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Premier Li Qiang (right) shakes hands with Klaus Schwab, chairman of the World Economic Forum, during the opening of the 54th Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, on Tuesday. The event will run through Friday. MARKUS SCHREIBER / AP

Investing in China an opportunity, Li says at Davos

By CAO DESHENG
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Premier Li Qiang assured the world on Tuesday that the Chinese economy will grow steadily thanks to its sound and solid fundamentals in terms of an industrial base, production factors and innovation capacity, as well as its huge market.

When addressing the 54th Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Li called on enterprises from around the world to continue to invest in China, and said "choosing the Chinese market is not a risk, but an opportunity".

The Chinese economy is estimated to have grown around 5.2 percent in 2023, higher than the official target of 5 percent, Li said at the meeting, which is being attended by the global elite from the fields of politics, business, culture and civil society.

"The overall trend of long-term growth will not change. It will provide continuous and strong impetus to the development of the world," he said.

Noting that China has a mega market with rapidly unlocked demand, the premier said the nation is also cultivating large-scale new growth drivers in areas

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such as a new type of urbanization and green transition, which will provide broader space for boosting global trade and investment.

"No matter how the world changes, China will stay committed to the fundamental national policy of opening-up and open its door still wider to the world," he said. "We embrace investments from businesses of all countries with open arms."

China will steadily expand institutional opening-up in terms of rules, standards and management, continue to shorten the negative list for foreign investment, provide national treatment for foreign businesses, and keep fostering a market-oriented, law-based and world-class business environment, he added.

As the World Economic Forum's 2024 annual meeting is themed "Rebuilding Trust", the premier urged the international community to discard prejudices, bridge differences, treat each other with sincerity, and work as one in the same direction to tackle the trust deficit.

Li put forward a five-point proposal on rebuilding trust, enhanc-

ing cooperation and promoting world economic recovery, including strengthening macroeconomic policy coordination among nations and firmly upholding the multilateral trading system to build greater synergy for global growth.

In order to keep global industrial and supply chains stable and smooth, he called for strengthening industrial specialization and collaboration, as well as firmly advancing trade and investment liberalization and facilitation.

Efforts should be made to strengthen international exchanges and cooperation on science and technology, work together for an open, just and nondiscriminatory environment for the development of science and technology, and break the barriers impeding the flow of factors for innovation, he said.

After his address, Li answered questions from Klaus Schwab, founder and executive chairman of the World Economic Forum, on topics including artificial intelligence governance and the multilateral system. He said that true multilateralism should be built on basic norms governing international relations based on the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter.

"China neither walks away from

agreements nor pulls out of organizations; nor do we ask other countries to pick sides; and we have always been a staunch supporter of multilateralism," Li said.

Raymund Chao, chairman of PwC Asia Pacific and China, told China Daily that Premier Li's speech highlights the steady progress of the Chinese economy, which serves as a strong driving force for global economic recovery and growth.

In the face of global challenges such as AI technology disruption and climate change, it is crucial to strengthen cooperation and pursue mutual benefits in order to achieve sustainable development, Chao said.

He saw positively about the Chinese economy, saying that despite the complex development environment in China, the Chinese government is actively implementing macroeconomic policies to boost confidence and facilitate the transformation of the Chinese economy toward high-quality development.

"In 2024, the Chinese economy is expected to maintain a sustained upward trajectory, and the implementation of various measures will continue to contribute to global economic recovery," Chao said.

President sets key targets for financial sector

Xi emphasizes preventing risks, says regulation 'must have teeth and thorns'

By XU WEI
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President Xi Jinping set forth key targets on Tuesday for the nation's financial sector to follow a path of development with Chinese characteristics, stressing the need for the sector to better prevent and defuse risks and bolster institutional opening-up.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, said the nation's financial regulation must have "teeth and thorns" and remain sharp-edged.

He made the remarks while addressing a session on promoting the high-quality growth of the financial sector that was attended by provincial- and ministerial-level officials at the Party School of the CPC Central Committee in Beijing.

The session was held more than two months after the nation convened a tone-setting central financial work conference to outline plans for building up the sector.

Greater opening-up is needed to bolster the efficiency of and capacity for the allocation of financial resources and to build up the nation's global competitiveness and influence in rule-making, Xi told the senior officials.

Institutional opening-up must be prioritized to further open the financial sector, he said, adding that the nation must align its financial regulations with rules in high-standard international economic and trade agreements, streamline restrictive measures and enhance the transparency, stability and predictability of opening-up policies.

The president highlighted the need to standardize investment and

financing behaviors overseas and improve financial support for the joint building of the Belt and Road.

It is important to enhance the connectivity of domestic and foreign financial markets, make it easier for cross-border investment and financing, and actively take part in global financial regulatory reform, he said.

The nation must guard the bottom line for financial security under the circumstances of opening-up, Xi added.

China has prioritized the financial sector in its broader efforts in recent years to widen access for foreign investors, introducing steps to scrap foreign ownership caps in the banking and insurance sectors and to slash access thresholds for foreign investors.

The outstanding loans in China's banking system have exceeded 200 trillion yuan (\$28 trillion), and the balance of social financing exceeded 300 trillion yuan, with the nation seeing an annual increase of around 20 trillion yuan in new loans, according to Pan Gongsheng, governor of the People's Bank of China.

Pan wrote in an article last month that the risks in the nation's financial sector have remained "manageable in general", despite challenges such as financial chaos and corruption and weak financial regulatory and governance capabilities.

The president reiterated on Tuesday the need for the financial sector to prioritize the prevention and defusing of risks, especially systemic risks, saying that financial regulatory authorities and

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Snow show



People enjoy the snowy scenery on Tuesday in Xi'an, Shaanxi province. Many areas in the province welcomed the first snowfall of the year on Monday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

COP28 resolution a pivotal moment for decisive action

The resolution of the 28th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, or COP28, calls for a shift away from fossil fuels. The resolution is essentially more than just a list of pledges; it is a strong declaration of intent, a road map for a sustainable future, and an example of how the whole community is uniting to address one of the most important issues of our time.

When viewed from a historical

WORLD WATCH

By Gokhan Erel

perspective, the UN's efforts in combating climate change through summits have included pivotal moments such as the 1992 Rio Summit, the 1997 Kyoto Protocol and the 2015 Paris Agreement. Fundamentally, these summits spearheaded by

the UN encompass the specific targets and commitments of participating countries in their fight against climate change and global warming, as well as the activities undertaken within this framework.

The focus of these summits varies over time. At certain points, they have concentrated on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, while at others they have aimed to maintain global warming at levels comparable to those

before the Industrial Revolution.

COP28, held in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, from Nov 30 to Dec 12, notably focused on the agenda of diminishing the use of fossil fuels. Globally reducing the use of fossil fuels is instrumental in achieving objectives such as lowering carbon emissions and accelerating the transition to renewable energy sources.

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NATION'S PRODUCTS TO ENJOY GREATER PROTECTION

Landmark deal reached in 2020 with European Union being expanded

By MO JINGXI
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In-depth

Many consumers choosing crab from Yangcheng Lake in Jiangsu province in preference to common crab, or Roquefort instead of other types of blue cheese, consider the geographical sources of such produce when making their purchases.

Pu'er tea from Yunnan province, Wuchang rice from Heilongjiang province, Cognac from France and feta cheese from Greece are other examples of well-known names in China and Europe associated with products

of a certain nature and quality because of their place of origin. They are known as GI, or Geographical Indication, products.

Geographical Indications help meet consumers' growing demand for information about the products they purchase by identifying those that originate from a specific area, and which have characteristics essentially attributable to their source of origin.

He Yuxiang, head of an agency that promotes Iberian ham in China, said: "Put simply, I think GI products can be understood as local rural specialties whose quality is guaranteed. For example, Iberian ham is one such specialty from a designated area in Spain where the pigs are fed and the hams are processed."

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Left: A farmer picks goji berries at the Bairuiyuan planting base in Wuzhong, Ningxia Hui autonomous region, in June. WANG PENG / XINHUA



Center: A crab farmer displays Yangcheng Lake crabs in Kunshan, Jiangsu province, in October 2022. WANG XUZHONG / FOR CHINA DAILY



Right: A farmer produces Tieguanyin tea in Quanzhou, Fujian province, in October. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Goods: Battle waged against counterfeits

From page 1

In China, the protection of GI as a type of intellectual property can be traced to 1985, when the nation joined the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property.

Four years later, the State Administration for Industry and Commerce issued an administrative decree to protect Champagne from being misused as a generic term for a type of sparkling wine on Chinese markets. This was a milestone event in China regarding administrative protection related to GI.

Supervision of GI in China used to be the responsibility of a number of ministries, but after several rounds of institutional reforms by the State Council, the China National Intellectual Property Administration is now the main department responsible for such protection.

Hu Wenhui, deputy head of the administration, said, "GI protection bears great significance in terms of guaranteeing the characteristics of China's specialty products, improving their market competitiveness, and promoting global trade."

To accelerate the introduction of unified legislation, the administration also drew up a series of regulations to provide more detailed rules for the registration, use and protection of GI products. These regulations are due to take effect on Feb 1.

Data from the administration show that by the end of June, China had certified 2,498 GI products, 80 percent of which are agricultural and forestry items or food. In addition, more than 25,000 business entities have been authorized to use special GI sym-

bols. Last year, the direct output value of China's GI products surpassed 800 billion yuan (about \$112 billion).

John Clarke, former director-general of international relations at the European Union Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, said China's work to reform its GI system was one of the main reasons the EU and China were able to sign a landmark agreement on GI protection in 2020.

The deal, which took effect on March 1, 2021, was the first comprehensive and high-standard bilateral agreement on GI negotiated between China and foreign countries.

China and the EU were each other's second-largest trading partner in 2022. Statistics from China Customs show that the bilateral agri-food trade between the two sides that year amounted to \$30.56 billion.

The reciprocal deal aims to provide high-level GI protection from both sides, effectively prevent the counterfeiting of GI products, and ensure that consumers enjoy genuine and high-quality goods.

Clarke, chief EU negotiator for the agreement, said many well-known European and Chinese names are stolen by imitators. "On the European market, you will see several producers of what is said to be Longjing tea hailing from New Zealand or Chinese Taipei," he said.

Similarly, on the Chinese market, there are amounts of fake Bordeaux, Cognac, feta and other types of cheese, he said, adding, "This agreement helps stop that."

GI protection bears great significance in terms of guaranteeing the characteristics of China's specialty products..."

Hu Wenhui, deputy head of the China National Intellectual Property Administration

As part of the agreement, some 200 iconic Chinese and European agri-food names, including Anxi Tieguanyin tea, Shaoxing wine, Prosciutto di Parma and Champagne, are protected against usurpation (the unlawful assumption of the use of property that belongs to someone else) and imitation in each other's market.

The agreement will be expanded to cover an additional 350 GI products from both sides — including Xuan paper from Anhui province — within four years of it taking effect. This is the first time the EU has included non-agricultural GI in the deal.

Joan Valadou, French consul general in Shanghai, said the role played by GI has been recognized in France. "It can ensure high-quality products, enhance consumers' trust, and help producers and small and medium-sized enterprises gain a stable income," he added.

Signing the agreement means that people in China can now buy online and in physical stores various GI products from France and other European countries, Valadou said.

Wang Yi, secretary-general of the Ningxia Goji Association, said, "Mutual GI recognition and protec-

tion between China and the EU has opened opportunities for China's premium products to enter the European market and be sold at higher prices."

Chinese products may enjoy easier access to markets in third countries, because those listed in the agreement will be allowed to use official European symbols that identify a product's place of origin, he added.

The association is responsible for promoting the development of the goji berry industry in the Ningxia Hui autonomous region.

Noting that some Chinese GI products such as goji berries from Ningxia are produced in economically less-developed areas, Wang said the agreement will provide strong support in promoting rural revitalization and achieving sustainable economic development in these regions.

Hu, from the China National Intellectual Property Administration, said that since the agreement was implemented, the first batch of Chinese GI products — Xinghua chives, Fenghuang Single Cluster (a kind of oolong tea) and Shaoxing rice wine, have entered the European market. Meanwhile, Chinese consumers have shown a positive and open attitude toward high-quality European GI products such as wine, milk and meat.

The administration has also introduced a series of measures to aggressively crack down on GI counterfeiting and infringement violations involving Bordeaux wine from France and Munchner Bier from Germany, as listed in the agreement, Hu said.

Martha Mavrommatis, the Cyprus ambassador to China, said frequent GI exchanges between China and the EU over the years

have increased mutual understanding and helped the two sides maintain sound interactions.

"Cyprus is looking forward to the list being expanded in the near future. Apart from the economic aspects, the agreement plays a crucial role in cultivating cooperation and synergies in various other fields," she said.

Shi Shiwei, a senior research fellow at the University of International Business and Economics' Research Center for China-EU Economic Cooperation, said the agreement reflects the openness and adherence of both sides to rules-based trade relations.

"Despite distractions for political purposes, it is also a concrete example of China-EU cooperation," he said.

Shi added that China and the EU have developed a mutually beneficial trade relationship through long-term cooperation, and the two sides enjoy huge potential in areas such as the automobile industry.

"It is important that the European business community can

withstand political interference and enable China-EU economic and trade cooperation to play a stabilizing role in developing bilateral ties," he said.



A fisherman catches hairy crabs in Suzhou, Jiangsu, in October 2022. LENG WEN / FOR CHINA DAILY



A cultural representative from Anxi, Fujian, performs a tea ceremony at the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization headquarters in Rome in May. JIN MAMENGI / XINHUA

Chief European Union negotiator proud of vital role played by state-of-the-art act

By MO JINGXI

John Clarke likens the agreement reached between China and the European Union on the protection of Geographical Indications as a child he is highly attached to.

The deal, signed in 2020 after more than 20 rounds of negotiations held alternately in Brussels and Beijing over eight years, took effect on March 1, 2021.

Clarke said he is very proud to have worked as the chief EU negotiator for

"the first, and so far, the only trade agreement between Europe and China."

"China and the EU were natural partners when it came to negotiating a high-quality GI agreement, because both sides have a very strong and long cultural and culinary heritage and are extremely proud of their authentic, high-quality products," he said.

The outcome was "a state-of-the-art agreement", which the EU has used in its negotiations with other

countries, including New Zealand, Australia and Chile, Clarke said.

"We are negotiating another one, with India, and the Indians are saying to us: 'Please, we want an agreement like the one you have with China.' So it really has become the model for all of us," he said.

The agreement with China did not happen easily or overnight, Clarke said, adding that the biggest challenge was that it was the first such deal China had negotiated.

"To use the Chinese proverb, I

would say we crossed the river one stone at a time, so it took a lot of time," he said.

But Clarke said it was an extremely good experience, because his Chinese counterparts were well-prepared, principled and clever. "We built up a lot of trust between us," he added.

In addition to formal talks around the table, GI negotiations require field trips to places of origin to see how GI products are produced.

Clarke and his colleagues were taken to Hainan province, Tianjin, and

elsewhere in China, while he and his team took the Chinese negotiators to Poland, Ireland, France, Malta and Scotland.

"In a more informal environment away from the capital cities, we could really build a good, trustful relationship and also enjoy eating and drinking GI products," he said.

Clarke's connections with China started more than four decades ago, when he went to Guangzhou, Guangdong province, as a student in 1981 just after the nation opened its

doors to foreign visitors.

"In 1984, I went with my father, an archaeologist, to Xi'an, to see the Terracotta Warriors. Two years later, I crossed the Gobi Desert by bus all the way to Kashgar and over to Pakistan," he said.

In September, a week before his formal retirement, for his last official visit as an EU official, Clarke traveled to Suzhou, Jiangsu province.

"I'm very happy to have been associated with China and this agreement," he said.

TOP NEWS

Xizang makes strides in green energy production

By PALDEN NYIMA and DA QIONG in Lhasa

The Xizang autonomous region has made significant progress in the development of clean energy, with more than 90 percent of its power supply now coming from green sources, and more funds are expected to fuel its growth.

The region in Southwest China generates 53.72 percent of its electricity from hydropower, 36.32 percent from solar power and 14 percent from wind power, showcasing a substantial shift toward sustainable energy sources, according to State Grid Tibet Electric Power Co.

In addition, the company has signed a groundbreaking power-assistance framework agreement that is projected to result in outward electrical transmission of 15.5 billion kilowatt-hours from 2024 to 2026.

Notably, the Qinghai-Xizang direct current transmission capacity has been increased to over 400,000 kilowatts. The company said that last year, the Xizang power grid delivered 2.57 billion kWh of electricity to other provinces and regions, up 13.98 percent year-on-year.

Hua Ming, deputy director of the company's development and planning department, said their efforts have led to a reduction in coal consumption by 1.03 million metric tons and a decrease in carbon dioxide emissions by 2.52 million tons.

"Among all the deals that our company has signed, the landmark power-assistance framework agreement features the largest transaction scale and the highest number of participating provinces, and it promises substantial economic benefits for Xizang," he said.

Furthermore, the company has been steadfast in promoting the construction of a green power market. It organized two green electricity transactions in December, delivering 2.77 million kWh to Chongqing via the Sichuan-Xizang interconnected power grid, thereby contributing to a major breakthrough in the region's green power exchanges.

Hua said the company will proactively contribute to the construction of the national clean energy base, expedite research and con-

struction efforts in the demonstration area for the new type of power system in central Xizang, and better leverage the role of its clean energy innovation development center.

"In addition, the company will work to employ the power grid in the high-quality development of new energy and the development of industries such as heating, oxygen supply and hydrogen production," he added.

Meanwhile, the region's rich geothermal resources, which are both clean and sustainable, have greatly contributed to its geothermal power production. This plays a key role in its overall strategy for the development of clean energy sources.

The Yangyi geothermal power station in Damshung county of the region, China's only geothermal power station in operation, has generated more than 500 million kWh of electricity since it began operation in September 2018.

Yuan Hai, deputy general manager of the geothermal power station, said it can help cut 420,000 tons of carbon dioxide, 6,200 tons of nitrogen oxide and 12,000 tons of sulfur dioxide emissions annually, as well as save 116,000 tons of standard coal.

