopy in the Bangliang National Nature Reserve in Jingxi county, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region. ZHAO CHAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

songs, are highly individualistic and stable over time," Fan said.

This discovery has led to the suggestion that these vocal "fingerprints" in gibbons could serve as the foundation for an objective population survey method.

At first, the scientists built a total of 29 listening posts distributed across the global range of the cao vit gibbon, 23 in Vietnam, four in China and two along the border. Listening posts were placed on mountain tops and ridges to maximize the probability of hearing and observing groups.

The surveyors monitored each listening post for at least five consecutive mornings, which was deemed to be sufficient to detect all groups. A roving team also assisted in the counting of group sizes using a UAV. This team operated independently of the main survey teams, each morning selecting a listening post that might offer the best chance of detecting gibbon groups. Videos from the UAV were reviewed carefully and group size and composition counted. Then the surveyors deployed acoustic recorders at 55 locations across the global range of the gibbon. The devices were programmed to record continuously every day. Between Oct 26 and Nov 10, 2021,

monitoring at the 29 listening posts across Vietnam and China generated 245 records of gibbons from field teams. The passive survey by acoustic recorders harvested more than 25,000 hours of sound clips.

"With the revised method, incorporating vocal fingerprinting and UAV-based group counts, we carried out the most robust survey so far of the last remaining cao vit gibbon population," Fan said.

Three of the 11 groups primarily reside in China and eight in Vietnam, according to the article.

"Group sizes observed during the survey were consistent with those from long-term monitoring in our country, with most groups consisting of one adult male, two adult females and dependent offspring," Fan said. "As we know it, this approach has never been employed in a gibbon species population survey before."

The paper emphasizes the urgent need for ongoing habitat restoration efforts, which are likely the most viable means of increasing population size. The cao vit gibbon is evidently facing immediate threats due to the effects of small population size, including the loss of genetic diversity, inbreeding and vulnerability to unforeseen catastrophes.

WORLD

Israeli ministers' remarks on Gaza future slammed

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong
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The calling by top Israeli government officials for Palestinians to be displaced from Gaza has drawn broad condemnation from regional neighbor Saudi Arabia among others, as well as the Western nations, with some calling it "irresponsible".

During their parties' respective faction meetings in the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, on Monday, National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich presented the migration of Palestinian civilians as a solution to the long-running conflict, the Times of Israel reported.

"The war presents an opportunity to concentrate on encouraging the migration of the residents of Gaza," Ben Gvir was quoted by the online newspaper as saying, and that "not only did he not rule out Jewish settlement there," he believed "it is also an important thing".

Further, Smotrich reportedly told members of his party that the "correct solution" to the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict was "to encourage the voluntary migration of Gaza's residents to countries that will agree to take in the refugees", predicting that "Israel will permanently control the territory of the Gaza Strip", including through the establishment of settlements, the report said.

Saudi Arabia condemned the remarks on Thursday, with the Saudi Foreign Ministry expressing Riyadh's "categorical rejection of the extremist remarks by two ministers in the Israeli occupation government, who called for the displacement of the population of Gaza," said an English translation of the statement released by Saudi Press Agency, according to a report by Arab News on Thursday.



People inspect the rubble of a building where the displaced Palestinians were sheltering after it was hit by Israeli bombardment in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Wednesday. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

More than 22,000 Palestinians have been killed after the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas conflict on Oct 7 when Hamas attacked Israel, leaving 1,200 of its nationals dead.

Gokhan Erel, Gulf studies coordinator at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, in Turkey, told China Daily that Saudi Arabia's strong stance in favor of Palestinian rights and opposition to any plans for the expulsion of Palestinians from Gaza is demonstrated in its condemnation of the statements delivered by Israeli officials.

He also said Riyadh's emphasis on the necessity of international accountability for Israel indicates a

commitment to upholding international law and the decisions of international legitimacy.

'Irresponsible' statement

Apart from Saudi Arabia, the US, a staunch backer of Israel, rejected the recent statements from the Israeli officials, saying in a statement issued on Jan 2 that the rhetoric "is inflammatory and irresponsible".

"We have been told repeatedly and consistently by the Government of Israel, including by the Prime Minister, that such statements do not reflect the policy of the Israeli government. They should stop

immediately," said Matthew Miller, US State Department spokesperson.

"We have been clear, consistent, and unequivocal that Gaza is Palestinian land and will remain Palestinian land, with Hamas no longer in control of its future and with no terror groups able to threaten Israel," he said.

In Europe, the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell said on his X account that he strongly condemned the "inflammatory and irresponsible statements" by the Israeli ministers "slandering the Palestinian population of Gaza" and calling for a plan for their emigration.

World leaders decry terror attacks in Iran

Teheran vows revenge after deadly blasts near burial site of slain general

TEHERAN — Iran vowed revenge on Thursday for explosions on the previous day that killed at least 84 people at a ceremony near the burial site of Iran's slain general Qassem Soleimani as countries across the globe strongly denounced the blasts.

The twin attacks — labeled a "terrorist attack" by state media and regional authorities — came amid high Middle East tensions over the Gaza conflict and the killing on Tuesday of a Hamas senior leader in Lebanon, Agence France-Presse reported.

No one claimed responsibility for the explosions, which sparked fears of a widening conflict in the region, rattled global markets, where oil prices jumped more than 3 percent and sparked global condemnation.

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

An earlier death toll of 103 was twice revised lower after officials realized that some names had been repeated on the list of victims and also due to the severity of wounds suffered by some of the dead, health authorities said, The Associated Press reported. Many of the wounded were in critical condition.

The first blast was about 700 meters from Soleimani's tomb and the second was a kilometer away, according to the official IRNA news agency.

Rahman Jalali, the deputy governor of Kerman Province for political and security affairs, said the explosions were carried out by "terrorists", the IRNA reported.

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

Iran observed a day of mourning Thursday for the attacks.

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

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

China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said on Thursday that China is deeply shocked by the serious terrorist attack in Iran which caused heavy casualties.

China opposes all forms of terrorism, strongly condemns terrorist attacks, and firmly supports Iran's efforts to maintain national security and stability, Wang said.

The Chinese embassy in Iran said that no Chinese citizens were hurt in the incident. It asked Chi-

nese citizens in Iran to pay close attention to the local security situation and strengthen personal safety precautions.

Following the incident, Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei said the attackers will face "a harsh response".

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said: "Undoubtedly, the perpetrators and leaders of this cowardly act will soon be identified and punished".

"Washington says USA and Israel had no role in terrorist attack in Kerman, Iran. Really? A fox smells its own lair first," Iranian president's deputy chief of staff for political affairs, Mohammad Jamshidi wrote on X, formerly Twitter.

US officials, meanwhile, rejected any suggestion that it or its ally Israel was behind the deadly blasts. "The United States was not involved in any way. And the suggestion to the contrary is ridiculous. And No 2, we have no reason to believe that Israel is involved in this," US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller told reporters on Wednesday.

Asked about the blasts, Israeli army spokesman Daniel Hagari said: "We are focused on the combat with Hamas."

The United Nations, European Union, and several countries, including Russia, Turkey, and Germany, denounced the blasts.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemned the attack in the strongest possible terms and said those responsible must be brought to justice, according to a statement issued by the UN chief's office.

Expressing condolences

In a phone call with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, European Union's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell strongly condemned the deadly incident, and extended condolences to the victims' families and the Iranian government and people, wishing a speedy recovery for the injured.

According to a statement from the Kremlin, Russian President Vladimir Putin had sent a message to Khamenei and Raisi, saying that Russia strongly condemns terrorism in all forms and reaffirms its commitment to the uncompromising fight against it.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in a phone call with Raisi, condemned the twin attacks "targeting civilians", reiterating his call for Iran to act jointly in the fight against terrorism.

It was also decided during the phone call to postpone Raisi's visit to Turkey, originally scheduled for Thursday, "to a later date", said Erdogan's office, which was also confirmed by Mohammad Jamshidi, Raisi's deputy chief of staff for political affairs.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Rising US COVID cases linked to variant

By MINGMEI LI in New York
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COVID cases are rising in the United States, and one variant seems to be fueling the virus' spread, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

JN.1, as the variant is known, now accounts for about 44 percent of COVID cases in the US, up from 8 percent just a month ago, according to the CDC.

JN.1 also has rapidly spread across the world in recent weeks. It accounted for 27 percent of genetic sequences submitted to a global virus database called GISAID in the week that ended Dec 3, up from 10 percent in the week that ended Nov 19.

"We are seeing JN.1 quickly become the dominant version of the COVID virus, which tells us it is more transmissible," Dr Mandy Cohen, the director of the CDC, told NBC News. "The good news is we don't see an increase in severity."

Americans are now facing a new round of respiratory ailments, including COVID and influenza.

COVID is attributed to around 1,200 deaths weekly in the US, which is one-third of the rate in 2022 and one-eighth of that in 2021.

Hospitalizations due to COVID have increased by 17 percent in the week leading up to Dec 23, with around 29,000 new hospital admissions, compared with 39,000 in the

same period last year and 61,000 in 2021, according to The New York Times.

Official data is limited because the CDC stopped tracking the number in May. Current numbers are based on wastewater data, positive tests, emergency department visits, hospitalization rates and death data trends.

Health authorities are now advising all people, regardless of their risk level for severe illness, to get vaccinated against both COVID and flu; utilize masks and air purifiers to avert infections; seek testing and treatment; and remain at home if they fell sick.

As of Dec 23, however, about 19 percent of adults have received the most recent COVID vaccine; roughly 44 percent have taken the annual flu shot, and just over 17 percent of adults age 60 and older have been vaccinated for RSV (respiratory syncytial virus), according to The New York Times.

Meanwhile, Florida's surgeon general on Wednesday called for a halt to COVID vaccines, claiming that the shots could contaminate patients' DNA.

In a Florida Department of Health bulletin, Dr Joseph Ladapo said the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the CDC hadn't properly assessed a risk that "DNA fragments" in widely administered mRNA vaccines manufactured by Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech can cause "contaminant integration with human DNA".

Ladapo had first raised the issue in a Dec 6 letter to the FDA.

"The FDA's response does not provide data or evidence that the DNA integration assessments they recommended themselves have been performed," Ladapo, Florida's highest-ranking health official, said Wednesday.

"DNA integration poses a unique and elevated risk to human health and to the integrity of the human genome, including the risk that DNA integrated into sperm or egg gametes could be passed onto offspring of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine recipients," he said. "If the risks of DNA integration have not been assessed for mRNA COVID-19 vaccines, these vaccines are not appropriate for use in human beings."

In response, the FDA said Wednesday: "The FDA stands firmly behind the safety, effectiveness and manufacturing quality of the approved and authorized COVID-19 vaccines, and respectfully disagrees with the Florida Surgeon General's opinion. With over a billion doses of the mRNA vaccines administered and following very careful review of all the available scientific evidence, the FDA has not identified safety concerns related to the sequence of, or amount of, residual DNA."

Dr Ashish Jha, a former White House COVID-19 response coordinator and dean of Brown University's School of Public Health, said Ladapo's claim of DNA fragments is "scientific nonsense".

"People who understand how these vaccines are made and administered understand that there is no risk here," Jha told The Washington Post.

"We've seen this pattern from Ladapo that every few months he raises some new concern, and it quickly gets debunked," he said, referring to a claim by Ladapo in September that the latest release of COVID boosters hadn't been tested on humans, and that he attributed life-threatening conditions reported in Florida and elsewhere to the COVID vaccines, leading the FDA to issue a rebuttal.

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, who is seeking the GOP presidential nomination, appointed Ladapo in 2021, and both have opposed the vaccine, suggesting that the shots cause serious harm. Florida has the lowest vaccination rate in the US.

Florida became the first state to recommend against the COVID-19 vaccine for healthy children, contrary to the CDC's recommendation that most Americans 6 months and older receive booster shots.

Ladapo's latest contention is "very irresponsible", John Wherry, a vaccine expert and director of the Institute for Immunology at the University of Pennsylvania, told the Post.

The Harvard-educated Ladapo is associated with a group called America's Frontline Doctors, which has pushed bogus COVID-19 cures, according to a Time magazine investigation.

Salt makers combat climate change to protect tradition

HANAPEPE, Hawaii — On a warm summer afternoon, Tina Taniguchi was on her hands and knees scraping dirt off an oblong depression in the ground. Thick brown hair peeked out from her coconut leaf hat. Splotches of mud stuck to her T-shirt and speckled her smiling face.

Taniguchi smiles a lot when she is working in her corner of the Hanapepe salt patch on the west side of Kauai, a terracotta plot of land about the size of a football field, dappled with elliptical pools of brine, crystallizing in clay beds.

Taniguchi drives about an hour to get here. For her, it is church and play rolled into one — the time she forges a connection to the land.

"It's hard work. But for me, it's also play," Taniguchi said, adding with a

laugh. "I play in the mud all day."

Taniguchi's family is one of 22 that have dedicated themselves over generations to the cultural practice of *paakai*, the Hawaiian word for salt. This is one of the last remaining salt patches in Hawaii. Its sacred salt can be traded or given away, but must never be sold. Hawaiians use it in cooking, healing, rituals and as protection.

Under threat

Over the past decade, this tract has been under constant threat due to development, pollution from a neighboring airport, sand erosion from vehicle traffic and littering by visitors to the adjacent beach.

In addition, climate change threatens to obliterate the practice with rising sea levels and modified weather

patterns. This year, the salt-making season lasted barely three months from July to September because of above-average rainfall. During a good year, work typically begins in May and ends in November.

Malia Nobrega-Olivera's grandfather was instrumental in forming a group of salt-making families called Hui Hana Paakai. She is also an educator and activist who leads efforts to preserve this centuries-old tradition. The organization's goal, she said, is to speak with a collective voice when communicating with the landowner, the state of Hawaii, whenever issues arise.

After the Maui fires in August that claimed 100 lives, the practitioners there specifically requested white Hanapepe salt from Nobrega-Olivera to bless and "calm" the trauma-



Kane Turalde reaches into a salt bed to examine salt crystals in Hawaii. JESSIE WARDARSKI / AP

tized island, particularly areas that housed makeshift morgues.

The salt makers continue to send their salt to survivors who are rebuilding their lives, so they can "make their food delicious and bring some of that joy into their lives," she said.

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WORLD

Investments hampered by fickle policies

Indian actions against Chinese firms driven by political dynamics: Experts

By YANG RAN
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India's business environment characterized by nebulous market regulations and fickle law enforcement is not conducive to wooing foreign investment and may harm its long-term development, experts said.

In December, India's Enforcement Directorate, the agency that fights financial crimes, arrested three senior executives of the Indian unit of Vivo, a Chinese mobile company, on allegations of money laundering. The three appeared at the Patiala House Court in the capital New Delhi on Dec 26, with no verdict reached and their detention extended by two days.

On Dec 30, the court ruled their arrest illegal and ordered their release, while mandating that they report to the agency daily until Jan 3, NDTV, a local channel, reported.

A spokesperson for Vivo in India expressed concern over such incidents, stating: "The recent arrests demonstrate continued harassment and, as such, induce an environment of uncertainty among the wider industry landscape."

