

Victory at the polls

Bangladesh's PM Sheikh Hasina reelected to fourth straight term

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Glittering past

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CHINA DAILY

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Putting safety first

Above: United Airlines passengers try to rebook tickets at Luis Munoz Marin International Airport in San Juan, Puerto Rico, on Sunday after their flights were canceled.

Right: A United Airlines Boeing 737 MAX 9 jetliner is grounded on Sunday at Luis Munoz Marin International Airport in San Juan.

PHOTOS BY MIGUEL J. RODRIGUEZ CARRILLO / REUTERS See story, page 7



Xi highlights winning fight against graft

General secretary says anti-corruption battle must be fought with resilience, perseverance

By XU WEI xuwei@chinadaily.com.cn

Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, called on Monday for targeted and sustained efforts to win the tough and protracted battle against corruption, saying that the battle must be fought with resilience and perseverance.

The pledge from Xi, who is also Chinese president and chairman of the Central Military Commission, came as he addressed the third plenary session of the 20th CPC Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, the Party's top disciplinary body.

The annual session is being held from Monday to Wednesday in Beijing.

Xi highlighted during the session the need to develop a sober understanding of new situations and trends in the Party's anti-graft efforts, including the breeding grounds and conditions that give rise to corruption problems, despite the CPC's overwhelming victory over corruption in the past decade.

He expounded on key theories for advancing the Party's self-reform, saying that efforts in this

regard must aim for the strategic goal of breaking away from historical cycles of rise and fall by strengthening the system for exercising comprehensive and strict governance of the Party.

Xi has previously highlighted self-reform as one of the solutions for the CPC, the world's largest Marxist ruling party with over 98 million members and over 5 million grassroots organizations last year, to ensure its long-term governance.

Over the past year, the CCDI announced investigations into a total of 45 high-ranking officials, the largest number in the past decade. Many of the officials who were placed under investigation had already retired from their posts, in a sign that retirement would not allow officials to evade investigations into their wrongdoings.

Going forward, Xi called for sustained steps to eradicate the environment and conditions that give rise to corruption problems.

He reiterated the need to take concerted steps to ensure that officials do not have the audacity, opportunity or desire to become corrupt, saying that the depth and scope of the fight against corruption must be expanded relentlessly.

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China's forex reserves expected to increase in 2024

By ZHOU LANXU zhoulanxu@chinadaily.com.cn

China's foreign exchange reserves will likely see a moderate increase this year amid improving export growth and recovering capital inflows after hitting a two-year high in December, experts said on Monday.

Meanwhile, the country's official reserves in gold surged by the largest amount in eight years in 2023, a trend experts said is likely to continue as the country further diversifies its reserves away from dollar-denominated assets and capitalizes on rising gold prices.

Their comments came after the State Administration of Foreign Exchange said on Sunday that China's foreign exchange reserves reached \$3.238 trillion as of the end of last year, the highest since December 2021, while gold reserves rose for the 14th consecutive month.

The country's foreign exchange reserves were up \$66.2 billion, or 2.1 percent, compared with the

end of November, the administration said, attributing the rally to a weakening US dollar and rising global financial markets. A softer dollar means that reserves denominated in other currencies become more valuable in dollar terms.

For the full year of 2023, China's foreign exchange reserves rose by \$110.29 billion, the biggest increase in six years, compared with a \$122.5 billion drop in 2022.

Guan Tao, global chief economist at BOC International, said the country's foreign exchange reserves climbed last year as the US Federal Reserve slowed monetary tightening and made the US dollar weaker amid fluctuations.

Guan, who is also a former head of the administration's Balance of Payments Department, said the rise in reserves has fortified China's ability to cope with external uncertainties, with the country's foreign exchange reserves equivalent to about 15 months of its import payments, well above the international red line of three to four months.

Liu Chunsheng, an associate professor at the Central University of Finance and Economics, said the increase also reflects the resilience of the Chinese economy, with the country's exports having resumed positive growth in November despite lukewarm global demand.

China's foreign exchange reserves will likely further rise this year while remaining overall stable, as the domestic economic recovery strengthens and the US Fed is poised for interest rate cuts, which may propel capital flow into China, Liu said.

The nation saw the resumption of net foreign capital inflow into securities in November, when foreign investors purchased a net \$33 billion in onshore bonds, the second-highest on record, data from the administration showed.

Meanwhile, China's official gold reserves reached 71.87 million ounces at the end of December, up from 71.58 million ounces a month earlier. In 2023, the country's gold reserves were up by 723 million ounces, the

biggest increase since 2015, according to the administration.

The official gold reserves may further increase as the country diversifies reserve assets, said Wang Youxin, a senior researcher at the Bank of China. "The US government debt problem will further evolve in 2024, making gradually cutting the proportion of US debt in reserves conducive to reserve asset security."

Zheng Houcheng, chief macroeconomist at Yingda Securities, said that China may continue to boost holdings in gold reserves in the first half of the year, as global gold prices may further rise with the US dollar weakening.

At its annual work meeting last week, the administration emphasized that it will improve the management of foreign exchange reserves to ensure the security and liquidity of reserve assets, as well as to preserve and increase the value of these assets.

Liu Zizheng contributed to this story.

CLIMATE CHANGE POSES HUGE CHALLENGE TO AVIAN MIGRATION

Birds face extreme weather events, rising sea levels, disappearing wetlands, record temperatures

By LI HONGYANG lihongyang@chinadaily.com.cn



Avian migration is a challenging journey that is subject to sudden storms, vast bodies of water and the risk of losing direction.

Climate change has made this situation worse, especially with record-low temperatures in northern China this winter.

In early November, a snowstorm struck more than 100 Oriental white storks in Changchun, the capital of Jilin province, during their southward migration. The birds are classified as first-level protected animals in China.

As the storm passed, most of the storks continued their journey, except for 11 birds who were too exhausted to fly on.

On Nov 16, staff members from the local forestry and grassland bureau transported these birds to the Qilhai wetland in Tianjin, where they joined others migrating to the area. The 11 storks are in good condition in their natural habitat, the bureau said.

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Nation's proactive role puts the lie to 'China threat' myth

US President Joe Biden's recent Beijing-friendly overtures notwithstanding, the looming United States presidential election is expected to heat up the "China threat" narrative, with both major political parties likely to try to outdo each other on China-bashing.

According to a Dec 26 report in The New York Times, former president Donald Trump's election campaign is mulling a plan that would phase out all Chinese imports of essential goods, along with proposing new rules to stop US companies from investing in China and to inhibit Chinese purchases of US assets.

Western media and bookstores are brimming with smear narratives related to allegations about



By Andrew KP Leung

China supposedly planning to dominate the world, perceived trade and intellectual property transgressions, alleged human rights violations, including so-called "Xinjiang genocide", military expansionism and territorial ambitions, among others.

In contrast to the predominantly one-sided Western discourse, Joseph Solis-Mullen, a relatively lone political scientist, economist, journalist and author, calls these allegations "the fake China threat" and outlines how the depiction of

China has dramatically changed from "responsible stakeholder" to US public enemy No. 1.

He lists a barrage of works by prominent authors and intellectuals, including Michael Pillsbury's *The Hundred-Year Marathon: China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower* (2015); Graham Allison's *Destined for War* (2017); and Hal Brands and Michael Beckley's *Danger Zone: The Coming Conflict with China* (2022).

Solis-Mullen boldly says that these highly respected intellectuals invariably work for or are affiliated with powerful think tanks of the US or its allies, and are funded behind the scenes by the US military-industrial complex.

The "China threat" narratives ignore China's historical developmental struggle under the tutelage of the Communist Party of China,

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New Year celebrations



A dragon dance is performed on Sunday at a shopping center in Kelang, Malaysia. The event's 118 auspicious "dragons" began dancing after completing an "eye-dotting" ceremony to welcome the upcoming Year of the Dragon. CHENG YIHENG / XINHUA

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PAGE TWO

Birds: Global consensus needed on habitats

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Oriental white storks usually leave their breeding grounds in Northeast China for the warmer south in September or October, returning north in spring.

By Nov 24, about half the migratory birds in China had completed their journeys and reached coastal areas in eastern and southern parts of the country for the winter, the National Forestry and Grassland Administration said.

At that time, cranes and storks were experiencing a second migratory peak, the administration added.

The China Meteorological Administration said the increasing frequency of extreme weather events, rising sea levels, disappearing wetlands, and record temperatures are having adverse effects on avian migration.

Severe drought, wind and temperature drops, and wildfires that force birds to alter their routes are contributing to migratory difficulties.

Without the ability to replenish their energy and rest in areas along their route, birds may struggle to reach their habitats safely, the administration said.

In late summer 2020, wildfires and an early snowstorm are thought to have played a major role in causing a huge number of deaths among migratory birds throughout the west of the United States.

An essay published in the journal *GeoHealth* in 2021 said a laboratory report showed that the birds were severely emaciated.

Severe drought

In 2022, Poyang Lake in Jiangxi province, China's largest freshwater lake, experienced a prolonged drought and food shortages that jeopardized the wintering grounds of numerous waterfowl species, including swans, geese and ducks. That year, the lake entered its dry season 100 days earlier than when records were first taken in 1951, setting a historically low water level.

The drought, a rare occurrence during the summer, had devastating effects on submerged vegetation, which is essential for wintering waterfowl.

Jin Jiefeng, a Yangtze River program director at the International Crane Foundation, told *China Dialogue Ocean* that although they may not necessarily alter the migratory routes of the birds, changes in the timing of migration due to insufficient food supplies could impact their breeding cycles and overall population development.

China Dialogue Ocean is a platform dedicated to highlighting, analyzing and helping to resolve the ocean crisis.

A study by US researchers published in the journal *Nature Climate Change* in 2019 suggested that compared to 20 years ago, migratory birds are passing certain sites earlier in spring, possibly due to rising temperatures. In spring and autumn, warmer seasons indicate earlier peak migration dates.

Not only has the timing of migration altered, but due to factors such as climate change, so too has the distribution range of some avian species.

Jia Yifei, associate professor at Beijing Forestry University's School of Ecology and Nature Conservation, said winter habitats have expanded northward, as more migratory birds such as red-crowned cranes spend this season in Shandong province, which is further



Egrets stop over in Beihai, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, in November during their winter migration. PENG HUAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

north than Jiangsu province, a traditional winter habitat for the species.

The Yellow River Delta, a vital wetland for migratory birds, has seen a rise in the number of winter arrivals.

Since 2020, the number of avian species at the delta's nature reserve has risen from 187 to 373. A total of 389 red-crowned cranes were sighted at the reserve in January last year, up from 306 in January 2022.

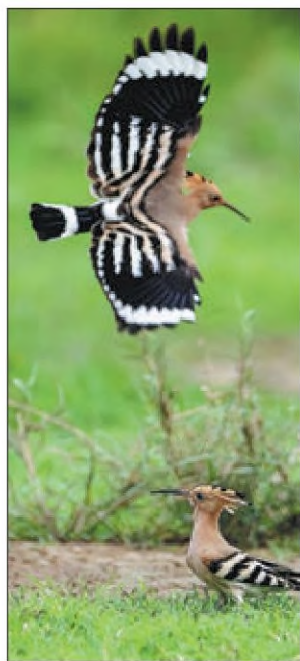
Jia said: "The increasing frequency of extreme weather events globally due to climate change affects migratory routes and habitats. However, climate change is just one of the factors, and it is hard to gauge how much climate affects avian migration."

In 2021, Chinese researchers wrote in an essay published in the journal *Ecological Indicators* that migratory birds will change their habitats and growth cycle in response to climate change. The direction and distance flown are different for every species.

Delicate balance

Over the past century, sightings of the rainbow-hued ibis were extremely rare in China. However, in recent decades, the birds have been consistently reported in a vast area of the country, ranging from the Inner Mongolia autonomous region in the north to southern parts of Yunnan province in the south, the China Meteorological Administration said.

Jia said avian species are trying to adapt to human-dominated environments, adding that the delicate balance between human



Hoopoes arrive to spend winter in Fuzhou, Fujian province. WEI PEIQUAN / XINHUA

activities and conservation efforts determines the fate of bird populations.

"Migratory birds are smarter than we thought. Some can adapt to climate change well. For example, cranes, which have good migration capabilities, often live for more than 20 years. The fact that they live longer than other birds contributes to their wealth of field experience and resilience in adverse conditions," he said.

While efforts to mitigate global warming are crucial, Jia said the focus remains on adapting to the inevitable changes and providing sufficient habitats for migratory species to thrive.

He added that as birds migrate globally, a consensus on offering them sufficient habitats is needed in the international community.

"Humans and other creatures share the global ecosystem as biodiversity. This plays a pivotal role in supporting various aspects of life," Jia said.

"Ensuring the preservation of biodiversity is not just an ecological imperative, but also

contributes to the well-being of cultures and the fundamental functioning of the planet."

In November 2022, during the 14th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, held in Wuhan, Hubei province, a China Bird Migration Channel Protection Network Initiative was announced. The initiative called for priority to be given to protecting wetlands on avian migration routes.

The Chinese Academy of Forestry said China is one of the world's most biodiverse countries, hosting 1,445 avian species, or about 17 percent of the global total. Among them, more than 800 species exhibit migratory behavior, underlining the nation's crucial role in global bird ecology.

Four of the nine major bird migration routes in the world pass through China. To protect them, the nation has built more than 2,200 wetland nature reserves and numerous wetland conservation communities, the National Forestry and Grassland Administration said.

Meanwhile, the International Crane Foundation has worked with Chinese nature reserves and scientists to maintain water and vegetation in four key wetlands on the Songnen Plain, which is situated between Heilongjiang and Jilin provinces.

This work was reported by Rich Beilfuss, the foundation's president, in an article titled "A Risky Climate for Cranes, Wetlands and Our World", which was published in 2018.

Jia, from Beijing Forestry University, added: "We have a long way to go to properly manage the ecosystem. For example, in addressing the issue of drought in bird habitats, authorities are trying to find a middle ground that both safeguards the ecological system and sustains economic benefits, as it is difficult to assess the outcome of ecological gains."



Migratory birds spend winter at Poyang Lake in Jiangxi province. BAO GANSHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Severe cold spell makes its presence felt, even in tropical Hainan

By LI HONGYANG

Late last month, temperatures fell significantly in many parts of China.

In Shandong province, snowfall created a picturesque landscape, with netizens likening it to scenes from the Arctic.

In southern provinces, netizens compared the power of the winter sun to the light inside a refrigerator, as these areas experienced temperatures colder than the interior of a fridge, which is typically 4 C.

In northern China, temperatures were consistently 5 C or more below the average for this time of year.

Yantai and Weihai cities in Shandong experienced a severe cold wave accompanied by heavy snowfall. Over a three-day period, the weather station in Yantai recorded snowfall of 28.6 millimeters, with a snow depth of 52 centimeters, which set records since meteorological documentation began in 1951.

Wendeng district in Weihai reported a snow depth of 74 cm, setting a provincial record.

Yang Chengfang, chief forecaster at the Shandong Meteorological Service, told *Xinhua Daily Telegraph*, "This blizzard is considered an extreme occurrence."

She added that the weather was

unprecedented, with Wendeng setting records for daily snowfall on Dec 16, when 27.5 mm was recorded.

In some cities in the north of Shanxi province, the mercury plummeted to -30 C, with five places setting records for their lowest temperatures, the provincial climate center said.

Even in tropical Hainan province, an orange warning for cold air, the second-highest level, was issued on Dec 21, signaling that temperatures in northern parts of the island would fall below 10 C.

From Dec 12 onward, the China Meteorological Administration issued yellow warnings for freezing conditions — the third-highest warning on the four-tier

system. Such extreme conditions have been rare in recent years, with the last such warning issued a decade ago.

The National Climate Centre said that before that time, the average national temperature was higher than usual.

However, the recent cold wave caused a sudden drop in temperatures across most of the country. These falls, which set records at some meteorological stations, were attributed to a prolonged and extensive cold wave with complex weather patterns and significant accumulated precipitation.

Against the backdrop of global warming, the Arctic region is heating up at a rate two to three times faster than the

global average. This contributes to a reduced temperature difference between the Arctic and mid-latitudes, allowing cold air from the Arctic to move south more easily.

This frigid air, which is much colder than that in mid-latitudes, has resulted in many areas of China experiencing exceptionally cold weather, the center said.

Data show that during El Nino periods, China's winter temperatures generally tend to be higher. However, there has been a noticeable frequency of episodes of cold air, highlighting distinct fluctuations between warm and cold spells, it added.

TOP NEWS

Death strikes again



Al Jazeera's bureau chief in the Gaza Strip Wael Dahdouh (left) and the widow (right) of his son Hamza Dahdouh, also an Al Jazeera journalist, mourn over his body after Hamza was killed in a reported Israeli airstrike in Rafah on Sunday. The veteran journalist, who himself was wounded in the strike, lost his wife, two other children and a grandson in Israeli bombardment during the initial weeks of the conflict. AFP

Friendly visa policies aim to boost inbound tourism

Industry insiders confident of outbound travel market's performance

By CHENG SI
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As the global tourism industry continues to woo Chinese travelers, China is reciprocating the gesture of goodwill by offering more friendly visa policies to attract overseas visitors and reignite inbound tourism, making it a strong driver for economic development.

Last week, Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavasin announced that Thailand will permanently waive visa requirements for Chinese visitors starting on March 1. The Southeast Asian country had previously granted a temporary visa waiver for visitors from China, which is set to expire on Feb 29.

Soon after the announcement, Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said the mutual exemption of visas between China and Thailand will serve the fundamental interest of both peoples once implemented.

Related government departments are in close communication on the matter, and China is looking forward to the early implementation of the policy, he said at a regular news conference last week.

This is not the first time China has made a friendly gesture to attract international travelers. The nation resumed visa-free entry for visitors from Singapore holding ordinary passports on July 26, after its suspension in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

On Dec 1, China started allowing visitors from Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Malaysia to enter the country without a visa. A total of 214,000 visits from these six nations were recorded as of Dec 31, up 28.5 percent compared with the previous month, according to the National Immigration Administration.

Among these visits, 118,000 individuals entered China visa-free using ordinary passports, account-

ing for 55.1 percent of the total trips made by individuals from the six countries during the same period, data from the administration showed.

Yang Jinsong, director of China Tourism Academy's International Institute, said that China's visa-free policy has demonstrated its well-intentioned attitude toward international travelers, and has also given tourism operators a confidence boost.

"The inbound tourism market will recover to the level of 2019 ... or even better than 2019. The visa-free policy is a boost, and we have to improve our services and market regulations to guarantee safe and happy experiences for international travelers coming to China," Yang added.

After Thailand upgraded its visa policy for Chinese visitors, searches and bookings for various destinations in that country surged on travel portals.

Online travel agency LY.com said that searches for tour services to Thailand made by its users increased 158 percent within half an hour of the announcement on Jan 2, compared with the same time the previous day.

Yang said that Thailand's move showed its "great determination to win back Chinese travelers", as its previous efforts fell short of the expectations.

Although Thailand is recognized as one of the top choices for Chinese travelers, the country has had to redouble its efforts in the face of stiff competition from other Southeast Asian nations, such as Singapore and Indonesia, which offered friendly visa policies to Chinese visitors last year, he said.

Chinese visitors are an irreplaceable source of tourism revenue for Thailand and many other countries, industry insiders said.

According to Thailand's Ministry of Tourism and Sports, the country received 3.35 million Chinese travelers as of Dec 20, and the total number for the whole of 2023 is expected to reach 3.5 million.

Fan Dongxiao, travel portal Tuniu's director of short-distance outbound travels, said they expect a surge in visits to Thailand during the Chinese winter holiday period, and "are confident of the performance of the outbound tourism market to Thailand once the visa-free policy is implemented".

China's human resources cooperation benefits many

By ZHOU JIN
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Teka Gebreyesus Entehabu, the state minister for trade and industry in Ethiopia, became an overseas student at Peking University three years ago. He wanted to learn about China's methods of achieving modernization and development.

Noting that he had visited China many times as a government official, Entehabu said he was always curious to know how changes took place in the country.

When he heard about a scholarship program to study in China, he applied without hesitation. Currently, Entehabu is pursuing a PhD at the Institute of South-South Cooperation and Development in Peking University.

The institute was established in 2015 as a platform for training high-caliber talent and conducting research and exchanges among developing countries.

Entehabu said the program offers him an opportunity to learn about the development of Chinese modernization, the industrialization process and how the country's technologies developed.