He said the station produced 130 million kWh of electricity in 2023, and has an average annual power generating duration of 8,700 hours. "Basically, the station achieved full generation throughout the year, and its stable power supply has played an important role in ensuring Xizang's sustained electricity supply."

When delivering a government work report at the annual session of the regional people's congress earlier this month, Yan Jinhai, chairman of the regional government, said Xizang plans to support and enhance the development of green energy in 2024.

"The region will set up a dedicated fund for the clean energy industry, mainly comprising special bonds, to ensure a growth of over 25 percent in installed power capacity," he said, adding that the promotion of clean energy heating and oxygen supply projects will be accelerated according to local conditions.

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New school for diplomats



Foreign Minister Wang Yi (second from left) and Tunisian President Kais Saied (right) visit the library of the International Diplomatic Academy of Tunisia in Tunisia on Monday. The Chinese-built diplomatic academy was inaugurated on Monday. HUANG LING / XINHUA

Demand for China-Europe freight train services growing

Experts: Rail links to play bigger role amid geopolitical uncertainties

By ZHONG NAN
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China-Europe freight train services will continue to play a key role this year, facilitating foreign trade amid China's ongoing industrial upgrade and a growing inclination among companies to seek greater efficiency while circumventing geopolitical uncertainties, said analysts and exporters.

The current reluctance of global shipping companies to transit through the Suez Canal has affected China-Europe trade and exerted pressure on operational costs of businesses on both sides. The orders for China-Europe freight trains — an important supplementary mode of transportation of goods between the two major trading partners — have surged in recent weeks, they said.

When container ships avoid the Suez Canal and instead navigate around the southwestern tip of Africa — the Cape of Good Hope — it increases sailing costs, extends shipping duration and creates corresponding delays in delivery schedules.

All freight train cars on the Yiwu-Madrid service route are fully

booked for January with many exporters securing their slots in December. Previously, customers would book their containers two weeks prior to departure, said Chen Kaifeng, director of YXE Trading Service Group's business development department. The group, based in Yiwu, Zhejiang province, provides freight services for the China-Europe rail route that links Yiwu with Madrid, Spain.

Chen said the freight rates have also spiked by 10 to 20 percent in January, compared with the previous month, in line with the increase in demand.

"January, following the peak shipping season in October, is also regarded as a minor peak season," he said, adding that Chinese suppliers have been working hard to arrange shipments before the Spring Festival holiday in February.

There has been a change in the composition of China's exports in recent years, with the focus shifting to high-value items such as smartphones, vehicles, auto parts, computers and high-end electronic components. This has resulted in a surging demand for swifter transportation methods over

maritime shipping service, said Zhou Zhicheng, a researcher at the Beijing-based China Federation of Logistics and Purchasing.

Driven by deepening economic and trade cooperation between China and partner countries, the number of China-Europe freight trains operated in 2023 reached 17,000, up 6 percent year-on-year, while 1.9 million 20-foot equivalent units of containers were shipped, soaring 18 percent year-on-year, according to the latest data from the China State Railway Group, the country's railway operator.

Starting mid-December, there has been a notable surge in global maritime shipping prices due to security concerns in the Red Sea region. As a result, a growing volume of maritime cargo is being diverted to the China-Europe freight service. Certain products, such as computers and footwear, are now being redirected to the rail route, said Li Ke, an official at Chengdu Customs' Qingbaijiang branch.

As both Chinese and overseas automotive and household appliance manufacturers show a growing interest in shipping their products via freight trains, Li said the cargo slots for China-Europe

freight trains departing from Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province, in January are fully booked.

In 2023, the number of China-Europe freight trains originating from Chengdu exceeded 2,400, with transported goods weighing 1.19 million metric tons in total and the total value of goods reaching 46.39 billion yuan (\$6.46 billion), both record highs, data from Chengdu Customs showed.

"Since our washing machines have gained popularity in markets participating in the Belt and Road Initiative, the export value of this product transported through the China-Europe freight train route witnessed a year-on-year growth of 85 percent in 2023. We anticipate further growth of over 2 percent on a yearly basis this year," said Lin Chuangen, head of supply chain management at Nanjing LG Panda Appliances Co, a China-South Korea joint venture based in Nanjing, Jiangsu province.

Jiangsu, another key export hub, saw the number of China-Europe freight trains originating from cities in the province increase to 2,123 with a cargo value of 30.32 billion yuan last year, up 7.6 percent and 8.3 percent year-on-year, respectively, according to Nanjing Customs.

Angels get face-lift



An expert restores one of the 12 angel statues on the Ponte Sant'Angelo bridge in Rome, Italy, on Monday. The Roman pedestrian bridge was built around 1,890 years ago. TIZIANA FABI / AFP

Finance: Local authorities must perform their duties

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industry regulators must clarify responsibilities and enhance collaboration.

He urged strict law enforcement in procedures such as market access, exercising prudent oversight and compliance oversight.

Local authorities must perform their duties in risk disposal and maintaining stability, a process that involves zero tolerance for corruption as well as the prevention of moral risks, he said.

He highlighted financial regulation as a systematic project, saying that regulatory departments must bolster coordination with industry regulators, justice departments and disciplinary watchdogs.

Financial crimes must be the target of strict crackdowns, the president added.

Xi called for stronger confidence in the Chinese path of financial development, saying that the country must continue to explore and improve the path to make it broader in practice.

He explained characteristics of the path, including upholding the centralized, unified leadership of the CPC Central Committee, a people-centered orientation, and remaining committed to the fundamental purpose of providing financial services to the real economy.

Xi said the development of a nation with a strong financial sector requires long-term and persistent efforts, as such a country should be built on a robust economic foundation and enjoy economic, technological and overall national strength.

Mo Jingzi contributed to this story.

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The consensus reached at the summit on commitments regarding the use of fossil fuels demonstrates that significant efforts in the global climate movement are beginning to yield results.

However, the intensification of geopolitical concerns in global affairs, due to conflicts such as the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine crises, and the consequent emphasis on the security of fossil fuel supplies and routes, indicate that developments in renewable energy are still susceptible to geopolitical disruptions. Therefore, this development needs to be seen as an indicator that a complete and immediate departure from fossil fuels is unlikely to happen in the short term.

The COP28 resolution is a pivotal moment in the international climate narrative, signifying a unified, determined stride toward a greener future. Its global significance is multifaceted, touching on crucial aspects of climate action.

First, the resolution marks a historical shift in energy policy, signaling the will to end the fossil fuel era. This transition, vital for curbing greenhouse gas emissions, sets a clear trajectory toward renewable

Only in a scenario where countries collectively adhere to their pledges, backed by concrete efforts and financial support, can the goals of COP28 be achieved.

energy, reshaping the global energy landscape. The implications are profound, as it nudges economies worldwide toward sustainable practices and technologies.

Second, the resolution reinforces the commitment to limiting global warming to 1.5 C above pre-industrial levels, a crucial threshold in mitigating the worst impacts of climate change. This ambitious target is a clear call for immediate, substantive emissions reductions, highlighting the urgency of the situation and the need for concerted global action.

Moreover, the focus on increasing climate finance is a game changer. It acknowledges the disparate impact of climate change across nations and the necessity of equitable resource distribution. By emphasizing

ing financial support, particularly for developing countries, the resolution ensures that global climate efforts are inclusive and equitable.

The setting of tangible targets and the call for updated Nationally Determined Contributions bring accountability and measurability to the forefront. This approach is essential for tracking progress and maintaining the momentum of climate commitments. Furthermore, the resolution's inclusive nature, involving a spectrum of stakeholders, underscores the realization that effective climate action is not solely the domain of governments.

The involvement of corporations, civic society and other organizations enriches the international response to climate concerns by bringing a variety of perspectives and ideas. Moreover, the resolution has worldwide implications because it is a moral and ethical declaration rather than just addressing environmental issues. It also shows that we all recognize that we have a shared responsibility to preserve the environment for coming generations, treating climate change as a global justice and equality issue. This development strengthened the ongoing collaboration among coun-

tries in tackling climate change and global warming.

At this critical juncture, the key for countries is to translate COP28's ambitious commitments into tangible actions. This requires robust policy reforms, prioritizing renewable energy and green technologies. Financial commitments, especially to developing nations, must be rapidly mobilized to facilitate this transition. The success of these efforts hinges on stringent accountability measures and regular progress assessments.

Ultimately, realizing these commitments demands unwavering political will and collaborative action, both domestically and internationally. Only in a scenario where countries collectively adhere to their pledges, backed by concrete efforts and financial support, can the goals of COP28 be achieved. This is a moment for decisive action; the path forward is clear, and the stakes are unmistakably high.

The author is Gulf studies coordinator with the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, a nonpartisan, nonprofit research center based in Ankara, Türkiye. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA

Courier amasses 1m yuan in 3 years

By QUAN ZHANFU
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A delivery rider in Shanghai has earned over 1 million yuan (\$140,000) in three years, sparking both admiration and concern among netizens.

A video of delivery rider Chen Si talking about his income has gone viral, prompting discussions about work ethic, health and the gig economy.

The 26-year-old from Fuzhou, Jiangxi province, began working as a delivery rider in Shanghai in 2019 after a failed entrepreneurial venture running a restaurant in his hometown.

Born in 1998, the rider exudes a sense of maturity despite his youthful age. His hands marked by scars showcase the hardship he has experienced and how much effort he has put in over the past three years. "These scars come from frostbite and accidental falls. When I fall, I dust myself off and keep going," he said nonchalantly to news outlet ThePaper.cn.

Before working in Shanghai, Chen operated a restaurant in his hometown, for which he took out an 800,000 yuan loan from the bank. Unfortunately, the venture incurred heavy losses within five months, compelling him to abandon the business. Burdened by debt, Chen made the decision to seek his fortune in Shanghai, driven by the singular goal of earning money to repay his loans. At that time, Chen made up his mind to work hard to bounce back from the low where he was.

Upon his arrival in Shanghai in 2019, Chen initially worked as a chef in a restaurant, earning a monthly salary of 13,000 yuan. After nearly a year, he realized that delivery might be more lucrative and decided to give it a try. He started doing food delivery as a side job, and at that time he only slept about three hours a day.

In 2020, Chen quit his job at the restaurant to take up delivery full-time, working from 6 am to midnight.

He has completed over 110,000 orders in the past three years, taking only one day off a month.

Without an educated background, Chen said the only way to make money is through working hard by using his own hands.

The industrious rider has already repaid the 800,000 yuan loan, and has managed to purchase a house in his hometown, with a remaining mortgage of 100,000 yuan.

Chen said he hasn't given up on starting his own business in the future.

His story has attracted a lot of attention online. Many have admired him for his diligence and his achievements through hard work. Many have also expressed their worries about his health. Some have suggested he get a routine physical examination.

While openly acknowledging his prioritization of financial gain through hard work, Chen told others to work in accordance with their capabilities and not to replicate his way of working so intensively.

Safe hands



A primary school student tries on a firefighter's suit in Qianxi, Guizhou province, on Tuesday. The local fire brigade came to the school to teach them about fire hazards so that they can spend the winter holiday safer. ZHOU XUNCHAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

AI model helps diagnose ovarian cancer

By LI WENFANG in Guangzhou
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Chinese scientists have developed an artificial intelligence-based model that facilitates the low-cost, easily accessible and accurate diagnosis of ovarian cancer.

A report on the research was published in the international science journal *The Lancet Digital Health* last week.

Ovarian cancer is the most lethal gynecological malignancy, but timely diagnosis is difficult due to a lack of effective biomarkers, said Liu Jihong, a professor at Sun Yat-sen University's cancer center, who participated in the research with partners from several Chinese universities and hospitals.

Laboratory tests are widely applied in clinical practice, and some have shown diagnostic and prognostic relevance to ovarian cancer.

The researchers aimed to systematically assess the value of routine laboratory tests on the prediction of ovarian cancer, and develop a robust and generalized

AI model to assist with diagnosis, she said.

In this study, the team collected laboratory tests and clinical features of 10,992 women with or without ovarian cancer admitted to three hospitals in China from January 2012 to April 2021.

Researchers used a sophisticated system that considers multiple factors to predict the risk of a health condition.

They combined estimations from 20 different AI models that analyzed data from 51 lab test items and the age. When they tested the model at Tongji Hospital of Huazhong University of Science and Technology, it showed high accuracy. Similar good results were seen at Zhejiang University and Liu's center.

This model, according to Liu, outperformed traditional tumor markers in accuracy and sensitivity in detecting ovarian cancer, especially during its early stages.

The new model provides clinicians with a tool to assist with diagnosis, especially in routine health examinations or primary medical facilities with limited clin-

ical experience in gynecological oncology.

In addition, the lab tests included in the model cost less than 1,000 yuan in total (\$140), cheaper than a routine female tumor marker panel test plus an imaging examination, said Cai Guangyao, a resident doctor of the Sun Yat-sen University Cancer Center.

Ovarian cancer has a low prevalence in the population, but lacks typical early-stage symptoms, Liu said.

Within the healthcare system, primary care is often the first point of contact for a patient, but clinicians often fail to identify those with early-stage disease due to the absence of clear symptoms.

In China, less than 48 percent of ovarian cancer patients were reported to be diagnosed in the early stages, and the five-year survival rate of ovarian cancer was approximately 40 percent.

With the novel model, doctors will be able just to input the lab test values, and the model will output an estimated probability of having ovarian cancer.

Vocational education cooperation grows

By TAN YINGZI in Chongqing
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China's international cooperation in vocational education is developing rapidly, as 164 schools and companies from 14 countries and regions that joined an alliance, launched by Chongqing and Sichuan province, demonstrated recently.

Last Friday, the International Land-Sea Trade Corridor Vocational Education International Cooperation Alliance held its annual conference in Chongqing and announced a slew of programs, including the setting up of the Deves Future Technology School in Sri Lanka.

Facing a changing manufacturing landscape and increasing demand for skilled workers, the Chinese government is calling for investment in vocational education with urgency to improve the technical capabilities of its workforce.

In order to fulfill its needs, China is looking to its partners around the world to deepen cooperation in

vocational training and create a regional development community for vocational training and economic integration, especially in the countries and regions involved in the Belt and Road Initiative.

The ILSTC is a major international logistics project built by provincial-level regions in western China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations member states.

Founded in 2021, the alliance has attracted members from Indonesia, New Zealand, South Korea, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, the Philippines, Pakistan, Australia and Singapore.

Chongqing Industry Polytechnic College, one of the founding members of the alliance, worked with the Lao-German Technical Vocational College last year to set up a Panda College program, which introduces China's vocational training to Lao students.

Chongqing, a major auto manufacturing base in China, has a wealth of experience in the auto industry. So, the first training project focuses on vehicle inspec-

tion and maintenance.

"We hope to explore a way to help developing countries with their vocational education and make Chinese vocational training a world renowned brand," said Qin Chuanjiang, deputy director of Chongqing Industry Polytechnic College.

China has built the world's largest vocational education system, emphasizing both degree programs and vocational training, according to a report by the Ministry of Education.

Khamsavay Gnommilavong, director of the Lao-German Technical Vocational College, said that his school has learned a lot from Chinese counterparts in vocational education and the joint program will nurture a large number of skilled workers with technologies and abilities that meet international standards.

The alliance has established five Panda Workshops in three countries offering Chinese language and vocational skills training to 240 teachers and over 600 corporate personnel.

Population drop last year likely more than 2022

Expert predicts only mild downward trend in figure over next 3 decades

By WANG XIAOYU
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The decline in China's population last year is likely to have exceeded the historic fall recorded in 2022, but the overall downward trend in the next three decades will be mild, a senior demographer said on Tuesday.

Yuan Xin, a professor at Nankai University's School of Economics and vice-president of the China Population Association, said the decline will be greater because of the lingering impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the decreasing number of women of childbearing age, a low willingness to have babies and the growing trend of getting married and having babies at a later age.

He made the remarks during a forum held by the association ahead of the release of the 2023 population data on Wednesday.

China recorded the first decline in its population in about six decades in 2022.

Yuan said the years 2021 and 2022 marked a watershed in China's demography, with the total population of 1.41 billion recorded by the end of 2021 considered the peak.

"International experiences have shown that the initial stage of negative population growth is often accompanied by fluctuations of both rises and falls," he said.

This year, Yuan said, the population decline is forecast to be milder due to the waning effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and families' preference for having a baby during the Chinese zodiac Year of the Dragon.

"However, the downward trend in China's total population is bound to be long-term and become an inherent characteristic," he added.

One fundamental factor influencing demography is the fertility rate — the average number of children born to women of childbear-

It is vital that we take action and make interventions to address demographic problems that would surface in the future."

Yuan Xin, vice-president of the China Population Association

ing age. It fell below 1.1 in 2022, Yuan said.

He said the overall rate of decrease for China's population would be mild in the coming three decades, regardless of fertility rate levels. By 2050, China will have a population of around 1.2 to 1.4 billion, accounting for 14 to 18 percent of the world's population.

However, in the longer term, the decline could be dramatic and the lower the fertility rate, the steeper the fall in total population.

"It is vital that we take action and make interventions to address demographic problems that would surface in the future," he said.

China has stepped up supportive policies to encourage births in recent years, and in May 2021 it allowed all couples to have a third child.

Yang Fan, a researcher at the Population Development Studies Center at Renmin University of China, said during the forum that the central leadership and localities have explored and rolled out a variety of supportive measures covering marriage and childbearing, rearing and educating children, and housing families.

More efforts are needed to forcefully implement policies, expand coverage and enhance coordination across government departments, she added.

Wildlife rescue



Police officers and a village resident rescue an Oriental stork in Baoying, Jiangsu province, on Tuesday. The injured bird, which is classified under top-level national protection, was found by villagers, who contacted local forest police officers. The bird was later sent to an animal shelter for treatment.

SHEN DONGBING / FOR CHINA DAILY

Hidden agricultural gems wow locals, nonlocals alike

By XU ZHESHENG
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This winter's robust domestic tourism market has seen growing numbers of people from the south visiting the north and vice-versa, and governments in various regions have followed suit by sending out free samples of each other's specialty products for people in different regions to try.

Heilongjiang province sending cranberries to the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, and Sichuan province sending caviar to Harbin are just a couple of examples of the friendly exchanges of goods made this winter.