Qian Feng, director of the research department at Tsinghua University's National Strategy Institute, interprets Vivo's ordeal as a "clear sign of the Indian government's tendency to politicize and pan-securitize economic matters."

"The actions against Chinese firms in India, which has escalated to unprecedented levels recently, is driven by both domestic and global political dynamics," he said.

"With the general election approaching, the Bharatiya Janata Party government tries to construct China as an imaginary enemy, and by taking action against Chinese enterprises, it tries to stir up nationalist sentiments to secure the BJP's electoral base."

From the perspective of international politics, India's actions toward Chinese companies are also influenced by the US-led decoupling policy against China, Qian said.

Lin Minwang, deputy director of the Center for South Asian Studies at Fudan University, noted that the sectors India has targeted to decouple from China are those that it believes domestic suppliers can supplant Chinese ones.

"Take the mobile phone industry, for example. Chinese mobile phone companies entered India on a large scale in 2015, and after nearly a decade of development, India now has the largest shipment volume of low-end mobile phones in the world and has gained independent capacity in production of such phones," said Lin.

"After China introduced the entire mobile phone industrial chain to India, which helped cultivate the market and develop related local technologies, India is now

driving out Chinese companies to make room for the growth of its domestic enterprises," he said.

Apart from Vivo, Chinese smartphone makers like Xiaomi and Huawei have all been troubled by the Indian government in recent years, with Xiaomi being accused of making illegal remittances and violating foreign exchange laws and Huawei being accused of tax evasion. Oppo, too, faced tax fraud allegations.

Even non-Chinese firms, such as South Korea's Samsung, have faced similar accusations of duty evasion in 2023.

"India adopts a cherry-picking approach to foreign enterprises, favoring those that are beneficial to the country while suppressing those that the Indian authorities feel pose threats to domestic industries," said Lin.

For foreign companies that fall out of favor, the Indian government has plenty of tools to make their lives difficult there, as the Economist wrote in August. The regulatory measures at the government's disposal include outright prohibitions on certain products, hefty tariffs, and most important of all, noncompliance with tax rules, which the Economist said, is the Indian government's favorite accusation, as it's almost impossible to abide by them all.

'Rigorous legislation'

"India's legislation is so rigorous that violation of law could be quite widespread in its society, which makes selective punishment a common tactic used by the government to suppress foreign enterprises," said Lin.

"Adopting a zero-sum, replacement mindset instead of a collaborative, win-win approach toward foreign enterprises will only further deteriorate India's business environment and solidify its reputation as a graveyard for foreign investment," said Qian. He said that such tactics may ultimately cause long-term harm to India.

According to data from the Reserve Bank of India, the country's central bank, foreign direct investment coming into the country decreased by 16.3 percent to \$71 billion for the 2022-23 fiscal year ending on March 31. The net FDI saw a more significant drop, falling by 27 percent to \$28 billion.

A government report shows that during 2014-21, while nearly 11,000 foreign firms entered India, 2,783 had left or closed during the same period, a dispiritingly high number for a supposedly fast-growing economy, The Economist reported.

"Despite the attractiveness of India's vast market for foreign investment, its unfavorable business environment often results in high costs for foreign investors. Those who have learned their lessons there will choose to leave," said Lin.

Balancing act



French tightrope walker Nathan Paulin crosses Alameda Avenue in Santiago, Chile, on a 270-meter-long taut rope, 50 meters above ground, on the opening day of the Teatro a Mil festival, a performing arts festival, on Wednesday. JAVIER TORRES / AFP



People protest in front of the US Marines Camp Schwab in Nago, Okinawa Prefecture, on Dec 14, against the planned relocation of US Marine Corps Air Station Futenma to the Henoko coastal district, also in Nago. KYODO VIA REUTERS

US base plan risks losing Okinawans' trust

By JIANG XUEQING in Tokyo
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The Japanese government's coercive approach to relocating a US military base in Okinawa Prefecture will intensify Okinawans' anti-US sentiment, worsen their trust in the Tokyo administration, and deepen friction between the local and central authorities, experts said.

On Dec 28, Japan's Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Tetsuo Saito granted approval for design changes concerning the relocation of the US Marine Corps Air Station Futenma in Okinawa.

The planned site in the Henoko coastal area of Nago, Okinawa, is set to replace the current location in Ginowan, also on Okinawa's main island.

Saito's approval was granted in lieu of the Okinawa prefectural government, which had refused to give its consent. Consequently, the Ministry of Defense is set to resume comprehensive construction activities in Henoko as early as mid-January.

Kazuyuki Hamada, an expert in US political science and Japan's former parliamentary vice-minister for foreign affairs, said that even more than 75 years after the end of World War II, an abnormal situation persists in Japan with over 130 US military bases scattered across the country. More than 70 percent of them are concentrated in Okinawa.

The government needs to consider the "unfairness" felt by the people of Okinawa.

"Why is Okinawa, with only 0.6

percent of the nation's land area, burdened with 70 percent of US military facilities in Japan?" Hamada said.

"While maintaining an alliance with the US is diplomatically important for a nation, it seems unnecessary from a security standpoint to continue sustaining US military bases under the financial burden of the Japanese government," he said.

"If the relocation of the US military base to Henoko proceeds, Okinawa will bear an excessive base burden for over 100 years," Hamada added.

The Ministry of Defense announced in 2019 that the estimated overall cost of constructing a replacement facility for the US military base will reach 930 billion yen (\$6.48 billion).

Mounting pressure

"If the central government continues to prioritize its relationship with the US over the intentions of Okinawa and other local governments, it is unavoidable that resentment and destabilization toward the administration will increase," Hamada said.

Currently, the central government is exerting pressure on Okinawa Governor Denny Tamaki.

This pressure extends not only to the governor but also to Okinawa as a whole, indicating that if the prefecture does not comply with the government's demands, measures such as salary reductions will be imposed.

The Japanese government has demanded missile deployment in prefectures such as Oita and Aomori,

in addition to Okinawa. Most municipalities are opposed to this top-down decision, said Kumiko Haba, professor emerita at Aoyama Gakuin University in Tokyo.

"Currently, there is a conflict between municipalities desiring peace and stability and a government attempting to deploy missiles across the Japanese archipelago in alliance with the United States," Haba said.

"The majority of Japanese people do not want missiles deployed toward China in the cities where they live. Doubts and dissatisfaction with the government are growing from various municipalities," she added.

In response to public sentiment, Okinawa Prefecture has filed an appeal with the Supreme Court.

"Deploying missiles to Okinawa violates Article 9 of the Constitution, and the judiciary should clearly make a democratic judgment against a government that does not respect the popular will," Haba said.

"Rather than following the US directives, it is important for both the government and Okinawa to communicate with the US, emphasizing the unsuitability of the terrain for aircraft takeoffs and landings," she said.

Hamada, the political scientist, noted that if the relocation plan is forced through without the understanding of the people, it will worsen both Okinawans' anti-US sentiment and their trust in the central government, potentially leading to the destabilization of Japan-US relations.

Trump asks top court to overturn Colorado ballot ban

WASHINGTON — Former president of the United States Donald Trump on Wednesday asked the US Supreme Court to overturn a ruling barring him from the Colorado ballot, setting up a high-stakes showdown over whether a constitutional provision prohibiting those who "engaged in insurrection" will end his political career.

Trump appealed a 4-3 ruling in December by the Colorado Supreme Court that marked the first time in history that Section 3 of the 14th Amendment was used to bar a presidential contender from the ballot. The court found that Trump's role in the Jan 6, 2021, attack on the US Capitol disqualified him under the clause.

The provision has been used so sparingly in US history that the US Supreme Court has never ruled on it.

Wednesday's development came a day after Trump's legal team filed an appeal against a ruling by Maine's Democratic Secretary of State Shenna Bellows, that Trump was ineligible to appear on that state's ballot over his role in the Capitol attack. Both the Colorado Supreme Court and the Maine secretary of state's rulings are on hold until the appeals play out.

Trump's critics have filed dozens of lawsuits seeking to disqualify him in multiple states. He lost Colorado by 13 percentage points in 2020 and does not need to win the state to gain either the Republican presidential nomination or the presidency. But the Colorado ruling has the potential to prompt courts or secretaries of state to remove him from the ballot in other, must-win states.

None had succeeded until a slim majority of Colorado's seven justices — all appointed by Democratic governors — ruled last month against Trump. Critics warned that the court could not simply declare that the Jan 6 attack was an "insurrection" without a judicial process.

Trump's new appeal to the US Supreme Court also follows one from Colorado's Republican Party. Legal observers expect the high court will take the case because it concerns unsettled constitutional issues that go to the heart of the way the United States is governed.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Briefly

UNITED STATES

Young gamer beats 'unbeatable' Tetris

The falling-block video game Tetris has met its match in 13-year-old Willis Gibson, who has become the first player to officially "beat" the original Nintendo version of the game — by breaking it. Technically, Willis — also known as "blue scuti" in the gaming world — made it to what gamers call a "kill screen," a point where the Tetris code glitches, crashing the game. Willis managed on Dec 21 to trigger a kill screen on Level 157, which the gaming world takes as a victory over the game — something along the lines of pushing the software past its own limits.

EUROPE

Kyiv, Moscow swap hundreds of prisoners

Ukraine and Russia said on Wednesday they had exchanged over 200 captive soldiers each, in what officials have described as the biggest prisoner swap of the conflict so far. The two warring sides have carried out dozens of exchanges since Moscow launched the special military operation in February 2022. In near simultaneous statements, Russia and Ukraine announced they had received over 200 soldiers each following talk mediated by the United Arab Emirates.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Europe gets off to stormy start to new year

By JULIAN SHEA in London
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Europe has had a tumultuous start to the new year with extreme weather conditions being experienced across the continent, causing floods, power cuts and transport chaos.

Scandinavia was particularly hard hit. Even by the usual standards of the northern region, the temperature was particularly low, with Swedish news agency TT reporting that a reading of -43.6 C recorded in Swedish Lapland was the country's lowest January temperature in 25 years.

Bridges and schools were shut because of the extreme conditions. And in Denmark, the police advised motorists against unnecessary journeys because of the safety risks.

Siberian winds caused record-low temperatures in the Russian capital Moscow, and the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were also affected.

Further west, the problem was not the temperature but the high winds of Storm Henk, with thousands of households across the United Kingdom having a cold and dark start to the new year because of storm-related power disruption and widespread flooding. There was at least one fatality when a falling tree hit a car in Gloucestershire County in the west of England.

ITV News reported that the roof had been blown off an observation pod on the London Eye viewing platform with a family of 11 trapped inside it, and trees were lost at the world-renowned Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew in western London.

The Environment Agency put 271



A truck is being removed from a snowy street following an accident during heavy snowfall in Viborg, Denmark, on Wednesday. JOHNNY PEDERSEN / AFP

flood warnings in place. On the Isle of Wight, off the southern coast of England, winds of 151 kilometers per hour were recorded.

The disruption occurred as weather forecasting bureau the Met Office published provisional data showing that 2023 was the UK's second-warmest year on record, fractionally below 2022, with Wales and Northern Ireland both recording their hottest years. Climate change had made higher temperatures "significantly more likely," the Met Office was quoted as saying by the BBC.

Rising water levels on the River Maas in the Netherlands caused such concern that houseboat owners were evacuated as a precautionary measure, and personnel and

equipment came from as far away as Slovakia to help authorities in Germany and northern France deal with flood and storm damage in regions such as Pas-de-Calais, which had already experienced severe flooding in November.

"As the new year starts, EU solidarity does not waver," the European Union's Commissioner for Crisis Management Janez Lenarcic said.

"Once again, the EU Civil Protection Mechanism's swift and decisive assistance to the flood-stricken regions of Germany and France stands as a testament to the strength of unity. I thank Austria, Czechia, France, Hungary, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Slovakia and Sweden for quickly showing their support."

GLOBAL LENS



A man carries his belongings past a collapsed house following an earthquake in Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan, on Tuesday. KYODO NEWS VIA AP



A couple seek shelter inside their car after evacuating from their home near Anamizu, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan, on Wednesday. AFP



Rescuers help a woman from a collapsed house after a quake in Suzu, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan, on Tuesday. HIROTO SEKIGUCHI / THE YOMIURI SHIMBUN

QUAKES HIT NEW YEAR

At least 84 confirmed dead amid aftershocks, more damage in Japan

The death toll had risen to 84 in Japan's Ishikawa prefecture as of Thursday after a series of powerful earthquakes hit the area and its vicinity in central Japan in the new year, with subsequent reports of aftershocks and more damage.

A total of 57,360 people were evacuated in 955 locations across quake-hit Ishikawa and Niigata prefectures as of 11 am local time, Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi told the press on Tuesday.

Water supply was cut in at least 16 cities and towns in Noto Peninsula, at the northern part of Ishikawa, with about 1,000 self-defense force personnel arriving at the disaster area to carry out rescue operations, according to local media.

57,360 people

A total of 57,360 people were evacuated in 955 locations across quake-hit Ishikawa and Niigata prefectures by Tuesday.

A series of strong quakes, with a major temblor of preliminary 7.6 magnitude, occurred on Monday at a shallow depth on the peninsula. Japan's meteorological agency has officially named it the 2024 Noto Peninsula Earthquake.

All tsunami advisories along the Sea of Japan (called the East Sea by South Korea) were lifted following the quake but weather officials warned that strong aftershocks may occur in the week.

In a separate tragedy on Tuesday, a Japan Coast Guard aircraft taxiing on the runway to transport relief goods for quake-hit areas collided with a passenger plane at Tokyo's Haneda Airport.

Five of the coast guard plane's six crew members were confirmed dead and its captain was severely injured.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



Top: SOS letters formed with folding chairs are seen at a schoolyard after a strong earthquake in Suzu, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan, on Tuesday. KYODO NEWS VIA AP Above: A man who lost his house in the earthquake reacts as he visits the graves of his parents, in Wajima, Japan, on Thursday. KIM KYUNG-HOON / REUTERS



A woman cycles amid damaged houses in Noto town, northwest of Tokyo, on Tuesday, following Monday's deadly earthquake. HIRO KOMAE / AP



People help a woman on a cart to the bathroom after an earthquake in Wajima, Japan, on Tuesday. KIM KYUNG-HOON / REUTERS



Evacuees rest at a temporary evacuation center in Suzu, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan, on Wednesday. HIRO KOMAE / AP



Left: Cracks are seen on a bridge following an earthquake in Suzu, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan, on Tuesday. KYODO NEWS VIA AP



Right: People are seen at a residential and commercial area following an earthquake in Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan, on Tuesday, after a series of powerful temblors hit the country, damaging buildings and transportation networks. KYODO NEWS VIA REUTERS



A man directs a driver moving through a damaged street near Anamizu town in the Noto Peninsula, northwest of Tokyo, on Tuesday. HIRO KOMAE / AP

BUSINESS

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HIGHER GROUND

Shanghai goes big on smart factories

By WANG YING in Shanghai
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Shanghai is determined to consolidate its leading position in intelligent manufacturing by building 70 new intelligent factories this year, and 200 new intelligent factories and 20 benchmark factories by the end of 2025, official sources said on Thursday.