"I have seen farmers using technology in their work during my visits, and witnessed how the technologies make their work more efficient," he said.

Noting that Ethiopia shares some similarities with China, Entehabu believes that by learning in China, he can adopt experiences suitable for Ethiopia's unique situation.

Entehabu said he is thinking about making more practical plans and improving communication with the private sector and the communities when he returns to Ethiopia.

"I learned from the Chinese how they implement plans, not just make plans. That's what I want to implement in my country."

He underlined that the Chinese government's scholarship is an opportunity for individuals to explore China, and it is not an imposition of the "China model".

"China is not trying to force you to practically implement what you learn in the country. It's up to you," he said.

Entehabu is one of the 400,000 government and technical personnel China has trained over the past 70 years, as human resources development cooperation has become a highlight of China's foreign aid.

The country started human resources development cooperation with neighboring countries in the 1950s. Since 1980, the country has cooperated with the United Nations Development Program to provide technical training courses in various fields for developing countries.

Now, more than 180 countries

have benefited from China's human resources development cooperation programs, covering 23 fields and over 100 specialties such as agriculture, health and climate change.

Xu Wei, spokesman for the China International Development Cooperation Agency, said, "To support other developing countries, we have offered 100,000 training opportunities under the Global Development Initiative, contributing toward world economic recovery."

Such cooperation enhanced development capacity through exchanges and mutual learning, and deepened partnerships through cooperation and mutual assistance, he told China Daily.

In a congratulatory letter sent on the 70th anniversary of China International Human Resources Development Cooperation last week, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that true development is sustainable, and good development is development for all.

Human resources are important resources and fundamental support for economic and social development, he said.

China will make good use of its foreign aid to align with the development strategies of other countries, consider their needs, and train professionals to share advanced technologies, management experiences and development concepts, Wang said.

According to Luo Zhaohui, head of CIDCA, the trainees in China are also expected to deepen their understandings about the country's language, history and culture, and help promote exchanges between their home countries and China to deepen bilateral friendship.

Both Prasad Bhandari, a Nepalese engineer who currently studies in Beijing Jiaotong University, said the education program not only allows him to learn from China's technical management in the railway sector, but also helps him to better understand the Chinese people.

"While studying, we stay here a long time and have interesting interactions with the Chinese people," he said, adding that he hopes such exchanges will enhance more extended and stabilized relations between Nepal and China.

Entehabu echoed Bhandari's views. "I got the chance to see the country's culture and communicate with ordinary people in China," he said, adding that he was impressed by the hospitality of the Chinese people.

"We are ambassadors of China-Ethiopia relations because we not only learn here, we also get so many important benefits from human resources cooperation, so we can be a bridge for the countries to strengthen cooperation and make the relationship more strong," he said.

Anti-graft: Abuse of power targeted

From page 1

It is important to take targeted and precise measures, employing multiple approaches to gradually reduce recurring issues and prevent the spread of new problems, he added.

The general secretary stressed that the Party must keep up the intensity of the fight against corruption, saying that there must be no turning back, relaxation or show of mercy.

The call to action in fighting corruption must be constant, he added.

Xi called for the fight against corruption involving collusion between

politics and businesspeople to be a top priority, saying that resolute steps must be adopted to combat profit-seeking behavior based on the abuse of power and prevent various interest groups and power entities from infiltrating the political sphere.

Sectors such as finance, State-owned enterprises, energy, medicine and infrastructure must be targeted, and petty corruption and small wrongdoings must be investigated to provide the public with a greater sense of gain.

Last year, the CCDI prioritized SOEs in its two rounds of political inspection campaigns, covering 57 enterprises administered by the

central government and another five in the financial sector.

According to the anti-graft body, a total of 67,000 cases of wrongdoings in sectors concerning public well-being were investigated and addressed during the January-November period.

Xi pointed out that the essence of corruption lies in the abuse of power, and greater attention should be directed at the ways in which power is exercised while policies are formulated, decisions are made and approvals are granted.

He highlighted the importance of improving the system for constraining the allocation and functions of

power in order to "plug the institutional loopholes".

To intensify the drive to punish bribery, Xi called for serious actions to investigate and prosecute individuals who consistently drag officials into corruption, adding that greater efforts must be made to recover and rectify the illegitimate gains obtained through bribery.

Xi also underlined persistent efforts to purify the political atmosphere, while stressing the importance of abolishing "unspoken rules", establishing clear guidelines and resolutely preventing the forming of small circles.

He required vigorous measures to combat various forms of political deception, and to strictly prevent the principle of commodity exchange from being brought into the Party.



A Chinese doctor trains Egyptian students in a laboratory at the Jiangsu Province Hospital in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, on July 28. HOU YUMENG / XINHUA

Views: Nation has no inclination to replicate US' global hegemony

From page 1

emerging from two centuries of decline, backwardness, internal turmoil and foreign subjugation to become the world's second-largest economy, and lifting 800 million Chinese out of abject poverty, with rising living standards as well as technological and military capabilities to safeguard territorial integrity and other national interests.

These narratives omit the reality that China has neither the capabilities nor the inclination to replicate the US' global hegemony, supported by 800 military bases across the globe, world-leading science and technology, dollar dominance in the world's financial markets, global media influence and a plethora of Western allies, as Michael Beckley

enumerates in *Unrivaled - Why America Will Remain the World's Sole Superpower* (2018).

The so-called "China threat" has so permeated US politics that a record level of US residents (58 percent of those surveyed) said they view China as a critical threat to the US, the highest level recorded by the Chicago Council Survey dating back to 1990.

Views about China have severely plummeted, according to findings in July by the Pew Research Center.

However, China is strengthening measures to address issues of concern in China's relationship with the West, such as improving market access, leveling the playing field and protecting intellectual property protection with a view to creating, in President Xi Jinping's words, "a mar-

ket-oriented, legal and international first-class business environment".

Foreigners, including students, are increasingly welcomed in China. Recently, Alipay partnered with travel service providers to launch special tour packages for international tourists traveling to China. Xinjiang is now becoming the hottest tourist destination. The more that foreigners visit Xinjiang, the more the world will see through the West's manufactured delusion of "genocide".

At the annual work conference on Dec 29, Xi told China's envoys to other countries that they should tell the China story well and build more bridges, not only with governments but also with ordinary people. Additionally, dialogue between nonstate actors such as think tanks and influential businessmen and

individuals could work wonders in dispelling or mitigating some of the anti-China hyperbole. The extremely valuable work of the Beijing-based think tank Center for China and Globalization is a trailblazer.

At the end of the day, what counts in international relations is whom other countries turn to for economic livelihood and development. In this context, China is the world's largest trading partner to 128 out of 190 countries, the largest manufacturer, and is central to global supply and value chains. Seven of the world's top 10 container ports are in China, including Hong Kong. Even when not marked "Made in China", most products have China embedded in terms of materials, spare parts, components, processes or logistics.

It's telling that over 40 countries have expressed interest in joining the BRICS grouping. Similarly, multiple countries wish to become full-fledged members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which covers more than 40 percent of the world's population. China has an oversized influence in both groups.

Under President Xi, China is starting to play a more proactive and constructive role in bringing about better lives, peace and stability to the world, regardless of ideology, creed, race or size of economy. At the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing in October, an event attended by 140 countries and 30-plus international organizations, President Xi vowed to bring about a multidimensional, high-quality, green and

integrity-based BRI, benefiting every participant.

Supported by the China-proposed Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative and Global Civilization Initiative, China is starting to actively broker peace and development across the globe. The historic rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran and the efforts to resolve the Ukraine and Gaza crises come to mind.

China is showing the world by action and outcome that instead of being a "threat", it is actually offering the solution for achieving shared prosperity for mankind.

The author is a former director-general of social welfare for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and former chief representative of the SAR for the United Kingdom, Eastern Europe, Russia, Norway and Switzerland. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA



Left: Students taking the postgraduate studies entrance exam glance at their textbooks before entering the examination rooms at Jiangsu University of Technology in Jiangsu province on Dec 23. CHEN WEI / XINHUA **Right:** A job fair is held for graduates at Jinhua Polytechnic in Zhejiang province on Dec 1. SHI KUANGBING / FOR CHINA DAILY



Education continues strong progress

By ZHAO YIMENG

China continued to build a strong education system in 2023, a measure considered a pillar for advancing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

The Ministry of Education convened strategic consultation meetings on building a nation with a strong education system across the country, signing strategic cooperation agreements to promote the high-quality development of education.

The National Symposium for Outstanding Teachers was held in September last year. In a letter, President Xi Jinping sent greetings to teachers and those working in the education sector as well as representatives of outstanding teachers attending the symposium.

China has seen plenty of excellent teachers, and they have demonstrated the distinctive ethos of the country's educationists, Xi said. He also expressed his hope for teachers nationwide to carry on those high ideals.

The World Chinese Language Conference in December attracted 2,000 participants from China and abroad, including government officials and experts on Chinese-language education.

During the conference in Beijing, several panels and forums discussed issues such as the development of Confucius Institutes and academic systems for international Chinese-language education. Many foreign attendees showed strong interest in Chinese culture and were able to express themselves fluently in Chinese.

In February, the World Digital Education Conference was held to discuss digital transformation and the future of education, with the aim of promoting international cooperation in the field.

A reading branch of Smart Education China was officially launched in March. On June 9, the National Smart Education Platform was awarded the UNESCO Prize for the Use of Information and Communication Technologies in Education.

Meanwhile, the Chinese delegation topped the overall medal standings at the Chengdu FISU World University Games held in Sichuan province from July 28 to Aug 8.

On Nov 5, China's first Student (Youth) Games kicked off in Nanjing, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, aiming to deepen the integration of sports and education.

The UNESCO IISTEM in Shanghai was established in November, marking the first Category 1 Institute of UNESCO in China, as well as the first outside Europe and the United States.

In response to the urgent needs of a vast number of developing countries, China proposed to UNESCO the establishment of a new global category 1 center, aiming to promote global exchanges and cooperation in STEM education.

In June, opinions on building a high-quality and equitable public education system were issued, which proposed promoting equal access to basic public education services and meeting people's desire for a good education system. Schools were urged to provide scientific education services after the country implemented the policy of reducing the burdens on students from school assignments and out-of-school classes. The measures for the administrative penalties of extra-curricular training have been officially carried out.

In April, the education ministry, along with 17 other departments, jointly issued an action plan for improving work on students' mental health.

The National Advisory Committee for Students' Mental Health was established in November. It is responsible for research, consultation, monitoring, evaluation, and scientific popularization of mental health work in universities, middle schools and primary schools across the country.

Job security starts to supersede study

Graduates reassess value of further learning in light of pandemic, competitive employment market

By ZHAO YIMENG

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Yang Zirui, 22, had prepared for nearly a year to take the postgraduate studies entrance exam, but last month — 20 days before she was due to take the test — she abandoned her academic ambitions.

The journalism major from Chengdu, Sichuan province, planned to study for a master's degree in philosophy, which she hoped would help her find a satisfying job and a good career.

"I gradually realized a master's degree in philosophy might limit my career options as I am determined to seek opportunities in the internet business after graduation," Yang said.

Her decision is indicative of an emerging trend of college graduates appearing more realistic about whether they need to pursue postgraduate studies.

On a freezing cold morning last month, graduates gathered at a testing station in Beijing flipping through textbooks as they nervously prepared for the postgraduate studies entrance exam. The scene was repeated nationwide.

However, this year's exam saw the number of applicants fall by 7.6 percent year-on-year to 4.38 million, the first drop in nine years, according to figures from the Ministry of Education.

The drop surprised many observers as the number of applicants for the exam had been increasing steadily since 2016, with an average annual growth rate of 15.8 percent from 2015 to 2022.

Chen Zhiwen, editor-in-chief of online education portal EOL, said the uncertain employment prospects of postgraduate students are one of the major reasons for the drop.

In the past, many young people expected to land a decent job by pursuing further education. But after earning higher degrees they found they faced similar employment challenges, or an even tougher job environment, than their undergraduate classmates, Chen said.

"In 2023, the number of postgraduate students has exceeded undergraduates. Students began to calculate the value of accomplishing a master's degree and if it may not guarantee a decent job — some gave up the attempt," he said.

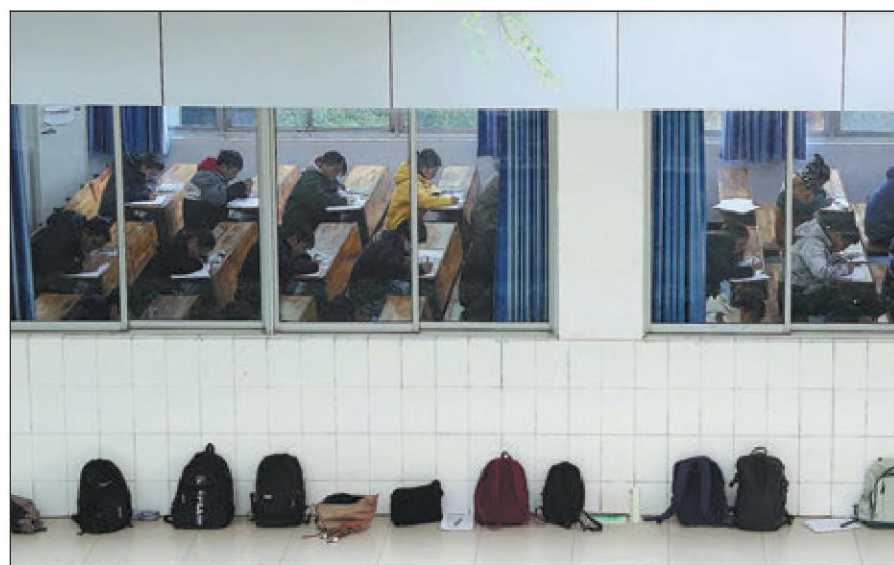
It's a good thing that they didn't blindly follow the crowd but made rational choices instead, he added.

Real goals

Yang said another reason she quit the postgraduate entrance exam is that it would take three years for her to complete an academic master's degree.

On why fewer students applied for the postgraduate entrance exam last month, Yang said she thought it reflected a growing belief among them that academic degrees are not the only path to a secure future. "If employment is the final goal, we need to think about our choices from a different perspective," she said.

Yang said she learned from doing an internship the importance of work experience, as opposed to academic knowledge, when it came to employment. She now believes the master's degree she wanted to pursue was too academic for the job market.



Top: Students prepare for the postgraduate entrance exam in the library of the University of South China in Hunan province on Nov 23. CAO ZHENGPING / XINHUA **Middle:** Students take the postgraduate entrance exam at the University of South China on Dec 23. CAO ZHENGPING / XINHUA **Above:** College graduates take part in a job fair at Jinhua Polytechnic in Zhejiang on Dec 1. SHI KUANGBING / FOR CHINA DAILY

While the time it takes to complete an academic master's degree stops some applicants, the financial cost of a professional master's is also a major consideration, said Chen from EOL.

The average annual tuition fee for an academic master's degree is 8,000 yuan (\$1,126) and for a professional one 12,000 yuan, according to the Education Ministry. Academic master's degree students are provided with dormitories with an annual rent of around 1,500 yuan, but pro-

fessional degree students in some colleges have to rent an apartment themselves.

"Aiming to cultivate students' practical skills, professional master's degrees usually cost more and cannot get national subsidies. The rising costs force students to calculate the true value of a master's degree," Chen said.

Refocusing

China's enrollment for professional master's degrees, which

tion to compete for vacancies at central authorities and their branches.

The National Civil Service Administration said 3.03 million applicants were eligible to take the test in 2023, a year-on-year increase of 16.8 percent. In November, about 2.25 million applicants took the exam.

The country plans to recruit 39,600 civil servants this year, a 6.7 percent increase from the previous year. However, it's a fiercely competitive process as the job-to-applicant ratio is about 1 to 57.

Chen said more and more graduates began to realize the importance of obtaining a secure job in recent years due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other factors. Examinations for public service and other government-related jobs have gained in popularity.

"Obtaining a postgraduate degree may not earn a promising career, but by taking the test for civil servants' recruitment, it's possible to directly hit the goal. So, some students give up the postgraduate studies exam if they cannot take both exams," Chen said.

Seeking certainty

Zhou Xintong from Shandong province decided not to take the postgraduate studies exam and instead is preparing for the provincial authorities recruitment exam in spring because it "has more certainty".

Based in a populous province renowned for the competitiveness of its provincial exams, Zhou discovered in November that six of her classmates studying Chinese language and literature intended to apply for the same university she was aiming to get into.

Due to a lack of confidence in her English proficiency, Zhou said she worried every night about failing the exam and having no time to prepare for other recruitment tests.

"Frankly speaking, with a goal of seeking certainty, I can't afford to take the risk," Zhou said.

For graduate students there are many avenues to get into the civil service. Central authorities and their branches recruit students through the national civil service exam. However, they can also take exams for provincial authorities and positions at local government-related institutions as a backup.

"No matter what the choice is, I don't want to end up with nowhere to go after graduation," she said.

Figures from the Education Ministry show the number of China's college graduates in 2024 is expected to reach 11.79 million, a year-on-year increase of 210,000, posing a new challenge for the country's job market.

To address the employment issues graduates are facing, the ministry launched an action plan to promote employment and entrepreneurship of graduates in 2024.

A meeting was held at the University of Electronic Science and Technology of China in Chengdu on Dec 28 to exchange ideas about supply and demand in the job market.

More than 400 higher learning institutions and 150 enterprises participated in the meeting to discuss collaboration on internships, career planning, teaching personnel and recruitment of graduates, with the aim of promoting high-quality and full employment for college graduates, the ministry said.

2023
year in
Review

emphasize the practical application of knowledge and skills, will be increased to about two-thirds of all master's degree programs by 2025, the education ministry said in late December.

This structural adjustment of master's degrees is inevitably affecting students' choices. Fortunately, more young people are aware that they are entitled to make their own choices on education. "I believe we should find the path that is suitable for each individual, though none of these goals are easy to achieve, and struggle for our dreams," Yang said.

Having no interest in academic research or working at government-related institutions, Yang is now preparing to study abroad and plans to get an internship with an internet company.

While fewer students took the exam for postgraduate studies last year, more registered for the annual civil service recruitment examina-

WORLD

Editor's note: Thousands of Chinese merchant sailors risked everything to keep Britain's vital supply lines open during World War II. And yet, after peace was restored, they were only repaid with gross injustice. This page looks at the startling truth and the poignant tale of brave seamen, familial tragedies, forgotten history and a community's quest for answers and dignity.

Remembering China's merchant navy heroes

Despite their sacrifices, many seamen in Liverpool were forcibly repatriated

By JULIAN SHEA in London
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Around the Tower of London, there are sites and monuments that tell stories of the long history of the United Kingdom. But there is one that many people pass by without noticing.

The Tower Hill Memorial on Trinity Square is a 20th century monument commemorating the 36,065 men and women of the merchant navy and fishing fleets lost at sea in both world wars, people who kept the country fed when it could easily have been starved into submission.

Unlike military campaigns, contributions of the merchant navy to the wartime narrative are rarely celebrated. And this has a strong Chinese connection, with an unexpected and unhappy ending.

In World War II, the main base of the merchant navy was the north-western port city of Liverpool, which was part of the crucial North Atlantic supply route. The city's strong dock heritage meant it was also the site of Europe's first Chinatown.

The first recorded Chinese presence in Liverpool dates back to 1834, when the first vessel arrived directly from China, and a more significant community was established there in the 1860s, by Chinese sailors who worked for the locally based Blue Funnel shipping line, which sailed to Hong Kong and Shanghai.

With such numbers and specific skills, it is no surprise that in Britain's wartime hour of need, Chinese merchant sailors were quick to volunteer to serve their adopted homeland.

In what became known as the Battle of the Atlantic, an average of four convoys of supplies, each made up of as many as 60 ships, would come into Liverpool's docks each week, making it an artery of survival for the whole country, and an estimated 20,000 Chinese sailors helped keep it open.

However, at the war's end, many of Liverpool's Chinese merchant seamen were treated as an unwanted presence despite their service, sacrifice, and in many cases, longevity in the city, with some having married and had families.

Although plenty were happy to return home after such a grueling wartime experience, it is estimated that around 2,000 decommissioned sailors remained in the Liverpool area postwar. And soon after the end of the conflict in October 1945, a meeting took place involving officials from the Home Office, Foreign Office, Liverpool police, immigration inspectorate and others with one topic: getting rid of them.