The upshot of these exchanges

has not only been that people from outside of a region get to know that region's specialty products, but also, even those inside those regions have been shocked to learn what their own regions produce.

The wave of surprise among locals who had no idea what their region produces has led many to start exploring the products of their hometowns.

From Xinjiang's rainbow trout to Anhui's foie gras and Shanghai's saffron, it turns out that each region has its own hidden treasures.

When it comes to foie gras, many people immediately think of France. However, in Huoqiu county, Lu'an, Anhui province, one can find authentic French-style foie gras. Lu'an has a

history of raising geese and is known for its local white geese.

In recent years, the area has begun industrial upgrading, introducing the world-renowned Landes goose, a breed specifically used for foie gras production, originally from France. The local soil and climate in Lu'an are suitable for its growth. Huoqiu has become the largest foie gras production base in the country, with over 140 farms raising Landes geese, producing over 5,000 metric tons of foie gras, and with an annual output value of nearly 2 billion yuan (\$280 million).

When it comes to agricultural specialties from Xinjiang, most people immediately think of Hami melons, Aksu apples and raisins.

However, Nilka county in Xinjiang also produces rainbow trout. With the glacial meltwater from the Tianshan Mountains, Nilka boasts an excellent natural environment for the farming of cold-water fish. In 2014, a local company invested in and built a breeding base in Nilka, importing fish eggs from abroad. The trout from Nilka are not only sold throughout China but also find their way onto tables around the world.

The current trend of uncovering hidden agricultural specialties in various regions began with the exchange of 100,000 boxes of high-quality cranberries from Heilongjiang to Guangxi. This not only shocked locals but also astonished people across the country, who

were amazed to learn that Heilongjiang produces cranberries.

It is a common perception that cranberries are mostly imported from North America. However, as early as 2014, cranberries were introduced from North America to Fuyuan county in Heilongjiang. By last year, the area under cranberry cultivation had reached 280 hectares, with an output of around 3,000 tons, making it the largest cranberry cultivation base in the country.

Fu Qiang, president of Northeast Agricultural University, explained that Heilongjiang is located in the "world's small berry planting zone", with significant climatic advantages. The region is abundant in small berries such as blueberries, blackcurrants, raspberries and sea buckthorn. The annual output value of small berry processing enterprises in the province exceeds 3 billion

yuan, ranking first in the country.

This fervent exploration of local agricultural products is ongoing. In this process, people are beginning to find out more about their own hometowns.

Other surprising local specialties include caviar from Ya'an, Sichuan, the annual production of which in 2022 reached 50 tons, accounting for 12 percent of the global market; saffron, a precious Chinese medicinal ingredient, from Chongming, Shanghai, which has been made into various products such as beauty masks, alcohol and cakes in recent years; and matcha from Tongren, Guizhou province, which boasts the world's largest single matcha workshop.

Moreover, the hairy crabs from Yuncheng, Shanxi province, and the Australian lobsters and South American prawns from Chongqing have also surprised locals.

CHINA

Gansu to further promote acclaimed cooperative model

Development of clusters to expand after provincial case garners high praise from UN

By MA JINGNA in Lanzhou and ZHENG CAIXIONG

The cluster development of cooperatives is expected to be further promoted in Gansu after the province's Lao'erdu Cooperative model in Luqu county was selected as one of 12 successful models worldwide.

Gongbao Lezhi, director of Lao'erdu Cooperative, said the model, which focuses on transforming single household farms into a unified effort, is of great significance to farmers and herdsmen in Luqu.

"Previously, there had never been such a model in Luqu county and Gannan prefecture, and farmers and herdsmen were not familiar with it, nor did they recognize or trust it," Gongbao said.

"But with support from the local government, as well as the exemplary role Lao'erdu Cooperative has played, every village and township in the county now recognizes that the cluster development model can help them achieve common prosperity in the years to come."

Gongbao said the model works because members in the cooperative can share their experiences, which they can take advantage of to realize economic benefits. Furthermore, it helps maintain stability and promotes ethnic unity.

"There used to be conflicts and a lack of unity among neighbors in grassland management. But now, with reasonable management and equal distribution, all conflicts have been resolved," he said.

The Lao'erdu Cooperative case, with the title "From a Household Initiative to a Cooperative Model: Empowering Tibetan Families in China", was selected as one of the 12 successful cases worldwide during the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization Global Conference on Sustainable Livestock Transformation, which was held in Italy in September.

The core of the case is to maximize the integration efficiency of grassland, livestock and labor resources in cooperatives through technological empowerment, with the support of governments at all levels.

It fully embodies the four aspirations of the FAO — better production, better nutrition, better environment and better life.

During the conference, the Lao'erdu case was invited to be presented for three days at the FAO headquarters in Rome, demonstrating the remarkable development achievements China has made in its



Clockwise from top: Members of the Lao'erdu Cooperative pose for a group photo in Luqu county, Gansu province. A yak farm is run by the cooperative in a pastoral area in Luqu. Yaks are the main source of income for herdsmen in the county. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

high-altitude pastoral areas over the years.

The case, aiming to promote the transformation and implementation of scientific research achievements and assist in the vitalization of pastoral areas and rural areas, was jointly implemented and promoted by Long Ruijun, deputy director of the expert group on the Transformation of Grassland Animal Husbandry Development Model and High Quality Development Technology initiative in Gannan prefecture, and his team and related government departments.

Long, an internationally renowned yak expert and professor at Lanzhou University, and his team have been persistently engaged in basic and applied research as well as practical promotion work on the frontlines of grassland pastoral areas on Asian plateaus.

Long has also been paying a great deal of attention to community life and social development in the high-altitude pastoral areas.

Working with the Lao'erdu Cooperative, Long and his team have provided long-term scientific guidance and targeted research for the project's planning, production, breeding, management, operation, sales, and emission reductions.

Gongbao, the Lao'erdu cooperative's director, said that before joining cooperatives, many households had to develop on their own but lacked experience.

"Since local households have clustered for development, our production has expanded and profits have increased as more modern technologies have been introduced," he said.

"With a focus on breeding and a combination of traditional and modern methods ... the breeding ability of yaks has been improved, the variety of yaks has increased, and profits from raising yaks have grown, thus increasing farmers' incomes."

According to Gongbao, households that raised about 100 yaks each used to earn annual incomes of between 50,000 and 60,000 yuan in the past. Now, they earn about 120,000 yuan (\$16,894) per year on average.

With the support of local governments and experts — particularly Long and his team, who have provided farmers and herdsmen with great technical guidance — cooperatives in the area have made rapid progress in ecological protection and scientific grass storage, he said.

"Local households are now able to make reasonable use of grasslands and scientifically raise yaks, which gives them more confidence in the future development of the animal husbandry industry," he said.

Gongbao said his cooperative would spare no effort to develop more sales stores for agricultural and livestock products to increase their market presence in the years to come.

A large-scale slaughtering and processing base is now being constructed in Luqu to carry out processing and cold-chain transportation.

"And we will use online and other means to further promote our green and dairy products in the plateau region to other parts of the country, achieving complete and large-scale development," he said.

"We will further expand the scale of cooperatives, broaden income channels and lead the local people to increase their incomes and become rich in the months ahead."

Gannan prefecture, which sits at a high altitude, is suitable for developing the animal husbandry industry, he added.

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After 3 jobs, 5 surgeries, woman standing again

By QUAN ZHANFU
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After working three jobs to pay for five surgeries in less than two years to treat her osteomyelitis, a woman in Taizhou, Zhejiang province, is finally able to stand again, Haibao News, a news portal based in Shandong province, reported on Jan 8.

In December 2021, Li Cai, born in 1995, started to experience an uncomfortable sensation in her left leg. "I just felt a bit uncomfortable in my leg, and my muscles were sore. Gradually, the pain intensified to the point where I couldn't turn over or walk anymore," she told Haibao News.

After diagnosis, Li was informed she had contracted osteomyelitis, a rare, painful bone infection caused by bacteria or fungi that occurs in the arms, legs or spine. Looking back, Li realized she was overly optimistic about her condition at the beginning.

"I thought one surgery would fix everything, so I didn't worry too much. It was just painful during the surgery," she said. "It wasn't until the condition recurred and I had several more surgeries — and I heard that amputation might be necessary — that I felt devastated."

The surgical process involves scraping the infected bone and extracting damaged bone marrow. For Li, the affected area was her inner left thigh.

When she first came down with the disease, her muscles, nerves and bones were all in pain. Even taking a breath hurt. Painkillers proved ineffective and even caused stomachaches.

Li said she could only lie face down when she slept.

The first three surgeries drained her savings of over 300,000 yuan (\$41,982). She took three jobs to pay for further treatments to alleviate the financial pressure on her family.

She would wake up at around

10 am each day and begin managing her online store, selling items for girls. At 1 pm, she would start her second job, editing promotional videos for her clients. And at 5 pm, she would be taking customer service calls for another online store, sitting for eight hours straight until 1 am, and then going to bed around 2 am.

Li said the income from the three jobs was enough to cover her medical expenses. She said she tried to get better jobs but was rejected because she had to use crutches or a wheelchair.

Last year, she began documenting her daily life through video posts, which she dubbed her "Rebirth Diary", on short video-sharing platform Douyin and eventually attracted over 400,000 followers.

Her fans would leave encouraging comments to cheer her up. She also received negative posts, which she said she would just ignore since they were nothing compared with what she had gone through. After her fourth surgery, Li began to earn extra income through the videos.

"I calculated that the total cost of the five surgeries was about 340,000 yuan. Afterward, I would need periodic check-ups, but my current work income was enough to fully support my medical and living expenses," she said.

In November, Li underwent her fifth surgery. Before the procedure, the doctor told her that the success rate was only about 25 percent. Fortunately for her, the surgery was successful. A small piece of her leg bone was removed and a prosthesis was implanted in her leg.

Eighteen days after the operation, Li was finally able to stand up from her wheelchair without aid. She said at that moment, she was happier than she had ever been. "I recovered two months earlier than the doctors expected!" she said. "Even the medical staff praised my rapid recovery!"



Architecture in Huangsiyang village in Huizhou, Guangdong province, dates back over 500 years. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Old village draws visitors

By XU ZHESHENG
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People who visit Huangsiyang village in Huizhou, Guangdong province, are dazzled by the grand scale of its ancient residential buildings.

Spanning an area of 220,000 square meters, the village was named "Huangsiyang" to express gratitude for the emperor's benevolence.

With a history of over 500 years, the village's architecture dates back to the late Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

As part of a Guangdong provincial project that targets the high-quality rural development of 10,000 villages from 1,000 townships in 100 counties, Huangsiyang has leveraged rural vitalization efforts to promote its heritage protection and cultural tourism, which have breathed new life into the village.

Yang Shouqiang, a village official, explained that the ancient village boasts more than 20 historical sites, making it the most well-preserved and extensive ancient residential complex in Huidong county.

Yang said the village has placed a strong emphasis on education and culture, having produced over 20 candidates who passed the provincial-level exams after being invited to sit

for the imperial examinations — the ancient form of the *gaokao*, China's university entrance exam. In its history, the village also served as an important hub for water and land transportation in the surrounding area.

From 2022 to last year, a total of 65 million yuan (\$9 million) was invested in the protection and development of Huangsiyang ancient village. Recent surveys have shown significant improvements in the village's surroundings and internal environment after it took measures to restore architecture and rivers, and improve lighting and other infrastructure.

At the same time, the village introduced high-quality boutique homestay projects. These homestays preserve the original architectural style of the ancient buildings, with some in renovated former schools.

The nostalgic layout has attracted many tourists from the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, who participate in team building activities and enjoy unique experiences.

The increasing number of visitors to the village is also boosting sales of local snacks and agricultural products. Online promotions of these products have also brought in more tourists to nearby villages such as Xiapu, Shui-kou and Bawei.

Experts find new treatment for breast cancer

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai
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Shanghai medical experts have discovered a new treatment method that significantly improved outcomes for patients with the most aggressive subtype of breast cancer during a clinical trial.

The method was uncovered during a two-year trial named "FUTURE-SUPER", which involved 139 patients. It extends progression-free survival for patients suffering from metastatic triple-negative breast cancer, a subtype of the disease that has the worst prognosis due to its high aggressiveness, early recurrence and metastasis, and a lack of effective treatment targets.

Triple-negative breast cancer accounts for approximately 15 percent of all breast cancer cases, and the traditional one-size-fits-all chemotherapy remains the standard treatment, experts said.

The trial used a "subtyping-based precision treatment" approach, combining chemotherapy with targeted therapy or immunotherapy. The use of the method resulted in a substantial extension in progression-free survival for such patients compared with the standard treat-



The hospital is seeking to launch clinical trials at multiple centers using the precision treatment regimen."

Jiang Yizhou, vice-president of the Fudan University Shanghai Cancer Center

ment. Researchers from the Fudan University Shanghai Cancer Center believe the novel approach can address limitations of the current standard treatment, which lacks individualization and has unsatisfactory efficacy.

A paper detailing the findings of the research, a joint effort between the Department of Breast Surgery at the cancer center and Jiangsu Hengrui Pharmaceuticals Co, was published in the journal *The Lancet Oncology* on Jan 9.

Professors Shao Zhiming, Wang Zhonghua, Jiang Yizhou and Fan Lei led the research.

In the clinical study, patients with

either metastatic triple-negative breast cancer or diseases not appropriate for surgery were enrolled.

They were divided into five treatment groups based on molecular subtypes. They were randomly assigned to receive traditional chemotherapy (the control group) or chemotherapy combined with a molecular targeted anti-tumor drug or an anti-PD-1 antibody (the subtyping-based precision treatment group).

During the median follow-up period of 22.5 months, the median progression-free survival period of patients in the precision treatment group was 11.3 months, about 5.5 months longer than that of patients in the conventional chemotherapy group.

Notably, a subset of patients categorized as immunomodulatory showed the most significant increase in progression-free survival, with a median of 15.1 months — 8.6 months longer than traditional chemotherapy.

This currently represents the most substantial survival benefit worldwide. "Such results represent a breakthrough in addressing the limitations of targeted therapies for treating this subtype of breast cancer," Fan said.

WORLD

Experts hail Li's speech at Davos meet

Premier lays emphasis on rules-based trading system, promotion of tech-sharing

By WANG MINGJIE
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Experts lauded Chinese Premier Li Qiang's address at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, on Tuesday, emphasizing China's commitment to global engagement — a pivotal imperative in the current global landscape.

Ebrahim Patel, minister of trade, industry and competition of South Africa, praised Li's insights into maintaining a multilateral rules-based system, promoting technology-sharing and addressing climate change.

Speaking to China Daily at the congress center following the speech, Patel shared his perspective, saying, "I thought that Premier Li had some thoughtful comments, particularly on the need for us to ensure that we maintain a multilateral rules-based system, that there is greater sharing of the fruits of science and technology, and that we work on climate change as a common global goal."

Patel was particularly attuned to one of the five proposals for rebuilding trust in the international environment put forth by Li, emphasizing the importance of heightened levels of South-South cooperation.

"From that, I gather that there is an openness from China for greater collaboration also on the southern countries' agenda on industrialization. We do need a rules-based system; we do need global openness; the world is becoming a better place as a result of people trading, investing and sharing technologies," he added.

Highlighting the session's significance, Patel noted the keen interest of participants from both the private sector and governments worldwide. He stressed the global impact of China's actions, saying, "What happens in China does impact the world." As a result, there was a collective desire to hear Premier Li's perspective firsthand.

Li's participation marked the highest-ranking Chinese official to attend the annual gathering in per-

son since President Xi Jinping's presence in 2017.

Borge Brende, president of the World Economic Forum, perceives Li's attendance at Davos, accompanied by a prominent delegation, as a tangible illustration of China's dedication to demonstrating openness and active engagement on the global stage.

"China remains very open for international business and plays a major role, particularly with the Global South," remarked Brende. While navigating the North-South and East-West dimensions, he said China's involvement is essential in international negotiations to get anything done.

Meaningful engagement

Joe Ngai, chairman of McKinsey & Company, Greater China, highlighted the essence of Davos in fostering meaningful engagement and discussions in an environment conducive to such exchanges. Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 years, which limited participation, he finds it encouraging to witness the resurgence of China's presence at Davos.

He deems this renewed engagement crucial, especially in a year when global collaboration and dialogue are paramount. "The positive signal from countries, including China, actively participating and sending delegations reinforces the importance of these dialogues," he added.

Christopher Bovis, a professor of international business law at the University of Hull in the United Kingdom, said: "The most important takeaway from the premier's speech in Davos is the commitment of China's administration to the principles of free trade and globalization."

"This is exactly what rebuilding trust is about: Trusting globalization, trusting free trade and allowing economies to cooperate with a view to sharing the economic growth among the participants of the global economies," he added.



Snow much fun

People sled at Sevier Park on Tuesday in Nashville, Tennessee. A snowstorm blanketed the area with up to 8 inches of snow and frigid temperatures.

GEORGE WALKER IV / AP

US faces shortage of new office buildings

By BELINDA ROBINSON
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Despite the current glut of office space in the US, commercial real estate analysts warn there is a lack of new construction projects that could thwart plans by companies to return staff to work in the next few years.

The warning from the CoStar group, a real estate-intelligence company, and other analysts, comes as data shows that less than 30 million square feet of buildings with office space was created in 2023 — the lowest amount in 13 years.

Yildiray Yildirim, the William Newman professor in real estate and director of the Steven L. Newman Real Estate Institute at the Zicklin School of Business at Baruch College says that a "temporary" lack of new buildings could be due to multiple factors. The biggest one is cost.

"There might be a short-term delay in new office construction due to high interest rates and inflation," he told China Daily.

Since March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has upended the use of office space, as employees shifted to remote work.

Last year, in-office attendance rates in 10 major cities hovered around 50 percent, according to Kastle Systems, which monitors entries into office buildings, as many employees continued to work from home. That created less demand for offices and halted new office-building construction.

In one of the biggest office markets

in the country — New York City — just three large office towers over 500,000 square feet are set to open in 2024 or 2025, and there are no others on the horizon for the next few years, according to The New York Times.