Some 70 new intelligent factories covering key industries, including automotive, high-end equipment and electronic information, will be built this year in an effort to achieve systematic optimization and overall enhancement in products' full life-cycles, manufacturing procedures and various supply-chain processes, said Zhang Ying, director of the Shanghai Commission of Economy and Informatization, during a smart factory construction promotion conference in Shanghai on Wednesday.

The East China cosmopolis is the nation's largest integrated solutions provider for intelligent manufacturing systems and one of the core equipment industrial clusters of intelligent manufacturing.

As manufacturing is critical for China's overall development, intelligent manufacturing is vital in enhancing core competitiveness of the nation's industries. It also plays an important role in accelerating new industrialization, said Chen Jie, vice-mayor of Shanghai.

"Therefore, it is an inevitable choice for megacities like Shanghai to take smart factories as a key area for the digital transformation of the manufacturing sector, and to accel-



Visitors learn how an intelligent robot helps check product quality during an expo in Shanghai.

WANG XIANG / XINHUA

erate the construction of smart factories," Chen said.

In the past few years, Shanghai has consolidated its development of intelligent factories, expanding the ecosystem of intelligent manufacturing. It has also gradually improved the toolbox of innovative development policies.

With equal focus on both quantity and quality, Shanghai's intelligent manufacturing has developed well with all-around achievements to show for it, Zhang said.

"Shanghai has so far built 19 national-level smart factories, 100 municipal-level smart factories and more than 1,000 intelligent manufacturing applications. More than 70 percent of the city's industrial enterprises above the designated size, or with an annual revenue of 20 million yuan (\$2.79 million) or above each, have conducted intelligent factory evaluation," said Zhang.

According to Zhang, the construction of intelligent factories has improved industrial enter-

prises' quality and efficiency. Production efficiency of Shanghai's intelligent factories has increased by more than 50 percent on average, while operational costs fell by more than 30 percent and energy consumption was down by nearly 14 percent.

"With support and help from various government divisions, we have constantly improved our intelligent manufacturing, and finally reached a high level of automation," said Xu Xiaoying, director of operations at Aptiv Electrical Centers (Shanghai) Co.

According to Xu, enterprises are increasingly benefiting from the integrated resources and industrial chain created by the Shanghai Commission of Economy and Informatization.

Through accelerated cultivation of a batch of world-class intelligent manufacturing system integration businesses, Shanghai has seen this segment's output value exceed 60 billion yuan, while the industrial scale of intel-

ligent manufacturing equipment sector has surpassed 100 billion yuan, Zhang said.

For example, Shanghai's current robot density in key industries is 383 units per 10,000 people, the highest worldwide, said Zhang.

Robot density is a key gauge to measure the adoption of automation in manufacturing, and is expressed by the number of robots per 10,000 people working in the manufacturing industry.

"By laying out detailed plans for advanced manufacturing and modern services, Shanghai looks to strengthen in-depth integration of technological innovation and industrial innovation, promote a new model of industrialization and the high-quality development of key industrial chains, thereby serving as a role model for a modern industrial system led by technological innovation," said Qian Feng, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering.

Fiscal focus to be on sci-tech, consumption

Minister: Combination of policy tools will be used to expand expenditure

By LIU ZHIHUA
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China will further optimize its fiscal policies, including tax policies, to help further expand and upgrade consumption, and also increase and restructure fiscal support for scientific and technological research and innovations, Minister of Finance Lan Fo'an said in an interview with People's Daily published on Thursday.

Lan also said China will strengthen the overall planning of fiscal resources and use a combination of fiscal policy tools, including Treasury bonds, local government special-purpose bonds, and preferential treatment in taxes, fees and subsidies, to moderately expand the scale of fiscal expenditure this year.

Experts forecast new policy measures are likely to be rolled out in this regard. They further said this will eventually help stabilize economic growth and promote the development of a modern industrial system, thereby promoting high-quality development and strengthening the Chinese modernization drive.

Lan said in the interview that China will maintain an "appropriate level" of higher fiscal expenditure this year to send positive signals to industry and markets. While maintaining stability of the overall government debt ratio, the country will continue to issue an appropriate amount of local government special-purpose bonds, and strengthen the management of the funds raised, thereby helping local governments to strengthen weak links in key areas and improve investment efficiency.

Lan also said China will further optimize and adjust preferential policies related to taxes and fees to provide key support for scientific and technological research, innovations and the development of the manufacturing sector. It will also standardize nontax fiscal revenue collection, and resolutely prevent arbitrary charges and fines.

The minister said the country will focus on residents' needs related to consumption upgrade to study new fiscal and tax policy measures that can improve consumption capacity,

optimize consumption environment and promote new types of consumption.

Besides, China will increase fiscal expenditure while improving the expenditure structure in the fields of science and technology, including leaning toward basic research, sci-tech applications and national strategic sci-tech projects, to fully support the pursuit of breakthroughs in core technologies and key areas via an improved national support system.

Wang Qing, chief macroeconomic analyst at Golden Credit Rating International, said that China's moderate inflation levels provide room for it to strengthen policy support to consumption.

"Consumption promotion will be key for China to expand domestic demand this year, and measures like tax reductions, fee cuts and larger-scale consumption subsidies will likely be implemented, especially in key consumption sectors like new energy vehicles, home appliances, furniture, and culture and tourism," Wang said.

"The central government can increase transfer payments to less privileged regions and weak areas to provide targeted consumption support to certain regions."

He said he expects increased fiscal support will be provided to basic research as well as research in sci-tech applications and key national sci-tech tasks. Preferential tax and fee treatment will tilt toward sci-tech innovations, and the country may also provide new fiscal subsidies to science and technology enterprises, he said.

Chang Haizhong, executive director of corporates at Fitch Bohua, a credit ratings agency, said he expects this year's fiscal policies to further encourage and guide expansion and upgrade of consumption in fields like smart homes, entertainment and tourism, through policy tools like fiscal subsidies, tax incentives and government procurement.

The current tourism boom in Harbin of Northeast China's Heilongjiang province is the best example of fostering new types of consumption, he said.

PBOC may increase size of property funding tool

By ZHOU LANXU
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China's central bank is likely to further expand the size of a targeted funding tool — pledged supplementary lending — to proactively back the struggling property sector, experts said after a PSL injection worth 350 billion yuan (\$49.1 billion) last month.

The much-anticipated PSL operations are expected to effectively catalyze multiple investments in the real estate industry, bolster credit expansion and drive up first-quarter economic growth, they said.

The People's Bank of China extended 350 billion yuan in loans to policy banks — lenders established to implement the government's economic policies — through the PSL facility in December.

The China Development Bank, the Export-Import Bank of China and the Agricultural Development Bank of China were the recipients of the funding, the PBOC said on Tuesday, without disclosing details of how the

banks will use the loans.

Bringing the outstanding balance of the PSL facility to 3.2522 trillion yuan, the move marks the first monthly increase in PSL loans since November 2022 and the third biggest single-month PSL injection on record, experts said.

Initiated in 2014, PSL is a monetary policy tool providing policy banks with low-cost and long-term funding, and was originally designed to support urban redevelopment.

Market data showed the interest rate of the PSL is now at 2.4 percent.

Ming Ming, chief economist at CITIC Securities, said the new PSL loans are likely to mainly fund investments in "three major projects" — construction of affordable housing, building of public infrastructure for both normal and emergency use, and redevelopment of shantytowns in cities.

The tone-setting Central Economic Work Conference, held in December, has called for accelerated efforts to advance the "three major projects".

PBOC Governor Pan Gongsheng also said earlier that the central bank will provide medium to long-term low-cost funding support to these projects.

"The size of this round of PSL loans may exceed 350 billion yuan and further PSL injections may continue," Ming said, as the abovementioned projects are still in need of large, low-cost funding.

Each yuan of PSL loans is estimated to catalyze about 2.5 yuan in investments, drawing on historical PSL effectiveness, Ming said, hence significantly boosting economic growth and boosting investor sentiment.

Zhu Haibin, chief China economist at JPMorgan, said the PBOC may use PSL and other policy tools to provide about 1 trillion yuan in funding to support affordable housing and shantytown redevelopment projects.

Zhu said this move should help China's economic growth reach nearly 5 percent this year while possibly narrowing the annual decline in real estate investment to about 2-4 percent, compared with almost 10 percent in 2023.

In the first 11 months of 2023, the country's total fixed-asset investment expanded by 2.9 percent, weighed down by a 9.4 percent decline in investment in real estate development, the National Bureau of Statistics said.

Tao Chuan, chief macroeconomic analyst at Shanghai-listed Soochow Securities, said PSL funding may have begun to generate effects in driving investment as the official purchasing managers index for the construction sector came in at 56.9 in December, well above the 50 mark that separates expansion from contraction and up from 55 in November.

Given that PSL operations are already channeling funds into the economy, the PBOC may not find it immediately necessary to reduce the reserve requirement ratio, another means of boosting liquidity, Tao said.

However, he said the central bank may lower benchmark interest rates through its medium-term lending facility in the first quarter, in response to recent fluctuations in economic indicators.

Briefly

PBOC adds liquidity via reverse repos

China's central bank conducted 15 billion yuan (\$2.11 billion) of seven-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 1.8 percent on Thursday. 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.

New energy installed capacity surges

Shandong province's combined installed capacity of solar and wind power surpassed 82.28 million kilowatts by the end of 2023, ranking first among all provincial branches of State Grid, said the energy giant's Shandong branch. The East China province had the highest installed capacity of solar power in China, at 56.38 million kW, while wind power capacity stood at 25.91 million kW.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

Legoland Shanghai to open early next year

By WANG ZHUOQIONG
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Legoland Shanghai Resort, the international IP-based theme park operated by British entertainment group Merlin Entertainments Ltd, is set to open in the spring or summer of 2025. It is expecting 3 to 5 million visitors per year.

The announcement was posted on the official website of the Shanghai Jinshan district government on Thursday.

The resort highlights the fusion of Lego brick themes and local culture. Comprising a theme park and a hotel, the 10 billion yuan (\$1.4 billion) investment features eight

diversified lands, such as Lego city, Ninjago and Monkie Kid.

These are expected to provide an immersive experience for family tourists and escalate competition in the theme park tourism industry.

John Jakobsen, chief operating officer of Legoland Resorts, said in November that China represents a key pillar of Merlin Entertainments' growth strategy. The group will continually explore investment opportunities in other locations across China.

Three Legoland resorts are under construction currently, including Shenzhen Legoland Resort in Guangdong province with an investment of more than 7 billion yuan, and another in Sich-

uan province with an investment of over 3 billion yuan.

Jakobsen said, over the next decade, China will be a strategic growth market supporting the growth of Merlin Entertainments, which has been operating 13 attractions in the country in the last 18 years.

The Lego-themed park projects align with the growing toy business in China, complementing toy maker Lego Group's expansion with more than 460 branded stores in over 120 cities across the country.

Meanwhile, a tourism boom has fueled the theme park market in China.

In 2022, about 80 theme parks in the country saw their revenue

grow 15.3 percent to 15.4 billion yuan, with 75.7 million visits, according to a report on the nation's theme park industry published by the Institute for Theme Park Studies in China.

Shanghai Disney Resort, Universal Beijing Resort and Shanghai Haichang Ocean Park rank as the top three in revenue. The number of parks is on the rise, according to the report.

The influx of international investments such as Disney's newly added Frozen-themed land in Hong Kong and Zootopia-based attraction in Shanghai last year, has highlighted the industry's momentum.

In 2023, Shanghai Disney



The model of Legoland Shanghai Resort on display during an expo in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Resort and Hong Kong Disney-land posted strong performances, driving Disney's park and experi-

ences business, according to the financial results of The Walt Disney Co.

BUSINESS

SOEs playing big role in improving livelihoods

By LIU ZIZHENG and ZHUANG QIANG

Serving as a strong force expanding the nation's global cooperation footprint in fields such as infrastructure, State-owned enterprises have also been working hard at home to improve livelihoods, boost rural vitalization and link remote areas.

Among them, China Construction First Group Corp, a unit of centrally administered China State Construction Engineering Corp, is working with Zhaotong, Yunnan province, to promote the well-being of the city's residents.

Yin Liang, the project manager, said while helping the local government relocate people from mountainous areas in Zhaotong to neighboring Jing'an New District, its team played a major role by providing better housing for those who were relocated.

CCFGC completed 33 buildings in 173 days, and readied new apartments catering to some 11,720 households.

"It's beyond my imagination that I am moving to such a good apartment at my age," said a 75-year-old resident.

To realize faster progress, Yin said he and his team barely rested, even during holidays.

Seven schools now stand in the new district — from kindergarten to senior high — providing quality education for some 20,000 students.



An employee of China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp works at the Pengyi Community redevelopment project in Shanghai in May. FANG ZHE / XINHUA

The company also carried out a series of voluntary activities, such as donating books and giving free lectures, to promote students' well-being.

"These kids remind me of my own. Their smiles can immediately remove all my anxiety," Yin said.

In addition, Yin and his team are currently building a new hospital, which will be equipped with 400 inpatient beds. And the land reclamation and reservoir projects they are working on are on track for timely completion and will boost local agricultural productivity, as the projects are expected to create 654 hectares of new farmland and provide water for around 65,000 households.

More job opportunities will also accompany the projects. The company cooperates with the local gov-

ernment to provide jobs and free training for over 2,800 local people, increasing their monthly incomes by two to threefold.

Wang Xiaoguang, director of the Beijing Rongzhi Corporate Social Responsibility Institute, said fulfilling social responsibilities will not only help companies meet expectations from both the government and society, but also significantly contribute to the companies' growth and competitiveness.

China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp, a unit of China Railway Construction Corp, said in December that its construction workers are approaching completion of redeveloping Pengyi Community — where over 2,100 residents will eventually resettle. The SOE said it is also engaging in other such projects in Shanghai, with its builders recently

kicking off redevelopment of Panqiang Community.

"State-owned enterprises must give full play to their strengths. They should make more efforts to help address the country's unbalanced and inadequate development, and contribute to the shared prosperity of all Chinese people," said Peng Huangang, chief expert of the China Enterprise Reform and Development Society.

Yin added that he and his team will carry out more projects to protect people's livelihoods and promote rural vitalization. They will continue to improve the local living environment, as well as access to quality healthcare and education.

Contact the writers at liuzizheng@chinadaily.com.cn

Dongguan rolls out rewards for enterprises

Measures covering sales, production, consumption to boost biz recovery

By QIU QUANLIN in Dongguan, Guangdong qiuquanlin@chinadaily.com.cn

136.3 billion yuan

trade value between Dongguan and Hong Kong Special Administrative Region from January to October

Industrial enterprises above a designated size in Dongguan, Guangdong province, will be rewarded suitably if they increase sales or production in the first quarter of 2024.

Industrial enterprises above a designated size refer to those with each of their annual sales income surpassing 20 million yuan (\$2.8 million).

This is part of the local government's new measures to stabilize production, boost consumption and ensure employment stability before and after the Spring Festival holiday.