The meeting resulted in the opening of a confidential file numbered

HO 213/926 and titled "Compulsory repatriation of undesirable Chinese seamen", which remained out of the public gaze for decades.

Just a year earlier in 1944, the contributions of Chinese merchant sailors had been praised in the Ministry of Information's propaganda movie *The Chinese in Wartime Britain*, with the narrator saying "shoulder to shoulder in the greatest battle of naval history, alongside their British seamen comrades, they too brave the torpedoes and the bombs and the mines, making history under fire... life at sea fuels a unique spirit of comradeship between the men of all nations".

But unequal pay rates had for many years led to ill feelings and even violent confrontations with police. No sooner had the war ended than they became tired of being treated as cheap labor, and the fraternal feeling dried up.

Many were literally snatched off the streets and bundled out of the country, without a chance to say goodbye to the families they left behind, who were often mystified as to where they had gone, many going to their graves without ever having had an answer.

'Nakedly racist action'

Shortly after the documents were made public, Kim Johnson, the Labour Party member for the constituency of Liverpool, Riverside, raised the issue in a parliamentary debate in July 2021, in which she said it was one "of deep concern to both the long-established Chinese community in Liverpool and constituents of Liverpool, Riverside, as well as many communities across the country", before giving details of what she called "one of the most nakedly racist actions ever undertaken by the British government... a shameful stain on our history".

"We know that about 2,000 seamen were deported, snatched from their homes and their loved ones and dumped unceremoniously on the shores of a homeland that many had left decades before. Their families were never told what was happening; they were never given a chance to object, or even a chance to say goodbye," she said.

"Most of the Chinese seamen's British wives and partners went to their graves never knowing the truth, left to believe that their husbands had abandoned them along with their children, suffering immeasurable trauma from the actions of the British government."

John Belchem, author of *Before the Windrush: Race Relations in 20th Century Liverpool*, told the BBC that for many years, Liverpool's Chinese residents were regarded as "absolutely model migrants". But when the country was looking to rebuild, literally and metaphorically, after World War II, there was no place for them in what he called "a terrible piece of ingratitude", so excuses were found to eject them en masse.



The Tower Hill Memorial stands on the south side of the garden of Trinity Square, London, across the road from the Tower of London. JULIAN SHEA / CHINA DAILY



Top left: Former Chinese sailor at Blue Funnel Shipping Office Sing Zhay Woo (second from right) poses for a photo in front of a building in Liverpool which housed the office in 1950-69. The blue plaque on the exterior wall marks the role Chinese seamen played in the history of Liverpool. XINHUA **Above:** The names of sailors from many countries who served in the British merchant fleet and were lost at sea are recorded on the memorial.

JULIAN SHEA / CHINA DAILY **Left:** A general view of Chinatown in Liverpool, England, on May 6. The city boasts the site of Europe's first Chinatown. SANJIN STRUKIC / PIXSELL



lutely model migrants". But when the country was looking to rebuild, literally and metaphorically, after World War II, there was no place for them in what he called "a terrible piece of ingratitude", so excuses were found to eject them en masse.

"They were respectful, well-behaved, believed in education, weren't violent, looked after their wives, looked after their children," he wrote.

This underlines arguably the greatest tragedy of the affair. It was

not just the injustice done to those taken away, but the equally large one done to the innocents left behind, including hundreds of children who grew up with no knowledge of what had happened to their fathers.

The story was covered in a recent podcast and documentary movie for History Hit TV, which featured Lucienne Loh, a reader in English literature at the University of Liverpool, who has been involved in raising awareness of the forced deportation story.

She told China Daily that there were a number of elements unique to Liverpool and its Chinese population that contributed to the incident, its consequences and the current revived interest.

"I first came across the story when I worked with members of the Chinese community on the story of their history in Liverpool, and one thing many of them had in common was a family link to the Blue Funnel line," she explained. "Its longevity and size means Liverpool's Anglo-Chinese community is unique in the UK, because of its extensive integration with the white British and Irish community, which is what first drew me to the story."

"As far as I know, the sailors weren't even necessarily returned to the ports or cities they came from, they were just dumped in the nearest colonial port, so overnight, people lost their fathers and husbands, with no idea where they'd gone."

"People often ask why the fathers didn't try to reconnect with their families, but a lot of the mothers didn't really want to draw attention to what had happened, or their children's ethnicity, so they often moved out to the suburbs and remarried, not drawing attention to the children's heritage, making any contact much harder."

The lost sailors are now commemorated with a memorial on the Pier Head in Liverpool docks, which honors "the many Chinese merchant seamen ... required to leave ... for their wives and partners who were left in ignorance ... for the children who never knew their fathers ... this is a small reminder of what took place. We hope nothing like it will ever happen again."

Keeping memory alive

But Loh said the 21st century Liverpool Chinese community is a very different demographic, and it is only the dwindling number of direct descendants who keep the flame of this memory alive.

"A large part of the Chinese community now is overseas Chinese students. The strata of the community affected by what happened after the war are now increasingly in their later years, so the story is kept alive by them, but they, and it, won't be around forever," she said.

"As for where this story leads, I suppose it depends who you speak to. Different people want different things. But I think most families just want answers — they want the dignity to grieve for their loss, which a lot of them have never had."

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WORLD

Concerns grow over farmers' protest in Germany

By JULIAN SHEA in London
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Concern is growing in Germany that the right-wing Alternative for Deutschland party, or AfD, will use the country's biggest agricultural sector protest in years to stir up discontent and anger toward the ruling coalition government.

Last week, police used pepper spray to break up a blockade of around 100 farmers who prevented Economy Minister Robert Habeck from getting off a ferry on his return from holidays, an incident that Habeck said made him "thoughtful, yes, even concerned, that the mood in the country is heating up to such an extent."

Despite a partial government U-turn over the key issues of cutting diesel subsidies and tax breaks on farming vehicles, an eight-day protest started on Monday.

Images showed convoys of tractors and trucks, some adorned with protest banners, on German roads in sub-zero pre-dawn temperatures. Police reports said that roads and highway ramps were blocked in multiple locations, causing traffic jams during the morning rush hour.

A backlash from farmers last week prompted Chancellor Olaf Scholz's coalition, racing to finalize a 2024 budget draft that was delayed by a court ruling, to make unexpected changes, including modifying plans to cut subsidies for agriculture.

Rather than abruptly ending the farmers' tax break on agricultural diesel, the subsidy will be reduced by 40 percent this year, by 30 percent in 2025, and will end in 2026.

The Guardian reported that in some parts of the country, gullows



Tractors line up as German farmers block access to highway A10 during a protest against the reduction of vehicle tax subsidies by the coalition government, in Birkenwerder, on Monday. FABRIZIO BENSCH / REUTERS

were seen with traffic lights on, symbolizing the colors of the parties in the governing coalition — red for the Social Democrats, yellow for the liberal Free Democrats, and the Green Party.

On social media, the AfD has spoken of workers being "driven into ruin by an irresponsible political leadership like in the Middle Ages", and called on people to join a "general strike".

In December, Reuters reported that support for the AfD had reached a record high of 23 percent, following the government's difficult passing of its 2024 budget.

There is concern that more economic problems could push voters toward the AfD ahead of key local

elections in Brandenburg, Saxony and Thuringia later this year.

The blockade of Habeck's journey has been heavily criticized, including by the head of Germany's farming union, Joachim Rukwied, who said personal attacks, insults, threats, coercion or violence "are quite simply not on".

But AfD leader Alice Weidel said the incident showed that Habeck "is no longer taken seriously by the citizens ... and instead of seeking dialogue, he'd rather flee on a ferry".

The east of Germany has proven to be fertile ground for the AfD.

In June, the party won its first election for the head of a district council in the southeastern town of Sonneberg.

In July, it won its first mayoral election in Raguhn-Jessnitz in the state of Saxony-Anhalt, and in December, it won its first bigger town mayoral vote in Pirna near the Czech border.

So far, the mainstream parties have operated a so-called firewall of noncooperation with the AfD, but with recent polls showing that it has higher levels of support than them, that approach may become increasingly politically impractical.

Germany's next federal elections are not due until 2025 but a survey published by Bild Zeitung in mid-December showed 59 percent of people want elections in 2024.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Sustainability taking center stage at CES

Las Vegas event expected to showcase key trends in technology innovation

By LIA ZHU in Las Vegas
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Fueled by surging internet access, the world is poised for continued tech innovation, said experts, pointing to three key trends as the driving forces shaping the world: artificial intelligence, sustainability, and inclusivity.

Imagine Alibaba's e-commerce platform anticipating users' needs with accuracy, powered by AI-enabled machine learning; witness enhanced digital twins that simulate physical environments for limitless research and development at a fraction of the cost.

These are just a taste of the "much larger" AI ecosystem which expands from chips all the way to robots, said Brian Comiskey, director of thematic programs at the Consumer Technology Association, or CTA, at a conference ahead of the CES 2024, which officially runs from Jan 9-12 in Las Vegas.

As the climate crisis intensifies, the race for a greener future accelerates. "Think about all the breakthroughs and advances we've seen in electric vehicles, renewable power sources, ... this has really pushed toward that greener tomorrow," said Comiskey.

"Sustainability is going to be a huge trend at CES 2024," he said. For example, one sustainable technology on display is fully customizable solar cells that can be integrated into any consumer electronics, such as headphones, or even GPS-enabled dog trackers, he said.

He also cited other "solar breakthroughs", such as a robot that moves around with extendible solar panels which can serve as a means of power in campsites or as an emergency power backup source.

Other novel innovations in the sustainability sector include the "air farm" which is an inflatable and portable, smart farm that can grow food sustainably in deserts and drought-impacted areas, according to Comiskey.

As to inclusivity, which means accessibility, diversity and equality, Comiskey said, people are going to see a convergence of health and wellness innovation.

An example of digital health solutions for women is a wearable AI bracelet that tracks menopausal hot flashes, triggering a connected cooling pad for a restful night's sleep. Healthcare for all becomes a reality through these accessible and intelligent solutions, he noted.

Women's digital health industry is forecast to reach \$1.2 trillion by 2027, said Jessica Boothe, director of research at CTA. Digital health solutions will help lower costs and reduce the healthcare disparity for women, she added.

This year, the skies open up with "flying cars" like the aircraft of Xpeng AeroHT, an affiliate of Chi-



Think about all the breakthroughs and advances we've seen in electric vehicles, renewable power sources, ... this has really pushed toward that greener tomorrow."

Brian Comiskey, director of thematic programs at Consumer Technology Association

na's Xpeng Motors. The company will showcase an electric vertical takeoff and landing, or eVTOL, aircraft at CES 2024.

TV remains a CES mainstay, evolving into an intelligent home hub. Picture walls stretch across rooms, boasting stunning picture technology and innovative features like wireless foldable displays. Chinese giants like TCL and Hisense lead the charge, blurring the line between screen and smart home control center.

Acceleration of connectivity

The CTA report also predicts that the world will see rapid tech innovations in coming years, thanks to the global connectivity acceleration.

Internet access has been the engine for global economic growth and fosters social connections, according to the report, which shows that 5.4 billion people are connected to the internet today and 1 billion more are expected to come online by 2027.

In China, that figure — of people being connected to the internet — has surged to over 70 percent over the last few years. "It means we're at a major runway for continued growth here," said Comiskey.

Formerly known as the Consumer Electronics Show, the largest technology exhibition in the world went online in 2021 because of the pandemic. CES 2022 saw a quarter of the event's typical attendance.

This year, the exhibition is expected to attract over 130,000 attendees, with more than 4,000 exhibitors from over 150 countries and regions.

"We are scaling back after the pandemic; companies are starting to return to this event this year," Comiskey told China Daily.

"China plays a role in that. You're seeing those numbers start to come back up for China."

He said it's important to see breakthroughs from anywhere, including China, because "technology is in our day-to-day lives that can help improve our daily lives".

DPRK conducts drill off west coast

SEOUL — The military units of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on Sunday conducted a live-shell firing drill off its western coast, the official Korean Central News Agency reported.

Military units in charge of the southwest coastal defense mobilized 23 coastal artillery units and fired 88 live shots toward four areas in the southwest waters, said KCNA citing a statement by the General Staff of the Korean People's Army.

The Republic of Korea accused the DPRK of "repeated artillery fire", saying the bombardment posed "a threat to the peace on the Korean Peninsula".

The DPRK said the district for the naval live-shell firing drill was not related to the Military Demarcation Line in terms of (firing) direction and posed no intentional threat to the ROK, the statement said.

It said the drill was conducted according to a plan within the Korean People's Army's regular training system.

In an earlier statement released by the KCNA on Sunday, Kim Yo-jong, vice department director of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, said the DPRK detonated blasting powder simulating the sound of artillery fire, a move designed to observe the reactions of the ROK's military.

The ROK claimed the DPRK conducted artillery shelling northwest of Yeonpyeong Island on Saturday afternoon, and the shells dropped in the sea buffer zone north of the so-called "Northern Limit Line", or NLL, in the western waters off the Korean Peninsula.

ROK's Joint Chiefs of Staff dismissed Kim's statement mocking the detection capabilities of its military as "low-grade" and "psychological warfare", according to a report by Yonhap News Agency on Sunday.

The two countries have long been bickering over the maritime boundary in the western waters off the peninsula. The ROK has set the sea border by designating the NLL, which the DPRK has never officially recognized.

XINHUA-AGENCIES

Bangladesh PM Hasina wins reelection

By ARUNAVA DAS in Kolkata, India
and XU WEIWEI in Hong Kong

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina won reelection for the fourth straight term as her ruling party Awami League, or AL, gained more than 70 percent of the 299 parliamentary seats available, according to the Bangladesh Election Commission.

Voting for Bangladesh's 12th National Assembly elections was completed peacefully on Sunday, with the exception of a few isolated incidents of violence. Counting of ballots began soon after voting ended that afternoon.

In Bangladesh, a party can only form the government if it manages to clinch 151 seats.

The AL, which rose to power in a landslide election victory in 2009, now eyes a fourth straight five-year term in parliament.

India's High Commissioner to Bangladesh Pranay Verma conveyed congratulations to Hasina on her election victory during a phone call, on behalf of the Indian government and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Asian News International reported.

The Bangladesh Election Commission said over 119.6 million registered voters were eligible to cast their votes at more than 42,000 polling stations across the country.

About 2,000 candidates contested in 299 of the 300 parliamentary constituencies. The election for the remaining constituency was postponed due to the death of a candidate.

Despite a boycott call by the



A man reads a newspaper the morning after the Awami League won the general election in Dhaka on Monday. MOHAMMAD PONIR HOSSAIN / REUTERS

Bangladesh Nationalist Party, or BNP, the AL's main political opponent, voter turnout was 40 percent, Bangladesh Election Commissioner Anisur Rahman said.

On election day, foreign election observers openly visited polling centers. Afterward, some of the foreign observers described the polls as free, fair, successful and legitimate.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said the BNP did not take part in the parliamentary elections because it knew that it would lose.

Abdur Rahim, who runs an export business in the capital Dhaka, told China Daily that Hasina's new term in office will keep Bangladesh's growth momentum going.

"I hope there will be a renewed vigor in the economy of Bangladesh," he said.

"Yes, we have several problems, but what makes Hasina an undisputed leader is her vision and ability to lead our country to a new dawn of

progress and development.

"Under Hasina, Bangladesh, which was reeling under abject poverty a few years ago, has witnessed extraordinary growth."

Some analysts say Bangladesh has also shown improvement in areas such as education, health, climate disaster management, and women's participation in the labor force.

"Relations between China and Bangladesh have flourished over the years under Hasina," Rahim said.

"Many ambitious infrastructure projects, including the Padma Rail Link, Dhaka Metro, and Karnaphuli Underwater Tunnel have been supported by the governments of Bangladesh and China," Marco Foerster, FDI adviser at Dezan Shira & Associates, said.

Arunava Das is a freelance journalist for China Daily.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

UK checks make Dutch trade far from rosy

By JONATHAN POWELL
in London
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The Dutch flower-growing industry has expressed "significant concerns" about its readiness for the United Kingdom's scheduled introduction of new post-Brexit border checks and has called for a delay until 2025.

The UK government plans to implement new paperwork requirements beginning in late January for European businesses exporting animal and plant products to Britain, with further physical inspections due to start in April.

Exporters, including the Dutch Association of Wholesalers in Floricultural Products, or VGB, have

expressed concern about their lack of preparedness for these rule changes, fearing potential losses and damages due to customs delays.

The VGB highlighted in a letter to the UK government that new requirements will be implemented during a crucial period for its sector, with significant trading volumes driven by Valentine's Day, Easter and Mothering Sunday.

The letter states that the stricter physical checks due in April may cause delays in product delivery and could potentially result in significant damage to plants during border inspections.

"We wish to express our concern regarding the impending introduction of phytosanitary certificates on medium-risk products, sched-

uled for Jan 31, 2024," VGB director Matthijs Mesken said in the letter as seen by The Guardian.

"This timing coincides with the absolute peak of the seasons, which poses challenges for our industry."

The VGB suggested Britain had "Europe's most efficient border" and recommended that the UK government postpone physical checks on plant imports until at least September 2025.

James Barnes, chair of the UK Horticultural Trades Association, said Brexit has already caused delays to imports, and he expressed concern that the situation could worsen under the new regime. "We think that the new border is a disaster waiting to happen," he said.

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WORLD

Russia: 300 evacuated in Belgorod over Ukraine offensives

By REN QI in Moscow
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Russia has evacuated around 300 residents of Belgorod, a city near the Ukrainian border, over strikes by Kyiv, the governor of the region said on Monday.

"Some 300 residents of Belgorod, who decided to temporarily evacuate, are at the moment being housed in temporary shelter centers in Stary Oskol, Gubkin and the Korochansky districts" which are further from the border, Belgorod's regional Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said in a video posted on Telegram.

The evacuation is the largest of a major Russian city since its special military operation in Ukraine in February 2022.

The Russian Defense Ministry claimed on Monday that its air defense systems intercepted a Ukrainian S-200 missile over the Belgorod region.

Calling it "a terrorist attack attempt by the Kyiv regime", the ministry said in a statement that the missile was targeting facilities inside Russia.

The ministry also said air defense systems in the past 24 hours intercepted 14 HIMARS and Uranium multiple launch rocket munitions, six Neptune anti-ship missiles and almost 40 Ukrainian drones, as Russians celebrated Orthodox Christmas on Sunday.

Meanwhile, Russia launched a large-scale missile attack across Ukraine at the start of peak morning hours on Monday, injuring several people, Ukrainian officials said.

Reuters reported that all of Ukraine was under air raid alerts from around 6 am local time, with Ukraine's Air Force saying the country was under several waves of cruise missile threats and ballistic missiles in some regions.

Ukrainian military officials in Dnipropetrovsk and Khmelnytskyi said their cities were under a "massive missile attack" by Russia.

The attacks were carried out after Russia launched 28 attack drones and three cruise missiles at Ukraine overnight on Sunday. Ukraine's Air Force claimed to have destroyed 21 drones.

However, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the situation on the battlefield at this time remains relatively stable.

"Ukraine is already and will always be one of the most significant European donors of security, and we strive for the best weapons and technology in the world, for our own security and the security of our partners," he told a conference in Sweden via video link.

Zelenskyy said Ukraine has already begun joint defense activities with Turkey, Romania, Poland and Great Britain. In addition, there are corresponding agreements with the Czech Republic, the United States and Germany.

As Ukrainian state agency Ukrinform reported, Ukraine and Sweden are discussing joint work in the field of innovation, as well as the possible transfer of Gripen aircraft to the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Weathering storm



Travelers board an Amtrak train during a storm in Hudson, New York, on Sunday. Winter storms left heavy snow in New York's Hudson Valley and sparked blizzard warnings across the Great Plains. Storm warnings were in effect throughout the US' Northeast. ANGUS MORDANT / GETTY IMAGES

Boeing faces scrutiny again on quality control

After midair incident on Alaska Airlines MAX jet, aircraft maker under new glare

By AIHEPING in New York
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An incident involving a midair breach in the fuselage of an Alaska Airlines Boeing 737 MAX 9 jet has again put the spotlight on Boeing's manufacturing quality.

The US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is looking at Boeing's production process and supply chain to pinpoint what might have caused a metal panel to fling off the side of the Alaska Airlines flight at 16,000 feet on Friday evening. Late on Sunday, the panel was found in the backyard of a schoolteacher in Portland, Oregon.