Manhattan, which traditionally opened one new building every year since 2018, now has the fewest office-building projects underway in more than 30 years, according to JLL, a real estate services company.

At least 20 proposals by developers for large office buildings in the city have yet to break ground. Some have been paused; others are ironing out difficulties associated with costs and high interest rates. Developers also are finding that banks are holding back on financing.

Constructing large office buildings can be costly — around \$3 billion each. They also take several years to complete. But they are vital for creating construction jobs, which in turn helps the local economy.

Observers suggest that new buildings up to 3 years old are proving to be more popular than older buildings with companies that want staff to head back into the office post-pandemic. But just 24 percent of all buildings in the US are 3 years old or less.

Since 2020, newer buildings have gotten 175 million square feet of net new occupancy, CNBC reports, which equates to 12.7 million square feet per quarter.

In comparison, between 2011 to 2019, 11.7 million square feet was leased from new buildings, and

between 2008 and 2010, 13.6 million square feet was the quarterly average leased.

Buildings up to 3 years old currently have around 200 million square feet of office space, CNBC reported. By 2026, it will be 150 million; by 2027, it will be just under 100 million.

In November 2023, the asking price to rent office space in Manhattan was \$75 per square foot. Higher interest rates could mean that rent will be pushed up to \$300 per square foot in the future, analysts predict.

The changes in commercial real estate also are straining New York City's budget, which is heavily reliant on property taxes to help finance city services. Office buildings account for one-fifth of all property taxes collected each year.

The city collected approximately \$6.8 billion in property tax revenue from office buildings in the fiscal year ending in June 2022, down from \$7.5 billion in fiscal year 2021.

Stijn Van Nieuwerburgh, a professor specializing in real estate at Columbia Business School and co-author of the study Work From Home and the Office Real Estate Apocalypse believes that the value of US office buildings will fall dramatically over the next few years.

Van Nieuwerburgh told China Daily that he expects the value to plummet "about 40 percent by 2029 relative to 2019 levels, according to our model. This amounts to about a \$411 billion loss."

He predicted in his 2022 study that in New York alone, the city could lose

\$50 billion in revenue because of a lack of office workers being back at their desks and instead continuing to work from home.

Before the pandemic, at least \$21 billion was spent annually on commercial construction projects, which included offices but not residential properties, according to the New York Building Congress, a trade group for the building industry.

In San Francisco, 1 in 3 offices sit empty, according to Moody's. At least 34 percent of all offices were vacant in the third quarter. Additionally, interest rates doubled in 2023, forcing some building owners to sell their properties at a loss.

Much like New York, the market value of San Francisco's offices has fallen, causing lower tax revenues to be generated.

It now costs about \$65 per square foot in a Class A building, and in a Class B, it is \$50. Before the pandemic, renting a Class A cost \$85, and Class B cost \$65 per square foot.

But in a positive sign of a comeback, leasing activity increased in the fourth quarter of 2023.

Several commercial real estate deals also were made in San Francisco, driven by artificial intelligence companies that made up 28 percent of all new leases.

Colin Yasukochi, executive director of CBRE's Tech Insights Center, a global real estate services company, predicted that vacancy rates will continue to rise in 2024, but will level off in the second half of the year.

Dazed by maze



An aerial view of people trying to find the way out in the biggest snow maze in the world in Zakopane, Poland, on Monday.

OMAR MARQUES / GETTY IMAGES

Inmates escape from Ecuador jail amid search operations

QUITO — Forty-three prisoners remain at large after escaping prison in northern Ecuador, the National Service of Integral Attention to Adults Deprived of Liberty and Adolescent Offenders, or SNAI, said on Monday, as security forces continued operations throughout the country.

President Daniel Noboa declared a 60-day state of emergency last week, including a nighttime curfew, and designated 22 criminal groups as terrorists.

The recent explosion of violence, including the storming by gunmen of a live TV news broadcast, explosions in several cities and the kidnapping of police officers, appears to be a response to Noboa's plans to address Ecuador's serious security crisis.

Police and military personnel are present in jails throughout Ecu-

dor after some 200 kidnapped guards and administrative officials were freed from at least seven prisons over the weekend.

The inmates escaped a jail in Esmeraldas, a city close to the border with Colombia, SNAI said in a statement on Monday, after some 2,000 members of Ecuador's security forces conducted a search operation in the prison on Sunday.

"As a result of this inspection, the escape of 48 people inmates was discovered," the statement added, noting that five prisoners were recaptured.

Security forces also learned that one prisoner had died in the prison, SNAI said.

Riots erupted on Jan 8 in several prisons after authorities confirmed the escape of a drug trafficking

kingpin from a jail in the southwestern coastal city of Guayaquil.

The unrest spread to several cities in the country on Jan 9, when criminal gangs unleashed a series of violent actions, including armed assaults, car bombings and police kidnappings.

As of Monday, security forces have arrested 1,534 people, with 158 of them on charges of "terrorism", during 15,461 operations carried out since Jan 9, the government said.

Operations will continue throughout Ecuador this week, the government said in a separate statement.

"The stated objective is clear: to be implacable with those who have terrorized and abused citizens," the government said.

Noboa, elected last year on pledges to restore security, has

promised to keep gang leaders imprisoned in new high-security prisons, among other measures.

Ecuador is one of the major cocaine distributors in the world, with most of the drugs originating in neighboring Colombia and Peru, the world's top producers of cocaine. At Guayaquil, Ecuador's biggest port and export hub, drug gangs and the coast guard play a cat-and-mouse game.

"Seventy percent of the cocaine that arrives in Europe comes from Ecuador, and 80 percent of this cocaine comes out of Guayaquil," navy coast guard commander Fernando Alvarez, whose unit is at the forefront of the fight against trafficking, said.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Ground collision of Boeing planes sparks investigation

CHICAGO — A plane taxiing for departure clipped another aircraft at the Chicago O'Hare International Airport on Sunday evening, the Federal Aviation Administration said on Monday.

No injuries were reported and both planes were of Boeing design. The FAA said it will investigate the incident.

The left wing tip of Flight 11 from Japanese airline All Nippon Airways struck the rear of Delta Air Lines Flight 2122 on Sunday at around 6:30 pm, FAA spokesman Tony Molinaro said. The All Nippon Airways aircraft was a Boeing 777, and the Delta Air Lines aircraft was a Boeing 717.

US aircraft manufacturer Boeing

faces increasing scrutiny following a series of mechanical failures and subsequent grounding of its Boeing 737 Max 9 model after an emergency exit door failed and caused an emergency landing last week. It was not immediately clear what caused the incident on Sunday and whether it was related to a manufacturing flaw.

Boeing representatives did not provide a comment on Monday regarding the collision at O'Hare and instead directed The Associated Press to speak with the airlines involved and the FAA.

Delta spokesperson Emma Johnson said on Monday afternoon by phone that the All Nippon Airways aircraft clipped the Delta plane

while it was parking at a gate after arriving at O'Hare from Detroit.

"Customers deplaned normally at the gate and the aircraft are being evaluated by Delta's maintenance technicians," the company said in a statement by email.

Raymond Bongalon, a customer service representative with All Nippon Airways, said on Monday afternoon that the airline could not yet provide any information on what happened.

The airline's flight status search said Flight 11 was bound for Tokyo, but canceled because of "aircraft inspection".

The Chicago Department of Aviation did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

On Monday, Boeing said it will add further quality inspections for the 737 Max after a midair blowout of a cabin panel in an Alaska Airlines Max 9 earlier this month, the head of its commercial airplanes division said.

In a letter to Boeing employees, Stan Deal, president of Boeing Commercial Airplanes, said the plane maker will also deploy a team to supplier Spirit AeroSystems, which makes and installs the plug door involved in the incident, to check and approve Spirit's work on the plugs before fuselages are sent to Boeing's production facilities in Washington State.

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WORLD

Iran launches attacks against 'terror bases'

Missiles hit sites in Iraq, Syria in defense of security amid escalation of hostilities

TEHERAN/BAGHDAD — Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or IRGC, said it has launched barrages of ballistic missiles against the bases of "terrorists" and Israel's intelligence service Mossad in Syria and Iraq's Kurdistan region respectively in response to recent anti-Iran "terror" attacks.

Iran said on Tuesday it had launched missiles at targets in the two countries in defense of its sovereignty and security, and counter terrorism.

The strikes come amid concerns over the escalation of the conflict that has spread through the Middle East since the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas began on Oct 7, with Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen also entering the fray.

The IRGC announced the attacks in three statements published on Sepah News early on Tuesday, describing the operations, which it said were carried out at midnight, as responses to recent "terrorist attacks" in the southeastern Iranian provinces of Kerman, and Sistan-Baluchestan as well as Israel's assassinations of Iranian and resistance commanders.

"In response to the recent atrocities of the Zionist regime, causing the killing of commanders of the Guards and the Axis of Resistance... one of the main Mossad espionage headquarters in Iraq's Kurdistan region was destroyed with ballistic missiles," the IRGC said in a statement. The Axis of Resistance refers to the groups that have raised concerns over violence spreading from the conflict in Gaza.

Israeli government officials did not immediately comment, Reuters reported.

Iran had vowed revenge for the killing of three members of the Guards in Syria last month, including a senior IRGC commander, who had served as military advisers there.

Preliminary reports showed the bombardment killed four civilians and wounded six in Erbil, the Kurdistan Region Security Council said in a statement.

The statement also called on the federal government and the international community not to remain silent about such attacks.

Since the Oct 7 attack by Hamas

fighters on Israel and the ensuing Israeli bombing campaigns in Gaza, more than 130 fighters of Hezbollah have been killed in hostilities.

In addition to the strikes northeast of Kurdistan's capital Erbil in a residential area near the US consulate, the Guards said they "fired a number of ballistic missiles in Syria and destroyed the perpetrators of terrorist operations" in Iran, including the Islamic State.

"We assure our nation that the Guards' offensive operations will continue until avenging the last drop of martyrs' blood," the Guards' statement said.

Situation assessment

"We tracked the missiles which impacted northern Iraq and northern Syria," Adrienne Watson, spokesperson for the White House National Security Council, said in a statement. "We will continue to assess the situation."

On Jan 3, two "suicide terrorists" detonated two bombs near the tomb of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani in Kerman, which resulted in more than 90 deaths and 280 injuries. The Islamic State terrorist group on Jan 4 claimed responsibility for the bombings.

On Tuesday, Iraq summoned the Iranian charge d'affaires in Baghdad to protest against the attacks in Kurdistan, the Iraqi state news agency reported.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanaani said Tehran respected the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other countries but at the same time was using its "legitimate and legal right to deter national security threats".

Meanwhile, three armed drones were shot down on Tuesday near a military base hosting US and other international troops in northern Iraq, the Iraqi regional counterterrorism service reported.

A statement from the service in the Kurdistan region did not say if there were any casualties or damage to infrastructure due to the attack, which happened at the Erbil International Airport.

AGENCIES—XINHUA



Palestinian children displaced by Israeli strikes gather in Rafah, Gaza, on Monday. SALEH SALEM / REUTERS

US-led strikes in Yemen risk wider conflict

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong
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Airstrikes by the United States and United Kingdom against Yemen's Houthi militia violate international laws as well as Yemen's sovereignty, and risk sparking a broader regional conflict, contrary to their claimed goals and international de-escalation efforts, experts said.

The US-UK attacks on Houthi targets in Sanaa and other areas of Yemen on Friday killed five people while injuring six, Houthi spokesman Yahya Sarea said in a statement.

On Sunday, the allies conducted another strike on the Red Sea port city of Hodeidah, the Houthi-run al-Masirah TV reported.

While the US claimed the strikes were "necessary and proportionate" against Houthi attacks on commercial ships in the Red Sea, as US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield told the United Nations, the Houthis warned that the West's "aggression" will not go unanswered and unpunished, Xinhua News Agency reported. A number of countries have criticized the US-UK strikes.

Abdalfatih Asqool, an international law lecturer at the University of Palestine, told China Daily the US-UK strikes are illegal because there is no international legal cover for these strikes, such as a decision made by the UN Security Council.

"Thus, these attacks, according to international law, are considered a violation of the sovereignty of Yemen," Asqool said.

Despite US calls to avoid an escalation of the conflict and

allow humanitarian aid to enter the Gaza Strip," Asqool said. Therefore, the easiest solution to stop the Houthi operations is to let humanitarian aid enter the Gaza Strip and stop the conflict, he said. While Iran and Russia led a group of countries in condemning the US-led strikes, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan criticized the strikes as a "disproportionate use of force", accusing the US-led forces of seeking to turn the Red Sea into a "bloodbath", reported the Hurriyet Daily News.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appealed to countries to avoid an escalation in the Red Sea, saying it endangers the safety and security of global supply chains and hurts the economic and humanitarian situation worldwide.

Khaldoun Abdulla, a nonresident fellow at the Asia Middle East Center for Research and Dialogue, said the US this time was inclined to take more severe steps, calling for an alliance and military actions, which "raises the question about the duality of the responses". He also said that given the fact the connectivity of supply chains and transshipment along ports, the Houthi's operation against ships sailing to Israel might have an impact on international shipping, but it is relatively small, compared to piracy activities near other strategic maritime routes such as the Malacca Strait.

"Therefore, the disproportionate response of the US, its allies and shipping companies raises a question about the real objectives of those measurements," Abdulla said.

When the US and the UK strike Yemen, they are not only expanding the conflict — they are also violating international law."

Abdalfatih Asqool, international law lecturer at the University of Palestine

aggression against the Gaza Strip, its practices "prove the opposite" at the same time, he said.

On Monday, a missile attack targeted a commercial ship in the Gulf of Aden off the coast of Yemen. The US Central Command confirmed the attack on X, formerly Twitter, saying: "Houthi militants fired an anti-ship ballistic missile from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen and struck the M/V *Gibraltar Eagle*, a Marshall Islands-flagged, US-owned and operated container ship."

After the Western strikes last week, the Houthis said they would not be deterred and declared that US and British interests were "legitimate targets".

"When the US and the UK strike Yemen, they are not only expanding the conflict — they are also violating international law. As the Houthi practices in the Red Sea do not affect the US or the UK interests or even the freedom of navigation, it only aims at putting pressure on Israel to stop the massacres against Palestinians and force Israel to

allow humanitarian aid to enter the Gaza Strip," Asqool said.

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Briefly

UNITED STATES Defense chief Austin released from hospital

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin was discharged from the hospital on Monday, two weeks after being hospitalized due to complications from prostate cancer treatment, the Pentagon said. Austin, 70, was admitted to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Maryland on Dec 22 for treatment of prostate cancer. He returned to the hospital on Jan 1 due to complications. His hospitalization was not revealed until four days later. Doctors at Walter Reed said the Pentagon chief had received testing and nonsurgical care to address needs, including leg pain, and would not need further cancer treatment.

Succession, The Bear dominate Emmy Awards

Media dynasty drama *Succession* and restaurant dramedy *The Bear* dominated the Emmy Awards on Monday, earning six trophies each as Hollywood handed out its top accolades for television. *Succession*, the HBO series about the high-stakes battle for control of a global business empire, won the prestigious best drama prize for its fourth and final season. *The Bear* was named best comedy at a ceremony that was delayed by four months because of last year's labor turmoil in Hollywood. Road rage drama *Beef* claimed best limited series.

COLOMBIA Cease-fire with FARC rebel group extended

Colombia's government has extended a cease-fire with the FARC-EMC rebel group that was set to expire this week, as both sides hold peace talks in Bogota in an effort to reduce violence in rural parts of the country. The cease-fire will now last until July 15, according to a decree signed by President Gustavo Petro, and it requires that the rebels cease attacks on civilians in areas under their control. Colombia's government in October announced peace talks with the FARC-EMC splinter group after both sides agreed to a three-month-long cease-fire.

JAPAN Two passenger planes collide at airport

Two passenger planes collided at New Chitose Airport in Japan's northern prefecture of Hokkaido on Tuesday evening, with no reports of injuries so far. The collision, which took place around 5:30 pm local time, involved planes from Korean Air and Cathay Pacific, according to national broadcaster NHK, citing the operator Hokkaido Airports as saying.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

DPRK decides to abolish agencies on inter-Korean affairs

SEOUL — The Democratic People's Republic of Korea decided on Monday to abolish its agencies handling inter-Korean affairs, the official Korean Central News Agency reported on Tuesday.

The Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK issued, during its session on Monday, the decision on abolishing the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Country, the National Economic Cooperation Bureau and the Kumgangsan International Tourism Administration, agencies designed to facilitate inter-Korean dialogue, negotiations

and cooperation, the report said.

The decision was made on the grounds that "the reunification of Korea can never be achieved with the Republic of Korea which set it as its state policy to achieve the 'unification by absorption' and 'unification under liberal democracy'" according to the report.

"It is quite contrary to our national reunification line based on one nation, one state and two systems which we have adhered to for nearly 80 years," the report said.

"It is a serious anachronistic mistake to regard the ROK as a partner

for reconciliation and reunification any longer as it declared the DPRK as a 'principal enemy' and is seeking only an opportunity for 'bringing down the government' and achieving 'unification by absorption', while keeping the uncontrollable crisis on the Korean Peninsula in collusion with outside forces."

In a speech to the Supreme People's Assembly, the DPRK's top leader Kim Jong-un said: "We should take strict stepwise measures to thoroughly block all the channels of north-south communication along the border."

Kim, also general secretary of the

Workers' Party of Korea and president of the State Affairs of the DPRK, said: "We do not want war, but we also have no intention of avoiding it."

The move comes amid heightened tensions on the Korean Peninsula as the ROK's military exercises with the United States have intensified.

The Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Country has been the DPRK's main agency in handling inter-Korean affairs since its establishment in 1961, The Associated Press reported.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

Cast away



People take part in a traditional fishing festival in Sylhet, Bangladesh, on Monday. The festival is celebrated on the first day of the Bangla month of Poush. MD RAFAYAT HAQUE KHAN / NEWSCOM

Timely help



A resident helps a woman rescued from her home in a boat on a flooded street in Rio de Janeiro state, Brazil, on Monday. Neighborhoods in the state remained flooded after torrential rains killed at least 12 people. PILAR OLIVARES / REUTERS

Kremlin: Ukraine talks yield nothing without Russia

By REN QI in Moscow
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The Kremlin said on Monday that talks in Davos on Kyiv's peace proposals would achieve nothing as Russia was not participating in the discussions, and Moscow will continue its special military operation in Ukraine until all its goals are achieved.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, French President Emmanuel Macron and some leaders from the Middle East are scheduled to attend this week's World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, putting talks to end conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine at the top of the agenda for the global elite.