According to the steps announced on Wednesday, each industrial enterprise will get up to 500,000 yuan, based on year-on-year sales increases in the first three months of 2024.

For stabilizing production and boosting output, the local government will encourage enterprises to maintain continuous production, and support them in formulating production plans for the first quarter and adjusting production capacity based on actual circumstances.

Industrial enterprises above a designated size that meet the conditions for maintaining continuous production in February, with electricity consumption no less than 50 percent of that in January, will receive electricity subsidies, with a maximum subsidy of 600,000 yuan for each, according to the new measures.

On employment stability, the local government will provide transportation subsidies to migrant workers for returning to their positions after the Spring Festival, which falls on Feb 10, with subsidies ranging from 200 to 300 yuan per person.

The city government will also organize special vehicles and chartered trains to assist employees, including those newly recruited from other provinces and cities, to quickly return to work.

Enterprises in Dongguan that employ nonlocal residents for the first time, sign labor contracts and provide them with social insurance continuously for more

than three months will receive a one-time subsidy of 1,000 yuan per person for new employment, according to the measures.

The measures on stabilizing production, boosting consumption and ensuring employment stability are part of the important moves to facilitate a steady and positive economic start for Dongguan, the local government said.

Dongguan, a manufacturing and trade hub in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, is also a major destination for labor resources due to some foreign-invested processing and trade enterprises in the city.

Investment from the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region remains the largest source of overseas capital in Dongguan, according to the local commerce authority.

Currently, there are 8,075 Hong Kong-funded enterprises in Dongguan, accounting for 58.3 percent of the total number of overseas enterprises in the city, data from the local commerce authority showed.

To promote economic and trade cooperation between Dongguan and Hong Kong SAR, a business summit and exchange conference in the GBA was held on Thursday, with participation from government officials and business leaders on both sides and representatives from Hong Kong-invested enterprises.

Economic and trade cooperation between Dongguan and Hong Kong has maintained steady growth over the years.

From January to October 2023, Dongguan attracted 644 new Hong Kong investment enterprises, an increase of 171 compared to the same period in 2022.

During the same period, trade value between Dongguan and Hong Kong exceeded 136.3 billion yuan, a year-on-year growth of 3.9 percent, or 12.9 percent of the city's total import and export value.

Future industries spur China's economic engine

BEIJING — A group of Chinese researchers has created a gene target therapy drug for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS.

SineuGene Therapeutics, a biopharmaceutical company, successfully completed a clinical drug delivery attempt of adeno-associated virus vector gene therapy for ALS.

The company's co-founder and CEO Peng Lin acknowledged that treating ALS is a worldwide challenge.

"Based on the basic research achievements in neuroscience of the Tsinghua University School of Medicine, we developed the drug and completed the transformation of the research result within two years."

The company is currently promoting the drug to patients with ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease.

Cell and gene therapy is a potential future business for Beijing.

The city has released an implementation plan for establishing a world-leading source of future industries.

The implementation strategy focuses on six fields — information, health, manufacturing, energy, materials and space.

The added value of Beijing's strategic emerging industries in 2021 was 996.16 billion yuan (\$139.2 billion), a 14 percent increase year-on-year.

Beijing's story is an example of China's efforts to foster new development engines by actively developing emerging industries and future industries.

In 2021, "future industries" was included in China's Outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) for National Economic and Social Development and Vision 2035.

At present, seven provinces and municipalities as well as more than 20 prefecture-level cities nationwide have issued more than 30 policy documents relevant to future industries.

According to Jiang Jiang, an official with the Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research, the main

composition of China's future industries is cutting-edge technologies such as new energy, artificial intelligence, biological manufacturing, low-carbon, and quantum computing, along with a large number of new business forms, new models and new industries derived from their applications.

In recent years, South China's Shenzhen has promoted the development of basic research platforms to aid in studies pertaining to brain science, precision medicine imaging, supercomputing, free electron laser, synchrotron radiation light source and material genome.

Last year, the city announced a policy to boost critical emerging industries and foster future industries.

Shenzhen-based BYD announced the production of its 6 millionth new energy vehicle on Nov 24.

In the first three quarters of 2023, the output of NEVs in Shenzhen increased by 125.8 percent, official data revealed.

The added value of Shenzhen's strategic emerging industries reached 1.04 trillion yuan in the first three quarters of 2023, up 14 percent year-on-year, and accounted for 42.5 percent of the GDP, up from 37.7 percent in 2019.

Strategic emerging industries have been the driving engine behind Shenzhen's high-quality development.

Since the beginning of 2023, China has continued to increase its support for future industries.

China has already met the preliminary criteria for developing future industries, said Pan Jiaofeng, president of the Institutes of Science and Development under the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Pan said that the country has a relatively excellent industrial system, rapidly increasing research and development investment, a diverse and huge market, qualified talent and local initiatives.

XINHUA



The Belt and Road Initiative will help tap market potential in these regions, promote investment and consumption, generate demand and job opportunities, enhance people-to-people and cultural exchanges among the peoples of involved countries and enable them to understand, trust and respect each other and live in harmony, peace and prosperity.

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The Belt and Road Initiative

Making the world a better place



BUSINESSFOCUS



Pudong mirrors China's modernization drive

In 2013, new area in Shanghai was chosen to host country's inaugural pilot FTZ, transforming itself into high-tech powerhouse

SHANGHAI — During the latest edition of the China International Import Expo, a remanufactured car engine was displayed at the booth of German carmaker Mercedes-Benz at an exhibition showcasing new technologies and products by companies based in Lingang Special Area of China (Shanghai) Pilot Free Trade Zone in Shanghai.

Prior to that, the sprawling Shanghai Pudong International Airport also welcomed a remanufactured engine in September. This one, imported by Volvo Construction Equipment (China), was the first of its kind in the country.

Both cases were made possible by the higher-level opening-up measures for China's FTZs and free ports launched by the State Council — the nation's Cabinet — in late June.

According to the measures, pilot programs for importing remanufactured products will be carried out in the FTZs and free ports.

"Compared to new products, remanufactured items can reduce energy consumption by 60 percent, and up to 70 percent of the materials can be recycled, thus lowering carbon dioxide emissions by 80 percent," said Chen Chaoping, vice-president of Volvo Construction Equipment (China).

The fresh move is just one of a series of innovative approaches that support Pudong's reputation as the country's vanguard in pushing reform and opening-up.

Pudong's transformation is an embodiment of China's modernization drive over the past decades.

When designated a new area in 1990, Pudong was still a vast expanse of desolate farmland, said Shao Yudong, then head of Pudong's development office.

"Infrastructure in Pudong, such as roads, bridges, water, electricity and sanitation facilities, was also quite inadequate at that time," Shao said.

In September 2013, Pudong was chosen to host the country's first pilot FTZ, which plays a vital role as a testing ground for institutional reform.

Over the past decade, Pudong has accomplished a great many firsts with the implementation of several bold attempts — the establishment of the country's first wholly foreign-owned hospital, the first wholly foreign-funded public fund company and the first wholly foreign-owned automobile manufacturing enterprise.

A number of pioneering projects, across 60 sectors such as automobile manufacturing, financial services, value-added telecommunications,



Top: An aerial view of Zhangjiang Science City, formerly known as Zhangjiang Hi-tech Park, in Shanghai's Pudong New Area in September. FANG ZHE / XINHUA

Above: A view of an automated section of Yangshan Port in Shanghai in January. JI HAIXIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

testing and certification, have been cultivated in Pudong.

Official data show that between September 2013 and 2022, Shanghai FTZ saw the establishment of 84,000 new enterprises, which is 2.35 times the number recorded in the previous 20 years in the region.

During the same period, the area also welcomed more than 14,000 new foreign investment projects with a cumulative actual foreign

investment of \$58.6 billion, which means every minute, over \$10,000 in investment was injected into the Shanghai FTZ.

Today, Pudong is packed with gleaming skyscrapers and is also home to a cluster of state-of-the-art industries.

With only 1/8,000 of China's total land area, Pudong now contributes 1/74 of the country's GDP, and has become a model for the rest of the

country on how to launch reforms and achieve high-quality development in a new era.

As China moves toward its second centenary goal of fully building a modern socialist country, Pudong is also ushering in a new stage of development.

In 2021, China issued a guideline to support high-level reform and opening-up of Pudong and build the area into a pioneer of socialist modernization.

By 2050, Pudong is expected to become a critical urban area that is highly attractive, creative, competitive and influential globally — a global model of urban governance and a "shining pearl" of a great modern socialist country, the guideline said.

In Lingang Special Area, a newly launched special area in Shanghai FTZ in August 2019, new industrial clusters are turning into fresh growth engines.

New energy vehicles, for example, have become a landmark industry in Lingang.

At Tesla's Shanghai gigafactory, it takes an average of just 40 seconds for a finished car to roll off the assembly line. In 2022, the annual output value of the NEV industry in Lingang exceeded 230 billion yuan (\$32 billion).

Thanks to the solid industrial foundation and the support of preferential policies, the average annual growth of Lingang's GDP reached 21.2 percent over the past four years, and the average annual growth of industrial output value and fixed-asset investment also logged remarkable growth rates of 37.8 percent and 39.9 percent, respectively.

In 2000, leading German-Swiss construction machine manufacturer Liebherr set up the first wholly foreign-owned enterprise in Pudong's Waigaoqiao. The company's growth gained further strength after the establishment of the Shanghai FTZ. In 2019, Liebherr set up its Chinese headquarters, incorporating a trading center, a distribution center and aviation maintenance business, in the Shanghai FTZ.

"We are honored to grow together with the Shanghai FTZ. We also appreciate the support provided by the FTZ. In the future, we will continue to adhere to the principle of 'based in Shanghai serving China', and introduce Germany's most advanced machinery manufacturing technology into China," said Patrick Schulz, general manager of Liebherr China.

XINHUA

Tropical resort island gains momentum amid nation's reform, opening-up

HAIKOU — As night falls in Yangpu, South China's Hainan province, diners at Le Pont d'Or — or "The Golden Bridge" in English — enjoy not only exquisite cuisine, but also breathtaking views of a bridge spanning a distant bay, seen through large windows.

"When I came to Yangpu two years ago, I couldn't even find a decent place for a cup of coffee," recalled Marco Cheung from Hong Kong, who runs the French-style restaurant. However, after the construction of the Hainan Free Trade Port gained steam, he sensed the potential for business opportunities and opened the eatery.

In less than two years, Le Pont d'Or has become a must-visit dining experience in Yangpu. More and more fancy establishments have emerged, transforming the landscape of the coastal area, now a pioneer and demonstration area for the FTZ.

Yangpu was designated a national-level economic development zone in 1992 and is home to the largest cargo seaport and the most extensive industrial cluster in Hainan,

China's southernmost province. However, due to the absence of a corresponding urban development plan, it lacked the hustle and bustle of a typical big city for a long time.

Rapid and profound changes occurred with the establishment of the Hainan FTZ, a pivotal leap in the nation's commitment to comprehensively deepening reforms and expediting institutional opening-up.

In 2020, China released a master plan to build the whole of Hainan into a globally influential and high-level FTZ by the middle of the century.

Since then, many favorable policies — including zero tariffs and eased market and foreign investment access — have been rolled out to support the development of the Hainan FTZ.

Randy Floyd, hailing from the United States, arrived in Hainan six years ago. Local policies proved to be so advantageous that he soon decided to establish a company in Haikou, the provincial capital.

"I had no idea how long to stay in China or Hainan, but seeing the rap-

id progress of the free-trade port and all the policies, the free flow of people, information and money, I want to stay here for as long as possible," said Floyd.

"The government is very supportive, and also the innovation parks here are very supportive to help companies with everything they might need to do," he said. "All the processes here are very streamlined."

In the first half of 2023, Hainan saw the establishment of 732 foreign-invested companies, up 3.5 percent year-on-year. The actual use of foreign capital totaled 13.37 billion yuan (\$1.88 billion), a year-on-year increase of 23.3 percent. During the first six months, 63 countries and regions invested in Hainan.

Meanwhile, the favorable policies have boosted Hainan's foreign trade. The total trade volume in goods exceeded 200 billion yuan in 2022, with an annual growth rate of 36.8 percent.

By the end of July last year, the total value of imported goods under the FTZ's zero-tariff policies had

exceeded 18 billion yuan.

The island is also a shopping paradise. From January to November, 6.23 million shoppers purchased duty-free products worth over 40 billion yuan on the island, up over 26 percent year-on-year, said Haikou Customs.

Over 300 types of imported medicines and medical equipment have been approved at the Lecheng International Medical Tourism Pilot Zone in Boao, a town near the island's east coast. The pilot zone received 189,000 medical tourists in 2022, up nearly 50 percent year-on-year.

Reforms have also extended to environmental initiatives. As a national ecological civilization pilot zone, Hainan has undertaken six landmark projects, including the Hainan Tropical Rainforest National Park, which led to the discovery of at least 28 new species.

Yu Tao, a Hainan FTZ researcher at the National Institute for South China Sea Studies, believes that the comprehensive and deepened implementation of reform and opening-up policies, particularly



An entrance to Yangpu Free Trade Port in South China's Hainan province is seen in November 2022. PU XIAOXU / XINHUA

those regarding the FTZ, have boosted confidence among market players as well as the general public.

The construction of the FTZ has also enhanced Hainan's international reputation.

"For example, Hainan has opened up wider to the outside world

through international forums such as the Boao Forum for Asia and the China International Consumer Products Expo. The Hainan FTZ is poised for even greater achievements in the future," Yu said.

XINHUA

COMMENT

Editorials

BRICS enlargement can help boost confidence and promote fair and just global governance

Despite newly elected Argentinian President Javier Milei announcing on Friday that his country would not become a member of BRICS for now, that regrettable decision will not diminish the bloc's appeal, which is only set to increase with the strong message of inclusiveness that was sent on Monday with its expansion.

Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Iran and Ethiopia joined Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa to start a new chapter for the group. The doubling of its membership is testament to the group's strong global appeal as it turns 18 years old this year and also to the cohesiveness of developing countries despite their different sizes, development stages and political systems. Apart from the five new members, dozens of countries have signed up to join BRICS, including Kuwait, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Bolivia.

Over the past 17 years, BRICS has been a platform for the five BRICS countries to strengthen their cooperation, helping to foster the rise of the Global South. The Shanghai-based New Development Bank and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement exemplify the fruitful and pragmatic nature of the bloc's cooperation.

Amid the increasingly complex international environment and lackluster global economic recovery, many developing countries are facing such woes as debt pressures, high inflation and sluggish growth. The five new members, as representatives of the Middle East and Africa, will help

extend the bloc's global reach and influence, giving it greater weight as a global economic stabilizer. The newly expanded BRICS can coordinate efforts to promote shared growth, safeguard multilateralism, and make greater contributions to realize more just and equitable global governance.

The world has entered a new period of turbulence and transformation, and the international order is undergoing major shifts, divisions and regrouping. The conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza have not only disrupted the global supply chains but also brought huge risks to peace and development both regionally and globally.