United Airlines announced Monday that it found loose bolts on its Boeing 737 MAX jet. United has 79 of the MAX 9 planes in its fleet, and is the biggest operator of the jet model.

The FAA on Saturday grounded dozens of 737 MAX 9 planes after the Alaska Airlines panel blew out, calling for inspections.

United has 79 of the MAX 9 planes in its fleet and is the biggest operator of the jet model.

"This sort of failure should not happen on any airplane, but for it to happen on a 3-month-old aircraft is unacceptable," Nick Cunningham, an analyst at Agency Partners, told the BBC of the Alaska Airlines jet. "This adds to the impression that Boeing has forgotten how to build aircraft."

The incident Friday resulted in no serious injuries but led to the FAA grounding about 171 jets, pending inspection. Boeing said it supported the decision and that safety remained its "top priority".

Other than finding the cause of the midair incident, industry

This sort of failure should not happen on any airplane, but for it to happen on a 3-month-old aircraft is unacceptable."

Nick Cunningham, analyst at Agency Partners

observers say Boeing needs to reassure customers and investors that the problem is contained.

The 737 MAX is Boeing's best-selling aircraft, with more than 4,000 orders to fill. However, the more common MAX 8, which isn't affected by the grounding, makes up most of those orders.

The Alaska Airlines incident is just the latest production lapse at Boeing, and it couldn't have come at a worse time.

Boeing is battling Europe's Airbus for orders, and both have been trying to rapidly recover their manufacturing capacity after slashing production over the pandemic.

Boeing is trying to increase the rate at which it builds the MAX, because like other airplane manufacturers, it isn't paid until delivery of a plane.

It currently builds 38 jets a month at one of its factories near Seattle and has said it plans to reach 50 a month by the middle of the decade.

The latest incident "begs the question how is the quality control going as they try to ramp up?" said Bank of America analyst Ron Epstein.

Boeing's shares have risen more than 18 percent over the past 12 months. But on Monday, they fell 8 percent, dropping \$20 to \$229 a share. Boeing is a component of the Dow Jones Industrial Average.

Boeing's most recent issue "does not come as a complete surprise to us," said Christopher Raite and Peter McNally, analysts at global research firm Third Bridge. "Since the onset of the pandemic, there has been an acute shortage of highly skilled laborers, which can be viewed as a key driver for the myriad of recent issues."

Boeing has faced production problems since a design flaw triggered two deadly plane crashes and led to a worldwide grounding of the 737 MAX in 2019.

Last month, Boeing asked airlines to check for loose bolts on the system controlling the MAX's rudder, while improperly drilled holes and improper fittings were found on some jets earlier in 2023.

Boeing suffered from supply chain shortages in 2022. Starting in 2020, a series of issues on the 787 led to 20 months of delivery delays.

In October 2023, Boeing reported another \$482 million in red ink on the contract to retrofit two new Air Force One US presidential 747 jets. Boeing has now lost more than \$1 billion on each of the two jets.

CEO Dave Calhoun said last year that Boeing should have never agreed to the fixed \$3.9 billion price tag.

The Alaska Airlines incident also drew in Spirit AeroSystems, a key Boeing supplier, which installs the plugged doors as part of the construction of the 737 MAX fuselages.

China is an important market for Boeing. In December 2023, Boeing made its first direct delivery of a 787 Dreamliner to China since 2019, a step that industry watchers said could hasten the end of China's freeze on deliveries of Boeing's profit-making 737 MAX since the 2019 grounding.

But Scott Hamilton, head of consultancy and news site LeeHam News, said, "Anything could cause Beijing to change its mind."

Fuel leak may put at risk first private US lunar landing

By MINLU ZHANG in New York
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The first US moon-landing attempt in more than 50 years appeared unlikely after a private company's spacecraft developed a "critical" fuel leak just hours after Monday's launch.

The NASA-financed robotic lunar lander named Peregrine was launched from Florida. It was designed by and is operated by Pittsburgh-based Astrobot Technology.

The fuel loss that would interfere with the craft's ability to achieve a sun-facing position so the solar panel couldn't collect enough sunlight and charge its battery.

While the company managed to tilt the spacecraft in the correct direction, aiding in recharging the battery, it might not be sufficient for the scheduled moon landing to take place on Feb 23.

"The team is working to try and stabilize this loss, but given the situation, we have prioritized maximizing the science and data we can capture," Astrobot said in a statement on its website.

"We are currently assessing what alternative mission profiles may be feasible at this time," it said.

For the Peregrine mission, NASA was the primary customer, paying \$108 million to Astrobot to transport five experiments.

The mission is a crucial milestone in NASA's goal of returning astronauts to the moon, marking the first such mission since the conclusion of the last Apollo mission in December 1972.

Astrobot aims to be the first private business to successfully land on the moon. Currently, only four countries — the United States, the former Soviet Union, China, and India — have managed to do that.

Peregrine is one of several landers approved by NASA to carry instruments into space. The instruments on Peregrine will help NASA get ready for the Artemis program, aiming for people to stay on the moon for a long time.

"NASA instruments aboard Peregrine will help NASA prepare for the Artemis program's missions to enable a sustained human presence on the moon," Astrobot said.

The mission also carried a variety of other payloads, including a small

rover built by students at Carnegie Mellon University, experiments for the German and Mexican space agencies, and mementos.

We are currently assessing what alternative mission profiles may be feasible at this time."

Statement by Astrobot Technology, operator of lunar lander

NASA and the Canadian Space Agency are planning to send four astronauts to fly around the moon in Artemis II later this year. If it goes well, they aim to land on the moon in Artemis III in 2025.

A second lunar lander, developed by a Houston-based company, is scheduled for launch next month. NASA provided both companies with millions of dollars in funding to construct and conduct missions with their own lunar landers.

"Each success and setback are opportunities to learn and grow," Joel Kearns, deputy associate administrator for exploration at NASA's Science Mission Directorate in Washington, said in a statement about Peregrine.

"We will use this lesson to propel our efforts to advance science, exploration, and commercial development of the moon."

The only country that has had a perfect record on the moon is China, The New York Times reported. The country has landed spacecraft on the lunar surface successfully three times this century and is getting ready to launch a fourth one to explore the far side of the moon later this year.

NASA officials, according to the Times, are open to accepting more risks to cut costs. Unlike the 1960s moon program, when NASA built its own lunar landers, this time NASA wants private companies to find cost-effective solutions.

The approach could create new opportunities for universities, businesses and space agencies worldwide interested in sending payloads to the moon.

Jigsaw master



Hans-Josef Schaadt accepts congratulations from Freisen Mayor Karl-Josef Scheer in Freisen, Germany, on Sunday for his world record puzzle. He put together 54,000 pieces in 99 days to create a picture, which included classical paintings. LASZLO PINTER / AP

Secrecy over defense secretary's hospital stay raises concern

WASHINGTON — US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's hospitalization was kept far more secret than previously known, officials disclosed on Sunday, adding his deputy to a long list of people right up to President Joe Biden who were kept in the dark for days.

The latest disclosure came as members of both parties in Congress expressed sharp concerns over the secrecy of Austin's hospital stay and the fact that the president and other senior leaders were kept in the dark about it for days.

Austin, who is 70, was admitted to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center's intensive care unit on New Year's Day after experiencing severe pain following a still-undisclosed

elective medical procedure on Dec 22.

The Pentagon's failure to disclose Austin's hospitalization, including to President Biden, the National Security Council and top Pentagon leaders, for days reflects a stunning lack of transparency about his illness, how serious it was and when he may be released, The Associated Press reported.

Such secrecy, when the United States is juggling myriad national security crises, runs counter to normal practice with the president and other senior US officials and Cabinet members.

Austin sits just below Biden at the top of the chain of command of the US military, and his duties require him to be available at a moment's

notice to respond to any national security crisis, Reuters reported. That includes always being ready to enter secure communications with other officials in the event of an incoming nuclear attack, something that would be difficult to do from an ICU bed.

Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks assumed some of his operational duties on Jan 2, while she was on vacation in Puerto Rico, a US official said. But Hicks was only told why Austin was unavailable on Jan 4, three officials told Reuters.

It was the same day that Biden and other senior White House officials were told that Austin had been hospitalized since Jan 1, five officials said.

The Pentagon said on Sunday the delay in disclosing his whereabouts

was at least partially due to Austin's chief of staff being off sick.

Austin said in a statement on Saturday that he took "full responsibility" for the secrecy surrounding his hospitalization.

The US Congress was only informed on Friday, shortly before the Pentagon published its public statement.

Leadership in question

Several lawmakers say the communication breakdown raises serious questions about Pentagon leadership.

A joint statement from the top Democrat and Republican lawmakers on the House Armed Services Committee called for the Pentagon to be transparent about Austin's health

"and the decision-making process that occurred in the past week".

"Several questions remain unanswered including what the medical procedure and resulting complications were, what the Secretary's current health status is, how and when the delegation of the Secretary's responsibilities was made, and the reason for the delay in notification to the President and Congress," the joint statement said.

The Pentagon said Austin remained in hospital on Sunday but was recovering well and was in good spirits.

"Since resuming his duties on Friday evening, the Secretary has received operational updates and has provided necessary guidance to his team," it said.

Senator Roger Wicker said the episode erodes trust in the Biden administration and called on the department to provide lawmakers with a "full

accounting of the facts immediately".

In a joint statement, Representatives Mike Rogers and Adam Smith said they were "concerned with how the disclosure of the Secretary's condition was handled".

Meanwhile, US lawmakers announced a bipartisan agreement on Sunday on the fiscal year 2024 funding totals that mark a step toward averting a looming government shutdown in a presidential election year.

The agreement on a roughly \$1.6 trillion "top-line" federal spending limit was announced after weeks of negotiations.

It was swiftly applauded by Biden, who said in a statement that the deal "moves us one step closer to preventing a needless government shutdown and protecting important national priorities".

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BUSINESS

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HIGHER GROUND

Processing trade focus to give lift to exporters

By ZHONG NAN
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China's recent initiative to bolster processing trade activity will offer export-oriented companies more options to sustain growth in 2024, thus aiding in the transformation from a labor-intensive development pattern to a more dynamic model in global trade, said industry sources and analysts.

The government introduced a guideline to improve the development of processing trade in late December. It put forward 12 measures encompassing six categories, encouraging the processing trade of high value-added products, while supporting the development of advanced manufacturing and strategic emerging industries engaged in the sector.

Processing trade refers to the activity of importing all, or part of, required raw and auxiliary materials from abroad, and reexporting related finished products after processing or assembly by companies within China.

The proportion of processing trade in China's total foreign trade peaked at 53.4 percent in 1998. The country's value of exports and imports related to processing trade amounted to 5.57 trillion yuan (\$779.99 billion) in the first three quarters of 2023, accounting for 18.1 percent of its total foreign trade, said the Ministry of Commerce and the General Administration of Customs.

With escalating labor costs putting pressure on traditional manufacturing sectors in China's coastal



An employee works on the production line of an auto parts plant in Shenyang, Liaoning province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

areas, coupled with a surge in trade protectionism by certain countries and softening external demand, these measures have been crafted to create new growth points, said Zhang Jianping, director of the China Center for Regional Economic Cooperation at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation in Beijing.

For example, the government allows companies to conduct bonded maintenance services for a batch of industrial goods within China's comprehensive bonded zones.

Suzhou Soin Internet Technology Inc, a Jiangsu province-based printing equipment manufacturer, initiated its first bonded maintenance project on Dec 31. This endeavor focuses on servicing a 5-metric ton printing machine located within Wuzhong Comprehensive Bonded Zone in the city.

With over 1,000 clients both at home and abroad, the Chinese company's maintenance service model previously involved directly importing used printing machines from abroad. These imported machines

would then undergo a comprehensive process involving maintenance, refurbishment and upgrades before being reexported.

"Due to the large size and high unit cost of these mega printing machines, each imported equipment unit requires the payment of relevant taxes, together with transportation and storage expenses, which has placed significant pressure on our operational expenditures," said Jiang Anli, the company's chairman.

Saying that the value of printing machines the company imported amounted to 140 million yuan last year, Jiang said that with the support of policy incentives, the value of the company's bonded maintenance services for imported equipment is projected to exceed 200 million yuan in 2024, making this type of service a new growth area for the company in expanding into global markets.

As a crucial link in the industrial chain, maintenance services deeply integrate manufacturing and service sectors, providing new impetus for the transformation of the com-

prehensive bonded zone from traditional simple processing to diversified production services, said Zheng Ke, an official at Suzhou Customs, a branch of Nanjing Customs.

"One of the government's new measures we are most concerned about is the decision to encourage large-scale companies to conduct processing trade. Customs authorities have provided us with detailed explanations, and our sales specialists have established communication channels with relevant units within the group," said Hu Shouguo, head of the export unit at Dalian, Liaoning province-based Dayang Group Co Ltd, a large-scale exporter of made-to-measure suits with more than 4,500 employees.

"We will actively facilitate the unified management of group accounts and the free flow of materials, ensuring implementation of these measures in an organized manner. It is expected to reduce annual out-bound processing filings by over 200 cases and render exempting a guarantee deposit of 800,000 yuan this year," Hu said.

Zhejiang eyes big presence overseas

For strong show in 2024, province wants firms to shine at biz events

By WANG KEJU
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East China's Zhejiang province, a major export-oriented economic powerhouse, has embarked on a series of actions aimed at expanding its presence in markets untapped so far, retaining more business orders as the new year unfolds and getting its economy off to a strong start this year.

With a clear focus on expanding presence beyond the Chinese mainland, a government-led out-bound business delegation, consisting of representatives of 24 enterprises from Zhejiang's Wenzhou city, has set sail to explore new opportunities and strengthen existing partnerships during the Hong Kong Toys and Games Fair, the largest of its kind in Asia, which began on Monday.

With meticulous planning and a keen eye on market trends, Hi Childhood Amusement Equipment Co, a Wenzhou-based outdoor playground supplier, has selected a range of innovative and engaging products that it hopes will help connect with potential buyers at the fair.

In response to the specific needs and preferences of different markets such as Europe, North America and Southeast Asia, the company made targeted offerings of products in its attractive catalog, said the company director Xue Yiming.

The company aims to strengthen relationships with established clients from Europe and the United States while exploring new prospects and expanding its customer base. It also plans to gather valuable insights into market trends and consumer preferences, Xue said, expressing confidence in securing orders worth \$1-2 million.

Despite the challenges posed by global uncertainties, government support for participating in such exhibitions has proved to be crucial for foreign trade enterprises seeking to expand their reach and showcase their offerings to a global audience.

The lack of in-person interactions with clients over the past few years has prompted Zhejiang Vsuch Industry Co to seize the opportunity for group participation in overseas trade shows such as the Hong Kong fair. It hopes to uncover new customers and generate new business orders.

In the past few years, due to disruptions induced by the COVID-19

pandemic, customer acquisition methods mainly relied on e-commerce channels. However, such platforms have limitations, and the opportunities to connect with new customers were relatively restricted, said Wu Ankang, manager of the company's foreign trade department.

"By participating in trade shows, we can engage in face-to-face interactions and gain access to a wider range of potential customers. It has been a few years since we last attended a trade show, and this offline (on-site) experience will help us understand their needs better, and tailor our offerings accordingly," Wu said.

Participation in the Hong Kong fair is expected to set the stage for a series of overseas initiatives put forward by local authorities in Zhejiang to start the new year on a strong note.

Looking ahead, Zhejiang has set an ambitious target of organizing over 1,000 such delegations and facilitating the participation of over 10,000 companies in trade shows around the world, to empower companies to gain exposure to emerging markets, according to the provincial commerce bureau.

The value of Zhejiang's imports and exports reached 4.5 trillion yuan (\$628 billion) in the first 11 months of last year, up 4.4 percent year-on-year, data from local Customs authorities showed.

Exports from Zhejiang jumped 3.5 percent year-on-year to 3.28 trillion yuan, accounting for more than 15 percent of the country's total, which secured its position as the second-largest exporter nationwide, according to official data.

Noting that Zhejiang and other provincial regions with sizable foreign trade serve as pillars of China's trade growth, Zhuang Rui, a professor at the Beijing-based University of International Business and Economics, said that stronger government support should be extended to help them navigate the growing complexities in the global economic landscape.

In addition to helping or encouraging foreign trade firms to take part in overseas trade shows, tax breaks, export rebates, facilitation in Customs clearance and other preferential policies should be rolled out to help slash their costs and better anchor their expectations, Zhuang said.

Briefly

Hainan offshore duty-free sales up 25%

China's southern island province of Hainan saw total offshore duty-free sales surge 25.4 percent year-on-year to 43.76 billion yuan (\$6.2 billion) in 2023, local Customs said on Monday. Last year, over 6.7 million shoppers purchased 51.3 million duty-free products on the tropical island, said the Customs department in Haikou, capital of Hainan. The two figures grew 59.9 percent and 3.8 percent, respectively.

Logistics sector sees December expansion

China's logistics sector registered expansion in December, industry data showed. The index tracking the country's logistics market performance stood at 53.5 last month, up 0.2 percentage point from November, said the China Federation of Logistics and Purchasing.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

Chip gives edge in quantum computing

By CHENG YU and MA SI

China's efforts to scale up the manufacture of superconducting quantum computers have gathered momentum with the launch of the country's independently developed third-generation Origin Wukong, said industry experts on Monday.

The latest quantum computer, which is powered by Wukong, a 72-qubit indigenous superconducting quantum chip, has become the most advanced programmable and deliverable superconducting quantum computer currently available in China.

The chip was developed by Origin Quantum, a Hefei, Anhui province-based quantum chip startup. The company has already delivered its first and second generations of superconducting quantum computers to the Chinese market.

"The release of the latest quantum computer and chips offers a new entry ticket for China's superconducting quantum computer in terms of manufacturing. It means

that the country is able to manufacture such computers from a small scale to a medium scale," said Jia Zhilong, deputy director of the Anhui Quantum Computing Engineering Research Center's Quantum Computing Chip Provincial Key Laboratory.

Compared with previous generation quantum computers, the latest one is powered by more advanced chips, Jia said.

The Wukong chip, he said, has 198 qubits, including 72 working qubits and 126 control qubits. Qubits represent quantum's key advantage over classical computing.

Wukong's name was inspired by Sun Wukong, a mythical Chinese figure who can assume 72 different forms. The name symbolizes the computer's power and versatility.

Currently, quantum computing is seen as the most promising alternative to the general computer based on silicon chips. But for now, quantum computing technology exists on a small scale, and only a small number of companies internation-

ally, such as Google and IBM, are able to develop such computers.

"The latest chips will improve the efficiency of current global quantum computers by many times," said Kong Weicheng, deputy director of the Anhui Quantum Computing Engineering Research Center.

In terms of speed, the latest computer can execute the calculation tasks of up to 200 quantum circuits at a time, which gives it a speed advantage over similar international quantum computers, Kong said.

Global consulting firm McKinsey & Co said it expects quantum computing will have a value of up to \$700 billion by conservative estimates by 2035, driven by demand from pharmaceutical, chemical, auto and financial sectors among others.

China said in its 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) that it will speed up frontier science and technological blueprints such as quantum computing and quantum communication.

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Performance of A-share cos seen positive this year

By SHI JING in Shanghai
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UBS holds an optimistic outlook about the performance of A-share companies this year on the back of expected improvements in profitability, stabilizing economic fundamentals and more supportive policies, analysts at the Swiss banking company said at a news conference on Monday.

The MSCI China Index is expected to jump 15 percent in 2024, propelled by the companies' 7 percent revenue growth and 10 percent earnings' increase over the next 12 months, said Eric Lin, head of UBS Greater China research.

In general, MSCI China companies' revenue is positively correlated to China's GDP growth.

Since China's GDP growth is estimated at 4.4 percent in 2024, the 7 percent revenue increase is attainable, said Lin.

Commodity prices will further decline in 2024. This will lower com-

panies' costs and improve their profits marginally, he said.

The property sector's impact on the economy is likely to weaken in 2024, which is another positive factor in companies' profitability, he added.

The current price-to-earnings ratio of the MSCI China Index is eight. The low PE ratio of Chinese equities points to opportunities that can hardly be found in other markets, whether developed or emerging, Lin said.

On the outlook for the A-share market, UBS Securities' China equity strategist Meng Lei said that the "worst period is over" and they have changed to an optimistic tone for the following months.