According to Swiss Federal Councilor for Foreign Affairs Ignazio Cas-

is, delegates from 83 countries are taking part in a meeting of national security advisers on the Ukrainian "peace formula", which is being held in Davos at the initiative of Switzerland and Ukraine on Sunday.

"This is simply talking for the sake of talking," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said when asked about the Davos discussions on Ukraine.

"This process cannot be aimed at achieving any specific results for the obvious reason — we are not participating. Without our participation, any discussions are devoid of any prospect of any results."

When asked about Russia's position on possible talks with Ukraine, Peskov said Ukraine's own position on outlawing talks with Moscow

was "absurd". Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has decreed that any talks with Russia are illegal.

"For us, it is preferable to achieve our security objectives through peaceful and diplomatic means," he said.

"But in the face of the impossibility of this — the unwillingness of the collective West and Ukraine to take into account our security considerations, we will continue the special military operation," Peskov said. "We will achieve our goals."

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova claimed on Sunday that peace talks would work only when the West stops imposing sanctions on Russia.

But US Treasury Deputy Secretary Wally Adeyemo would start a week-long visit to Europe and Japan on

Tuesday, where he will coordinate with partners on the use of a new Russian sanctions authority that takes aim at financial institutions.

Meanwhile, Peskov said Russian President Vladimir Putin will visit the Democratic People's Republic of Korea "in the foreseeable future".

It came as Pyongyang's top diplomat Choe Son-hui arrived in Moscow on Sunday.

The visit is to further discuss agreements reached by the DPRK's top leader Kim Jong-un on a space launch facility in the Russian Far East in September, where Putin promised to help Pyongyang build satellites.

"Dialogue at all levels will continue... We look forward to intense and fruitful negotiations," Peskov said.

BUSINESS

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Boom in travel to 'ice city' Harbin spurs sales of cranberry products

By ZHU WENQIAN
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The tourism business in Northeast China, led by "ice city" Harbin, capital of Heilongjiang province, has reached a historical high during the winter season, boosting sales of several related sectors such as locally produced cranberries.

Online searches and online sales volume of cranberries, cranberry juice, jam and dried cranberries have surged in recent days.

Earlier, not many people were familiar with cranberries produced in Heilongjiang, and consumers mainly bought them for baking and embellishments in cocktails. Most stores did not even have high inventories of the previously little-known fruit.

But retailers have had to urgently restock, as sales of cranberries surged following livestreaming sessions, industry players said.

When a group of children from Nanning, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, went on a study tour to Northeast China in early January, they received a warm welcome in Harbin and Mohe, the northernmost city in China.

Touched by the response of Heilongjiang residents, who had taken good care of the students, Guangxi sent truckloads of honey mandarins to Harbin to express its gratitude.

In return, Heilongjiang sent 100,000 boxes of premium cranberries to Guangxi. The gesture went viral online, fueling the popularity of cranberries.

The departments of commerce in Guangxi and Heilongjiang are now discussing business opportunities to promote special local products.

"Our warehouse has reported a shortage of fresh cranberries. It is expected that based on the current booming sales, it will run out of stocks by the end of the month," said Dang Linguang, director of Ganfuyuan, a store for cranberries on Alibaba's e-commerce platform Taobao.

Dang said his store serviced more than 500 orders for cranberries on Jan 7 and over 1,000 orders

on Jan 8 following the newfound popularity of the fruit.

The area extending from China's easternmost city of Fuyuan in Heilongjiang to Heihe on the Russian border is Asia's largest cranberry producing area. The Greater Hinggan Mountains in Northeast China have been a major production area of cranberries, and domestic cranberries are only grown in some parts of the province.

In 2023, the output of cranberries at the base reached 2,700 metric tons, up 5.88 percent year-on-year.

Still, the domestic supply of cranberries in China does not meet the demand, and the country mainly imports cranberries from the United States, Chile and Canada, according to the local government.

Cranberries mainly grow in cold regions, and the main sales season falls between September and December.

They generally grow at the foot of mountains and near acidic lakes, swamps or ponds, industry players said.

"Cranberries prefer cool environments and require moist peat soil, as this kind of soil has good air permeability and drainage, which can meet the large-scale water harvesting requirements of cranberries," Dang said.

The travel boom in Harbin, market experts said, will help promote local consumption and draw the attention of more Chinese consumers to Northeast China.

The craze for the "ice city" and related online marketing events are similar to the popularity of Zibo barbecue and Guizhou province's popular Village Basketball Association. It has become a phenomenon, said Li Yang, associate professor of marketing at the Cheung Kong Graduate School of Business.

"Harbin is a large market, and it has more to offer beyond winter travel consumption. On a macro level, the overall consumption recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic depends on residents' consumption confidence and expectations for potential income growth," he said.



A view of Apple Inc's flagship store in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. LONG WEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Apple offers discounts as market heats up

4-day promotion expected to stabilize tech giant's sales in Chinese mainland

By CHENG YU
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US technology giant Apple Inc will offer a rare discount of up to 800 yuan (\$114) for Chinese mainland consumers on its latest series of products from Thursday to Sunday.

Industry experts interpreted Apple's discount as a strategy to boost sales in the lead-up to the Lunar New Year holiday in the first half of February, one of China's most important festivals and a peak consumption period.

Any sales spike could help Apple grab a larger share of China's consumer tech market that is marked by increasingly fierce competition.

Apple's sales promotion spans iPhones, iPads, MacBook Air laptops and AirPods. The discount on its latest iPhone 15 is 500 yuan, or about 8 percent of the listed price, while that on the MacBook Air is up to 800 yuan, or about 10 percent off.

"Apple had already adjusted prices of its iPhone 15 series in multiple channels like e-commerce platforms. It's for the first time in years that Apple is (directly) offer-

ing a discount at the beginning of a year," said Guo Tianxiang, senior analyst from market consultancy IDC China.

Ivan Lam, senior analyst at market consultancy Counterpoint Research, wrote in a note: "The strategic price adjustment will cancel out competitive pressure but will also boost sales growth, especially around the Lunar New Year season. The move will also help Apple clear out older models from its inventory."

In China, Apple is facing heightened competition from domestic tech companies, including Huawei Technologies and Xiaomi Corp. Huawei launched its Mate 60 series of phones in August.

The Mate 60 series is widely regarded as the Chinese smartphone maker's comeback to the high-end smartphone market amid geopolitical tensions.

According to a research note of brokerage Jefferies, in the first week of this year, Apple's iPhone sales in China dropped by 30 percent year-on-year, but its competitors such as Xiaomi and Huawei remained much stronger with

sales that remained flat.

There have been aggressive discounts on multiple iPhone models on major Chinese online marketplaces. For instance, the latest iPhone 15 Pro and iPhone 15 Pro Max retailed at a 16 percent discount on e-commerce platform Pinduoduo in the first week of this year, the note said.

Jefferies analysts also said they believe Apple's iPhone sales will fall by double digits this year in China and expect the US tech giant to face even higher revenue pressure in the Chinese market this year.

IDC said it believes China, the world's largest smartphone market, is expected to see its smartphone shipments soar 3.6 percent year-on-year to 287 million units this year, which would mark the market's first year-on-year growth.

With an expected sales recovery, various brands, be it Huawei or Apple, will eventually rely on product quality and features to win market share, said Xiang Ligang, director-general of the Information Consumption Alliance.

"In recent years, Apple has made modest strides in product innovation. After Huawei's breakthrough comeback, the Chinese firm will gain a more active position in the market," he said.

State Grid to pump 500b yuan into power system

By ZHENG XIN
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State Grid Corp of China said it would invest more than 500 billion yuan (\$69.6 billion) in grid network construction this year to ensure power supply stability and boost green power consumption.

The investment will be focused on construction of ultra-high voltage power transmission projects, while the company also vowed to continue stepping up construction of clean energy power transmission, intelligent power distribution systems, new energy storage regulation and vehicle network interaction, among others.

UHV transmission lines refer to power transmission cables operating with greater than 800 kilovolts of direct current, or 1,000 kV of alternating current. Compared with traditional transmission lines, UHV lines not only increase transmission capacity and extend transmission distances, but also reduce transmission losses.

The Beijing-based State-owned enterprise said six UHV AC power transmission projects are expected to be completed and put into operation this year, while the company will also promote the approval of several new UHV projects, it said.

An analyst said acceleration of investment in grid construction by State Grid, the largest power provider in the country, will not only guarantee sufficient energy supply, but also provide more green power in the country's energy mix.

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number of State Grid's UHV projects that will be constructed during 2021-25

Kou Nannan, head of China Research at BloombergNEF, said most new energy sources are intermittent with rapid and random variables, making it difficult to maintain stable and steady power generation, thus posing a threat to steady grid operation.

Investment in infrastructure, such as upgrading and expanding the grid, as well as developing energy storage systems, will play a key role in accelerating China's green and low-carbon energy transformation in the years to come, Kou said.

While the country's green energy transition creates growth opportunities, it can also put significant strain on existing grids. For the power distribution industry, which has not experienced major changes in half a century, energy transition means fundamental transformation, global consultancy Accenture said in a report.

Increasing investment in the grid network will lead to greater use of transmission channels, and help shore up investor confidence in wind and solar projects, it said.

China, which vows to peak carbon emissions before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060, has pledged to build a new electric power system with the share of new energy resources rising further.

The National Energy Administration said China's installed capacity of renewable energy exceeded that of thermal power last year, with solar and wind power playing a major role in allowing green energy's installed capacity to exceed 1 billion kilowatts.

Minsheng Securities said the country's power grid investment scale will witness a substantial increase during the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) period, while intelligent distribution networks and digitized transformations will be key.

State Grid has for years been accelerating construction of the power grid. It said earlier that it would complete construction of 38 UHV projects during the period. Total investment, meanwhile, is expected to reach 380 billion yuan, up 35.7 percent compared with that during the previous five years, it said.



Employees sort cranberries at a plantation in Fuyuan, Heilongjiang province. LI YONGJUN / XINHUA

Briefly

PBOC adds liquidity via reverse repos

China's central bank conducted 760 billion yuan (\$106.84 billion) of seven-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 1.8 percent on Tuesday. The move aims to offset the impact of the tax season and keep liquidity in the banking system reasonable and ample, the People's Bank of China said in a statement. A reverse repo is a process by which the central bank purchases securities from commercial banks through bidding, with an agreement to sell them back in the future.

Zhejiang sees surging power consumption

Zhejiang province, an economic

powerhouse in East China, saw a 6.78 percent year-on-year increase in electricity consumption in 2023, signaling positive momentum in its economic growth. The province's power usage reached 619.2 billion kilowatt-hours last year, with manufacturing taking up about 345 billion kWh, a yearly rise of 8.74 percent, said State Grid Zhejiang Electric Power Co Ltd. Among the 31 manufacturing subsectors, 29 saw positive growth in power usage, represented by high-tech and high-value-added sectors such as photovoltaic equipment production. Meanwhile, some high energy-consuming industries, like aluminum smelting, saw falling power usage.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

Marine engineering equipment industry set to expand this year

By ZHONG NAN
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China's offshore engineering equipment industry is expected to grow substantially this year on the back of a fast-growing marine economy, cost competitiveness and technological advancements, said market watchers and industry sources.

They said the marine engineering equipment industry has seen solid breakthroughs in recent years as it transitions from a period when focus was on marine oil and gas to a new phase where emerging marine power generation is considered critical.

Marine engineering vessels will continue to serve as a primary driving force in the marine equipment market this year, experts said.

The offshore equipment market in China has already reached a certain scale, encompassing various areas like marine engineering ships, oil rigs, offshore wind power installation vessels, marine engineering heavy-lift ships and offshore platform supply vessels, said Lu Huawei, a professor specializing in offshore engineering equipment manufacturing at Dalian Maritime University in Liaoning province.

For example, there has been a notable increase in global demand for offshore wind installation vessels, and Chinese manufacturers have secured nearly 90 percent of these orders, data from the China

Association of the National Shipbuilding Industry showed.

As of October, there were 37 worldwide orders for offshore wind installation vessels, with Chinese shipyards bagging as many as 33 of them.

From a product structure perspective, China's marine equipment market boasts significant diversity, capable of catering to various marine resource development needs across different fields and water depths, said Chen Xinhua, vice-president of Shanghai Zhenhua Heavy Industries Qidong Marine Engineering Co Ltd, a Nantong, Jiangsu province-based manufacturer.

He predicted that auxiliary vessels, such as heavy-lift and offshore support vessels, will have high utilization rates and market demand this year. These vessels, which are not primarily used for navigation but rather for offshore operations and services, are expected to be increasingly vital to the industry.

CIMC Jiguang Marine Technology (Yantai) Co Ltd, a Yantai, Shandong province-based offshore engineering product manufacturer and a subsidiary of Shenzhen, Guangdong province-headquartered China International Marine Containers (Group) Co Ltd, plans to deploy more resources to develop semi-submersible offshore photovoltaic power generation platforms this year.

"Our semi-submersible offshore photovoltaic power platform, which is larger than four basketball

courts, can generate up to 400 kilowatts of electricity per hour. It is able to provide power to nearby offshore platforms," said Pan Xi, the company's president.

China has about 710,000 square kilometers of eligible offshore areas for the development of solar photovoltaic installations, with an estimated potential capacity exceeding 70 gigawatts, he said, noting that compared to land, the solar irradiance on the sea surface is higher.

China's marine power industry saw newly connected capacity and electricity generation of offshore wind power surge 14.8 percent and 19.2 percent year-on-year, respectively, in the first three quarters of 2023, data from the Ministry of Natural Resources showed.

China's offshore engineering product market is closely tied to demand for energy, particularly oil and natural gas. The future growth of the market will depend on energy needs of both domestic and global markets, said Xu Weidong, a member of the expert committee at Shandong Electric Power Engineering Consulting Institute Corp Ltd.

Echoing that sentiment, Feng Xuebao, secretary-general of the Shanghai Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers, said that with the advancement of deep-water oil and gas exploration technologies and the resurgence of oil prices, deepwater oil and gas development will emerge as a crucial direction for the future growth of the marine economy.

BUSINESS

FESTIVE CONSUMPTION

Gen Z takes charge of festival agenda

Quest to build enduring memories, boost family ties drives shopping

By FAN FEIFEI

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The post-1995 generation has accounted for more than half of the consumers who have already purchased products for the upcoming Spring Festival holiday, and they are increasingly willing to prepare Lunar New Year's Eve dinners for family members, according to Taobao, Chinese tech heavyweight Alibaba Group's online marketplace.

The young demographic tends to buy fresh ingredients from e-commerce platforms, with sales of beef, mutton and shrimp surging 153 percent, 130 percent and 182 percent year-on-year, respectively, since December, Taobao said.

Zhang Peng, head of food and fresh produce industry at Alibaba's Taobao and Tmall Group, said young people's pursuit of a "sense of ritual" is forming a new consumption trend, and "new varieties" of family reunion dinners alongside more trans-regional cuisines will appear on dining tables this holiday.

For instance, people in Zhejiang province prefer to buy mutton from the Inner Mongolia autonomous

region, while those in southern provinces fancy seafood caught from Chagan Lake in Songyuan, Northeast China's Jilin province, Zhang said.

Young shoppers are more inclined to place orders while watching livestreaming sessions, which boost sales of agricultural products like oranges, cherries, tea, seasoned duck and nut gift boxes, Taobao said. In addition, other products, including liquor and red wine, are gaining popularity among the demographic.

Consumers who buy commodities for Lunar New Year via Alibaba's online Tmall Supermarket are able to enjoy half-day express delivery services in 20 cities, including Beijing and Shanghai, the company said.

Industry insiders said China's young consumers, especially Gen Z — people born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s — grew up with the rise of the internet, instant messaging, smart devices and other digital technologies. What's more, they are well-educated, have developed distinct personalities and hobbies, and are capable of making their own choices.

China's younger shoppers are emerging as mainstream consum-



Visitors gather at an event held by Alibaba's Tmall to promote Spring Festival products in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, on Sunday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ers and becoming the driving force behind the growth of livestreaming e-commerce, said Mo Daqing, a senior analyst at domestic consultancy Internet Economy Institute.

Young Chinese shoppers, who have started stocking up ahead of the Lunar New Year, prefer trying something new and boast comparatively higher purchasing power, Mo said, adding that they have witnessed China's rapid economic development, which enables them to have a global perspective and willingness to embrace diversity.

Moreover, an increasing number of young people would rather spend money on experiences rather than the product itself, she added.

Hong Yong, an associate research fellow at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation's e-commerce research institute, said, "Spring Festival is the traditional festival that Chinese people attach the most importance to, and it's also a peak season for consumption." Major Chinese online retailers

have launched promotional events ahead of the weeklong Chinese New Year holiday to promote the recovery of the country's consumer market, Hong said, adding that these promotional campaigns will further unleash pent-up consumption demand and inject fresh impetus into China's immense consumer market.

China's consumption market has witnessed a recovery. In the January-November period, retail sales increased 7.2 percent year-on-year to 42.79 trillion yuan (\$5.95 trillion), data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed.

Moreover, online consumption remained a bright spot as online retail sales rose 11 percent to 13.96 trillion yuan on a yearly basis during the period.

As the Chinese consumer market gradually recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is a critical time for brands and retailers to reshape strategies and strengthen market adaptability, according to a report from consultancy Bain & Co.

Retailers need to leverage data and technology to better understand consumer behavior, thus optimizing their product mix and promotional strategies, as well as balance the tasks of maintaining competitive pricing and focusing on product quality, product innovation, supply chains and sourcing, the report said.

Havas banks on AI to spur growth in China

By HE QI in Shanghai

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As one of the first batch of communications firms to embrace artificial intelligence, Paris-based Havas Group decided to actively apply AI to its business while continuing to invest in the Chinese market, which is considered a leading market in creative goods and services.