Painting an even gloomier picture, some Western countries, entrenched in a Cold War mentality, have been sparing no effort to sow the seeds of division and confrontation so as to maintain the West's hegemony. Under such a gloomy backdrop, the BRICS cooperation mechanism is being looked to as a means to serve the common aspirations of emerging economies and developing countries for a fairer share of the global pie, and to shore up the global trend toward multipolarity.

As a developing country, member of the Global South and founding member of BRICS, China is confident in the development of the cooperation mechanism. It is ready to deepen cooperation across the board in the spirit of openness, inclusiveness and win-win cooperation to jointly shape a brighter future for peoples of the BRICS members and the world at large.

US should call time on its tariff review

US business organizations, trade unions and enterprises have never stopped lobbying the US government to review the feasibility of the high tariffs imposed on goods from China.

However, the review, which the Joe Biden administration has extended time and again, dragged into its fourth year on Monday. During the process, the Biden administration has neither disclosed anything regarding the progress of the review or its findings, nor has it set a deadline for its conclusion.

Americans for Free Trade, a coalition of US businesses, trade organizations and workers united against tariffs, on Tuesday urged the Office of the United States Trade Representative to release the review results "immediately", believing that the review would prove the folly of continuing the high tariffs imposed on one of the largest trading partners of the US.

Its call came after the USTR announced last week a further extension, through May 31, 2024, of the reinstated COVID-related exclusions in the China Section 301 Investigation, which were due to expire on Dec 31 last year, without giving any indication of when the review into the tariffs imposed on imports of thousands of types of Chinese goods would be wrapped up. The COVID-related exclusions include medical products such as face masks, examination gloves and hand sanitizing wipes.

What the AFT said in its statement reflects the call of the majority of the US business community for the USTR to bring an end to the tariff policy that was initiated by the previous administration with the aim of gaining the upper hand in the second phase of trade negotiations that were due to be held with Beijing.

Rather than scrapping the tariffs on taking office, the Biden administration has kept them in place, which, as the AFT said, has led to more dislocation, inefficiencies and job losses.

International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva warned on Tuesday that the rivalry between the US and China could reduce global economic output by 7 percent — roughly equal to the annual output of France and Germany — by causing economic fragmentation that increases the cost of trade.

In that sense, her admonishment "we would all be better off finding ways to reduce frictions, concentrate on security concerns that are real and meaningful" should not fall on deaf ears. As she said, going "willy-nilly in fragmenting the world economy" just means everyone ends up "with a smaller pie".

If the US lifted the tariffs, it would not only give a shot in the arm to the world's top two economies steady their ties, but also help inject positive energy and certainty into the global economy, which is in desperate need of a restorative tonic.

Quake questions safety of nuclear power plants

The 7.6-magnitude earthquake that hit Japan's Ishikawa Prefecture and nearby areas has so far left at least 77 people dead and 35 missing, and rendered at least 33,000 people homeless.

Japan's response to the earthquake — the deadliest since 2016 — has so far been viewed as a success, mainly due to the experience it has accumulated over the past decades dealing with the many natural disasters that have befallen it. The country's sophisticated earthquake and tsunami warning systems, high-standard quake-resistant building code, and a well-trained public ready to follow established emergency procedures, have all contributed to minimizing the number of human casualties and the damage to infrastructure.

But with hundreds of tremors continuing to strike the region, raising fears of landslides and further damage to buildings, Japan is still facing huge challenges carrying out rescue and relief operations.

China has expressed its willingness to provide relief assistance to its neighbor, and Premier Li Qiang has sent a message of condolence to Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, expressing deep condolences for the deceased and offering the Chinese people's sympathies to the bereaved families and the injured.

It is hard to imagine that any other country could have responded in a better way to a disaster of the same magnitude. Notwithstanding that, grave concerns have been expressed about the

safety of Japan's nuclear power plants after the New Year's Day quake. Which is not without cause. After all, the memory is still fresh of the devastation caused by the 8.9-magnitude earthquake and the resulting tsunami 13 years ago, which struck the northeast coast of Japan and knocked out the cooling systems of three of the reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, causing a triple meltdown that spewed radioactive fallout over large swaths of land around it.

Tokyo's decision to release the nuclear-contaminated water used to cool the nuclear fuel rods into the Pacific Ocean, starting last summer, remains a thorny issue between Japan and its neighbors.

Fortunately, all of Japan's nuclear power plants escaped serious damage this time. But one plant in Ishikawa reportedly saw its electricity system partially disabled following the quake, while water from a spent fuel pool at another nuclear power station in Niigata Prefecture spilled over due to the quake, although no abnormality in operation was detected.

Japan relies heavily on nuclear power. Twelve nuclear power plants have been officially restarted since 2011, while another five have received permission to restart. Another 10 reactors are also undergoing inspections for a possible restart. It is imperative that Japan double down on its regulation and supervision efforts to ensure the safety of its nuclear power plants for the good of itself and the rest of the world.

Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Greater economic openness key to community with shared future

The World Openness Index, which is compiled by domestic institutions to gauge the openness level of the world's major economies, has been declining since 2008, falling by 5.4 percent cumulatively to 0.76 in 2022, and under the influence of tightening macro policies, geopolitical tensions, climate change and other factors, the openness of the world economy continued to be affected in 2023.

The world's economic openness is expected to remain sluggish this year, further decelerating the pace of the global economic recovery. The latest World Economic Outlook issued by the International Monetary Fund predicts that the global economy will grow 2.9 percent in 2024, 0.1 percentage points lower than in 2023, with both developed and emerging market and developing economies projected to grow 0.1 percentage points lower than in 2023. Due to structural challenges, including the trauma caused by the

pandemic, weak investment momentum, increased debt vulnerabilities, and unresolved funding shortfalls, the world economy is at risk of suboptimal growth.

Because of the Israel-Palestine conflict and some structural factors, the uncertainty involving the world economy and international trade will continue to be high. Current global macroeconomic conditions and geopolitical tensions do not facilitate a significant pickup in global FDI. The plan to fully implement a global minimum corporate tax rate of 15 percent from the end of 2023 will make oneshot economies less attractive to outside FDI.

However, there is hope. Driven by digital connectivity and technological advances, the trade in digitally delivered services is expanding rapidly and digital technology is becoming a key force driving the development of international trade. Even if trade restriction policies

adopted by many countries exert a strong oppressive force, the advanced productivity represented by digital technology will eventually break various barriers to promote trade integration and "reglobalization" to become a source of world economic prosperity.

Growing concerns about national security are becoming the key variables affecting world openness, but in the era of globalization, the openness and security of one country are inseparable from the openness, development and security of the whole world, and only by building a community with a shared future and taking into account the positions and interests of other countries, can the global common security be maintained. For further development, all countries should work to break the current dilemma, reverse the "anti-globalization" momentum, and realize consensus on greater world openness.

— ECONOMIC DAILY

Attack in ROK not an election changer

A man made a murderous attack on Lee Jae-myung, leader of the Republic of Korea's largest opposition party, the Democratic Party of Korea, stabbing him in the neck at an event in Busan on Tuesday. Lee is now recovering after surgery.

The ROK president's office has condemned the attack. Because of firearm control laws in the ROK, the country does not have a particularly high crime rate. Instances of violent attacks on political figures are also rare. People from various sections of society in the ROK have been guarded in their response, avoiding hasty conclusions in the run-up to the ROK National Assembly elections (midterm elections) in April.

Lee was attending an event to set the stage for the polls. Despite President Yoon Suk-yeol being from the ruling People Power Party, it holds significantly fewer seats in the ROK parliament. Which is why the elections are being seen as a "midterm exam" for Yoon.

Over the past year, the right wing has spared no effort to undermine opposition parties and influential figures such as Lee, aiming to reverse the right wing's disadvantage in the parliament.

If the man who attacked Lee is found to be linked to the right wing, it might have an impact on the poll outcome. However, Lee's personal safety is unlikely to become an election issue in the ROK, where elec-

tions are seen as a team effort, with party leaders carrying insignificant weight.

At the moment the right wing is trying to tarnish the left wing's image by stirring up tensions between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the ROK while the left wing is trying to expose the connections between the right wing and money lords.

Also, under the current system in the ROK, the president wields significant power till his term ends in 2027; the parliament isn't as significant in contrast. Hence, the attack on Lee is unlikely to have as much of an impact on the election.

— BEIJING NEWS

What They Say

Teheran needs to keep calm in the face of provocations

Nearly 100 people have been killed and more than 200 wounded by two bomb explosions near the tomb of Iranian general Qasem Soleimani in Kerman, Iran, on Wednesday, the fourth anniversary of his assassination by the United States.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei vowed the "terrorist attack", the deadliest in the country in 42 years, would be met with a "harsh response".

Although no group had claimed responsibility for the attack as of Thursday, some suspected that Arab separatists and Sunni jihadist groups such as the Islamic State are behind the explosions. These organizations have carried out attacks on civilians and security forces in the country in recent years.

Soleimani was widely seen as one

of the most hated people by Washington and Tel Aviv for his leadership in major anti-Israel and anti-US campaigns in the Middle East from 2000 up until his death on Jan 3, 2020. He served as the commander of the Quds Force, an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps division primarily responsible for extraterritorial and clandestine military operations.

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi called the bombings a "cowardly act" carried out by "Iran-hating criminals and the henchmen of terror and darkness".

The attack came amid heightened tensions in the region after the deputy leader of the Iran-backed Palestinian group, Hamas, was killed in an apparent Israeli drone strike in Lebanon. Even while a probe into the blasts is still under-

way, it is highly possible the incident will prompt the Islamic Republic to strengthen its support for the Palestinians in their ongoing fighting with Israel in Gaza, and the Hezbollah in Lebanon that is also fighting with Israel, as well as the Houthi group in its conflict with the US military in the Red Sea.

The United Nations, and other major players on the world stage including the European Union, China and Russia, have condemned the attacks and expressed their condolences to Teheran. The Iranian leadership should keep calm and not seek to take a rushed revenge, which will only make the situation in the region even more volatile and complicated, which is what its enemy in the dark has aimed at with its "cowardly act".

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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COMMENT

Sudheendra Kulkarni

China, India could co-lead Global South

As we enter the fourth year of the third decade of the 21st century, we see our world at a peculiarly liminal point of change. The old order is fast receding, but the new order has not yet taken its place. The domination of the West, the United States in particular, is irreversibly on the decline. However, it is yet to be firmly replaced by a new world order resting on the four strong pillars of multipolarity, peace and cooperation, equitable and sustainable development, and democratic global governance.

Developing countries — collectively known by the rather imprecise term now in vogue, the Global South — are no doubt engaged in constructing these four pillars for the edifice of the new world order. But their efforts are beset with three problems.

First, they have not yet adopted a clear and consensual vision of what this edifice should look like and function. Second, there isn't sufficiently strong unity among them to undertake this task with zeal and determination. Indeed, differences and disputes among some of them have seriously hindered their united efforts. And third, and this is most important, the US and some other Western powers, fearful of losing their global hegemony, have hatched a plan to create and widen divisions among the Global South countries so that the latter are incapacitated to pursue a common goal.

Specifically, the Western powers are busy conspiring to exploit the differences between India and China and create a scenario that shows a struggle between the two large Asian neighbours for dominance in the Global South. This conspiracy must be defeated. Otherwise, it has the potential to decelerate, distort and even derail the process of the construction of a new and better world order.

For the success of this conspiracy, concerted efforts are being made to exaggerate the nature and extent of differences between India and China. A systematic campaign in the Indian media and academia is afoot to make the Indian people believe that China is their enemy and, therefore, India should join hands with the US to thwart the "Chinese threat". An identical message is being trumpeted by the US media and think tanks. Often there is a direct collaboration between the anti-China forces in India and the US to amplify this message.

Examples abound. Here are two. The Council on Foreign Relations, an influential US think tank, published an article in its journal *Foreign Affairs* last month by Hap-pymon Jacob, an Indian academic, titled "How to thwart China's bid to lead the Global South". Its subtitle says: "America can use India as a bridge to the rest of the world". The article claims that "India and China are competing to shape the future of the Global South — and if Washington helps New Delhi achieve a bigger role among these states, it could weaken the appeal of a Chinese-led order."

It adds: "Friction between India and China extends beyond their shared border and the region to a much bigger arena. The growing rivalry includes a competition for influence and even leadership among the far-flung countries of the Global South."

This view is echoed by Michael Schuman, a non-resident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, another reputed US think tank. "As Asia's other emerging power, India could

In fact, the 21st century beckons all countries to try and obliterate the East versus West, and South versus North divisions, and bring all the peoples of the world together as one single harmonious family. This indeed is the true meaning of building a community with a shared future for mankind.

act as a crucial counterweight to Chinese influence, both in the region and outside it," he writes in *The Atlantic*, adding, "In the coming confrontation with China, Washington needs all the friends it can find, however it may get them."

Their proposition that China is the real adversary of developing countries, and that an alliance between India and the West is the best guarantor for the protection of their interests, is laughable. It turns the whole concept of the Global South on its head by hiding the irrefutable fact that a small number of US-led Western powers (accounting for a mere 15 percent of the global population) have a disproportionate control over the affairs of the human race.

The moot question is how to foil this Western conspiracy. Undoubtedly, the biggest responsibility lies on the leaders of India and China, both rising powers. They must do three things.

To begin with, they should break the current deadlock in their bilateral dialogue, take effective steps to resolve their differen-

ces through non-military means, and enlarge the area of mutually beneficial cooperation based on equality and mutual respect. This will create enormous hope and confidence among countries of the Global South.

India and China should also convince the international community that they will never imitate the European powers of the last century to engage in ruinous rivalry and ignite the flames of the two horrific world wars. Instead, guided by the wisdom of their ancient civilizations, they should stick to the path of peace, partnership and trust-promoting cooperation.

Specifically, this means India and China must not seek "spheres of influence", indulge in "block politics" or "project hegemonic powers" in their neighbourhood and beyond. And instead of rivalry, they should set an example by co-leading the Global South, along with other members of a multipolar world, as exemplified by the recently expanded BRICS.

And last, and this is related to the second principle, India and China should treat all countries in the world — large or small, rich or poor — as their equals. Indeed, larger and richer countries have a greater responsibility to help poor and less-developed countries in their efforts to fulfil their peoples' aspirations for a dignified, happy and peaceful life.