The earnings per share of the blue-chip CSI 300 index is likely to be 8 percent in 2024, Meng said.

China's nominal GDP growth in 2024 — estimated at around 5.3 percent and higher than last year's 4.6 percent — will accelerate the rebound in A-share companies'

profitability, he added.

Industrial companies' profits grew by 7.7 percent year-on-year in the third quarter of 2023, according to the National Bureau of Statistics.

This can be interpreted as the start of companies' profitability recovery, but such a recovery has not been reflected in the stock market yet, said Meng.

Other assets, such as government bonds, commodities and foreign exchange reserves, all seem to have been priced into China's economic recovery. However, it seems the Chinese stock market did not truly reflect the nation's stabilizing economic fundamentals last year, he said.

Going forward, China will introduce more solid supportive monetary, fiscal and property policies. There is still room for further lowering the reserve requirement ratio. The favorable policy environment will help drive up stock market performance, he added.

Meng further said that one major reason for the relatively lackluster performance of the A-share market last year was a lack of confidence, which was a result of the sluggish performance of mutual fund firms.

According to UBS' calculations, the top 100 heavyweights in mutual fund companies' portfolios have always outperformed the A-share average since 2010, with the year 2023 serving as the only exception.

The median stock price of these top 100 companies dropped 6 percent last year, while the median stock price of A-share companies climbed 4 percent during the same period.

The less-than-stellar performance of mutual funds has impaired investor confidence.

Retail investors would rather buy stocks on their own than direct their money toward mutual fund firms, giving a cold shoulder to new products from mutual fund companies. This has made it more difficult for mutual fund firms to receive new



Investors check share prices at a securities brokerage in Fuyang, Anhui province. LU QIJIAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

financing. The firms have to reduce their exposure to certain heavy-weight stocks to manage risks. The net asset value of mutual fund products has thus been affected, creating a vicious circle, said Meng.

However, such a reduction in heavy-weight stocks actually started in mid-2021 and may be approaching an end, Meng said. Therefore,

investor sentiment may pick up in the following months, he added.

The benchmark Shanghai Composite Index dropped 1.42 percent to close below the 2,900-point level on Monday, while the Shenzhen Component Index shed 1.85 percent.

A-share listed semiconductor companies reported the biggest daily slump of 3.32 percent on average.

BUSINESS



Visitors check out an OLED display during an expo in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Domestic OLED makers zoom in on next-gen tech

Nation seen accounting for 76 percent of panel production capacity next year

By FAN FEIFEI
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Global shipments of organic light-emitting diode (OLED) panels used in terminal devices like smartphones, tablets and laptops are expected to gain growth momentum in 2024, as major Chinese display panel makers are doubling down on next-generation display technologies and expanding their footprint in the rapidly growing semiconductor display sector, experts said.

Sigmaintell Consulting, a Beijing-based market research firm, said global shipments of OLED panels will likely reach 710 million units this year, an increase of 14 percent year-on-year, with the vast bulk of these panels to be used in smartphones — reaching 680 million units in 2024.

Global shipments of OLED panels used in tablets and laptops will stand at about 15 million units and 6 million units this year, respectively. Meanwhile, shipments of OLED panels used in smartphones made in China will account for about a 45 percent share in overall OLED panel shipments worldwide this year, said Chen Jun, executive vice-president and chief analyst of Sigmaintell.

It is noteworthy that an increasing number of OLED panels are gradually being applied in medium-sized display products, such as tablets, laptops and vehicle-mounted devices.

According to Sigmaintell, the penetration rate of OLED panels used in tablets is expected to increase from 5.7 percent in 2024 to 18 percent in 2028, while shipments of OLEDs in laptops will soar nearly 92 percent year-on-year in 2024.

Compared with traditional liquid crystal displays, the latest generation display technologies represented by OLEDs have made great improvements in terms of image contrast, brightness and color spectrum, thus further accelerating the upgrade of the display industry.

Chinese display panel maker BOE Technology Group Co Ltd announced in November it plans to invest 63 billion yuan (\$8.8 billion) to set up a new active-matrix organic light-emitting diode (AMOLED) production line in Chengdu, Sichuan province. BOE's products will be mainly high-end touchscreens such as those seen on laptops and tablets.

BOE topped the domestic market, with shipments of flexible OLED panels used in smartphones reaching 76.65 million units in 2022, making it the world's second-largest OLED maker after South Korea's Samsung Display, said Sigmaintell.

Chinese smartphone makers, such as Huawei Technologies Co and Xiaomi Corp, have adopted flexible OLED panels from homegrown display panel suppliers in their handsets, buoyed by the maturity of OLED technological levels and continuous production cost declines.

TCL China Star Optoelectronics Technology Co Ltd, another display panel manufacturer, is upbeat about the prospects of OLED panels, and will strengthen cooperation with global partners to bolster industrial upgrade.

Zhao Jun, senior vice-president of TCL Technology and CEO of TCL CSOT, said the company's inkjet-printed OLED panels, which feature greater brightness, faster response times, wider viewing angles and lower power consumption — and are deemed as the development direction for next-generation display technology — are expected to achieve mass production in the second half of 2024.

Industry tracker Display Supply Chain Consultants said in a report that shipments of OLED screens in high-end IT devices will increase to 44 million units in 2026, with a compound annual growth rate of 51 percent, constituting 75 percent of the premium IT equipment market.

In addition, Li Yaquin, general manager of Sigmaintell, said artificial intelligence-powered computing chips will be increasingly used in personal computers that are able to run large language models independently, adding that global shipments of AI PCs are likely to amount to 13 million units in 2024.

Li expects shipments of AI-powered smart devices, including handsets and notebooks across the globe, will rise from 170 million units in 2024 to more than 700 million units in 2028.

China will overtake South Korea to become the biggest OLED manufacturer by 2024, as more Chinese companies have invested large sums of money into new production lines, said Zhou Hua, chief analyst at CINNO Research, a Chinese flat panel display consultancy firm.

Zhou said that at present, China has become the world's largest display panel producer and is expected to account for about 76 percent of global panel production capacity by 2025.

Bustling logistics activity points to growing economic momentum

BEIJING — China's logistics market, a high-profile indicator of economic vitality, saw progress and improvement in the past year, underpinned by steady economic recovery and new growth drivers.

The annual average logistics performance index stood at 51.8 in 2023, above the expansion-contraction line of 50 and 3.2 percentage points higher than the previous year, said the China Federation of Logistics and Purchasing.

Subindices for business volume, new orders and equipment utility rates all posted notable improvements compared to 2022, said the CFLP.

Analysts said the robust trend of the logistics sector is likely to extend into 2024 as the December 2023 reading grew 0.2 percentage point month-on-month to 53.5 percent, with most of the subindices in expansionary territory, indicating upbeat business expectations.

Echoing the brisker logistics activities, another index that tracks roadway logistics prices recorded a 0.9 percent year-on-year growth in December, amid general improve-

ments in roadway transport demand and supply.

Hu Han, a CFLP analyst, said that with policies in place to stabilize the economy and boost confidence, industrial production and consumption performance continued to recover in 2023, which buoyed transport demand.

The country's growing industrial improvements, combined with the improving logistics supply structure, further consolidated the sector's recovery trend, Hu said.

Companies' profitability in the fourth quarter performed significantly better than in the third quarter and first half, Hu said, adding that the indices gauging operating profits of small and micro logistics firms have rallied for five consecutive months.

With its improved logistics infrastructure development, extensive warehousing networks and advanced storage facilities, China's logistics market maintained its position as the world's largest for the seventh consecutive year in 2022.

The robust logistics sector is a prime testament to the country's

warming consumption demand and robust economic dynamics.

Closely linked to the country's burgeoning e-commerce business, the courier sector saw its annual delivery volume exceed 120 billion parcels for the first time.

During the annual "Double 11" online shopping spree, about 7.51 billion packages were sent across the country from Nov 1 to 16, representing a 30.9 percent year-on-year growth.

The consistent pursuit of innovation is also an important contributor to the booming logistics sector, said Zhou Zhicheng, a CFLP researcher.

In November, transport orders for equipment manufacturing and high-tech manufacturing maintained rapid growth, up 9.8 percent and 6.2 percent year-on-year, respectively, data showed.

Green energy-related logistics remained active as well. In November, logistics demand in new energy vehicles and solar cells grew rapidly, with their growth rates above 35 percent year-on-year.

XINHUA

Budweiser steps up green efforts in China

By ZHU WENQIAN
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Budweiser Brewing Co APAC Ltd, the largest beer company in the Asia-Pacific in terms of sales revenue, may have its first carbon-neutral malt house in Yangzhou, Jiangsu province by year-end, as the brewer increases efforts to reduce carbon emissions.

Budweiser APAC, a subsidiary of Belgium-headquartered AB InBev, the world's biggest brewer by production volume, has partnered with its supplier, Supertime Baoying, in Baoying county, Yangzhou, and the malt factory is expected to achieve carbon neutrality and receive certification later this year.

After the certification, Supertime Baoying is expected to become the first carbon-neutral supplier for Budweiser APAC.

The global brewer operates two carbon-neutral breweries in China — in Wuhan, Hubei province and Jinzhou, Liaoning province.

"Sustainability is not just a part of our business, it is our business, seamlessly integrated into every aspect of our value chain," said Jan Clysner, vice-president of sustainability and procurement at Budweiser APAC.

"We need quality raw materials, quality water, a sustainable way of packaging beer, and a sustainable way of producing and transporting our beer to consumers. We are a natural product brewed locally for local consumers," Clysner said.

He added that the company has roadmaps on how to make most of its breweries carbon-neutral. In the long run, it has an ambition to turn net zero by 2040.

Next, Budweiser APAC will cooperate with its suppliers for more carbon-neutral factories, driving the green transformation of the beer industry, and contribute to the realization of China's dual carbon goals.

China is aiming for carbon peak before 2030 and carbon neutrality before 2060.

The nation has been a powerhouse of beer production and consumption, and green and sustainable development has become the main trend of the beer sector in the country.

Among a group of green manufacturing enterprises listed by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology last year, there were 17 beer production companies, accounting for 85 percent of total alcohol makers on the list.

"Beer is a production cost-sensitive product, indicating that the market is highly competitive. Higher requirements have been put forward for cost controls in the production process, and for the consumption and utilization level of various resources and energy," said He Yong, secretary-general of the China Alcoholic Drinks Association.

Budweiser APAC said its malt supplier Supertime Baoying has contracted 100 percent renewable electricity and fully achieved bio-

mass boiler steam supply, which have helped lower costs.

"Biomass makes our costs much more predictable. Not depending on whether fuel prices go up or down will bring much more stability and security in our cost of operations," Clysner said.

The first batch of carbon-neutral malt produced by the factory will supply Budweiser APAC's Nantong and Suqian breweries in Jiangsu, creating a closed-loop green production chain, the company said.

With an annual capacity of 130,000 metric tons, the malt house currently provides products for the China market, and has the potential for export and producing different types of malt for various kinds of beer, the brewer said.

Chinese consumers have been increasingly pursuing high-quality beer.

In 2024, the consumption volume of high-end beer in the country is expected to exceed 5.5 million kiloliters, and sales revenue is forecast to reach 280 billion yuan (\$39.2 billion), accounting for 40 percent of total beer sales, according to a projection by Topsperity Securities.

Budweiser, which entered the high-end Chinese beer market early, has seen growing production capacities and profits.

Domestic breweries CR Beer and Tsingtao Beer have also been launching more high-end products to satisfy growing demand from consumers.



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The Belt and Road Initiative PEACE AND COOPERATION

The Belt and Road Initiative, reflecting common ideals and the pursuit of fairer, more connected human societies, endeavors to seek new models of international cooperation and inject a new sense of positivity into efforts aimed at promoting world peace and development.

BUSINESSFOCUS

Qingdao's key moves keep it clean, green

Air pollution levels drop markedly after switching to renewable energy sources

By LIU ZHIHUA
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Qingdao, a key export and economic hub in East China's Shandong province, has shown substantial improvement in air quality after switching its major heating source from coal to natural gas in key urban districts and developing a network of multiple clean energy resources.

In September, its PM2.5 level fell to 18 micrograms per cubic meter, while concentrations of inhalable particulate matter — sulfur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and carbon monoxide — had all turned first-class by national standards on air quality.

PM2.5 is the average concentration of fine particles of less than 2.5 microns in diameter and is a common measure of air pollution levels.

While Qingdao's annual average concentration of fine particles was as high as 59 micrograms per cubic meter in 2014, it had dropped to 26 by 2022, data from the city government showed.

"In the past, the 44 coal-fired boilers in the main urban areas of Qingdao often operated at full capacity each winter, causing heavy environmental problems from coal transportation, spill of cinder, chimney discharge and coal storage," said Xu Bing, general manager of Qingdao Energy Group, a State-owned large-scale energy supplier. "Today, such a sight has disappeared forever."

In its energy development plan for the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) period unveiled in late 2021, Qingdao vowed to expand the scale of clean energy utilization, increase the proportion of non-fossil energy in its energy consumption structure, and reduce coal consumption.

By 2025, coal is expected to account for 23.5 percent of primary energy use. Consumption of coal-fired power, clean energy and external power transmitted to Qingdao will be optimized, to account for 21.5 percent, 27 percent, and 51.5 percent, respectively, of total electricity consumption in the city, according to the plan.

To promote the use of clean energy, the city will carry out projects to supply natural gas for heating in urban areas, and steadily promote clean heating projects such as "coal-to-gas" and "coal-to-electricity" in rural areas in accordance with local conditions, the plan showed.

The city will also continue to expand the use of clean energy, such as solar energy, geothermal energy, biomass energy, and industrial waste heat, while promoting the integration of renewable energy-based and conventional fossil energy-based heating systems.

It is estimated that the coal-to-gas conversion project will help the city reduce consumption of around 1 million metric tons of coal per year, thereby cutting carbon emissions by 850,000 tons annually.

Thanks to loans worth about \$130 million provided by the Asian Development Bank, the company started the three-year project in 2021, together with other initiatives to promote low-carbon and digital transformation of energy supplies in Qingdao.

The total investment for the project as well as for other initiatives is planned at 1.68 billion yuan (\$230 million), which also includes special local government bonds and funds from Qingdao Energy, in addition to ADB loans.

As of end-October, the first and second phases of the project had been completed, which can provide heating to an area of more than 11.43 million square meters, reducing coal consumption by 92,800 tons per year.

The project can also reduce emissions of ash and nitrogen oxide by 30,000 tons and 137.05 tons, respectively, per year.

The project, which upgrades the energy mix and improves the air quality in Qingdao, also aims to set an example for the rest of the country amid China's efforts to honor its dual-carbon goals.

According to Xu, switching to natural gas as a heating source has reduced pollution on multiple fronts.

For instance, natural gas is transported by pipeline, which means it seldom causes pollution from transportation.

The new boilers, which adopt a low nitrogen-based combustion method, no longer need external flue gas treatment facilities. Besides, the natural gas heating plants are also in harmony with the surrounding environment, unlike coal-fired heating plants that discharge white smoke.

After the coal-to-gas conversion revamp, the Jinze heating station in Shibei district can meet household heating demand from within 8 million square meters.

At the same time, the vacant coal storage facility has been turned



Workers install photovoltaic panels at a farm in Qingdao's West Coast New Area, Shandong province, in March 2022.

HAN JIAQUN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Technicians inspect heating supply status at a natural gas power station in Qingdao in December.

WANG HAIBIN / XINHUA

into a community cultural and sports center with an area of more than 10,000 square meters, becoming a good place for community residents to refresh and exercise.

Ding Ruijing, deputy general manager of Qingdao Energy, said that the company's heating supply capability has surged more than 40 percent, thanks to the implementation of the project.

In addition, about 380 mu (25.3 hectares) of land has been saved from the renovation of the heating plants for other more productive uses.

A resident surnamed Han, who lives near the heating plant in Shi-

bei district, said the coal-to-natural gas switching project has greatly benefited his neighborhood, as they no longer have to suffer from dust and smoke from the coal-fired unit.

Apart from natural gas, the city has also made use of other new and clean energies, mostly renewables like distributed photovoltaics and ocean thermal energy.

"To reduce carbon emissions, Qingdao needed to phase out coal-fired boilers and a centralized heating network and switch to a distributed system relying on natural gas and other renewable energies for heating," said Lu Lanlan, a

senior project official of ADB.

To achieve this, ADB has facilitated the sharing of experiences between the Qingdao and Swedish industry associations in heating and cooling, Lu said.

The project design has fully taken into consideration that a single clean energy source alone cannot meet the growing heat demand in Qingdao, nor achieve overall low-carbon transformation of the heating system while the city phases out its coal-fired power plants.

Therefore, a "multienergy complementarity" approach — a combination of multiple clean and renewable energies — has become

the core aspect in promoting a low-carbon transformation of Qingdao's heating system, she added.

For example, the Qingdao Olympic Sailing Center, a community of 10 buildings, has achieved zero CO2 emissions by improving energy efficiency, phasing out fossil fuels, reducing the use of natural gas, and increasing the use of renewable energies.

The distributive photovoltaic facilities on the roof of the Qingdao International Convention Center, part of the Olympic sailing center, not only generate power to meet demand from the convention center, but are also able to provide electricity to the Qingdao power grid.

Their average annual power generation is 760,000 kilowatt-hours, saving 224 tons of standard coal and reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 580 tons per year.

Apart from common renewable energy sources like solar photovoltaics and wind energy, the center also makes good use of clean energy technologies to heat or cool the buildings, such as industrial waste heat recovery and seawater source heat pumps.

The center can save 3.03 million kWh of electricity, 22,000 gigajoules of heat, and 5,500 standard cubic meters of natural gas every year, therefore slashing 8,663 tons of carbon emissions.

Wei Qingpeng, an associate professor at the school of architecture at Tsinghua University, said that buildings account for about 21.7 percent of China's energy consumption, and Qingdao's "multienergy complementarity" approach for heating and energy supply has accumulated valuable experience in developing an energy model centered on new energy sources.

Provincial-level regions speed up environmentally friendly power initiative

LHASA — In the past, electricity from Sichuan and Qinghai provinces was transmitted to Southwest China's Xizang autonomous region during power shortages in winter.

Now, the region relies more on its natural resources to get green power.

Last year, the construction of dozens of green power supply projects, such as photovoltaic and wind power, was completed in Xizang.

In early October, 15 wind turbine generators with a single-unit capacity of more than 3 megawatts at Tsomey Drigu wind farm in Shanhan were successfully connected to the grid for power generation. Some are 3.6-MW wind turbines, currently the largest single-unit capacity in operation in China's high-altitude areas.

During the peak period of power consumption from this winter to next spring, the region will have 1.39 million kilowatts of photovoltaic power, 100,000 kW of wind power, and 1.12 million kilowatt-hours of energy storage projects connected to the grid together, according to the State Grid Tibet Electric Power Co Ltd.

Mei Fangquan, director of the

regional energy administration, said that the region will continue to promote the large-scale transformation of power systems and a high proportion of new energy.

Following the fast development of the clean energy industry, Xizang has drawn many enterprises from East China.

Song Huihua came to Xizang in 2018 and established an energy technology company, which is part of the Unbeatable Group headquartered in East China's Jiangsu province.

The company started a heating device business via the region's abundant solar energy resources, as its capital city, Lhasa, enjoys more than 3,000 hours of sunshine annually. "It is an ideal place to develop solar energy for heating, bringing lower costs for the company," Song said.

So far, the company's products, such as ceramic solar power heaters and the plateau heating bed system, can be found in high-altitude areas across all prefectural-level areas of the region, providing heating for more than 100,000 residents.

"The application of heating technology with clean energy is chang-

ing people's lives on the plateau," said Li Xiuyu, head of the regional department of housing and urban development.

In Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, plentiful power supply from new energy has also attracted some companies of energy-consuming industries to transfer from the eastern areas.

As of Dec 10, Xinjiang had added more than 20.1 million kW of new energy installed capacity last year, and the new grid-connected installed capacity ranked first in the country in 2023, according to the State Grid Xinjiang Electric Power Co Ltd.

Xinjiang's installed power capacity from new energy sources has surpassed 62 million kW. Among them, the installed capacity of wind and photovoltaic power goes beyond 31 million kW and 30.6 million kW, respectively.