Yannick Bollere, global chairman and CEO of Havas Group, believes AI will bring disruptive changes to the industry.

"AI has been a topic of discussion for the last 12 months on a global scale. If you compare AI with what happened to painting after the invention of the camera, it's a little bit the same. The camera hasn't killed all the painters. It has killed the average painter, and it created Cubism, Surrealism, Expressionism and Impressionism. I don't know if AI will replace people in every industry. But I know for sure that people using AI will replace people that are not using AI. That's why we are moving very importantly into AI," said Bollere.

Founded in 1835 and one of the world's largest global communications groups, Havas has more than 23,000 employees in over 100 countries.

In China, Havas serves a large variety of clients such as those engaged in fast-moving consumer goods, consumer electronics, lifestyle goods and services, finance, food and beverage as well as tourism, focusing on communications consulting and services across offices in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong province's Guangzhou and Shenzhen, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and Taiwan province.

The company has been cooperating with and supporting Chinese smartphone maker Huawei to become a global high-end brand since 2015, and during its five-year cooperation with Tsingtao Beer, Havas also created a series of impressive advertising videos. These successful partnerships have helped Havas occupy an important position in the Chinese market.

However, despite the positive development in both China and the global market, companies like Havas still need to maneuver amid changes brought by AI to the industry.

Research released by US market research company Gartner Inc recently pointed out that nearly 63 percent of marketing executives plan to invest in generative AI solutions in the next two years.

Yang Tong, vice-president of Amazon China, pointed out that generative AI will become a creative tool used by advertisers in their daily lives in 2024.

"The increasingly diversified and fragmented media environment alongside the continuous innovation and iteration of advertising technology around the world have brought unprecedented changes to the advertising and marketing industry. Understanding global marketing trends, leveraging diverse media channels to reach potential global users and telling good brand stories are crucial for enterprises to achieve global success," Yang said.

To embrace the rapidly growing technology and AI industry, Havas quickly responded and became a prime example in the industry.

Besides providing global training for tips on newly emerging technologies and making AI tools accessible to almost all employees around the world, the company implemented AI Generated Content in its business operations.

"AI, and its many derivatives, are already being deployed across the majority (over 90 percent) of our group," said Bollere.

"We also saved a lot of time. Our creative executives and directors could finish their work in 20 minutes which earlier took them two or five hours. AI is poised to reinvent the entire communications industry and pave the way for better, more accessible human expression by eliminating monotonous tasks and expanding creative potential."

"We will arm our client solutions and offerings empowered by AI, especially where creative content and visual meet, by bringing and adapting new tools," Bollere added.

Younger generation keen to shop over long break

By WANG ZHUOQIONG

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Young people in China are playing greater roles as decisionmakers as Spring Festival draws nigh, willing to spend more and seeking memorable experiences, according to a lifestyle market survey.

"Spring Festival holds paramount significance as the key annual celebration, encompassing the run-up to the holiday and the festival itself, periods that serve as distinct shopping opportunities," said Jason Yu, general manager of Kantar Worldpanel China.

Yu said this year's heightened expectations for Lunar New Year festivities have spurred increased marketing initiatives aligned with diverse moments and needs.

As revealed by its 2024 report on insights on social media trends during the festival, jointly compiled by Kantar, a market research institute, and Xiaohongshu, a lifestyle-focused social media platform, about 83 percent of those aged between 18 and 35 consider themselves or their partners to be primary planners for the festival in the Year of the Dragon, with the

bulk of the rest naming their parents as the key organizers.

The report, based on interviews with 400 young consumers across first, second and third-tier cities, said 48 percent of respondents are opting to celebrate the holiday at home, 33 percent plan to return to hometowns and some 18 percent intend to travel.

Compared to the Spring Festival last year, 68 percent of consumers plan to increase their spending for the upcoming extended holiday, 26 percent have no budgetary changes in mind and only 6 percent will tighten their purse strings over the break.

The report found that hot commodities during the Spring Festival are apparel and accessories (48 percent), snacks, alcohol and beverages (36 percent), fresh produce (36 percent), restaurants (36 percent) and personal hygiene (36 percent).

Travel spending is expected to rise some 36 percent, ranking third among growing categories.

As for activities planned for the break, 97 percent of young individuals will prioritize "food and drinks", 55 percent will focus on activities imbued with festival



Shoppers check out Spring Festival decoration items at a mall in Yuncheng, Shanxi province, on Sunday. YAN XIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

vibes, 36 percent plan to participate in Lunar New Year dinner preparations, 36 percent will take part in indoor entertainment and recreational activities while some 30 percent will focus on healthy activities and gift giving.

The motivations behind these

festival plans predominantly revolve around seeking positive starts to the beginning of a new lunar year, creating unforgettable experiences, improving mental and physical health, and fostering family ties.

On social media platforms,

young people are exploring ideas for a joyful holiday, including indulging in culinary delights, sharing local specialties, experiencing diverse cuisine, checking out outdoor markets or galas, and taking part in banquets and other activities.

Chinese enterprises investing more in intellectual property

BEIJING — In the initial stages of traditional business strategies, enterprises tend to spend money on marketing for fast returns, but an increasing number of Chinese startups are now willing to invest in intellectual property despite a longer period before they see returns.

The pride of Airdoc Technology, a Beijing-based medical device maker, is a wall of patent certificates. Since its establishment in 2015, the company has owned over 500 invention and design patents.

Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, it logged considerable spending on IP management. In August 2020, China's drug authorities approved AI diagnostic software developed by Airdoc for clinical use.

The company also cooperated with big hospitals nationwide on scientific research, the results of which appeared frequently on the pages of international academic journals.

"Patents have boosted the company's competitiveness and made a great contribution to revenue," said Airdoc's Vice-President Wu Xiaolei.

IP plays a crucial role in attracting external investment for enter-

prises, and enterprises can transform intangible IP into wealth through effective operations, Wu said.

Cost-effectiveness used to be Great Wall Motor's primary competitive advantage in market penetration. But few customers are aware that the domestic carmaker has been the leading patent holder among China's private auto enterprises for several consecutive years, thanks to the company's annual allocation of nearly 100 million yuan (\$13.95 million) to IP endeavors.

In recent years, Great Wall Motor has augmented its research and development expenditure consistently, enhancing performance and refining designs, particularly in the domains of new energy vehicles and intelligent software.

In 2023, the company launched an off-road vehicle that not only won China's prestigious design patent award but also became a resounding success, with sales exceeding 280,000 units and profits nearing 20 billion yuan.

With the increasing pace at which Chinese enterprises are going abroad, many private firms have faced IP challenges. In the early years of the 21st century, the origi-

inality of a Great Wall Motor design was questioned at a European trade show. And a decade ago, a domestic smartphone brand renowned for its high performance-to-price ratio also found itself embroiled in a patent dispute in India.

Such growth pangs have prompted Chinese enterprises to shift their focus from cost competitiveness to IP competitiveness. They have discovered that the only path to achieving sustainable development is prioritizing R&D while safeguarding innovation.

Tencent's Vice-President Jiang Bo revealed at the 12th China IP Annual Conference that the company has invested an astonishing 180 billion yuan in R&D since 2020.

Tencent stands out as a leading player among global internet giants in terms of patent applications and grants, showcasing the alignment of its innovation input and patent ownership.

The sharing of cutting-edge technologies through open patent licenses has also helped Tencent generate revenue. Describing the tech giant's returns on its IP investment, Jiang said, "If sci-tech innovation is considered an addition, IP would be a multiplication, and using this multiplication effect can

create sustainable social value." While enterprises actively engage in IP investment, the Chinese government has been steadfastly fortifying IP legislation, amending patent laws, and rigorously penalizing illicit activities such as patent infringement. IP regulators have established protection centers to provide low-cost, expeditious and efficient services for small enterprises to solve their IP problems.

And these endeavors have garnered international recognition. China ranked 12th on the Global Innovation Index 2023, released by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), and has the largest number of sci-tech clusters globally. At the second WIPO Global Awards, seven small and medium-sized enterprises were honored, with China securing two of these awards — ranking first among all countries.

IP also brings added value. Beijing-based pharmaceutical company WehandBio has led the development of a groundbreaking drug to reduce blood sugar levels, helping farmers in South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region combat poverty simultaneously.

Following a 21-year study, the company developed a diabetes treatment using a potent active ingredient derived from mulberry branches. WehandBio owns over 50 patents related to this innovative remedy.

The company established a production base in Hechi, Guangxi, that had several impoverished areas and abundant local mulberry resources. Previously, local farmers had used mulberry leaves to cultivate silkworms, which was a major industry, but the branches were considered useless and were thus wasted.

But WehandBio's new drug has turned these branches into treasures, increasing the incomes of local farmers by 30 to 40 percent since its market launch in 2020, said Jiang Lingmin, head of the company's development department.

A recent advertisement aired on a national State broadcaster stressed the importance of protecting IP to promote innovation, and this emphasis has been widely adopted by Chinese enterprises. WehandBio, for example, will increase IP investment to create sustainable economic and social value, Jiang said.

XINHUA

BUSINESSFOCUS

Fujian town makes third of country's umbrellas

Dual-circulation development, tech innovation help Dongshi thrive over the years

By ZHENG YIRAN in Beijing and HU MEIDONG in Fuzhou

Dongshi, a town in Jinjiang, East China's Fujian province, produces one out of three umbrellas nationwide, and one out of four globally. Two thirds of Chinese-made umbrella parts are also made there.

Dongshi, understandably nicknamed "Umbrella Town", is seeing orders rain down like cats and dogs, as it has developed an umbrella industrial chain worth more than 10 billion yuan (\$1.4 billion).

Dongshi's economic development and reform office said that in 2022, the town's total output value reached nearly 13 billion yuan. There were a total of over 470 umbrella manufacturing enterprises, producing around 560 million units annually.

Ding Jingtang, general manager of Haixia (Jinjiang) Umbrella Scientific Innovation Center, is a representative for umbrella entrepreneurs in Dongshi. In 2005, Ding came from his hometown in Hubei province to Jinjiang for work. He soon after joined an umbrella manufacturing firm as an administrative staffer, but actually knew next to nil about umbrella manufacturing at the time.

As it turned out, lady luck was on Ding's side, as a company's technical department was short of staff. Ding therefore gradually picked up on the job as if it were the art of umbrella making, and not long after realized that he was keenly interested in the craft. Sometimes, in order to fully wrap his head around a small detail in the umbrella-making process, he didn't clock out until 3 am or so. However, Ding enjoyed the work immensely.

In 2007, a foldable umbrella handle project completed by Ding and his team obtained a utility model patent. The project won the Jinjiang golden patent award in 2008.

"This was a great honor and encouragement for us. Afterward, everyone devoted more passion and yearned to conquer higher technological barriers in umbrella manufacturing," Ding recalled.

In 2015, the "self-opening and closing umbrella with safety protection functions" developed by Ding and his team won a China Patent Award — the first of its kind in Jinjiang. The umbrella, which garnered six invention patents, now helps the company earn tens of millions of yuan every year, and has become a flagship product. Three years later, another project developed by Ding and his team won another China Patent Award.

Eventually, a few leading umbrella manufacturers in Dongshi jointly funded the Haixia (Jinjiang) Umbrella Scientific Innovation Center, with Ding being among the shareholders.

The center mainly focuses on technological innovation, achieve-



Umbrellas of various types and patterns are displayed in a showroom of a manufacturing enterprise in Jinjiang, Fujian province, in June 2022. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

“Within years of transformation, the town's umbrella manufacturing industry has begun gaining a firm foothold both at home and abroad.”

Wang Xiangpeng, head of the Jinjiang Umbrella Industry Association



Workers are busy at an umbrella production line in Jinjiang in June 2022. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ment transformation, testing, quality certification and product design. In the past years, the center has actively promoted research and development, helping umbrella manufacturing enterprises realize technology transfers and transactions, as well as intellectual property transfers and licensing. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the center facilitated over 10 million yuan worth of technology transformation within the industry.

"In the past, we had to travel to Guangdong province, Shanghai and Beijing to complete a lot of tests. Now, the tests can be done at home, greatly lowering business costs. More importantly, the center is open to the whole umbrella manufactur-

ing industry, which improves the efficiency of the sector, and lowers R&D costs," Ding said.

Xiong Jun, chairman of Jinjiang Dayu Umbrella Co Ltd, has experienced some changes in business trends after the pandemic.

"In the past, we only needed to deal with a few big foreign clients and produce umbrellas according to the orders. An order-placing meeting once a year was enough. Now, this is far from capable of meeting market demand, which has resulted from the country's new dual-circulation development pattern that keeps the domestic market as its mainstay while letting domestic and foreign markets reinforce each other. Domestic demand has been

greatly unleashed," Xiong said.

Now, there is one additional task to perform during Xiong's business trips. Every time he visits a city, apart from visiting customers and distributors, Xiong takes a stroll around town, seeking out supermarkets and universities where students gather in order to get a feel for the market. "College students are one of our main customer groups, and mastering their consumption preferences is the key to mastering the 'compass' of new product development."

In the past, exports of umbrellas were mainly based on large orders, and whether one could secure some of these orders might make or break a company in Dongshi. Dependent

on export channels, the town's finished umbrellas were exported to more than 160 countries and regions around the world.

However, hit by the pandemic and the global macroeconomic situation, the town's export orders shrank significantly. To tackle the challenge, the town has been embracing a "dual-circulation" development paradigm, actively exploring the domestic market while also keeping one eye on overseas opportunities. Meanwhile, it has stepped up efforts in new product R&D, technological innovation, the introduction of cultural and creative elements, online and offline distribution channel exploration, and new brand establishment to satisfy domestic demand.

"In the past few years, the domestic market share of umbrellas made in Dongshi has been constantly improving. Now, it has a 33 percent share in China. Within years of transformation, the town's umbrella manufacturing industry has begun gaining a firm foothold both at home and abroad," said Wang Xiangpeng, head of the Jinjiang Umbrella Industry Association.

In the new era, the umbrella manufacturing industry in Dongshi is embracing high-quality development. Specifically, the local government and entrepreneurs have been aiming to transform from low value-added manufacturing to targeting the mid to high-end market.

"We should aim at current and future market demand, enable technology and culture to empower the umbrella manufacturing industry, promote the local industry to march

toward a high-tech, intelligent and fashion development path, and seize the high value-added market space both domestically and internationally," said Jiang Jiaxing, township government chief of Dongshi.

Enterprises are actively developing umbrellas with proprietary intellectual property, integrating local characteristics and cultural elements, such as oriental variegated patterns, porcelain and culturally specific fabrication skills. The finished products have thus become increasingly popular among consumers.

Meanwhile, new technologies and new equipment are constantly being upgraded.

"Previously, there were over 20 parts needed to make a single umbrella. Now, through independent R&D, we have not only reduced the number of parts to fewer than 10, but also achieved more comprehensive functionality and stable performance of our products," said Xiao Yingzhen, chairman of Jinjiang Tengxing Umbrella and Plastics Co Ltd.

Statistics showed that between 2017 and 2023, the umbrella manufacturing industrial cluster of Dongshi completed 22 technological transformation projects. There were 16 intelligent transformation enterprises, and technological transformation investment totaled nearly 1.2 billion yuan. So far, the town owns over 1,300 patented products, such as ultraviolet-resistant coated umbrellas and self-opening and closing umbrellas with safety functions.

Contact the writers at zhengyiran@chinadaily.com.cn

Innovative rain protectors usher in sunnier future for townsfolk

By ZHENG YIRAN in Beijing and HU MEIDONG in Fuzhou

With technological advances, high-tech umbrellas manufactured in Dongshi town, Jinjiang, East China's Fujian province, are winning the hearts of consumers and improving local peoples' livelihoods.

For example, a rotating flashlight-inlaid umbrella manufactured in Dongshi has become one of the best-selling models.

"These days, apart from eating, sleeping and driving, my life has been filled with price negotiations. Our rotating flashlight umbrellas are selling like hot cakes. The production equipment in the factory has expanded from four units to over 20. Our research and development and production capabilities have been constantly improving, and merchants come to us for orders one after another," said Ye Jinyun, founder of Jinjiang Haoda Umbrella and Accessories Co.

Ye said the rotating flashlight umbrella has been popular for two years. During peak sales seasons,

the company produced over half a million units of the model every month. Even with this frenetic manufacturing flurry, supply failed to meet demand.

"Trucks waited in line at the factory to get loaded, and sometimes we were out of stock," Ye said.

He added that during peak season, monthly demand for the specialized umbrellas totaled well over 2 million, and 90 percent was met by umbrella manufacturers in Dongshi, where businesses all over the country went to pick up goods. The model is extremely popular on online platforms such as Tmall, Taobao and Douyin.

"The popularity of the product has declined a little this year. However, we are launching a new product soon. This evening, a client from Zhejiang province is coming over to see my new product. It is likely to bring new growth points for the company," Ye said.

Apart from the flashlight umbrella, another product from Dongshi — a specialized plastic-handled model — has been popular in the market since 2019. The man-

ufacturer, Jinjiang Nathan Umbrella Co Ltd, has been constantly upgrading its products. Now, it has launched the third generation of the model, which sold over some 800,000 units on the first day it was launched on Douyin's e-commerce platform, becoming an overnight bestseller for the company.

Huang Jiangnan, general manager of Jinjiang Nathan Umbrella, said: "Making profits is better than expanding scale. Only through continuous product innovation, meeting new demand from consumers and solving pain points can we gain a sustained competitive advantage."

Huang said that in order to better carry out industrial design and product innovation, he has introduced senior experts from the umbrella industry in Taiwan to jointly develop products. Every year, five or six innovative products are put into production and launched in the market.