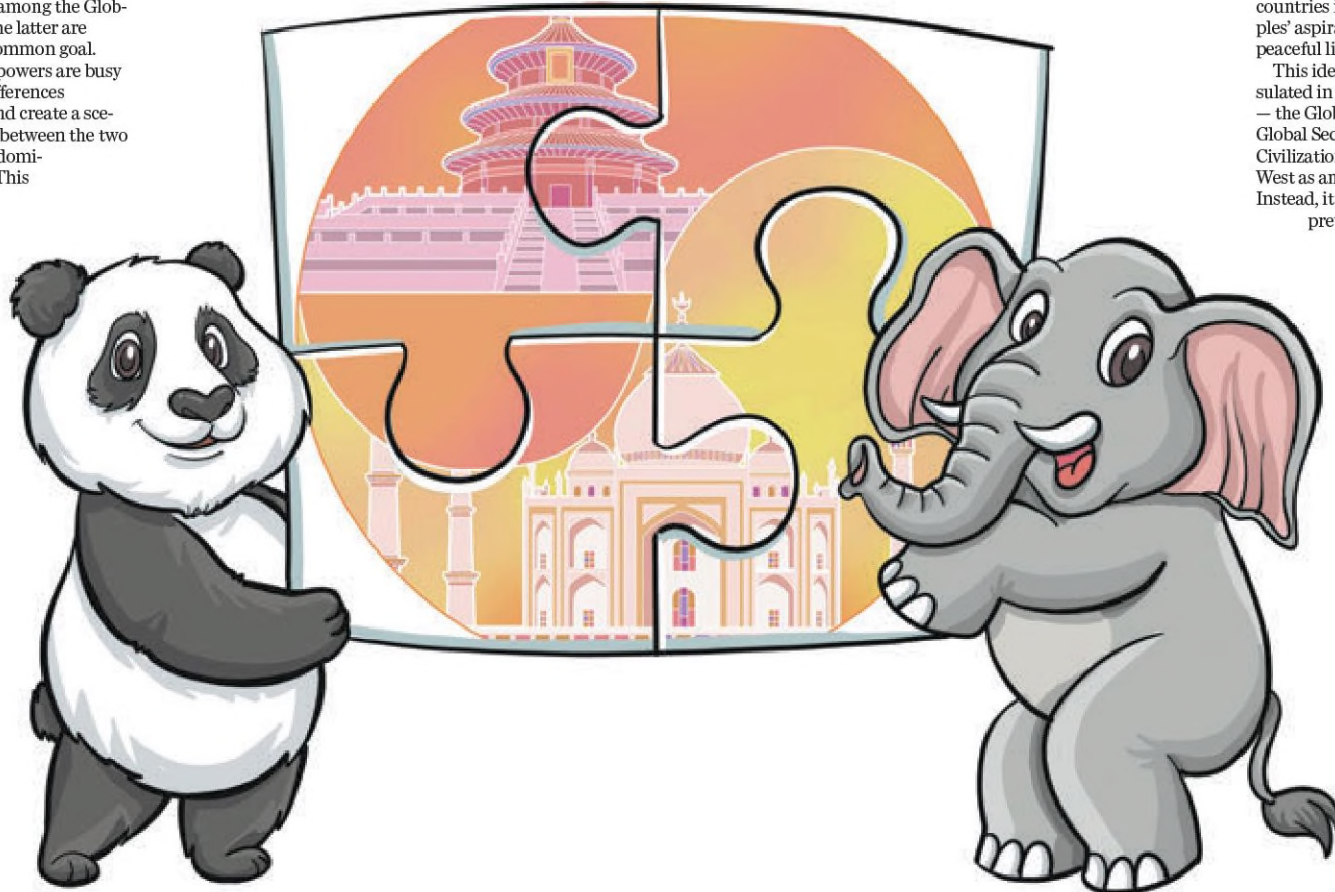
This idea of a new world order is encapsulated in China's three strategic initiatives — the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative. It does not treat the West as an enemy of the Global South.

Instead, it only seeks to radically reform the prevailing unjust, undemocratic and violence-inducing structures of global governance.

If Western countries choose to partner with India, China and other developing countries in this reform process on the principle of equality and equal responsibility, they are most welcome. In fact, the 21st century beckons all countries to try and obliterate the East versus West, and South versus North divisions, and bring all the peoples of the world together as one single harmonious family. This indeed is the true meaning of building a community with a shared future for mankind.

The author is an advocate of India-China-Pakistan cooperation for a New South Asia and was an aide to former Indian prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

Praying for restoring peace through talks around globe this year



Chen Weihua

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The continuing Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine conflicts, along with those in several African countries, mean peace should be the top priority as the world enters 2024.

A New Year wish for world peace is definitely not a cliché in 2024, especially because the conflicts between Russia and Ukraine, and Israel and Palestine are not only continuing but could also escalate into wider hostilities.

A few months after the Russia-Ukraine conflict broke out on Feb 24, 2022, many, including some US and European politicians, said it would end by the end of that year. Now we know that the negotiations between Russia and Ukraine in Belarus and Turkey in the spring of 2022 were actually going well until they were abruptly halted because of the not so covert intervention of the US.

However, The Washington Post reported in November 2023 that the Joe Biden administration is privately encouraging Ukraine's leaders to signal an openness to negotiate with Russia and change their stance of not engaging in peace talks with Moscow unless Russian President Vladimir Putin is ousted from power.

The public fatigue both in the US and the European Union over the conflict is obvious. The Republicans in Congress have been blocking funding for Ukraine, while in the EU, Hungary blocked a €50 billion (\$54 billion) funding for Ukraine. And Slovakia's new Prime Minister Robert Fico halted military aid to Ukraine in November.

While the EU adopted its 12th sanction package against Russia in December, many, including some in Brussels, say the sanc-

tions are not working, partly because they are not mandated by the United Nations. The fighting over in the last 22-plus months has caused huge suffering to the people and the economy, especially Ukraine's and, if allowed to escalate, could turn into a wider, much more devastating conflict between two nuclear powers — Russia and NATO.

But all these could probably have been prevented had the US and NATO, in their reply to Russia in January 2022, not ignored Russia's concern about NATO's eastward expansion, or had the US not prevented Ukraine from negotiating with Russia in the spring of 2022.

What has become abundantly clear in the past 22 months is that the battlefield is not the solution to the Russia-Ukraine disputes. The solution lies in diplomacy and negotiations, which have been seriously lacking. Sadly, in Europe today, negotiations and diplomacy with Russia seem politically incorrect for many.

Just like it's politically incorrect to discuss the Nord Stream pipeline explosion, an attack on Germany's and the EU's critical infrastructure.

Like any negotiation, the talks on the conflict should start with a cease-fire between Russia and Ukraine, one long urged by China and many other countries but rejected by the US and some of its NATO allies.

I hope EU leaders will show wisdom and courage to help bring an end to the conflict as soon as possible and restore lasting peace through negotiations.

On the other hand, Europe is indeed in a bad situation. The Israel-Palestine conflict is not far either, right on the other side of the Mediterranean Sea.

The Israel-Palestine conflict, which started on Oct 7 with Hamas attacking Israel, has triggered Israel's disproportionate military reaction which has claimed more than 22,000 lives, the majority of them children and women.

According to the Wall Street Journal, by mid-December, Israel had dropped about 29,000 bombs on the Gaza Strip, destroying or damaging nearly 70 percent of Palestinian homes.

What's worse, the humanitarian crisis in Gaza is so catastrophic that a United Nations report says half of the 2.2 million people in Gaza are at risk of starvation, with 90 percent regularly going without food.

The US is among the very few countries which oppose UN resolutions calling for a permanent cease-fire in Gaza. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's decision last week to again bypass the US Congress to approve arms sales to Israel has further exposed Washington's bias, proving it is responsible for the sufferings of the people in Gaza.

Israel's alleged involvement in the assassination of Hamas deputy chief Saleh Arouri in a drone attack in Beirut, Lebanon, on Tuesday, as confirmed by US officials, has made matters worse, with Lebanese caretaker prime minister Najib Mikati condemning the attack and calling it "a new Israeli crime aimed at inevitably

dragging Lebanon into a new phase of confrontation".

It is important to remind that Lebanon is a sovereign nation and the alleged Israeli attack is a violation of the UN Charter and Lebanon's sovereignty.

In the Red Sea, the Houthi forces based in Yemen, which supports the cause of Palestine, have started attacking freight ships heading to Israel, saying they would launch more such attacks until people in Gaza "receive the food and medicine" needed. In response, the Biden administration, despite saying it did not want a direct military conflict with the Houthis, fired shots at the Houthis on Sunday, killing all the crew on three Houthi boats. The situation worsened on Wednesday when two explosions killed about 100 people and injured more than 200 in the Iranian city of Kerman during the commemoration ceremony of late General Qassem Soleimani, who was killed by US forces four years ago.

It has been another major provocation despite the fact that no one has claimed responsibility so far.

Given all the latest developments, a regional conflict in the Middle East looks much more likely now than just a few weeks ago.

The continuing Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine conflicts, along with those in several African countries, mean peace should be the top priority as the world enters 2024. And all countries should push for dialogue and diplomacy to prevent more bloodshed.

GLOBAL VIEWS



Editor's note: The world has undergone many changes and shocks in recent years. Enhanced dialogue between scholars from China and overseas is needed to build mutual understanding on many problems the world faces. For this purpose, the China Watch Institute of China Daily and the National Institute for Global Strategy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, jointly present this special column: The Global Strategy Dialogue, in which experts from China and abroad will offer insightful views, analysis and fresh perspectives on long-term strategic issues of global importance.

HUANG JIKUN

Over the past four decades, China's rural economy has experienced rapid transformation, including the rapid growth of high-value agriculture (vegetables, fruit, livestock, fisheries, etc.) and the continued expansion of rural labor's non-farm employment, which has greatly increased the income of rural residents. However, while per capita rural income has been increasing, the income gap between urban and rural residents is still big and widening. Ensuring faster income growth for farmers is the key to

achieving common prosperity. However, there are many challenges that have to be overcome to increase the income of farmers.



First, farmers are facing new challenge in expanding the development of high-value agriculture (e.g., vegetables, fruits, livestock, fishery, etc.), and the rural economic transformation in agriculture has recently slowed down. In addition to the market risks, farmers face policy restrictions on the development of high-value agriculture. In November 2020, the central government issued a guideline on preventing non-grain use of the officially designated basic farmland, with the aim of ensuring grain security. In 2022, the No 1 Central Document of the Chinese government further proposed that the basic farmland should mainly be used for producing grains and other agricultural products such as cotton, oil, sugar, vegetables and forage and feed. However, some local governments have implemented the above policies by adopting a one-size-fits-all approach, allowing basic farmland to only be used for growing grains, which limits farmers' incomes, particular the income of farmers with small-scale farms.

Second, amid the sluggish recovery of the global economy, the downward pressure on the economy is mounting and the growth of rural labor's non-farm employment has slowed down. Based on a survey of migrant workers released by the National Bureau of Statistics, the total number of migrant workers declined by 5.17 million, or 1.8 percent year-on-year in 2020 to 285.6 million. Under the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the proportion of migrant workers in manufacturing, engineering, and accommodation and catering industries in 2020 stood at 27.3 percent, 18.3 percent and 6.5 percent, respectively, down 0.4, 0.1 and 0.4

Required transformations

Policies to narrow the rural-urban income gap are key to common prosperity



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percentage points from 2019. While the share of agricultural employment has decreased over time, it rose in 2022, up from 22.9 percent in 2021 to 24.1 percent, which could have a negative impact on farmers' income from non-farm activities.

Third, in the past several decades, even as the Chinese economy maintained a high growth rate, which has created hundreds of millions of employment in industry and service sectors for rural labor, there has

been a large surplus labor force in rural China. Now, many industries are seeking to enhance their overall productivity by means of automation, which will bring great challenges to increasing the non-farm employment of rural labor and a reduction of the agricultural labor force. Along with the boom in the use of industrial automation, the unemployment pressure will mount. Increasing employment for the rural labor forces in non-farm sectors will

be an arduous task for the Chinese government in the next three decades.

In light of this, related policies should be put forward to promote rural economic transformation and raise the income of farmers.

First, policies should be implemented to accelerate urbanization and industrialization to create more jobs for the rural labor force, which will narrow the rural and urban income gap. Access to large, medium

and small cities should be eased for the rural labor force, the people-oriented new urbanization should be accelerated, and rural residents who work and settle in cities should be granted the identity of urban residents. Rural urbanization needs to be promoted in counties, so as to offer the rural labor force more entrepreneurship and non-farm employment opportunities to widen their income channels.

Second, to achieve common prosperity among farmers, China's crop production should move toward the "20-80 production pattern" through the setting up of two separate policy support systems for large and small-scale farms respectively. The large-scale farms that account for 20 percent of farms should produce grain and other bulk agricultural commodities to ensure the nation's grain security and leverage investment by the government to maximize the income derived from their relatively large production scale. The income of small-scale farms that account for 80 percent of farms should be increased through the development of high-value and therefore higher profit agriculture, with aid of policy support aimed at developing production and marketing cooperatives, improving customized production services, reducing the market risks, and promoting smart-agriculture and marketing (e.g., e-commerce and gaining more from added-value chains).

To summarize, the government should accelerate urbanization to facilitate the structural employment transformation from agriculture to the industrial and service sectors by creating a favorable environment for enhancing the rural labor's employment in non-farm sectors, so that the income gap between rural and urban residents can be narrowed. Within the agricultural sector, after ensuring absolute food (particularly rice and wheat) security and largely achieving self-sufficiency in other cereals, the government needs to accelerate rural economic transformation through the development of high-value agriculture, so that farmers can enjoy common prosperity.

The author is director of the New Rural Development Institute and honorary director of the China Center for Agricultural Policy at Peking University. 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.

SU QINGYI

Shock resistance

China's role in reducing uncertainties and maintaining the stability of global supply chains and cooperation is commendable

International supply chains are a division of labor model in which multiple countries contribute to the production of one product. Since the 1980s, especially after the Cold War, the world has experienced a golden age of rapid development, with its division of labor deepening continuously. However, the global supply chains are now facing several challenges including limited potential for development, rising trade protectionism and anti-

globalization, and increasingly fierce competition among the big powers.



Dealing with global supply chain risks shows the typical feature of maintaining public goods. However, since each country is responsible for a different part of the chains, the benefits it can gain from maintaining the chains vary, and so does its enthusiasm to participate in their maintenance. In addition, the international political landscape also affects countries' willingness to cooperate. The United States is more inclined to engage in alliance-based cooperation. This has led to the formation of different camps in supply chain cooperation, with some camps opposing each other, thereby harming the concerted efforts of the international community.

As the world's largest trading country in goods and an important participant in the international supply chains, China has always been steadfast in maintaining the stability of the international supply chains and promoting their development, effectively assuming its responsibility as a major country. The first China International Supply Chain Expo held in Beijing from Nov 28 to Dec 2 was an example reflecting China's commitment to maintaining stable and smooth industry and supply chains as a major power.

First, China is creating a favorable environment for the development of the international supply chains by actively building an open world economy.

China firmly opposes trade protectionism, any form of decoupling, unilateral sanctions and extreme pressure that hinder the progress of globalization. It has always been an active advocate of the correct direction of economic globalization, continuously providing new opportunities for the world with its new development paradigm, and allowing openness to bring the world a new, bright future. China has always adhered to promoting the implementation of the global development, security and civilization initiatives, and making efforts to uphold peaceful and cooperative development as the main theme of the world, and common security the consensus among all countries. It promotes the joint high-quality growth of the Belt and Road Initiative and makes the Belt and Road construction an important platform for cooperation among countries. China actively engages in the reform and construction of the global governance system, orderly internationalizes the renminbi, and supports multilateral mechanisms such as the World Trade Organization to better play their roles.