Ruihao, a textile company in Xinjiang, which is part of an industrial science and technology group headquartered in Shanghai, built a cotton textile factory in Shache county of Xinjiang's Kashgar prefecture.

"We can combine the advantages

of talent and the financial environment in Shanghai and the abundant raw materials and energy in Xinjiang to create opportunities for the enterprise's development," said Zhou Yuanping, general manager of the company.

According to Zhou, the industrial electricity cost in Shache county is between 0.35 yuan (5 US cents) and 0.38 yuan per kWh, about half that in Shanghai.

In Southwest China's Sichuan province, which is rich in hydropower resources, electricity from clean energy is continuously transmitted to Jiangsu, Zhejiang and other places in the Yangtze River Delta region to ensure economic development and meet people's daily demand.

The Baihetan hydropower station, the world's second-largest in total installed capacity, which became fully operational in December 2022, had generated 100 billion kWh of electricity by Oct 12.

Baihetan and five other mega hydropower stations on the Yangtze River form the world's largest clean energy corridor. They are expected to generate 300 billion kWh of electricity annually, reducing coal con-



A wind farm in Nagchu county, Xizang autonomous region, is seen in November. cctv

sumption by over 90 million metric tons and carbon emissions by over 240 million tons.

According to Sichuan's power grid development plan for 2022-25, the province will also accelerate the construction of the integrated renewable energy development base of hydropower, wind power and solar power on the upper reaches of the Yangtze River and promote the development of biomass and geothermal energy in

line with local conditions.

The National Energy Administration said last month that China's renewable energy capacity had surpassed thermal power for the first time, constituting more than half of the country's installed power generation capacity. The installed power generation capacity of renewable energy totaled 1.45 billion kW by late 2023.

XINHUA

COMMENT

Editorials

Visit sign of friendly ties with Maldives not an attempt to steal India's thunder

President of the Republic of Maldives Mohamed Muizzu is paying a state visit to China from Monday to Friday. He is the first head of state to visit China in 2024.

What makes this visit notable is the fact that he is the first president of the archipelagic country in the Indian Ocean to make China a destination of his official visits after his election before India, as his seven predecessors had done after being elected head of state.

This may become something some other countries with ulterior motives try to make an issue of to estrange China from India.

However, if there is any political message this visit may send, it is that the government of this Indian Ocean country does not want to get involved in any geopolitical game, and it does not want to take sides in any geopolitical rivalry.

President Muizzu has emphasized his intention to work closely with all countries, including India. The Maldives is too small, he says, to take sides in a "geopolitical rivalry between bigger nations".

It is natural that the Chinese leader should extend an invitation for the Maldivian president to visit, because the country is one of the major destinations for Chinese tourists. Under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, the China-Maldives Friendship Bridge, or Sinamale Bridge, the first cross-sea bridge in the Maldives was built, and the 2-kilometer-long bridge makes it possible for

locals and tourists to travel between the two islands within five minutes. The initiative has also enabled the Maldives to build affordable housing projects and renovate the country's international airport.

The cooperation between China and the Maldives is an example of how the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative has promoted ties between countries on the basis of equality and mutual benefit.

In developing relations with all countries, China has long upheld the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence: mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual nonaggression, noninterference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence.

With these principles, China has never and will never attach any political conditions when developing relations with other countries. This conforms to what the building of a community with a shared future for mankind entails.

Multilateralism and globalization are what China pursues in developing its relations with other countries. China will never seek hegemony however strong its economy and however powerful its congregate strength become. To suggest that China is developing relations with the Maldives in order to estrange it from India is a malicious smear. But such bad-mouthing of China has become day-to-day occurrence, requiring little to feed the rumor mill.

Order on China-Myanmar border shared concern

Strengthening border security and maintaining the stability of the border have always been a top priority in the cooperation between China and Myanmar, as it has a huge bearing on the well-being of the people of both countries.

Thus it came as no surprise that during the meetings between Vice-Foreign Minister Sun Weidong and Myanmar leader Min Aung Hlaing and other senior officials, during Sun's three-day visit to the country that ended on Saturday, the two sides pledged that they will jointly maintain peace and stability across the border, continue to build the China-Myanmar economic corridor to promote mutual economic and social development, and cooperate to combat cross-border crimes such as telecom fraud, and jointly promote regional peace, tranquility, development and prosperity.

A similar message was conveyed when State Councilor and Minister of Public Security Wang Xiaohong made a video call with Myanmar Union Minister for Home Affairs Yar Pyae on the weekend, during which they vowed to deepen law enforcement to safeguard security and stability in the border areas, particularly by cracking down on telecom and online fraud cases. The stepped-up contacts follow a series of disruptive events including armed conflict near the China-Myanmar border that have posed a threat to people's safety.

In the latest development, five people were

injured last week by artillery shells fired during fighting between government and rebel forces that fell on a small town on the Chinese side of the border, prompting the Foreign Ministry to lodge a protest with "the relevant parties", while urging them to "stop fighting and take measures to prevent the recurrence of such vicious incidents".

Such remarks should not fall on deaf ears, because the determination of the Chinese government to safeguard the lives and property of the Chinese people should not be underestimated.

This has been evidenced in the joint operations China and Myanmar have conducted in recent months to crack down on the illegal activities along the border where tens of thousands Chinese people have been trapped and forced by criminal gangs to carry out scams targeting Chinese people via the internet.

More than 31,000 suspected fraudsters had been extradited to China by the end of November, including three group leaders who were on the most-wanted-list of the Chinese public security organs, with the Chinese police issuing a new batch of arrest warrants last month for 10 alleged "ring-leaders" of online scam syndicates.

It will likely not be long before order is restored in the border areas as China and Myanmar join hands to combat cross-border crimes and internet scams in their pursuit of a China-Myanmar community with a shared future.

US making miscalculation by not reining in Israel

As long as the United States does not adjust its stance and continues to give one-sided support to Israel in the Gaza Strip conflict, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will likely be greeted with cold shoulders during his ongoing seven-day visit to the Middle East.

As of Monday, the conflict in Gaza had dragged into its fourth month, having claimed more than 22,000 lives and creating a grave humanitarian crisis in the Palestinian enclave. The rising death toll and worsening sufferings of people in Gaza are primarily attributable to Washington's unconditional support for Tel Aviv's continuing military operations that have gone far beyond "self-defense".

Were it not for the timely and sustained military and financial assistance provided by the US, much of which the Joe Biden administration has provided by bypassing congressional approval, Israel would not have been able to carry out its campaigns on the scale and with the intensity it has for so long.

Had the US not vetoed or obstructed relevant proposals of the international community, the United Nations Security Council would have been able to pass a resolution calling for a cease-fire, and gained the authority to oversee the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza.

If the US had not sent at least two aircraft carrier strike groups to the Middle East soon after the conflict broke out in a move to protect Israel, not from Hamas, but its angry neighbors, Tel Aviv would not have been able to carry out its military campaign in the Gaza Strip, which some have described as genocide and ethnic cleansing, in defiance of other countries' strong

opposition. That around 140 UN work staff have been killed in the conflict in Gaza over the past more than three months exposes how helpless Palestinian civilians are in the face of the ruthless offensive by Israel.

Were it not for the US' acquiescent indulgence of Tel Aviv, some Israeli politicians would not have had the audacity to suggest that the Palestinians in Gaza and even beyond should be relocated somewhere else, and Tel Aviv would not have opened new fronts in Lebanon, Syria, Judea and Samaria (the West Bank), Iraq, Yemen and Iran, as its defense chief admitted shortly before Israel pulled some of its troops out of northern Gaza.

Blinken has visited the Middle East three times before over the past three months. It is a pity that he is still not there to try and broker a cease-fire.

As a matter of fact, what the Biden administration is concerned with most is by no means the civilians in Gaza or even the Israeli hostages taken by Hamas, but the expansion of Gaza conflict into one that is uncontrollable while the conflict between Ukraine and Russia that it has orchestrated shows no sign of a quick victory of its proxy.

With Israel taking advantage of that and the unwavering support it is being given by the Biden administration, there are signs indicating the conflict in Gaza is swiftly spilling over across the whole of the Middle East after Hamas' senior leaders were killed by drone strikes in Lebanon, deadly explosions were set off in Iran, and US targets came under intensive attacks in Iraq, Syria and the Red Sea.

The worsening situation in the Middle East is another bloody mess of the US' making.

Song Chen



Opinion Line

Excessive dollar debt major risk to economic security and recovery

The total debt of the US federal government exceeded \$34 trillion for the first time as of Jan 2, only three and a half months after it topped \$33 trillion, and five years earlier than the Congressional Budget Office had predicted.

The total debt is more than 120 percent of the GDP of the United States, and if every US family contributes \$1,000 a month, the debt would take 22 years to pay off. Many people cannot help but wonder how did the US build up such a huge debt?

In order to fund its ever-growing fiscal deficit, the US government has long issued treasury bonds, and because of low borrowing costs, the "debt snowball" has become bigger and bigger. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic further plunged the US economy into a predicament. To spur economic recovery, the US government increased its debt issuance. At the same time, in order to curb inflation, the US

Federal Reserve has raised interest rates time and again, further increasing the debt repayment costs for the US government. This, coupled with higher government spending and lower tax revenues, has led to the continuous expansion of the US debt.

Analysts predict that based on the current trends, the US government will have more than \$2 trillion new debt each year, and considering the bitter dogfight between the two parties over budgetary issues and the government's lack of means to address them, the US' debt problem will continue worsening.

According to the US Congressional Research Service, since the end of World War II, Congress has adjusted the debt ceiling hundreds of times to prevent a government shutdown due to insolvency, often leaving it until the last minute. This not only causes serious turmoil in the financial markets, but also rais-

es doubts about the ability of the US government to pay debts. Fitch Ratings downgraded the US' sovereign credit rating.

The record high of the US debt has hit and the risk of default are bound to affect foreign investors' confidence in the US economy. If investors reduce their holdings of US treasury bonds, the dollar will face depreciation pressures, which will further aggravate the US government's debt repayment burden and financing difficulties. In the context of the looming debt crisis, the US will have to cut government spending on the programs related to people's livelihood.

The failure to resolve many of its deep contradictions in the economy has caused repeated occurrence of the debt crises in the US. This has not only brought hidden dangers and instability to US society, but also brought more uncertainties to the world.

— CHINA MEDIA GROUP

Chinese EV charge driven by battery technology

From January to November 2023, China exported 4.41 million automobiles, a year-on-year growth of 58.4 percent, surpassing the 3.99 million of Japan.

What some Western media outlets and politicians have noticed is that BYD and other Chinese EV makers enjoy a big battery advantage that enables them to win the price battle. The Financial Times article that called Chinese EVs "a challenge" has to admit that BYD's "threat" comes from "its expertise in producing lithium-based batter-

ies, the most expensive single part of an EV".

The entry of cost-effective Chinese EVs into the European market means European governments are caught in a dilemma between encouraging tram consumption and protecting domestic car companies.

The European Union and the United States are seeking to weaken the competitiveness of Chinese EVs through subsidies and tariff policies. In October, the European Commission launched an investigation against Chinese EVs.

US President Joe Biden signed the Inflation Reduction Act in 2022, which includes billions of dollars in purchase subsidies for non-Chinese EVs and he is reportedly considering additional tariffs on Chinese EVs.

Instead of blaming Chinese EV makers for having honed their competitive edge, Western media and politicians should seek to spur their enterprises to improve their technologies so they can compete fairly in the market.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Smug lauding of double standard on anti-graft

To mark International Anti-Corruption Day on Dec 9, the Joe Biden administration last month released A Proclamation on Suspension of Entry as Immigrants and Nonimmigrants of Persons Enabling Corruption, a fact sheet on US Leadership in the Fight Against Global Corruption, as well as a statement Promoting Accountability for Corruption Globally.

Washington has issued many such documents over the past 20 years praising the United States' zero-tolerance to global corruption and its commitment to promoting governance transparency and justice.

But no matter how the US tries to portray itself a leader in the fight against global corruption, it cannot cover up the fact that it has been a haven for those engaged in corruption around the world.

As the United Nations has

stressed, corruption has negative impacts on every aspect of society and is profoundly intertwined with conflict and instability, jeopardizing social and economic development and undermining democratic institutions and the rule of law and thus should be dealt with through concerted international efforts that prioritize professionalism, justice and neutrality.

However, the US binds "national security" and "value diplomacy" with its work with other countries to hunt down those wanted for corruption that have fled to the US or elsewhere in the world. Taking advantage of the global anti-corruption cooperation, the US practices its customary "long-arm jurisdiction" to interfere in other countries' judicial work and internal affairs, and maximize the US' "national interests" at the expense of violating

international laws.

If the US government thinks those engaged in corruption fleeing to the US can promote US interests, they will be given safe haven. That explains why most corrupt officials from other countries regard the US as their first choice when planning their escape. The vast majority of foreign corrupt individuals and their immediate family members can even obtain permanent residence through various means, and even US citizenship.

Even if the US government agrees to hand over a small number of these people to their home countries, it often takes the lion's share of the illegal money the corrupt individuals have transferred to the US before turning them over.

The double standard of the US on the global anti-corruption cooperation is clear.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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COMMENT

Wu Ge

Petty corruption not trivial in anti-graft war

Anti-corruption supervisory bodies at all levels intensified the campaign against corruption in 2023, achieving new success and advancing the comprehensive and strict governance of the Communist Party of China.

A prominent feature of the anti-corruption campaign in 2023 was the drive to eradicate corruption in specific industries, systems and regions. Strict measures were taken to uproot corruption in sectors such as financing, state-owned enterprises, healthcare, sports, grain procurement and sales, rural vitalization, tobacco and falsification of statistics. This shift from individual cases to eradication of corruption and improving governance in specific sectors marked a significant advancement in the fight against corruption.

Another distinctive aspect of the 2023 anti-corruption drive was the resolute crackdown on new and covert forms of corruption. The anti-corruption campaign's focus on more complex issues revealed some new forms of corruption such as "false transactions", "shadow companies", and profiteering through "shadow shareholders". Supervisory bodies closely studied these new forms of corruption, and intensified efforts to eradicate them.

The rigorous scrutiny of "petty corruption" was a notable feature of the 2023 anti-corruption campaign. Petty corruption refers to corruption that directly affects the general public. Focusing on areas such as employment and entrepreneurship, education, healthcare, eldercare, social security, environmental protection, workplace safety, and food and drug safety, the authorities investigated corruption-related activities like embezzlement, misappropriation of funds, false

And by intensifying political inspections to eradicate corruption, the authorities will intensify the anti-corruption campaign, ensuring victory in the fight against corruption.

reporting and extortion. They made special efforts to address petty corruption affecting people's livelihoods, and launched a targeted campaign to uproot corruption in fields such as rural vitalization, by scrutinizing funds intended for agricultural development.

Special emphasis was placed on simultaneously investigating bribe takers and givers in 2023, and more efforts were made to punish bribery, focusing especially on recurrent, large-scale and politically damaging cases. Probing into the "blacklist" system for bribe givers, supervisory bodies handled 12,000 bribery cases in the first three quarters of 2023, 2,365 individuals were referred to the procuratorial authorities.

While global collaboration in the fight against corruption was deepened, in order to pursue fugitives, 1,278 individuals were repatriated to China, including

140 Party members and State officials, and 48 individuals with "red notices" from January to November 2023. Also, about 2.91 billion yuan (\$405 million) was recovered.

Besides, the Belt and Road Initiative was leveraged to promote clean business operations, exemplified by hosting the thematic forum on Clean Silk Road during the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation.

Adhering to the eight-point agenda to improve Party and government conduct, the Party acted on its commitment to rectify the "four undesirable work styles": formalities for formalities' sake, bureaucratism, hedonism and extravagance. In particular, efforts were made to address the problems of formalism and bureaucratism, rectifying the mechanical implementations of policies and the arbitrary use of power. And while investigating and addressing the root causes of corruption, the authorities focused on regional, sectoral and phase-specific characteristics, so as to solve the recurring problems.

The revised Regulations of the CPC Disciplinary Action was issued in December 2023 to ensure the Party's disciplinary measures are implemented to strengthen internal supervision and use accountability tools to ensure Party committees at all levels shoulder their responsibilities.

The scope and depth of inspections, too, were expanded in 2023, with

increased focus on younger cadres, and early interventions to prevent corruption and strengthen governance, with the measures promoting a clean culture in the new era and especially emphasizing on family values, prompting people to reject corruption and help foster a wholesome ethical environment.

Throughout 2023, supervisory bodies promoted clean governance while cracking down on corruption. In the first three quarters, they handled 1.28 million leads, initiated 470,000 cases and disciplined 405,000 individuals — these figures were noticeably higher than those for 2022.

This year, too, supervisory bodies at all levels will adopt a strict stance against corruption, taking stringent measures to build an ethical atmosphere, and intensifying the anti-corruption campaign in key areas to eradicate petty corruption.

In 2024, while comprehensively enforcing the eight-point decision remains an ongoing and essential task, greater efforts will be made to strengthen the Party's disciplinary structure. And by intensifying political inspections to eradicate corruption, the authorities will intensify the anti-corruption campaign, ensuring victory in the fight against corruption.

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Kang Bing

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New efforts and better services good for eldercare

Our community service center released a notice on its WeChat account recently, informing those above the age of 80 to apply for an emergency call device at home. The device and installation will both be free of cost, and it's up to the aged people to decide if they want to install one at home, the notice said.

Although still "too young" to be eligible for the free service, I welcome the move by the Beijing local authorities to ensure the elderly people receive better old-age care services. I welcome the move also because I can expect a more mature eldercare service if I need a stick or wheelchair to move around in the future.

By the end of 2023, the number of people in China aged 60 or above was 280 million — more than the total population of Indonesia, the world's fourth most populous country. With the aging population increasing by more than 10 million every year, taking good care of the elderly is becoming a challenge for governments at all levels.

The Chinese people still take it for granted that they will spend their old age with their children and grandchildren. But now that families are becoming smaller — averaging 2.62 individuals per family in 2021 — more and more elderly people live alone. And even if people visit their elderly parents regularly, the fact that they are mostly the only child of the family makes it difficult for them to tend to all the needs of their parents, not to mention their grandparents.

Understandably, the promotion of the new business model requires big investments, huge human resources and wide publicity to make it successful.

In rural areas where couples usually have more than one child, the elderly are happy to live with the family of their children, who, to earn more, generally migrate to cities and towns and visit their parents only during the Spring Festival holidays — an occasion from traditional family reunion.

Shifting to old-age homes can be a choice for the aged, though one has to have a fat wallet to afford a bed or a room in an old-age home, because it could cost up to 10,000 yuan (\$1,406.82) per month, far more than the average pension elderly people get. Old-age homes today have more than 8 million beds. But since about 10 percent of the elderly people, according to surveys, prefer to stay in old-age homes, the demand for beds/rooms in such homes is several times higher than supply.

Although the government has expedited the construction of old-age homes to meet the increasing demand, the officials at different levels have realized that it's a mission impossible to provide enough beds for all the elderly people.

Studies conducted in different regions of China show that the best eldercare model is neither the traditional home-stay option nor the old-age home arrangement but rather a mixture of the two. If governance is strengthened and arrangements improved, the elderly people can stay in their familiar homes and be taken care of by eldercare professionals from local community centers and some companies that provide all the eldercare services one can think of.

My community's offer of installing emergency call devices for those advanced in age is part of the local government's efforts to promote the new eldercare model. The model, also called the one-button model, enables an elderly person to get the necessary support any time he/she needs. By pressing a button on the device, one can seek immediate help, from calling an ambulance to getting someone to come and trim your nails, from ordering a meal or medicines to getting someone for a massage or simply to chat.

These are paid services and a senior citizen can purchase them if he/she can afford it. Once established, it will become a major sector employing millions of people, and thus reduce the unemployment rate. In fact, many medical colleges are already enrolling more students in the eldercare service major.

Understandably, the promotion of the new business model requires big investments, huge human resources and wide publicity to make it successful. Difficult as it is, popularizing the new eldercare service model is probably the only practical option for China to address the problem of a rapidly rising aging population.



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

Maya Majueran

BRICS can help promote a fairer world order

BRICS is focused on building a fairer world order for the Global South. The United States and its Western allies have long dominated the world order, imposing their own values and policies on the rest of the world in the name of promoting "democracy" and "defending" human rights while smearing countries whose political systems are different from theirs. Worse, they have been bullying some emerging market and developing economies, forcing them to take sides in disputes with countries that don't adhere to the Western-centric ideology and policies.