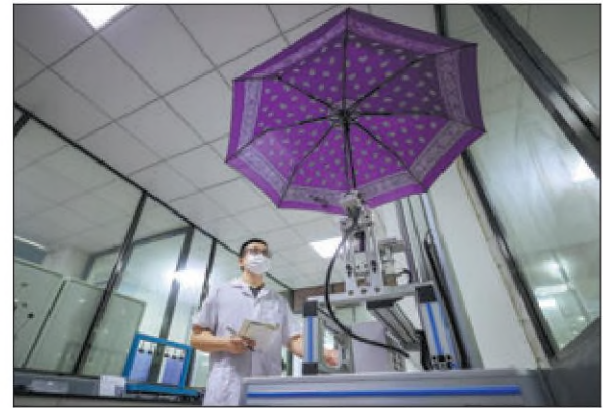
In fact, as early as 2014, there were enterprises manufacturing such umbrella handles in Dongshi.

After years of development, there are now 40 to 50 such enterprises, offering no less than half a million such handles every month.

Industry experts say the reason why umbrellas from Dongshi sell well is because the local industry owns a complete umbrella manufacturing industrial chain.

In the 1980s, people in the town started to open umbrella factories and introduce advanced manufacturing equipment, forming numerous umbrella making professional villages. Driven by leading enterprises and industrial clusters, Dongshi has formed a complete industrial chain and also accumulated a lot of umbrella industry talent and technologies.

Wang Xiangpeng, head of the Jinjiang Umbrella Industry Association, said: "We have advantages in terms of our industrial chain, and our practitioners have more exquisite assembly skills. For example, the technology of self-opening and collecting umbrellas mainly focuses on the handle. A small handle has a relatively complex internal structure, with no fewer than five



A technician tests umbrella quality at a lab in Jinjiang, Fujian province, in June 2022. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

parts in each handle. Each part requires different suppliers, and there are no fewer than 50 material suppliers in this category in Dongshi."

Wang added: "The structure of the skeleton is also very complex, with several parts. There are no

fewer than 100 suppliers of such parts in the town, and even a spring and screw can be quickly found in Dongshi. With joint efforts from the industry, we will step up efforts to promote the innovation of the umbrella manufacturing industry in Dongshi."

COMMENT

Editorials

Sincere upholding of cooperation and staunch opposition to economic hegemony at Davos

China will continue to be an important driver of the global economy and create opportunities for global development, and it will firmly advance high-standard opening-up and work for economic globalization that is more open, inclusive, balanced and beneficial to all.

That was the key message that Premier Li Qiang conveyed to world leaders and representatives of the business community in his speech at the ongoing World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, on Tuesday.

His speech reflects the country's strong confidence in the prospects of its own sustainable recovery and its conviction that in the face of the sluggish global recovery, all countries need to pull together to tide over difficulties and seek common development.

Premier Li's exchanges with other government and business leaders at the gathering in the Swiss resort are expected to give them greater assurance that China's efforts to build a new development paradigm will produce dividends for the world. There is no doubt the country is ready to fully leverage its role as a platform for advancing high-standard opening-up to make China's big market a market shared by all, and better provide international public goods and services to help build an open world economy.

The earnest welcome Li extended to multinational corporations, investment and talents is in stark contrast to the slamming of doors by some developed countries. While China is striving for the common development of the world and to sta-

bilize the global industry and supply chains, they are doing the opposite, trying to roll back globalization and wind back the clock to a time when the global economy was ruled by the law of the jungle.

Premier Li and the large government and business delegation he has led to Davos have clearly expressed the commitment of China to work together with the rest of the world to use cooperation, development and dialogue to resolve the differences and problems confronting humankind today. That points to the right choice for the world at this historical crossroad.

Moreover, that should serve as a direct rebuke to the misinformation and misperceptions some China-bashers in Washington have been tirelessly seeking to spread, with their claims that the country is turning its back on the world and shuttering its doors, blacklisting foreign companies and weaponizing trade issues. Those are exactly what their own country has been doing these years, targeting not only Chinese entities but also those from its own allies.

More than any time before, China cherishes entrepreneurship, innovation, talents and know-how; it is open to and seeks cooperation with the rest of the world; and it is committed to building a rule-of-law business environment that is predictable and transparent.

Some in the world are calling for estrangement, confrontation and conflict. China, as Li's speech showed, is promoting communication, openness and peaceful cooperation.

Friendship enables effective coordination

Continuing a Chinese diplomatic tradition that has now entered its 34th year, Foreign Minister Wang Yi is visiting African countries on his first overseas trip of the year.

This month is destined to be a busy one for the country's senior diplomat. As well as his visits to Egypt, Tunisia, Togo and Cote d'Ivoire, the second half of the trip will also take him to Brazil and Jamaica.

If the year-opening visit to the United States by Liu Jianchao, head of the Communist Party of China Central Committee's International Department, signified a strong desire for stabilizing ties with the US-led West, Wang's Africa trip reveals the weight Beijing places on the Global South.

As the visiting Chinese diplomat told his Egyptian hosts, Egypt is a major Arab, African, Islamic and developing nation bestowing upon it special geopolitical significance in Chinese foreign policy.

Egypt was the first African and Arab country to establish diplomatic ties with China. And as Wang and Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry both agreed, that Egypt has again been the destination for the Chinese foreign minister's first overseas visit of the year showcased the two countries' long friendship.

Over the decades, Chinese and Egyptian foreign policies have aligned well under the guiding principles of peaceful coexistence, mutual respect and non-interference in each other's internal affairs. Egypt, as a key member of the African Union and the Arab League, wields critical influence on the peace, stability and prosperity of the corresponding regions, hence

the world at large. China finds Egypt to be an ideal partner for the materialization of its global security, development and civilization initiatives, and a key participant in the Belt and Road Initiative.

In addition to the tangible benefits Belt and Road cooperation brings to both sides, as Wang said, China and Egypt are key factors for global strategic stability. Praising the two countries' relationship as all-round strategic partners, which is now in its 10th year, Wang said China is willing to work with Egypt to support equitable, orderly multipolarization and inclusive economic globalization, and to safeguard the common interests and legitimate rights and interests of developing nations by prompting international governance to proceed in a just and reasonable direction.

The two countries' joint declaration on the Palestinian issue was a timely answer to a historical impediment to lasting peace in the Middle East. Upholding the general international consensus on a two-state solution, the two countries' foreign ministers proposed a Palestine state with full sovereignty and independence, based on the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as the capital. Wang also called for a larger-scale, more authoritative international peace conference of more practical effect, the goals being a concrete timeline and road map for the realization of that solution.

The friendship between China and Egypt has brought tangible benefits to the two peoples and set a model for South-South cooperation, Wang's visit shows that it will continue to do so as the two sides raise their relations to new heights.

India's attitude to blame for Maldives' demand

India has always regarded the Indian Ocean region as its backyard, and, as a result, it has treated the Maldives like it is its colonial overlord, considering the country to be subject to New Delhi's authority, politically, economically and culturally. Not surprisingly, the Maldives does not share that view, and to demonstrate its autonomy it has demanded that India withdraw its military presence from the country.

But with Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu making the demand on Sunday that India must withdraw all troops stationed in his nation by March 15, shortly after concluding a productive visit to China, it has stirred up something of a hornets' nest in India, with some speculating that the demand has come at the urging of Beijing.

New Delhi-based NDTV said in an "explainer" article that "the number of troops — 88 — is too few to be a threat", and intimated that it is an outcome of Beijing wooing Male away from New Delhi so China can have a military presence in the country.

But those making such a claim should note that Muizzu became president vowing to ensure that the country had no foreign military presence on its soil.

They should also look at the recent social media posts by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi showing him enjoying a vacation on India's Lakshadweep Islands, which was widely interpreted

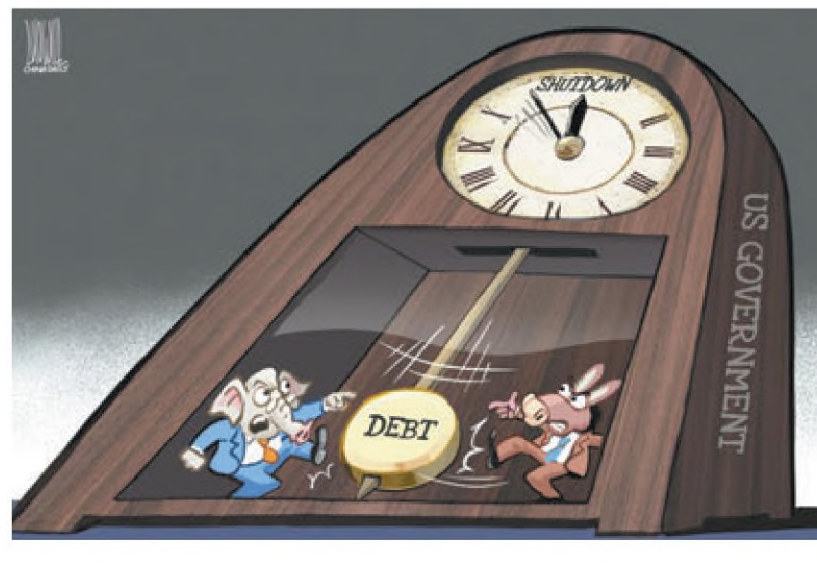
as a bid to lure Indian tourists to the islands at the expense of the Maldives' tourism industry.

The timing of the announcement may be related to the fact that Male is not worried about losing Indian tourists by making the demand, as one of the outcomes of his recent state visit to China was his hosts expressing the country's readiness to provide support in areas that the Maldives deems priorities, including strengthening people-to-people exchanges and tourism cooperation.

Indian officials justify the continued presence of the Indian troops, a legacy of the 1980s when it sent troops to help the then Maldivian government thwart an attempted coup, by claiming that they are there as part of the two nations' Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief mechanism.

But the Maldives' dependence on India for humanitarian assistance and essentials such as rice, vegetables and medicines has fueled India's colonialist mentality toward the island country, which in turn has led to the rising wave of "India out" sentiment in the country, which Muizzu rode to victory in the November election. With the country's cooperation with China improving the Maldivian people's livelihoods and that cooperation set to deepen after his visit, it is natural that Muizzu should seek to use it as a leverage to reduce New Delhi's influence so that the country can exercise greater autonomy.

Luo Jie



Opinion Line

Country continuously brings dividends to world businesses

The expectation-exceeding growth of China's foreign trade in 2023, with the total value of imports and exports reaching 41.76 trillion yuan (\$5.83 trillion), an increase of 0.2 percent year-on-year, has been a strong boost for international trade and economic development.

Of China's export value of 23.77 trillion yuan, manufacturing products accounted for 23.51 trillion yuan. Among them, equipment exports increased 2.8 percent year-on-year, accounting for nearly 60 percent of the country's total export value.

China may have surpassed Japan as the world's largest auto exporter in 2023. In addition, the value of exports of China's electric vehicles, lithium-ion batteries and solar cells exceeded

1 trillion yuan for the first time, an increase of 30 percent year-on-year.

China's complete industrial system and strong supporting capabilities have facilitated the formation of its industry clusters, not only reducing costs for enterprises, but also providing fertile ground for product iteration and upgrading. This is an important factor behind the solid progress China's manufacturing has made in recent years.

The country's pursuit of an innovation-driven growth has injected new momentum into its exports, as indicated by the year-on-year 9.3 percent export growth of self-owned brand products in 2023, with the share in the country's total export value increasing by 1.7 percentage points.

In terms of imports, due to downward commodity prices, China's import value declined slightly in 2023, but import volumes rose 2.9 percent year-on-year. The increased imports reflect China's continuous recovery in production and consumer demand, and the unleashing of the advantages of its huge market.

Many international institutions have estimated that China contributed more than 30 percent to global economic growth in 2023 as the largest engine of the world economy. The Chinese economy is seeing continued recovery, stimulating its demand for imports and also promoting exports, which will bring more dividends to businesses around the world.

— CHINA MEDIA GROUP

AI in the dock for copyright violations

The New York Times filed a lawsuit against OpenAI and Microsoft in December alleging that the companies illegally used millions of its articles to train its large language artificial intelligence models. To support its case, The New York Times provided over 100 examples where the output from ChatGPT was highly similar to its articles.

In response, OpenAI issued a statement on Jan 8 saying that using publicly available internet materials to train AI models was reasonable, and OpenAI provides the option to opt out. It suggested that AI's "copying" and regurgitation of the original text, as demonstrated by The New York Times in its lawsuit, was a deliberate manip-

ulation of prompt words by the newspaper, including the use of lengthy summaries of articles, in order to have the models spit out entire parts of specific pieces of content or articles. Although it also said that such regurgitation "is a rare bug that we are working to drive to zero".

In a deeper sense, their disagreement is more about the ethics of the language learning models. AI companies such as OpenAI argue that the training of LLMs, which refer to large language models that can generate human-like responses to natural language queries based on massive data sets, is fundamentally different from copying. They say the learning and training process for AI

models should be understood in accordance with the growth mechanism of people. That is, learning public information, acquiring knowledge reserves, and developing and improving in the interaction with those it serves.

Media organizations such as The New York Times, on the other hand, as well as seeing the technology as a competitor and threat, believe that the LLMs are plagiaristic and violate media ethics.

Whatever the lawsuit's outcome is, it will not only set a precedent on whether companies developing LLMs have to pay high copyright fees for their data sources, but also decide which definition of LLMs will legally prevail.

— GMW.CN

What They Say

Together, China and EU can avoid new Cold War

The meeting between the leaderships of China and Belgium on Friday in Beijing demonstrates the two sides' common wish to deepen pragmatic economic and trade cooperation and make concerted efforts to stabilize global industry and supply chains.

It is good to hear the Belgian side echo Beijing in saying that it opposes decoupling or the severing of industry and supply chains. It also expressed its welcome to Chinese enterprises carrying out cooperation in Belgium, and its desire to strengthen personnel and cultural exchanges with China.

Since the European Union is headquartered in Brussels, and Belgium currently holds the annual rotating presidency of the EU, the country can be a pacesetter for European countries' ties with China in many aspects. That's why it is also a hope of Beijing that the Belgian government can play a positive role in the EU's policymaking regarding trade, business, investment, technology and foreign affairs related to China.

China maintains long-term consistency in its policy toward Europe. In the Friday meeting, Beijing made it clear that China has always regarded the EU as a partner, and hopes the EU will provide a fair, transparent and nondiscriminatory business environment for Chinese investment and companies.

In the face of the changing and volatile international situation, China and the EU need to build more "bridges", so that the two sides can deepen their political trust, play positive and constructive roles as important forces in a multipolar world and promote economic globalization that benefits all.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the China-EU comprehensive strategic partnership, and is of great significance in building on the past and opening up the future for bilateral relations. China and the EU should strengthen dialogue and cooperation and oppose bloc confrontation.

The essence of China-Europe cooperation is the complementary nature of their respective advanta-

ges and mutual benefit. The differences between the two sides should not and must not be allowed to hijack the overall development of the bilateral ties. The two sides can settle their differences properly through dialogue and negotiation conducted in good faith.

The EU should realize that neither "de-risking" — decoupling to be precise — nor bloc confrontation serves its interests. They are by no means a panacea for the challenges some developed countries face, even if the few shortsighted politicians advocating them argue to the contrary.

China and Europe, as two major civilizations and two major forces, have full wisdom and capability to carry out high-level dialogue and cooperation on the basis of mutual respect and win-win cooperation. In doing so they can create a new paradigm of interaction that is a more attractive alternative than the return to a Cold War, which is what the United States is offering the world.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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COMMENT

Hu Yifan

China's 'new normal' is emerging

Helped by incremental policy support, China's GDP growth is likely to be in line with the "around 5 percent" growth target. Looking ahead, we (at UBS Global Wealth Management) expect GDP growth in 2024 to settle in the mid-4 percent range as the real estate sector's weakness continues and the economic boost following the post-COVID-19 reopening of the economy fades. But more than 5 percent growth is possible if active policy easing continues, consumption recovery runs its full course, and the property market stabilizes.

In the longer term, China will enter a medium-growth period with potential GDP growth of 4-4.5 percent in the coming five to 10 years (compared with the nearly 6 percent over the past decade and 10 percent in the early 2000s). But if the transition goes as planned, the Chinese economy's sheer size means it could still contribute a third of global growth, with per capita GDP doubling to about \$25,000 by 2035 (from \$12,720 in 2022).

As the Chinese economy shifts to higher-quality development, new drivers are emerging to shape China's growth path. Among these, we believe mass consumption, green transition and industrial upgrading would be the key drivers of

China's growth in the future.

China's middle-income group, the major force of domestic purchasing power, adds up to more than 400 million and will grow further as per capita GDP increases.

Some new trends have also emerged in recent years.

Consumers are focusing more and more on domestic cultural products and services, evident in the rise of home-grown Chinese brands or *guochao*. Also, spending on services has quickly rebounded after the pandemic, while online shopping has registered double-digit growth over the past five to 10 years. The silver economy, too, is set to shine, with the elderly population reaching 280 million (about 19 percent of the total population) in 2022 and the pension market doubling to 12 trillion yuan (\$1.67 trillion) from 2014 to the end of 2020.

Besides, China's de-carbonization road map — peaking carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and achieving carbon neutrality before 2060 — has created many new opportunities for green industries because the government has been scaling up its clean solar, wind and nuclear power capacity to ensure non-fossil fuels comprise 80 percent of the country's energy mix by 2060 (from about 30 percent today). This in return has increased the demand for electricity storage facilities, needed to supply electricity without disruptions.

Backed by extensive government incentives and technology innovations, China is now by far the largest electric vehicle market in terms of both consumption and production. It is also a leading producer of many key minerals needed to make green products, including rare earths, as well as a major processor of cobalt, lithium, copper and nickel. This includes, for example, about 60 percent of all global lithium processing, which gives it a cost advantage of

20-25 percent compared with Western markets.

When it comes to technology innovation and industrial upgrading, in response to the tightening high-tech restrictions by the West, China has been focusing on becoming self-sufficient, especially in chips, 5G and artificial intelligence, among other advanced technologies. Notably, more than 2.1 trillion yuan has been invested in the semiconductor and related industries in the past two years, according to JW Consulting estimates. And the total spending on research and development has increased to about 3.1 trillion yuan, or 2.6 percent of GDP from less than 2 percent a decade ago. The figure could increase to 7 percent per year.

Besides, higher-value-added industries are emerging as China moves up the global value chains, with higher-value-added export (as percentage of the global total) rising to about 22 percent in 2022 from a mere 3 percent before China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001.

But will China's economy go the way the Japanese economy did in the 1990s?