As a major power of the digital economy, China has actively participated in global digital governance in recent years, signing multiple agreements containing special chapters on e-commerce and related rules. At the same time, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, which China has joined in, involves multiple frontier issues in the field of the digital economy and e-commerce, reflecting China's important exploration and beneficial attempts to establish international rules for digital economy governance. China has applied to join agreements such as the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership. In August 2022, a working group on China's accession to the DEPA was officially established to fully launch the negotiations. These actions undoubtedly help create a favorable environment for the development of the supply chains.

Second, China has been reducing uncer-

ainties for the development of the international supply chain by actively controlling competition among major powers.

President Xi Jinping pointed out that China-US economic and trade relations are mutually beneficial and win-win in essence. It is just business, and their economic and trade issues should not be politicized. Both sides need to make a bigger cake of cooperation. The US should stop abusing and overstretching the concept of national security to suppress Chinese companies. China has always responded to the US-initiated trade war in a well-founded manner, and has constructively handled the economic and trade frictions with the US. On the one hand, China is committed to bilateral consultations with the US to resolve trade disputes through negotiations, reduce the negative impact of the trade war on each other, and ultimately reach a mutually beneficial agreement. On the other hand, the Chinese side has shown its determination to safeguard its national interests, that is, if the US insists on imposing additional tariffs on Chinese products, it will resolutely take countermeasures and simultaneously sue the US for its actions with the WTO's dispute resolution body. After the US introduced measures to increase tariffs, China also released a list of corresponding countermeasures against it. China has always believed that dialogue rather than confrontation can solve economic and trade differences. The first-phase China-US economic and trade agreement proves that their differences on economic and trade issues can only be resolved through negotiations rather than a unilateral tariff war. China's proactive control of competition among major powers can help reduce the uncertainty of supply chain operations.

Third, China has been resisting various shocks to the global supply chains by promoting cooperation.

It has launched an investment facilitation initiative and actively participated in domestic regulatory negotiations on the service trade, e-commerce, and other multi-



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

party talks, providing a solid institutional guarantee for the development of supply chains. China also works together with other members within the WTO framework to maintain the security of key industry chains such as medical supplies and food.

Apart from actively improving ties with the US, China also coordinates its relations with major economies such as the European Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Japan, India and Brazil. China has always maintained an open attitude toward renewing discussions on the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment between China and the EU, strengthening economic and trade relations with ASEAN, and stabilizing the regional industry chains in East Asia. As to Japan, besides developing and strengthening its economic and trade relations under the RCEP framework,

China also hopes to continue to strengthen its economic and trade ties by joining the CPTPP.

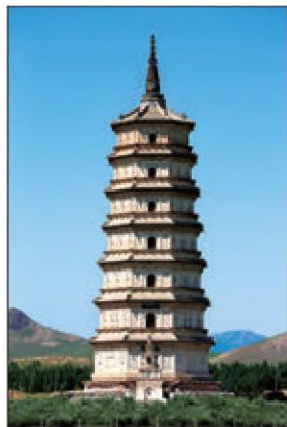
Furthermore, China fully utilizes the BRICS cooperation mechanism to enhance coordination with emerging economies such as Russia, India, Brazil and South Africa. These actions by China will undoubtedly consolidate the cohesion of the international community in resisting supply chain shocks.

The author is a senior fellow of the Institute of World Economics and Politics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and National Institute for Global Strategy at the CASS. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

LIFE

Towering determination of pagoda chronicler

Telling the stories of ancient structures is a passionate undertaking for enthusiast, **Yang Yang** reports.



Top center: Liuhe Pagoda in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. **From top:** Qingzhou White Pagoda in Chifeng, Inner Mongolia autonomous region. Gaogong Pagoda in Mount Wutai, Shanxi province. Minghui Pagoda in Changzhi, Shanxi. A relief on a Kaiyuan Temple pagoda in Quanzhou, Fujian province.

PHOTOS BY JIA FEL, GAO JUNQING, ZHANG LIWEI AND LUO YANLIN / FOR CHINA DAILY



“I’ve been fascinated by ancient pagodas for their profound religious meanings, marvelous architectural structure, great artistic values.”

Wang Xuebin, co-author



More than a decade ago, ancient pagoda enthusiast Wu Kai was looking for a book that systematically and comprehensively detailed the total number and locations of the pagodas, and provided introductions with good-quality photos.

“I read a lot of books. But I found that the pagodas they included are limited, with many mistakes and lacking clear logic. I decided to create such a book myself rather than wait for someone to complete the task,” he says, adding that, “after all, over the years I have systematically collected and organized plenty of materials.”

Wu fell in love with ancient pagodas when he was a student studying physics at Tsinghua University. “I didn’t know much about them at first. I just found them appealing to look at,” he recalls.

“Ancient Chinese people tended to build large-scale structures, but not tall buildings, and the pagoda was the only tall building they erected that lasts to this day,” Wu says. “They are so conspicuous that they became landmark buildings.”

“I love them, possibly because they are among the best carriers of Chinese culture.”

Originating in India, stupas, dome-shaped structures, were built to enshrine the relics of the founder of Buddhism, Sakyamuni. Nearly 2,000 years ago, stupas were introduced to China along with Buddhism. At that time, Chinese people had already started building multi-tiered wooden square watchtowers. Creatively combining the stupa form factor and the watchtower design, Chinese architects created something new — multistoried pagodas, which had the metal spire of a stupa, but the body of a multi-tiered Chinese wooden square tower.

A portrait brick from the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220) unearthed in Shifang city of Sichuan province in 1973 reveals the earliest image of a Chinese pavilion-style pagoda — a three-story building.

In the following 2,000 years, pagodas have evolved into many more styles, including dense-eave, Tibetan-style inverted bowl, Vajrasana and Dai-ethnic-style pagodas. The shape of a pagoda body has also developed from square to hexagonal, octagonal or round.

Initially for Buddhist purposes, pagodas were later built to mark the graves of eminent monks or common people, for auspicious purposes or to enhance the landscape.

In addition to the wooden structure at the early developmental stage, there are later pagodas made of brick, as well as a mix of brick and wood, even metal. In modern times,

people employ reinforced concrete and steel structures to build antique pagodas.

Apart from wood and bricks, ancient people also used colored glaze, rock, soil, iron, copper, gold and silver in pagoda construction.

It is estimated that there still exist more than 10,000 ancient pagodas across the country, but nobody knows the exact number, since many are anonymous and in disrepair or even just ruins hiding in obscure corners or in the remote wilderness.

To visit hilltop or cliff-top pagodas, or those hidden in deep forest requires fortitude, physical strength and even luck, so, few people get to see them in person. For those that do, there is the added difficulty of taking good-quality photos, especially those suitable for print.

More than a decade ago, blogging was popular in China and many enthusiasts loved to share stories of their visits to ancient pagodas. Through their blogs, they gradually got to know one another.

Wu’s plan was applauded by his fellow enthusiasts, many of whom generously offered their photos of pagodas and related materials they had collected.

In the last 10 years or so, Wu has also spent a great deal of time traveling around the country to see pagodas and take photos, systematically collecting and organizing the information about these ancient buildings. In that time, many pagodas have been damaged, moved or lost, so that the photos taken by Wu, or those he got from others, have inadvertently become their final portraits.

After a decade of persistent effort, he has organized firsthand textual and visual materials for nearly 5,000 ancient pagodas.

In 2019, he published his first book on the subject. In the tome, which exceeds 500 pages, Wu includes more than 300 ancient pagodas in Beijing. In addition to archival information, the book also provides maps and more than 800 recently taken high-definition photos, old photos, rubbings, architectural drawings and paintings, making it, to date, the most comprehensive book about ancient pagodas in the region.

Wu planned to create a calendar that introduces an ancient pagoda each day, which later changed to a catalog. He invited veteran enthusiasts to co-write the introductions, but found that people’s writing styles varied too much.

In the end, Wang Xuebin, now a scholar studying Chinese ancient pagodas in Henan province, became a co-author of the book.

Wang grew up in Ruzhou, a county-level city in Henan prov-



Cover of the book, *Youshengzhinian Yidingyao Kan de 1,001 Zuo Zhongguo Guta* (The 1,001 Chinese Ancient Pagodas You Must See Before You Die), by Wu Kai and Wang Xuebin. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ince. His interest in ancient pagodas burgeoned when he was young after hearing legends pertaining to an ancient dense-eave pagoda that stands conspicuously on a top of a hill beside the village where his family lived.

After graduating from university, Wang became a journalist, writing stories about ancient relics, including pagodas.

In 2007, he started sharing his visits to those pagodas in his blogs, and met enthusiasts online, including Wu.

Wang says: “I’ve been fascinated by ancient pagodas for their profound religious meanings, marvelous architectural structure, great artistic values, and their function of filling in missing parts of historical records that have been lost from mainstream narration, but can still be found inscribed at these ancient monuments.”

So far, Henan has recorded more than 700 ancient pagodas, but there must be more to be discovered, Wang says, and his goal is to visit all of them.

Like many enthusiasts, he has been organizing text-based and visual materials about the pagodas in the province, and published several academic papers about auspicious pagodas that emerged during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and pagodas in Henan. The two topics are also what he contributes to the new book he co-authored with Wu.

In October, their weighty 960-page tome about Chinese ancient pagodas was released by China Pictorial Press — *Youshengzhinian Yidingyao Kan de 1,001 Zuo Zhongguo Guta* (The 1,001 Chinese Ancient Pagodas You Must See Before You Die), weighing in at about 3 kilograms.

Alongside the ones that have been listed as national treasures, other precious pagodas that have not entered the list are also featured. It is hailed by many experts as the most comprehensive book in this field.

Ji Huailu, professor at the School of Architecture in Tsinghua University, writes in the recommendation that “the book has established relatively complete archives for top-class ancient pagodas existing in China, and is an important achievement in the study of this area”.

The book mainly consists of three parts. Wu uses the first 119 pages to talk about the developmental history of pagodas in China.

In the major second part, the authors make brief but concrete introductions to more than 2,000 pagodas at 680 points that are included in different chapters according to their geographical location. Among them, 960 pagodas are presented on individual pages with text and photos, while 1,000 more pagodas are displayed in groups.

“The ‘1,001’ in the title is not an accurate number of the ancient pagodas included in the book,” Wu says. “We introduce the pagodas according to the provinces in which they are located, so as to give readers a route guide if they want to visit them.”

The book covers all the provinces, municipal cities and autonomous regions on the Chinese mainland.

The last part includes illustrations about special terms of the pagoda structure, an index and a bibliography.

For Wu, ancient pagodas are not by any means just a pile of rocks or bricks, but old friends that he has not seen for a long time.

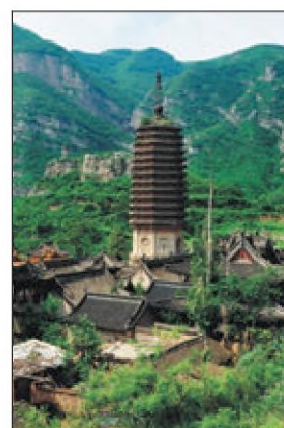
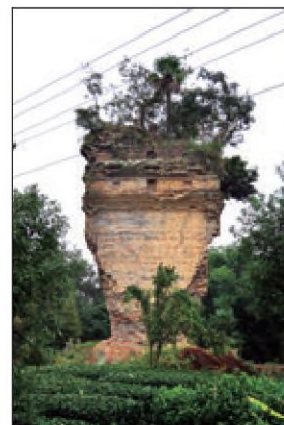
“Every time I visit an ancient pagoda, I see not only a cultural heritage item lasting for centuries and the beauty of architecture, but also the simple hearts pursuing perfection and revering nature that, however, have been lost in the hustle and bustle of modern life,” he writes in the introduction.

“Although originating from ancient India, unlike stupas, Chinese ancient pagodas are charming for their rich diversity,” he writes.

The pagodas built in different historical periods and regions exhibit unique characteristics. Throughout a development of nearly 2,000 years, pagodas have undergone countless changes in form, showcasing a multitude of styles.

“Across the 9.6 million square kilometers of land in China, among the over 10,000 existing pagodas, no two are completely identical,” he writes.

Contact the writer at yangyangs@chinadaily.com.cn



From top: One of the two pagodas of Shuangta temple in Baoding, Hebei province. Jianta Pagoda in Pujiang county, Chengdu, Sichuan province. The pagoda in Jueshan Temple, Datong, Shanxi province. Another relief on a Kaiyuan Temple pagoda in Quanzhou, Fujian province.

PHOTOS BY SONG WANYONG, WANG ZELONG, ZHANG JIANJUN AND GAO JUNQING / FOR CHINA DAILY



“We introduce the pagodas according to the provinces in which they are located, so as to give readers a route guide if they want to visit them.”

Wu Kai, author

LIFESHANGHAI

Many people ran for their lives. And some fled the invading forces to not only save themselves but also national treasures.

It's this saga, which unfolded during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45), that's being recounted at the Shanghai History Museum through to March 29. Subsequently, *The Long March of the National Treasures: An Exhibition Commemorating the Southward Evacuation of the Palace Museum's Artifacts* will tour other cities, including Guiyang, Guizhou province, and Beijing.

After the Japanese invaders occupied regions in northeastern China in 1931, the Chinese government decided to relocate the Palace Museum's treasured artifacts to the south. It took over a year to pack the selected artifacts in more than 13,000 wooden crates. In 1933, they were sent to Shanghai by train, along with over 6,000 boxes of relics from other historical sites in Beijing, and were stored in a warehouse in the former French Concession.

By the end of 1936, a new warehouse was built in Nanjing, the then capital of China, and the artifacts were transported there. The following year, fighting battles against Japanese invaders broke out in Shanghai and Nanjing, and the artifacts had to be relocated again. They were eventually transported to three counties in southwestern China's Sichuan province: Baxian, Emei and Leshan.

In 1946, just after the war, these artifacts were moved to Chongqing and the next year to Nanjing. From the end of 1948 to 1949, a portion was shipped across the Strait after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

The 2,971 boxes of artifacts later made up the Palace Museum in Taipei's core collection.

By 1958, more than 10,000 boxes stored in Nanjing had been shipped back to the Palace Museum in Beijing. The 2,221 boxes left behind then became the main collection of the Nanjing Museum in Jiangsu province.

The Palace Museum later sent many objects from its collection to other museums, libraries and archives around China to support the construction of cultural facilities all over the country.

"Spanning more than two decades and covering thousands of kilometers, the 'Long March of the National Treasures of the Palace Museum' was a miraculous achievement in the protection of cultural heritage for all human civilization," says Wang Xudong, director of the Palace Museum in Beijing.

It was common for museums around the world to relocate their artifacts to avoid damage during the war, points out Zheng Xinmiao, a former director of the Palace Museum in Beijing, who is also a senior scholar researching on this chapter of the Palace Museum's history.

What's unique about the Palace Museum's collection, compared to other leading museums in the world, is that these objects have

Treasures continue their journey

An exhibition at the city's history museum reveals the story of the emergency relocation of celebrated relics during Japan's invasion of China, **Zhang Kun** reports.