There is no justification for killing innocent civilians, whether by Hamas or Israeli forces. Both Hamas and Israeli forces should be condemned for their actions. However, the Global South has been witness to the US' double standard, as seen in its support for Israel's invasion of the Gaza Strip despite pressuring the Global South earlier to take sides and condemn Russia for its actions in Ukraine.

The US even vetoed a United Nations Security Council draft resolution for an immediate humanitarian cease-fire in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Thirteen Security Council members voted in favour of a brief draft resolution put forward by the United Arab Emirates, while the United Kingdom abstained. Clearly, war is a business for some Western countries

These are the prime reasons why many emerging market economies have been calling for global trade to be conducted in currencies other than the dollar.

which spend hundreds of billions of dollars to advance their interests both at home and abroad.

In contrast, China, through its Global Security Initiative, has taken multiple steps to fulfil its commitment to global peace and sustainable development. It is due to the arduous efforts of China that Iran and Saudi Arabia re-established diplomatic ties on March 10, 2023, seven years after severing ties.

The Global South wants to improve the existing world order because it is unfair and Western-centric. With the reform of the world order high on its agenda, the BRICS member states, which now comprise the five original BRICS members (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and five new members (Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE). At the last BRICS Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa, in August

2023, the original BRICS leaders admitted six new members — effective from Jan 1, 2024 — but Argentina recently announced it would not join BRICS now.

The BRICS member states together accounted for more than 40 percent of the global population and over 25 percent of global GDP. With five new members, BRICS will further counterbalance the G7's global influence as its share of global GDP will increase to 36 percent while it will account for nearly half of the world's population.

With more than 30 economies ready to deepen relations with the grouping, BRICS is committed to strengthening the Global South coalition as a collective force and upholding multipolarism in order to help establish a world order that is not dominated by the US and its allies.

The inclusion of five new members will add to BRICS' weight, extend its global influence and strengthen trade ties with a wide range of emerging market and developing economies by establishing a fair payment system which cannot be exploited by the US and its Western allies.

The weaponization of the US dollar has helped Washington maintain its global economic and geopolitical supremacy. The US has imposed economic sanctions on nearly 40 countries, including Cuba, Russia, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Iran and Venezuela, apart from levying sanctions, punitive tariffs and

export controls measures on China, affecting nearly half of the world's population and causing untold hardships to ordinary people in those countries, thus hampering their economic growth. These are the prime reasons why many emerging market economies have been calling for global trade to be conducted in currencies other than the dollar.

If BRICS' plan to adopt a common currency to conduct global trade is successful, it will have a huge impact on the US dollar as a default international currency, because the 10 member states of BRICS account for 36 percent of global GDP. In fact, a common BRICS currency could be a game-changer; it could break the dollar's global hegemony and make it easy for emerging economies to conduct free trade in currencies other than the dollar.

Whether the US and its Western allies like it or not, the world order is changing, and the Global South is emerging as a key player in international relations. So the US and its Western allies should heed the Global South's concerns and help build a global governance system and financial architecture which benefits all.

The author is a director of BRISL, an independent and pioneering Sri Lankan-led organization, with strong expertise in BRI advice and support.
The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

GLOBAL VIEWS

HU BINGCHUAN

Road to zero hunger

Food security in China and the world in 2023 and outlook for 2024

China's grain output rose to a record high of 695.41 million metric tons in 2023, the ninth consecutive year China has registered a grain harvest of over 650 million tons and the 20th consecutive bumper harvest year.

Such a remarkable achievement should be attributed to the high attention paid by the Chinese government to food security and its constant efforts to ensure food security. By promoting high-standard farmland construction, strengthening the protection and improvement of farmland quality, implementing the Seed Industry Revitalization Action Plan and advancing agricultural innovations, China has been increasing its grain production capacity and disaster resistance and mitigation capacity, so as to continuously enhance the nation's agricultural productivity.

In the years from 2012 to 2022, Chinese farmland affected by natural disasters declined from 25 million hectares to 12 million hectares, and the crop disaster area decreased from 11 million hectares to 4 million hectares, a testament to the effectiveness of the implemented policies.

China also ensures a stable supply and prices in the grain market by advancing the circulation system, optimizing the supply chain management, and improving the emergency grain security mechanisms.

In addition to the domestic bumper harvests, China is the world's largest importer of agricultural products. It purchases grain and farm product supplies in the global market. In the first 11 months of 2023, the country imported 51.22 million tons of

grains, up by 2 percent year-on-year, and the import of soybeans hit a whopping 89.63 million tons, surging by 13 percent year-on-year. These imports are a supplement to domestic production. China's food security has actually been well safeguarded.

From a global perspective, the food security situation across the world improved in 2023. According to the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023, a report released by the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization, the increase in global hunger observed in the past two years has stalled and about 3.8 million fewer people were suffering from hunger in 2022 than in 2021.

With the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global food security is gradually improving. The balance between the supply and demand of products such as oil, sugar, meat and dairy is also improving. As grain supply further increases and the food market gradually recovers, the food security situation around the world is expected to further improve.

However, we should also be fully aware that challenges to global food security and uncertainties still exist.

First, severe humanitarian crises persist amid the rising geopolitical tensions. These geopolitical tensions across the world have long persisted. The frequent occurrence of political disputes and armed conflicts have wreaked havoc on local agricultural production and resulted in waves of refugees, undermining global food security.

Second, the emergence of unilateralism across the world has increased the difficulty of international agricultural cooperation.

Under the dual impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine crisis, many countries have unilaterally adopted restrictive trade measures, which have dealt heavy blows to the global agricultural supply chain. In 2023, India announced a ban on some rice exports, pushing up the global rice prices and putting more economic pressure on rice-importing countries.

Third, some global investors are speculating on food prices to seek exorbitant profits out of hunger.

The FAO Cereal Price Index rose sharply to 170.1 points in March 2022 in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine crisis, soaring by 17 percent compared with the previous month. Although some price fluctuations triggered by market anxiety are normal, overly speculative activities are clearly aimed at reaping profits.

Looking at global food security in 2024, the shortfall in agricultural products created by the Russia-Ukraine crisis and India's natural disaster is likely to be offset by other countries' increased production, so that the global food market may maintain overall stability.

In the meantime, China will continue to attach great importance to agricultural development, consolidate the foundation for its agricultural development through constant efforts, and fully advance rural revitalization.

The Central Rural Work Conference held in Beijing in December 2023 pointed out that it is imperative to do a good job in the production of grain and other important agricultural products, keep sown areas at a stable level, increase the output per unit at a large scale, consolidate the results from the expansion



GUO DEWEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

of planting soybeans, explore ways to build mechanisms on interest compensation between major grain production provincial-level regions and those that need grain supplies from other provincial-level regions, and do a good job in disaster prevention, mitigation and relief in the agricultural sector, to ensure that the grain output for 2024 remains above 650 million tons.

From the perspective of achieving the grand goal of zero hunger by 2030, the current agricultural production level and grain output level are yet to pose a substantial threat to food security. However, we must be fully aware that currently, the main challenges exist in the global governance of food security and international cooper-

ation in this regard.

To cope with such challenges, the international community needs to work together to ease tensions and seek peaceful solutions to political contradictions and conflicts. In the meantime, we need to unwaveringly advance multilateralism and international cooperation in agriculture, strengthen regional and global information exchanges and policy communication and strive to reduce trade barriers, so as to achieve the optimized allocation of agricultural resources at a larger scale.

In addition, we should vigorously encourage government institutions and businesses to strengthen their information disclosure, increase the supply of authoritative information and enhance market transpar-

ency, in an attempt to prevent risks associated with excessive speculation in food markets.

China and other countries have made strenuous efforts to address the food security challenges. Facing the future, we need to further advance pragmatic cooperation, until we eventually achieve the goal of zero hunger for the whole of humanity.

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WU SHUXIAN

Sci-tech savvy

Belt and Road science and technology cooperation has made remarkable progress with great potential still to be tapped

The sci-tech cooperation between China and the Belt and Road countries and regions has been increasingly deepened, the cooperation fields have continuously expanded, and the cooperation platforms and projects have been promoted in an effective and pragmatic way.

By the end of 2021, China had established partnerships with more than 160 countries and regions in sci-tech fields, and signed 114 inter-governmental cooperation agreements. These collaborations cover key areas including medicine, agriculture, oceans, energy resources, public health, advanced manufacturing, high-end materials, and information technology. China is committed to promoting high-quality joint development of the sci-tech Belt and Road by strengthening common basic scientific research, and setting up joint research platforms, technology transfer and transformation centers, overseas science education hubs, and science and technology parks. These measures are also helping cultivate talents and drive win-win development. As the sci-tech cooperation between China and countries and regions participating in the BRI has continuously deepened, it has formed a multi-level, interactive and wide-ranging cooperation pattern.

Cooperation in basic science has continued to heat up. By analyzing those papers sponsored by the National Natural Science Foundation of China and the Chinese Academy of Sciences that were jointly written by researchers from China and participating countries and regions from 2010 to 2021, it can be seen that the number of cooperative papers increased significantly after 2013, highlighting China's notable achievements in supporting Belt and Road sci-tech cooperation. The papers mainly focus on materials science, electronic circuits, chemical physics, applied physics, chemistry, nanoscience and environmental science. These basic scientific research achievements contribute considerably to the science, technology, and industrial development of the participating countries and regions.

Joint laboratories have also enhanced the technological innovation capabilities of countries and



YIN YIYUAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

regions participating in the initiative. In 2017, China launched the Belt and Road Science, Technology and Innovation Cooperation Action Plan, focusing on cooperation with participating countries and regions in sci-tech and the humanities, joint laboratories, sci-tech parks and technology transfer. In order to meet the specific development needs of the participating countries and regions, the Ministry of Science and Technology of China approved the construction of 53 joint laboratories in line with the standards for National Key Laboratories in 2019, 2020 and 2021, respectively. These joint laboratories, such as the China-Kenya Joint Laboratory for Crop Molecular Biology, the China-Austria Joint Laboratory for Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Manufacturing and the Chinese-Egypt-

tian Renewable Energy Laboratory, covering multiple fields and they are the top platforms for China's sci-tech cooperation with foreign countries and regions. Through these joint laboratories, China has actively played a leading and radiation role in industry-academia-research integration and interaction, strengthened the sharing of its resources and complementary advantages, conducted exchanges and the training of sci-tech talents, and jointly tackled some of the major development challenges and problems faced by participating countries and regions, effectively enhancing their sci-tech innovation capabilities.

Technology transfer is of great significance in promoting the transformation and application of technological achievements among

participating countries and regions. In 2016, the Ministry of Science and Technology launched a Belt and Road coordination network for technology transfer, which helps to enhance the sci-tech innovation capabilities of the participating countries and regions through the Science and Technology Partnership Plan, and drives the sustainable growth of the regional economy. Currently, more than 10 technology transfer centers have been supported by the ministry, playing a significant role in building a technology cooperation network and developing technologies. The Chinese Academy of Sciences has also established a global Belt and Road technology transfer and transformation center, and set up a long-term and stable innovation cluster and strategic alliance. Practice has proven

that these centers have fully played a practical role in technology transfer and transformation between China and members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and countries in Central Asia, and among the Arab countries, and have become a key platform for sci-tech achievement application.

The Chinese Academy of Sciences has built a total of 10 science education centers in Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and South Asia by leveraging its strengths in teaching, research, as well as education and strategy consulting. These centers integrate sci-tech research, professional training, information dissemination and the transformation of sci-tech fruits, providing solid support for the Belt and Road construction. At the same time, the Chinese Academy of Sciences has worked closely with various ministries and Chinese embassies abroad to innovate its foreign aid mode that teaches people to fish instead of giving them fish.

In recent years, sci-tech innovation and cooperation under the framework of the BRI have faced several challenges. First, the complex international security environment and geopolitical conflicts have impacted on regional economic development and cooperation between countries, increasing the uncertainty of cooperation. Second, in terms of international innovative talent cultivation, Chinese universities still face some challenges in curriculum design, faculty building, textbook development, and overseas and international student education. Moreover, since the sci-tech innovation and cooperation network between China and the participating countries and regions is still in its initial phase of development, it hasn't sustained a stable trend for development, and both the depth and breadth of cooperation need to be further improved.

To better support high-quality growth, Belt and Road sci-tech cooperation should focus on the fol-

lowing four key aspects.

First, common basic scientific research should be consolidated and the original innovation capabilities should be enhanced. By launching a fund for basic research, participating countries and regions could be supported in carrying out cooperation on basic research without aiming at any specific applications, which would help improve their innovation capabilities.

Second, efforts should be made to strengthen the research and development of advanced and applicable technologies and to promote the industrial transformation of participating countries and regions. Many Belt and Road partners are facing the challenges of the depletion of fossil fuels, a low-end industrial structure, severe energy consumption and high greenhouse gas emissions, and have an urgent need for industrial transformation. China should intensify its efforts to promote joint research and the transfer of advanced technologies, help enhance the industrial structure and development of these countries and regions, and form new innovation chains and industry chains.

Third, China should cooperate with participating countries and regions to establish a cooperation mechanism for low-carbon technological innovation, build international technology platforms, especially in the fields of renewable energy, hydrogen energy, and carbon dioxide capture and utilization.

Fourth, cooperation on agricultural technology should be consolidated. Spanning Asia, Europe and Africa, countries and regions participating in the BRI boast rich land resources and diversified agricultural products. Meanwhile, it is necessary to improve the institutional mechanisms for international sci-tech innovation and cooperation, establish dynamic collaboration mechanisms for global scientists, and encourage enterprises and international organizations to participate in sci-tech cooperation.

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CULTURAL HERITAGE



Casting light into the shadows of the past



Discoveries reveal elaborate rituals for divine sacrifice, **Wang Ru** reports.

In Beijing, the Temple of Heaven has stood for centuries, silently standing in testament to Chinese people's awe of the divine and their sacrificial custom to the heaven in the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties — a custom that actually has a much longer history.

Ancient Chinese people believed that “the great things in a country are its sacrificial and military affairs”, as stated in *Zuo Zhuan* (The Commentary of Zuo), the first detailed historical annal in China, dating back to the 4th century BC.

Our understanding of ancient Chinese people's sacrificial rites has been enhanced thanks to the archaeological work taking place at the Xiazhan site in Baoji, Shaanxi province, since 2020. The dig has been carried out by the National Museum of China and the Shaanxi Academy of Archaeology, among others. The latest discoveries were announced at a news conference in December held by the National Cultural Heritage Administration.

More than 1,400 sacrificial relics have been found at the site, which covers an area of 230,000 square meters. Archaeologists have excavated 99 pits that date from the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC) to the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 24), and exhibited clear differences between them. The site is believed to be *mizhi*, a sacrificial site established by Duke Xuan of Qin state (ruler of the state over 675-664 BC) in 672 BC.

According to You Fuxiang, a researcher at the National Museum of China, the pits at the site mainly have three shapes, namely long-strip, rectangular and cave forms.

At the center of the site, there is an area where building materials are stacked, covering about 2,000 sq m. Various sacrificial pits are distributed around it.

The first one, a long strip, located on the eastern side of the site, dates back to the middle stage of the Spring and Autumn Period. Such pits range in length from about 10 to 100 meters, and often have the remains of cattle that were used as sacrificial offerings, the heads of

which point northward.

The rectangular pits, located at the west of the site and dating from the late Spring and Autumn Period to the Western Han Dynasty, contain mainly three types of remains, animals, chariots and model chariots.

The largest of them is 8.7 meters long and 7.9 meters wide, and has a depth of more than 12 meters. It fell victim to robbers, but archaeologists suggest that it would fit four chariots, based on its size.

Some chariot-related artifacts unearthed are similar to those discovered from the Tomb No 1 of the Duke of Qin in Baoji, where Duke Jing of the Qin state (ruler of the state over 576-537 BC) was buried. This means that some pits were contemporaneous with the tomb, says You.

“From the Warring States Period (475-221 BC) to the Qin (221-206 BC) and Han (206 BC-AD 220) dynasties, the chariot pits gradually shrank. The life-size chariots were later replaced by models. Moreover, jade artifacts like figures, arch-shaped items known as *huang* and various cylindrical *cong*, as well as arrowheads, began to be put in the chariot and it became a custom,” says You.

Pits of the third type were from the Warring States Period to the Western Han Dynasty. They often contained model chariots.

A large number of gold, jade and bronze chariots from the Spring and Autumn Period, jade artifacts, bronze chariots and crossbows, arrowheads, coins and architectural items from the Qin and Han dynasties have also been found at the site.

“Many of the gold and jade artifacts are distinctively Qin-style, like gold tigers and birds, or have Qin-featured patterns, like that of a snake,” says You.

The Chinese character *mi* can be seen when two pottery pieces unearthed from the site are pieced together. Based on historical records, and the character, archaeologists infer that the area is indeed



mizhi, one of the five sacrificial sites near Yongcheng, one of the capitals of the Qin state in what is now Baoji.

The five places were jointly called *yongwuzhi* (five sacrificial places in the Yongcheng area), and were used to worship five mythical rulers who symbolize heaven. They were built one by one from the Spring and Autumn Period, and officially became a collective entity at the beginning of the Western Han Dynasty and functioned until its end.

Mizhi is the only one of the five sites of which there was a clear record of its specific location: to the south of the Weihe River. The site's location fits with this record, according to You.

Since 2015, an archaeological team started to carry out studies on the five sacrificial sites. Archaeologists have found four sacrificial sites in Baoji and excavated three of them, namely Xuechi, Wushan and Xiazhan, and suggest that they were all constituent parts of *yongwuzhi*.

The Xiazhan site is 21.8 kilometers from Yongcheng city ruins, 35 km from the Xuechi site, and 59 km from the Wushan dig.

Some chariot pits at Xiazhan are similar to those from the Xuechi and Wushan sites, says You.

“With the establishment of the Qin Dynasty, *yongwuzhi* upgraded from the sacrificial sites of a vassal state to places to worship heaven as a country, showing the develop-

ment of China's traditional ritual culture,” says You.

He adds that the custom was inherited by the Western Han Dynasty later.

When scholars conduct archaeological studies on settlement sites or city ruins of the Qin and Han dynasties, capitals, tombs and sacrificial sites are the three major elements they pay attention to.

That means the importance of sacrificial sites is not second to capitals or tombs, says Jiao Nanfeng, a researcher at the Shaanxi Academy of Archaeology.

Most of the sacrificial sites of the Qin and Western Han dynasties recorded in historical literature have been found, forming a complete sacrificial system of that time, Jiao says.

“So far, we have learned that the Qin people's sacrificial system mainly consisted of three types, one to worship ancestors, like the Majiazhuang ancestral temple ruins in the central area of Yongcheng city ruins, one to worship heaven like *yongwuzhi* and the last to worship mountains and rivers,” says Jiao.

“*Yongwuzhi*, represented by the Xiazhan site, was an important stage for rituals that worshipped heaven in ancient China,” he adds.

During the reign of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, from 141 to 87 BC, the status of Yongcheng and *yongwuzhi* gradually declined. And *yongwuzhi* was totally replaced by temples of heaven and earth in Chang'an, the capital at the time in what is now Xi'an, Shaanxi province, at the end of the Western Han Dynasty.

According to Jiao, although *yongwuzhi* ceased to function then, the content, form and central connotations of the sites remained and, in many facets, were developed during later dynasties, shown by the function of the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, where Ming and Qing emperors regularly went to worship heaven and pray for rain and a good harvest.

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Top left and right: Gold artifacts with snake and tiger motifs, unearthed from Xiazhan site in Baoji, Shaanxi province. **Clockwise from above left:** A jade artifact often used in rituals in ancient China. Two jade artifacts with beasts' faces. A cave-form sacrificial pit with model chariots. A sacrificial pit with animal remains. **Below:** An aerial view of the Xiazhan site. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Archaeologists unearth 7,000-year-old bottle

ZHENGZHOU — A rare type of bottle dating back more than 7,000 years has been unearthed at the Peiligang site in the city of Xinzheng, Central China's Henan province, providing archaeologists with the earliest dated artifact of its kind in China.

Bottles with this unusual shape, featuring a small mouth and pointed bottom, are among the representative artifacts of the Yangshao culture and have been unearthed at dwelling ruins, ash pits and burial

sites. There are various opinions regarding their function, including being considered a vessel for water collection, a brewing container or a burial item.

According to Li Yongqiang, associate researcher at the Institute of Archaeology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, a preliminary estimate of the newly discovered bottle's age puts it as approximately 7,700 years old. It is over 10 centimeters long, very compact and much smaller than the commonly seen

small-mouthed, pointed-bottomed bottles from the Yangshao culture period. The Yangshao culture, dating back 5,000 to 7,000 years, was a Neolithic culture that originated along the middle reaches of the Yellow River.

“This discovery provides fresh and crucial material evidence for exploring the origin and development relationship between the Peiligang culture and Yangshao culture,” says Li.

Li says that, in combination with

“This discovery provides fresh and crucial material evidence...”

Li Yongqiang, associate researcher at the Institute of Archaeology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

the prior discovery that the settlers of the Peiligang site had already learned how to use red yeast mold for fermentation and brewing wine, the newly discovered bottle could possibly have been a container used by the ancestors for making yeast.

In addition, archaeologists have discovered a large number of late Paleolithic stone artifacts, fragments of ostrich eggshells, pieces of red iron ore, and other items at the Peiligang site. This finding provides new material for the study of

major topics such as the late Paleolithic social landscape in the Central Plains region and the transition from the Paleolithic to the Neolithic.

The Peiligang site, dating back approximately 7,600 to 8,000 years, is a typical agricultural settlement site with an area of 50,000 to 60,000 square meters. It is renowned as one of the birthplaces of Chinese agricultural civilization.

XINHUA

LIFE

GIVING STORIES FLOW

A raft operator has earned acclaim by going beyond merely guiding passengers down the Jiuqu River to masterfully narrating the storied legacy of the Wuyi Mountains, **Yang Feiyue** reports in Wuyishan, Fujian.

Chen Jia's face was awash with a grin for all of the roughly 90-minute raft journey down the Jiuqu (Nine-bend) River that gurgles through a valley beneath the Wuyi Mountains in late December.

The air hung chilly in these highlands in Southeast China's Fujian province, but her smile remained warm, as she used a long bamboo pole to steer the raft while narrating to her five passengers.

Chen has navigated the river for more than two decades. She remained unruffled when the craft occasionally slapped out frothy sprays as it bounced and focused on telling her guests the stories behind attractions along the banks, especially rock formations that resemble humans, creatures or objects.

"That rock there resembles a shy turtle ... while legend says those two separated peaks in the distance are a mortal and fairy who engaged in forbidden love and were turned into stone," she tells those onboard.

Chen also knows what lies beneath the surface of the river, which runs from 3 to 30 meters deep along the 9.5-kilometer route.

"The greener the water, the deeper it is," she explains.

The ride has long remained a highlight of tours in the Wuyi Mountains. Mount Wuyi was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1999 for its cultural, scenic and biodiversity value.

Chen says about 9,000 visitors take the raft trips in the summer, when more than 20,000 visit the scenic area.

"Many guests have asked us to increase the raft tours, but we have to limit them to ensure the quality of their experiences," she says.

Her father was a raftsmen who took her down the river when she was a child.

"In retrospect, I think he might have wanted to show me how beautiful our hometown is," Chen says.

These experiences with her father inspired her to enroll in the bamboo-raft tour guide program at a local mountain-tourism vocational school in 1999.

"It was difficult at first. My hands got blood blisters," she recalls of working after graduation.

"There was extra physical labor. We had to harvest, skin and fire bamboo to make the rafts. And we had to disassemble them every time we finished the route and transport them back to the starting point."

But she'd feel happy when passengers complimented her on the service.

She points out there weren't many women doing the job until about a decade ago, so she often received extra attention.

"We girls wore blue clothes with floral patterns, and foreigners especially enjoyed taking photos of — and with — us," Chen says.

Her years on the job have given her the stamina to lead four tours over a 10-hour workday.

"The rafts have also been upgraded in recent years, so they're lighter and float better, and we don't have to put them together and take them apart now."

She has also developed a distinctive style that has made her a star guide, who's often nominated to serve important guests.

"When I first started, I thought it would suffice to just tell tourists the stories about the waters and mountains on both sides of the Jiuqu River," she says.

Now, she also incorporates ecological protection themes and shows how local people and authorities are translating these into wealth. She and her colleagues also

retrieve any litter they encounter during tours, she says.

"Over the past decade or so, we've been implementing the policy of returning farmlands to forests," she says.

"I see the water getting clearer and its volume increasing," Chen says.

She points out the improved environment has, in turn, enhanced the quality of another local treasure — tea.

Tea seeps into her narrations onboard the rafts, as do other local cultural legacies like Song Dynasty (960-1279) philosopher Zhu Xi's neo-Confucian thought, and numerous cliff carvings and hanging coffins dating back over 3,000 years.

Nearly 1.3 million travelers took the raft tours from January to November, a 36 percent increase over the same period of 2019, before the pandemic, says Zhang Ruicai, deputy general manager of Wuyi Mountains Tourism Development Co, which oversees the scenic area's operations. Business revenues reached nearly 150 million yuan (\$21 million) in the first 11 months of last year, up 43 percent over 2019, he adds.

The river route's nearly 800 bamboo-raft ride guides have each developed their own narration style.

"The content is different for each group of visitors," Chen says.

"We strive to tailor our explanations to their moods and incorporate elements they appreciate."

Chen has received zero complaints throughout her entire career, she says.

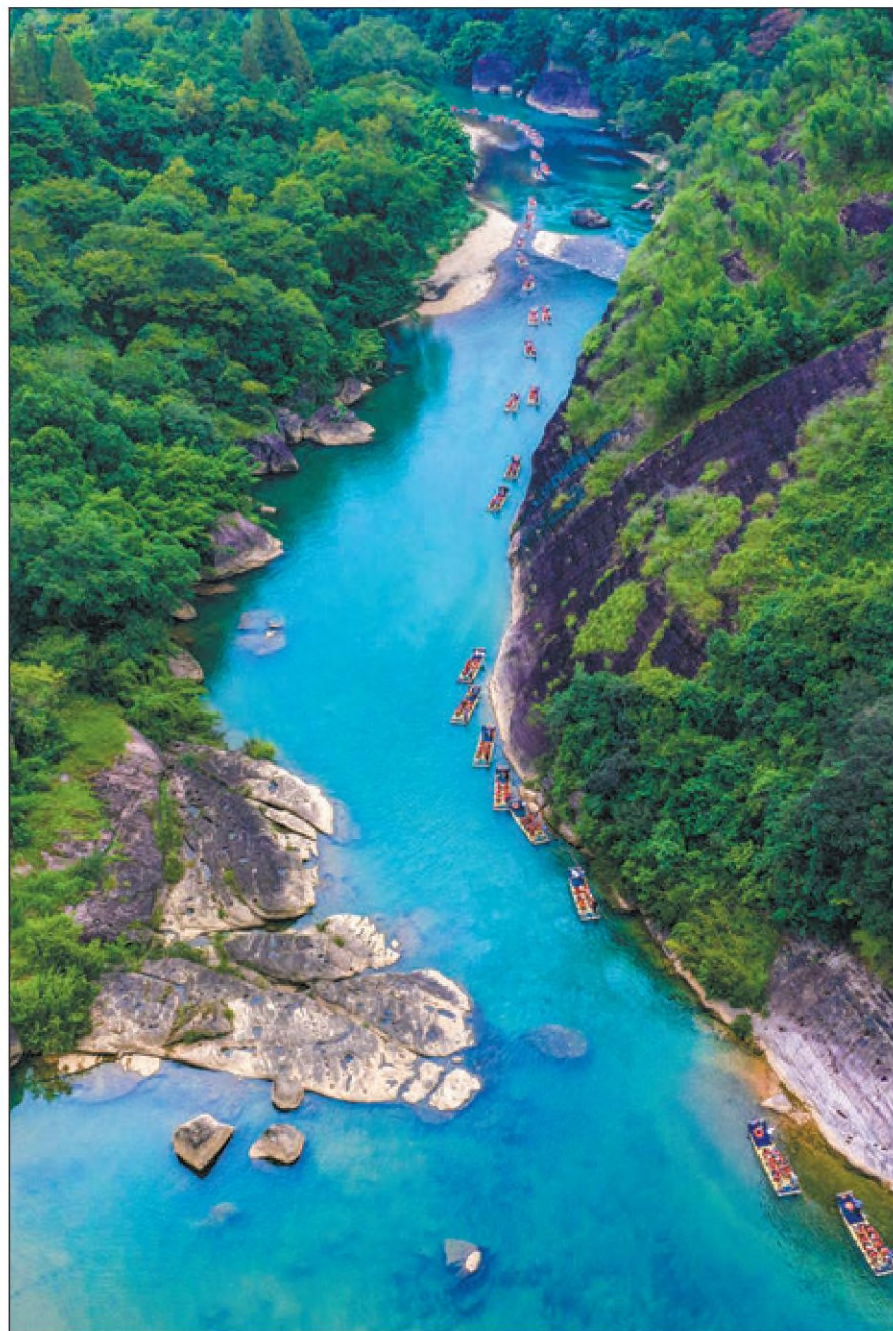
Her explanations are humorous and service is thoughtful, which has won recognition from guests from home and abroad, says her colleague, Zhu Jinxing.

"In the beginning, Chen's father held her hand, and she truly inherited essential (tour) narration skills," Zhu says.

"Chen is very adept at explaining human stories, landscapes and cliff carvings. She's insightful and culturally knowledgeable," Zhu says.

Chen was chosen to give a tour to President Xi Jinping during his visit to the national park in March 2021.

Local authorities have combined Xi's important instructions in such aspects as eco-civilization construction, the promotion of cultur-



Clockwise from top: Rafting the Jiuqu River offers a magnificent view of the green mountains and dramatic rocks in Wuyishan, Fujian province. Vistas of nature at its most alluring are among the highlights for rafters. Chen Jia trains her raft colleagues. PHOTOS BY PENG SHAN'AN, HUANG HAI AND QIU RUQUAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

al inheritance and rural vitalization with the latest local achievements in these areas to present tour-guide narrations and put together a team to share this with visitors to feel the beauty of the Wuyi Mountains.

Chen still has a thick notebook she saved from her student years

that's full of tips she used to develop her skills as a guide.

"I think what I need to improve is to be more patient with each group of guests and convey the landscape and culture of the Wuyi Mountains to them ... while emphasizing how we, the people of the Wuyi Mountains, protect this land," Chen says.

"I want to share this with them so that they not only marvel at the beauty of the Wuyi Mountains but also take this awareness back with them ... to protect their own lucid waters and lush mountains."

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A bird's-eye view of the jade-colored Jiuqu River at Wuyishan National Park. PENG SHAN'AN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Fijian student really treasures China's realities

SUVA — China showed Fijian Katriena Wong that seeing is believing.

"The real China that I saw with my own eyes was so different from what the Western media had been portraying for years," says Wong, who'd previously studied in China.

The Chinese government awarded her a scholarship in 2013. Wong studied the Chinese language at Central China Normal University in Wuhan, Hubei province, for a year, and then went to Shijiazhuang in Hebei province and completed her bachelor's in law at the Hebei University of Economics and Business in 2018.



The real China that I saw with my own eyes was so different from what the Western media had been portraying for years."

Katriena Wong, a Fijian manager of a Chinese company

"China was so vibrant and full of energy," Wong recalls. "What really struck me was the sheer scale of its infrastructure: glitzy skyscrapers, airports, malls, super-efficient transportation and convenient mobile payments."

Most of what she'd heard about China beforehand came from mainstream English-language media, which portrayed China as "rural," she says.

She visited several destinations, including Beijing and Shanghai and the Xinjiang Uygur and Inner Mongolia autonomous regions. She says she was impressed by the culture, people and landscapes.

"I really have wonderful memories of my visits. I always feel nostalgic about them," Wong says.

She especially appreciated how safe China is, "even at 2 am," and its clean streets and urban parks.

"We (Fijians) can learn a lot more from China," she says.

"We also hope to bring the good things we have learned back to Fiji and implement them in our society to modernize our own country."

Wong now works as a manager at Dingjin Real Estate Development Co and oversees Nausori Plaza, which is one of its largest investments in Fiji. It's the Nausori region's largest mall and will serve three bordering provinces.

She believes the challenging but high-quality education she received in China prepared her for the job market.

China's ambassador to Fiji, Zhou Jian, says around 300 Fijian students like Wong have studied in China through Chinese government scholarship programs since 1996.

Zhou says Fijians are becoming more interested in learning about China. Recently, many of the archipelagic nation's cabinet ministers, members of the parliament, government officials, entrepreneurs, young people and students have traveled to China.

Many of them told the ambassador these trips changed their perceptions.

"If you've never been to China, you should visit," Wong says. "It's the only way you will know what China truly is."

XINHUA

LIFE

Editor's note: More than a century ago, a number of US citizens began living in Kuliang, a famous summer retreat in Fuzhou, Fujian province, joining thousands of other foreigners. They blended with local Chinese, working and living in harmony with them. This page looks at Elyn MacInnis and her family's deep connection to Kuliang, and the essence of the human spirit, unity, love and deep-rooted heritage.

My China Album

Kuliang amity crosses borders, generations

Personal connection uncovers town's entwined histories between China, US

By MINGMEILI in New York
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Elyn MacInnis holds a pair of small slippers, about 5 centimeters long, with their red color slightly faded over time. Despite some wear on the soles, the insoles are still soft and elastic, sturdily constructed with no gaps at the seams.

The shoes were handcrafted by a Kuliang mother thread by thread in Fujian province for MacInnis' husband, Peter MacInnis, when he was a baby 75 years ago. Also, MacInnis' daughter had worn them, and MacInnis' newborn granddaughter would soon fit into the shoes.

"You can see her tiny, tiny stitches," Elyn, who is also the consultant for the Kuliang history and culture research organization, said as she caressed the shoes. "It's a wonderful memento, and also like a symbol of cool and spirit passing from generation to generation," she said.

The shoes journeyed across the ocean and time, symbolizing the family's connection and attachment to China, and especially Kuliang, the small town hidden in the mountains in the suburbs of Fuzhou, Fujian's provincial capital.

The MacInnis family has resided in cities including Nanjing, Beijing, Shanghai and Chongqing for almost 30 years since 1988. In the 1990s, Elyn impressed many Chinese students when she taught English with an engaging smile on a popular show

aired by China Central Television. However, it was not until 2015 that MacInnis first visited Kuliang.

This visit ignited Elyn's interest in researching the area as she explored stories forgotten by time and distance, searching for the narratives of old Kuliang residents and their descendants who had traveled back from China to the United States and were now scattered across different states. Through old maps, archives, photographs and memories, she began piecing together these disconnected tales, reconnecting them once more.

"When Elyn first began her interest in Kuliang, it was because that was part of my babyhood," Peter said. "But as she researched and met people — the true story of Kuliang, the people in Kuliang, the Chinese people and foreigners came out — it was very exciting to see what they did. That's really what has motivated Elyn, not just looking for a house or a pair of shoes, but actually looking at the people who lived there and what they did, their relationship with China, in particular, the friendship and caring that was going both ways back and forth."

Living in harmony

Kuliang, a summer resort from the late 1800s until 1949, attracted foreigners such as merchants, businesspeople, missionaries and consular officials who lived harmoniously with local residents. At its peak, the small town had 330 villas, with a sanitarium hospital, a post office, grocery stores,

a church and a clubhouse equipped with tennis courts and a stone-built swimming pool.

Beneath the lush cedar trees and morning fog shrouding the mountaintop, children enjoyed their childhoods in Kuliang, and deep-rooted friendships blossomed between the local Kuliang residents and the foreign families.

Although Peter initially could not quite remember the specifics of his infancy in Kuliang, with the assistance of a local he eventually located the site of his old family home, the "Skye", originally an island in Scotland where Peter's family came from.

"The same mountains, the same rise in the hill, the same view out toward the (Minjiang) River and then back toward the ocean," Peter said as he remembered the place of his birth and childhood.

Peter's father, Donald MacInnis, first arrived in China in 1939 to teach at a high school in Fuzhou. During World War II, he returned to Fujian with the Flying Tigers — a formidable group of US volunteer fighter pilots who from 1941 to 1942 helped China fight the Japanese invasion.

Following the war, Donald returned to China and continued teaching at Fukien Christian University in Fuzhou, where Peter was born. In 2004, at the age of 84, he made another trip to China to teach. Donald passed away in the US a year later, and in his will he expressed a wish for half of his ashes to be scattered in the Minjiang River.

"As I was growing up, we (Peter and his brother Bruce) would ask my father. My father had slides, and he put the projector on and put the slide



A group photo of Donald MacInnis, his wife Helen and son Bruce, and the faculty at Fukien Christian University in Fuzhou, Fujian province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Left: Helen MacInnis holds baby Peter in front of a house in Kuliang, Fuzhou.



Right: Donald MacInnis holds his granddaughters, Ai Zhong and Ai Hua, in Fuzhou in 1990.

up on the wall," Peter recalled. However, it was with Elyn that a deeper connection to the town emerged. Together, the couple began to gather "Friends of Kuliang", a group of individuals who shared similar family experiences to theirs.

Elyn and Peter crossed paths at Harvard University, where Elyn was studying religion but with a deep interest in China and Chinese culture, while Peter was majoring in East Asian studies.

As they found themselves in the same Chinese language class, working together on class assignments and school projects, Elyn gradually developed feelings for the "Chinese boy".

"You know, in our American way of thinking, wherever you're born and grow up, that's who you are. So he was Chinese! And I thought, oh, this is great," Elyn laughed and said. "When I was a child, all I wanted to do on a trip, you know, our family would take little trips, and all I wanted to do was go to Chinatown. I also want a Chinese baby. I don't know why, I was born to love China, an instinct."

Peter said with a smile, "Perhaps in a former lifetime, she was Chinese."

Uncovering narratives

The couple lived in China where they raised their daughters. Even after 50 years, they are still conducting research together on their topic of interest, delving into the cultural exchanges between China and the US, and uncovering the rich history and narratives of Kuliang.

"I'm the kite, and he's the string," Elyn described their collaborative work. "We are still doing our group project." While Elyn researched archives online, Peter scanned documents and conducted fact-checking.

Following their 2015 trip, the couple visited numerous libraries, gathered thousands of pieces of information and reached out to families who had lived in Kuliang.

"I wasn't looking for numbers," she said. Elyn is also working on a book that reports the story of Kuliang and the people-to-people friendship from the past to the present. "I was looking for quality of story, and I tried to find people whose families had stories to tell."

In June, Elyn returned to Kuliang to take part in the Bond with Kuliang: 2023 China-US People-to-People Friendship Forum, gathering "Kuliang's Friends" together, while also making new friends there.

"The Kuliang spirit represents 'peace, friendship and love,'" Elyn said, but she added two more key elements — understanding and respect — to the people-to-people exchanges through generations of many US families.



The red shoes are the same pair seen in the photo where Peter is on the back of his mother Helen, who holds Peter's brother, Bruce, by her side. MINGMEILI / CHINA DAILY



Donald MacInnis, a member of the Flying Tigers, plays the trumpet.

"The Kuliang spirit represents 'peace, friendship and love'."

Elyn MacInnis, an expert on Kuliang cultural studies



Elyn and Peter MacInnis at Donald MacInnis' cemetery in Fuzhou, where Donald's Chinese name is carved on the wall.

In November, Elyn met Chinese President Xi Jinping in San Francisco at a side event of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit. Xi, who worked in Fujian province from 1985 to 2002, had heard about the friendship of Kuliang and wrote a letter to her about her efforts in documenting and promoting such friendship.

"I don't remember exactly what I said," Elyn recalled. "We shook hands, and it was like a casual talk with an old friend as well."

Elyn said she was very happy when she heard President Xi and US President Joe Biden reached an agreement on strengthening cultural exchanges for younger children, and she said that is what she is trying to do — also pass the "Kuliang spirit" on to younger generations, not limited to families who

had lived in Kuliang but to the world as well.

"The most important thing is to have a relationship. As a child, it's a wonderful time to start a friendship and to be influenced by another country. The friendship has definitely passed from generation to generation," she said.

This is similar to how her father-in-law passed the connection to her and Peter, and how Elyn, in turn, passed that connection to her daughters, whose Chinese names are Ai Zhong and Ai Hua. Combined, they mean ai zhonghua, which translates into "love China".

"If China and the US can begin to make a beginning in this and carry it further, I think it will influence the other countries as well," Peter said.

Join hearts,
work together!



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