Clockwise from top: The opening ceremony of *The Long March of the National Treasures: An Exhibition Commemorating the Southward Evacuation of the Palace Museum's Artifacts* at Shanghai History Museum on Dec 28. The exhibition presents, in video projection, some of the artifacts evacuated from the Palace Museum 90 years ago. A photograph from 1933 showing workers at Taihemen Square in the Forbidden City getting ready to ship boxes of artifacts out. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

been accumulated across centuries and dynasties as testimonials to Chinese civilization, Zheng says. Such relics as ancient books and documents, as well as fine bronze, jade and ceramic pieces, represent China's collective cultural identity. So, when the country was fighting against Japanese invaders, their protection stoked the flames of

IF YOU GO

The Long March of the National Treasures: An Exhibition Commemorating the Southward Evacuation of the Palace Museum Artifacts
Dec 28-Mar 29, 9 am-5 pm (last entry by 4 pm), Tue-Sun.
Shanghai History Museum, 325 Nanjing Road West, Huangpu district, Shanghai.
021-2329-9999

patriotism, Zheng says.

The items' initial relocation from the Palace Museum immediately captivated public attention. Some feared the objects could be damaged, sold or lost.

"People working for the Palace Museum cherished the artifacts like their own lives and carried out strict measures to ensure their protection

throughout the lengthy process," Zheng says, noting that workers at the Palace Museum in Shanghai produced more than 90 volumes of documentation about the objects.

As the items were moving around, the Palace Museum held several exhibitions, the most important of which took place in London from 1935 to 1936.

"It was the first overseas exhibition of artifacts from the Palace Museum and, for that matter, also the first large-scale overseas exhibition of any artifacts from China," Zheng says.

Before they were shipped overseas, 735 objects were showcased at a preview exhibition in Shanghai. After their return to China, another exhibition was held in Nanjing.

People from China's cultural and intellectual circles were actively involved in these exhibitions. They engaged in heated discussions about which objects could travel abroad and which could not.

Many acclaimed collectors in Europe, such as Percival Victor David, a prominent connoisseur of Chinese ceramics, had previously recognized only porcelain as representative Chinese artifacts, while other items, such as jade ware, were considered unimportant ornamental handicrafts, but this exhibition "helped them realize that paintings and calligraphy are truly the essence of Chinese culture," Zheng says.

Over the past decades, more people have started to realize the significance of this history. While there are two Palace Museums, in Beijing and Taipei, both are dedicated to promoting Chinese culture. In 2010, workers from the Palace Museum in Beijing and their colleagues in Taipei took a journey together along the relocation route's important locations.

"We had received lots of important historical documentation about the relocation from our colleagues in Taipei," says Zheng.

In 2017, the then director of the Palace Museum in Beijing, Shan Jixiang, called for the protection of the locations where the artifacts were stored in Sichuan. A center to research this subject was established at the museum later that year. And in 2021, a memorial museum commemorating this legacy was founded in Chongqing.

The Shanghai exhibition features three chapters.

The first showcases historical photographs and documents about the journey. The second highlights the four years that these artifacts were stored in Shanghai. And the final chapter depicts the artifacts' long journey through multimedia displays.

"Shanghai is the first leg, and we hope to add new materials and improve the exhibition design during the tour," Zheng says.

He adds that there are plans to hold the exhibition in the Palace Museum in Beijing in 2025, when it celebrates its centenary.

It seems many more stories are yet to happen to these once roved relics.

Contact the writer at zhangkun@chinadaily.com.cn

Staging a modern take on a truly timeless story

By **ZHANG KUN** in Shanghai

The new musical, *Natasha, Pierre and the Great Comet of 1812*, will premiere on Jan 13 and run until March 2 at the Bocom New Bund 31 Performing Arts Center in Shanghai, after three successful trial performances at the Nine Trees Future Arts Center between Dec 29 and Monday.

This is the latest rendition of Dave Malloy's multiple award-winning musical based on 70 pages of the classical Russian novel, *War and Peace*.

Jointly produced by Shanghai Grand Theatre, Changyang Culture Company and West Bund Theatre, the show features high-tech design, including the stage, lighting, acoustics and costumes.

Both the previous off-Broadway and Broadway productions featured a stage setting reminiscent of a Russian restaurant, where Malloy took his initial inspirations while visiting Russia and began to compose the musical. The Shanghai production, however, introduces a new setting featuring giant red rings, inspired by the comet's orbit.

South Korean stage designer Pilyoung Oh commissioned construction of a new frame to support the settings, props and equipment that weigh a total of 15 metric tons, with



the chandeliers alone weighing 1 ton.

To correspond with the lyrics "there is a war going on somewhere outside", Oh designed an outer world with tall birch trees rising from a snow-covered landscape. The cold, bleak background contrasts sharply with the warm and opulent indoor setting, conveying the feel of the novel, *War and Peace*.

Seven rows of auditorium seats were removed so that some of the audience members can sit onstage in four rings surrounding the two central circles that serve as the

main performance areas.

A butler is positioned in each of the four rings to lead audience members to their seats, hand them a mask and serve them rose wine, as if they were guests to the ball.

"Sitting here, you might not see some of the performances from the best point of view, but the actors are so close and are running all over the place around you," said Jin Wen, an audience member who had an onstage seat at the trial show on Dec 29.

"A performer poured me a glass of wine, and a blue feather fell off one

of their costumes and landed in my lap," she recalls.

"It really was a unique theater experience."

Director Chloe Treat says that, while the play tells the story of events set in 1812, it's not a period drama, because the characters go through universal human struggles. This is reflected in the questions they ask, such as, "Am I spending my life the best way I can? Do I act responsibly and what do my family want me to do, or do I follow my heart?"

These issues will relate to people of any time, she says.

"So, for sure, modern young people are going to see themselves in there."

The costume designer wanted the show to represent a unique sense of Shanghai style and drew inspiration from haute couture and runway fashion, instead of period clothes, she says.

"The elegant style makes it feel like it could be in 1812, or it could be today."

Music director Or Matias says Malloy's music also "transverses timelines", as it draws from throughout the last 200-plus years of history in terms of sound, from

Russian folk songs to rhythm and blues, and from 1980s' power ballads to hip-hop.

"Anything you can think of may be turned into the score," he says.

The experiences presented in the show are so universal that Malloy just chose from whatever music genre could best express the emotions, says Treat, the director.

"So, we get this smorgasbord of musical styles that all helps to serve the story."

Matias and Treat met during past productions of the show eight years ago. They're married.



From left: *Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812* will be staged at the Bocom New Bund 31 Performing Arts Center from Jan 13 to March 2.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

CULTURE

CARRYING
A LUTE OF
RESPONSIBILITY

Sanubar Tursun will give two concerts in Beijing and Shanghai on Jan 13 and 14, featuring songs with *dutar* — a traditional musical instrument that her father taught her to play when she was a child. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Uygur musician promotes the beauty of the region's traditional instruments and music, **Chen Nan** reports.

As a child, Sanubar Tursun was intrigued by the sounds of the *dutar*, a two-stringed lute that is characterized by its long neck and pear-shaped body, which her father loved playing at home.

"The instrument was hanging on the wall at my home and my father often played it for fun. My mother always sang along and we danced together," recalls Sanubar, who was born into a Uygur family in Ili Kazak autonomous prefecture, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

Her father, a musician performing with a local art troupe, was good at playing different folk musical instruments, such as Xinjiang *yangqin* (hammered dulcimer) and *dutar*, as well as making instruments. He taught Sanubar and his other children to play *dutar*.

When her father died, Sanubar, who was 8 years old back then, composed her first song, to commemorate him, on the *dutar*.

Now, a musician herself, Sanubar has written over 100 songs and released about 10 albums. She travels around the world singing and playing *dutar*.

On Jan 13 and 14, the 52-year-old musician will give two concerts in Beijing and Shanghai, respectively, performing with her band featuring the traditional stringed musical instruments, *dutar*, *satar* and *gijak*, each with its own unique range.

One of the songs she will perform is *White Horse*, adapted from an old Xinjiang folk song and recounting a love story.

Another song, named *Childhood*, written by Sanubar, is about how her father discovered her musical talent and supported her learning to play *dutar*.

There are also songs she wrote that are adapted from poems by the musician's favorite poet, Rabindranath Tagore from India.

"I get inspired by poems. Poems are as rhythmic as music. So when I read a beautiful poem, I easily connect it with its sounds, which allows me to turn the poem into a song," says Sanubar. "Though I perform in the Uygur language, people can still understand me because the emotions delivered through the songs are shared."



I get inspired by poems. Poems are as rhythmic as music. So when I read a beautiful poem, I easily connect it with its sounds, which allows me to turn the poem into a song."

Sanubar Tursun,
dutar musician

Some songs are selected from the Xinjiang Uygur Muqam, a variety of practices widespread among the Uygur communities, which includes songs, dances, folk and classical music, and is characterized by a diversity of content, choreography, musical styles and instruments. It was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2008 (though it was originally proclaimed in 2005) by UNESCO.

She says that she grew up listening to many songs from Xinjiang Uygur Muqam as her mother loved singing while doing housework and cooking.

Sanubar will also improvise onstage with her band members, showcasing the beauty of their instruments.

According to Sanubar, the sound of *dutar* is low and deep, serving as a bass in the band. The sound of *satar* takes people back to ancient times and reminds them of their past, and is often used in playing music pieces from the Twelve Muqam — one of the four main regional styles of Xinjiang Uygur Muqam. *Gijak*, quite different from *dutar* and *satar*, is characterized by its crisp, light sound, serving as the tenor. The three instruments work together like chamber music, forming complementary sounds while keeping their own voices.

Sanubar learned to play *dutar* and Xinjiang *yangqin* at Xinjiang Arts University and, after graduation, she joined the Xinjiang Art Theater Muqam Art Troupe. From

2003 to 2005, she came to Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music to study music production. In 2010, at the age of 39, Sanubar quit her job with the Xinjiang art troupe and enrolled in the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, where she spent four years learning to compose and got her Bachelor's degree.

"I left my hometown to study music in Beijing and Shanghai because I wanted to write more songs, using different techniques," she says. "It has enabled me to work more effectively with my band members and better express myself through my own compositions."

During her study in Shanghai, she met Wu Man, an internationally celebrated *pipa* (a four-stringed Chinese lute) player, who invited her to record songs together and perform worldwide. Sanubar's stirring vocals and her instrumental performances were featured on Wu's 2012 album *Borderlands*, showcasing the rich and diverse musical heritage of Xinjiang to listeners outside the region.

In 2018, when sound artist Li Xingyu traveled around Xinjiang recording the album *The Farthest Place From the Sea*, Sanubar was also invited to record a song. She improvised a song about a mother and daughter, as well as playing *dutar*.

"In a yard, Sanubar and other folk musicians sang and danced with smiling faces. They were as happy as children," recalls Li. "She also read us the poems she wrote. Her voice was soft and warm."

Now, Sanubar teaches *dutar* at an art school in the regional capital Urumqi. During the summer, she returns to Ili Kazak autonomous prefecture, where she has a music studio.

"The local government supports my research into the folk music of Xinjiang. The music studio is a base where musicians gather to play their instruments and create music," says Sanubar. "I noticed that many young people in Xinjiang are learning traditional instruments and singing old songs, which makes me very happy."

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Sunday morning concert program highlights 'sound of China'

By CHEN NAN

Traditional Chinese music will be highlighted at Beijing Concert Hall in 2024.

Six ensembles featuring exponents of traditional Chinese music will deliver performances every Sunday morning, according to Zhang Yilin, the venue's general manager.

Each concert will last about 70 minutes, combined with introductions of repertoires by musicians of each ensemble.

According to Zhang, Beijing Concert Hall, which was built during the 1980s, was the first in the country to stage classical music. Initiated by late Chinese conductors Li Delun (1917-2001) and Yan Liangkun (1923-2017), the concert hall opened in 1986 with a performance by the China National Symphony Orchestra.

"The venue has gained a large patronage in the capital thanks to the concerts staged by classical musicians from around the world. Now, traditional Chinese music has grown in popularity among the younger generation, so we decided to launch this series of performances celebrating traditional Chinese music and Chinese classical music works," says Zhang, adding that besides music, traditional Chinese poetry, calligraphy and painting will also be featured during the guidance sessions of each concert.



The Chinese Music Orchestra of the China Conservatory of Music will perform as part of a new series launched by Beijing Concert Hall, which highlights traditional Chinese music. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"The concerts will be staged in the form of chamber music, with fewer musicians onstage demonstrating the sounds of the Chinese musical instruments," says Zhang. "We plan to present the concerts each Sunday morning, hoping to offer a fun time for families."

The first concert of the series will be performed by the Beijing Chinese Orchestra on Jan 14, playing music works adapted from popular Chinese folk songs, such as *Deep Night*, *Exploring Clear Water River* and *My Memories of Old Beijing*.

Appealing to the young audience, On Jan 28, the Beijing Chinese

Orchestra will also deliver a performance of pieces adapted from popular movie soundtracks, computer games and musicals.

On March 10, principal musicians of the orchestra will gather to stage a concert featuring ancient, classic Chinese music pieces, such as *A Moonlit Night on the Spring River*, a signature *pipa* (a four-stringed Chinese lute) piece of the Chinese classical repertoire, and *The Moon Reflected on the Erquan Spring* (Erquan Yingyue), a famous *erhu* (two-stringed fiddle) piece.

Guaqin, a seven-stringed plucked instrument, will be highlighted in a

concert on May 19 featuring *guaqin* player Zhang Xuguang from the China Broadcasting Performing Arts Troupe. Other traditional Chinese musical instruments, such as *xiao* (Chinese vertical flute) and *huqin* (Chinese fiddle), as well as the Western musical instruments, cello, piano and harp, will be played to deliver new interpretations of traditional Chinese music pieces, including *Three Stanzas of Plum Blossoms*.

The Chinese Orchestra of China National Opera and Dance Drama Theater will play four concerts, with each one highlighting a category of traditional Chinese musical instru-

ments, such as wind, string, plucked and percussion instruments.

"When we talk about 'the sound of China', we want to introduce these ancient Chinese musical instruments to the audiences, not only because of the beautiful sounds of those instruments, but also because of the history and culture behind them," says Luan Dong, head of the orchestra. "The sounds of Chinese musical instruments are colorful and versatile. Some of the instruments look simple, but require great skill and technique. That's why we plan to showcase the distinctive sounds of different types of instru-

ments rather than presenting large ensembles onstage."

Two top Chinese music schools will also participate in the series: the Central Conservatory of Music's Chinese Chamber Orchestra and the China Conservatory of Music.

According to Chen Bing, conductor and teacher of the Central Conservatory of Music, who will take part in the performances of the Central Conservatory of Music Chinese Chamber Orchestra, the school established its department for traditional Chinese music in 1950 — a year after the institution was founded — and launched courses covering nearly all the major traditional Chinese musical instruments, such as *pipa*, *erhu*, *guzheng* (a zither-like stringed instrument), and *suona* (a double-reed woodwind instrument).

"All the members of the Central Conservatory of Music Chinese Chamber Orchestra are award winners, who represent the younger generation of traditional Chinese musicians," says Chen.

"Thanks to social media, a greater number of people are enjoying traditional Chinese music and some traditional Chinese musicians, especially the younger ones, have gained a large fan base. We want to showcase the beauty of Chinese music with each performance during the series."