It should be noted that China today is at a much lower economic development stage than Japan was in the 1990s. While China's per capita GDP today is a little more than \$12,700 (about 17 percent of the US), Japan's per capita GDP in the 1990s was about \$25,370 (nearly at par with the US). This means China still has a lot of catch-up to do, although its potential growth is arguably more buoyant than Japan's in the 1990s. China also has a much larger consumer market with a middle-income group of more than 400 million people.

Given the Sino-US tensions, China has been, on a priority basis, reducing its overreliance on other countries to meet its strategic sectors' needs and maintain the stability of the supply chains. Japan, on the other hand, signed the Plaza Accord, along with France, the then West Germany, the United States and the United Kingdom, in 1985 which caused the yen to sharply appreciate, which in turn led to a slump in its exports and the shifting of the auto supply chains to the US.

Yet China's real estate sector (about 25 percent of GDP) and local government financial vehicle debt (about 48 percent of GDP) remain the two of the biggest risks. We don't foresee systemic risks, though, given the government's policy support. Activity in the real estate sector is likely to gradually stabilize at lower levels, helped by a package of solutions including relaxing purchase restrictions, lower down payment and mortgage rates in the short term, and new investment in rural revitalization projects and affordable housing in the medium to long term.

As for local government financial vehicle debt risk, it could be alleviated through bank loan roll-overs and debt swap.

The author is regional chief investment officer and head of macroeconomics for Asia-Pacific at UBS Global Wealth Management. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

Harald Brüning

Lai's election cannot reverse trend of reunification

Taiwan's pro-independence politician Lai Ching-te being elected the island's leader cannot change the Chinese mainland's determination to achieve national reunification.

Lai, who once described himself as a "pragmatic worker for Taiwan independence", only got around 5 million votes, or about 40 percent of the popular vote. It fell short of the more than 8 million votes his predecessor did in 2020. The rival candidate of the Kuomintang garnered more than 3.9 million votes and the Taiwan People's Party about 3.1 million votes, or nearly 60 percent in total. That's why Lai does not represent the majority of Taiwan residents.

Lai, a 64-year-old public health and rehabilitation graduate, ought to weigh the election outcome conscientiously. The fact that he doesn't have the support of the majority of the people on the island should temper his pro-independence activism that, ultimately, imperils cross-strait stability.

In his victory speech, Lai pledged to preserve the status quo across the Taiwan Strait. However, it shouldn't be the first (and last) time that a political firebrand, after gaining a top political post, has mellowed — hopefully not just superficially.

As expected, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said on Saturday night that whatever changes take place in Taiwan, the fact

that the region is part of China will not change. The ministry also reaffirmed that the Taiwan question is China's internal affairs and changes to the situation on the island will not affect the fact that there is only one China in the world. The ministry also described the one-China principle as the solid anchor of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.

Unfortunately, the island's ruling Democratic Progressive Party continues to reject the 1992 Consensus outright. I hope Lai brings himself to accept the 1992 Consensus, reached by the two sides of the Strait during a meeting in Hong Kong that year, according to which there is only one China.

While watching a raft of journalists from international TV news channels interviewing international relations scholars and experts about the Taiwan election results on Saturday night, I noticed one of them, a mainland-based commentator, saying, quite rightly, that Beijing is ready to talk with Taipei about anything based on the condition — that the Taiwan authorities accept that there is only one China and that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China. That's a reasonable proposition. Lai should mull over it.

There are many different ways that national reunification can be achieved in a peaceful and mutually beneficial manner.

Large parts of the global news coverage on Saturday night were desperately focused on Taiwan's purported "other-

ness" vis-à-vis the mainland, insinuating that the two sides of the Strait are inherently different. I beg to disagree. I've always found Taiwan to be "very Chinese", similar to Fujian province in fact (which should be no surprise to anyone familiar with Chinese history, considering that most Taiwan residents are descendants of people from Fujian who began to move in droves to the island in the 17th century). Fujian and Taiwan also share the same dialect (Southern Min aka Hokkien) and similar cuisines and other cultural traits. Also, about 15 percent of Taiwan's 23 million residents are Hakka who have their roots on the mainland.

Taiwan has always been a part of China. The Chinese people were the first to develop Taiwan. Since the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), successive Chinese governments have established administrative institutions in Taiwan and effectively governed the island.

In the mid-17th century, Dutch colonists occupied Taiwan. The national hero Zheng Chenggong expelled the Dutch colonists in 1662 and recovered Taiwan. In 1895, due to the Qing government's defeat in the war with Japan, and under coercion from Japan, the unequal Treaty of Shimonoseki ceded Taiwan and the Penghu Islands to Japan. In July 1937, the Chinese people began a nationwide war of resistance against Japanese aggression. In 1945, Japan announced its sur-

render, unconditionally accepting the Cairo Declaration and the Potsdam Declaration, and returned Taiwan to China. With this, Taiwan returned to the Chinese territory and came under the sovereign jurisdiction of China.

Incidentally, Taiwan and Macao have some interesting aspects in common — the faithful in both regions worship the Chinese goddess Mazu, and Sun Yat-sen, the forerunner of China's democratic revolution, is revered both in Macao, where he practiced medicine and worked on the downfall of the enfeebled Qing Dynasty, and Taiwan, whose political system still contains elements of Sun's "Three Principles of the People".

There is always the possibility of certain forces or powers making every effort to preclude a cross-strait rapprochement for geopolitical or other reasons. That's why, as far as the Taiwan question is concerned, we should always look out for squalls.

However, in his New Year's Eve address, the country's top leader reaffirmed his conviction that Taiwan and the mainland will "surely be reunified". Irrespective of the island election, China will continue to make efforts to realize national reunification.

The author is the director of Macau Post Daily. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



Kang Bing

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Anti-corruption campaign always on the road

China's fight against corruption must maintain its intensity and not turn back, relax or show any mercy to the corrupt officials, the country's top leader declared at a meeting that evaluated last year's anti-corruption drive and prepared the road map for this year's campaign.

While all the members of China's leading anti-graft body were discussing the importance of the anti-corruption campaign at the third plenary session of the 20th Central Commission for Discipline Inspection of the Communist Party of China, China Central Television was telecasting an anti-corruption documentary series, exposing the details of a dozen or so corruption cases investigated last year.

The series shows how three consecutive directors of a northeastern provincial public security bureau, who headed the organ for 20 years, took bribes amounting to 1.2 billion yuan (\$167 million) in total and turned the bureau from a defender to a destroyer of public security. The series also shows the senior leaders of eight bureaus of a northwestern province, as part of a clique, meeting for "a drink" while studying central discipline documents in the provincial Party school. The get-together resulted in the death of one of the officials because of excessive intake of alcohol.

These and many other examples show why the top leader said that the battle against corruption remains tough, complicated and protracted even after 10 years of intensified campaigns.

The decade-long campaign, despite its achievements, shows the fight against corruption is long.

Corruption has a history as long as that of civilization. Even before the Communist Party of China assumed power, Chairman Mao Zedong wracked his brains to find the decisive factor behind the rise and fall of dynasties. In China's long history, many ruling dynasties rose and fell. Mao found that corruption was the reason for the fall of many of the dynasties, and came to the conclusion that democratic oversight was the solution to the problem of falling regimes.

China has since used Mao's solution to cleanse the bureaucracy, especially after the Party assumed power in 1949. The country intensified its anti-corruption efforts a decade ago by increasing the powers of the discipline commissions and frequently dispatching inspection groups to ministries and provincial-level regions. The first thing an inspection group does after landing at a place is to announce its e-mail address and its hotline number through the internet and other channels, and install a letter box asking people to register their complaints against corruption and wrongdoings, and corrupt officials.

The officials' reliance on people to expose corruption has paid off. Over the past year, the central discipline commission has ordered investigations against 45 high-ranking officials, the highest number in the past decade. High-ranking officials in China usually refer to officials ranked above the vice-ministerial level. At least two of them are familiar names to me; they used to be experts in their respective fields.

What surprises me is that even after 10 years of the intensified anti-corruption drive, the number of investigated senior officials, instead of declining, has been increasing. My guess is that it is not because corruption is growing; instead, it is the result of more people joining the fight against corruption and more experienced supervisors leading the fight, leaving little room for corrupt officials to escape.

The Party needs to be praised for its commitment to uproot corruption from China, and for overcoming obstacles to courageously "scrape poison off the bones". Of all the officials under investigation or having been sentenced, the majority are Party members. I don't think any other Party in the world is even half as committed as the CPC to implement self-revolution. Anyone claiming that some countries and the political parties there are free of corruption ought to have his IQ measured.

The decade-long campaign, despite its achievements, shows the fight against corruption is long. Enemies will emerge from all directions and in different disguises to challenge our determination to eradicate corruption.

Fortunately, the country's top leader seems to know these facts well, because he stressed that the anti-corruption drive will continue till corruption is eradicated from the country.

GLOBAL VIEWS

YU ZHEN

Construction work

Better planning, preparation and implementation can ensure high-quality Belt and Road cooperation

Since the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative, Asian countries have strengthened their cooperation on infrastructure building, expanding the scale and diversifying the models.

By the end of June 2023, China had signed more than 200 cooperation agreements with 152 countries and 32 international organizations under the framework of the initiative. China and its partners have initiated more than 20 dialogue and cooperation mechanisms in various areas, including roads, bridges, high-speed railways, hydropower, wind power and gas pipelines.

The connectivity of infrastructure, based on the framework of "six corridors, six routes, and multiple countries and ports", has effectively driven the growth of participating countries: the full launch of the China-Laos Railway has indirectly created more than 100,000 jobs in Laos; the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has brought direct investment of \$25.4 billion to Pakistan, creating 236,000 jobs; Chinese companies have worked with the governments and enterprises of partner countries to jointly build more than 70 overseas industrial parks, fueling the development of the China-Belarus Industrial Park and the Thai-Chinese Rayong Industrial Zone.

The BRI has brought new opportunities for future infrastructure cooperation in Asia. However, large-scale infrastructure projects often face challenges in terms of technology, funding, and management, which can be further escalated in the context of extensive international cooperation.

First, the layout of projects needs to be optimized. A poor lay-

The BRI has brought new opportunities for future infrastructure cooperation in Asia.

out can lead to issues such as disorderly and repetitive development. In terms of project models, although the PPP model (public-private partnership) and DBB model (design-bid-build) remain the mainstream choices, these conventional models do have limitations.

Second, the share of digital infrastructure cooperation remains low. Most Belt and Road projects involve conventional infrastructure, with a disproportionately high share of energy and transportation projects and low share of projects in the digital economy sector. Although the concept of the "Digital Silk Road" was proposed many years ago, the Belt and Road partner countries, most of which are developing economies, do not have sufficient digital technology capabilities to engage in relevant cooperation.

Third, project funding management needs to be improved. Impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, some developing countries are struggling with economic stagnation, making it harder for them to repay debts. For example, China has received debt repayment extension requests from countries such as Pakistan, Ecuador, Angola and Zambia among others. Partner countries need to improve their capabilities to handle losses of funding due to such

major emergencies.

To achieve high-quality cooperation, it is necessary to explore effective pathways to strengthen project assessment, promote digital infrastructure construction, and regulate project timelines and fund utilization.

First, the conditions of the partner country and the area of cooperation should be better assessed in advance. When selecting a partner, it is essential to consider the political stability of the host country, clarify the legal content of investment and construction, and understand the environment for construction, so as to minimize the challenges brought by differences in political and economic development situations. The area of cooperation should align with the development needs of the host country and should be tailored for countries at different stages of development: fast-growing countries may prefer infrastructure building such as transportation and energy, while countries pursuing their green transition are likely to prefer cooperation in energy conservation, environmental protection, high-tech industrial parks, and among others.

Second, cooperation in digital infrastructure building needs to be enhanced. It is necessary to continuously assist partner countries to expand broadband access, improve important digital infrastructure, including communication, the internet, and satellite navigation, promote broadband network coverage, and enhance service capacity and quality. Starting from the cooperation project, digital technologies should be used in building conventional infrastructure, improving the digital skills of the workforce, enhancing public digital literacy, and advancing local transformation



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

toward digital, internet-based and intelligent industries.

Third, project timelines and fund utilization should be better planned. There should be better planning of the total budget, construction materials, and a timeline drawn up for each stage of construction, aiming to control costs while ensuring construction quality, and avoid the waste of funding.

Risk identification and assessment throughout project life cycle should also be mandatory and done properly. Moreover, it is important to determine the most suitable project model based on the public/private nature of project funding, scale, technical complexity, duration and so on, and continuously innovate the traditional engineering procurement

construction and public-private partnership models.

The author is director of the Institute for the US and Canadian Economies of Wuhan University. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

YANG YUE AND LIZHENGYANG

Linked together

China-ASEAN cooperation sets good example for high-quality development of the Belt and Road

Connectivity has been a focus of the cooperation between China and Southeast Asian countries over the past decade.

According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, China and Southeast Asian countries have jointly built 358 Belt and Road projects, of which 45 percent are related to connectivity. The Belt and Road Initiative has significantly aided Southeast Asian countries in building infrastructure and enhancing regional connectivity. The Belt and Road Infrastructure Development Index and its corresponding report released from 2017 to 2023 demonstrate that the infrastructure index of Southeast Asian countries has been consistently high for seven consecutive years. Southeast Asian countries have greater demands for a better development environment and more enabling development environment than other countries participating in the initiative.

As of Dec 24, 2023, the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway has carried over 1 million passengers since it began operating on Oct 17 of that year. By the end of 2023, the Laotian section of the China-Laos Railway transported 4.03 million passengers and over 6.37 million metric tons of cross-border goods. In 2023, the number of passengers traveling through trains on the Laotian section continued to rise, hitting a record high of 12,584 daily passengers on Dec 30, 2023.

In July 2023, the Lancang-Mekong-Sichuan Express train was inaugurated, establishing an international green channel connecting domestic and international markets, enhancing bilateral relations, and fostering cross-border tourism and industrial development along the railway. People in Vientiane have extensively commended

the China-Laos Railway for its pivotal role in optimizing transportation, creating jobs, improving the living environment and enhancing mutual understanding between the Chinese and Lao people.

In addition to infrastructure cooperation, the BRI has emerged as a crucial impetus for regional economic integration. Trade between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations has experienced an average annual growth rate of 8.8 percent since 2013. In 2023, trade volumes between the two sides reached 6.41 trillion yuan (\$893.55 billion). China maintained its position as ASEAN's largest trading partner for 15 years, and ASEAN has been China's top trading partner for four years. The bilateral trade and economic ties between China and ASEAN gained greater stability in 2023, giving a boost to world economic growth. All 10 ASEAN countries joined the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank as founding members in 2015. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership came into effect for all ASEAN members and China on June 2, 2023. The negotiations for the Version 3.0 China-ASEAN Free Trade Area have progressed steadily since November 2022, and are anticipated to be completed by 2024 as scheduled.

Since the proposal of jointly building the Green Silk Road in



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

2016, China and Southeast Asian countries have been promoting sustainable development, aligning their policies, and collaboratively advancing implementation. The years 2021 and 2022 were designated as the ASEAN-China Years of Sustainable Development Cooperation,

culminating in the issuance of the ASEAN-China Joint Statement on Strengthening Common and Sustainable Development in November 2022. The China-Laos Railway has pioneered exemplary Green Silk Road infrastructure projects, seamlessly integrating the

green development goals into project building and operation, fostering the BRI green production and supply chain, and advocating sustainable standard certification.

To preserve the ecological environment along the East Coast Rail Link, constructors minimized the impact on forests and wetlands traversed by the railway and built wildlife passageways. The Chinese-invested Phnom Penh-Sihanoukville Expressway in Cambodia is constructed by utilizing cutting-edge environmentally-friendly technologies and materials to mitigate dust pollution from road construction, and equipped with multiple wildlife-exclusive channels. Sewage treatment facilities have been established near all infrastructure projects along the expressway to recycle wastewater. In the future, China and ASEAN can endeavor to promote the high-quality development of the Belt and Road in three directions.

First, the enhancement of connection and integration between the BRI and the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative proposed by China should be prioritized for mutual support. These initiatives can be aligned with ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific and the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, encompassing political security, economic development, society and culture. Both parties should intensify security cooperation, expedite consulta-

tions on the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea, and collaborate with countries in the region to proactively address the South China Sea issue.

Second, the two sides should focus on developing more high-quality co-development models. Over the past decade, China and Malaysia have jointly developed high-quality projects including the China-Malaysia Qinzhou Industrial Park and Malaysia-China Kuantan Industrial Park, which have been instrumental in motivating other Southeast Asian countries to restart or accelerate their jointly-built projects. At the Third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in 2023, China announced eight steps to support high-quality BRI cooperation, introducing new initiatives and measures in fields such as artificial intelligence and digital economy. China should fully leverage its strengths in these fields.

Third, China and Southeast Asian countries should intensify supervision and management across all projects, resolve disputes in trade, taxation, intellectual property rights and environmental protection through laws and regulations, refine the legal system for dispute settlement between China and ASEAN, eradicate rent-seeking behavior, and cultivate an environment conducive to regulated and law-based cooperation.

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Z WEEKLY

All about Gen Z

Z
WEEKLYTales of creativity
and compassionBilibili's 2023 Power Up ceremony celebrated top content creators, recognizing diverse talents shaping China's digital landscape, **Meng Wenjie** reports.

On Jan 6, Bilibili, a prominent Chinese video platform, hosted its annual Bilibili Power Up ceremony, celebrating the top 100 content creators, known as "uploaders", on the platform in 2023.

Among the winners was Zhu Ruoxuan, a previous recipient of the award in 2021, following her two years as a vlogger.

Born in 1998, Zhu began sharing her life through videos in 2019 under the moniker "Duoduo Hualin", initially focusing on makeup tutorials. It wasn't until 2021 that she gained widespread attention with a video depicting the evolution of ordinary Chinese women's appearance and mindset from the 1920s to the 2020s, which garnered over 10 million views on Bilibili.

"The year 2021 marked the centennial of the founding of the Communist Party of China," Zhu said. "So, I combined my passion for fashion and makeup to celebrate it."

In the video, she also portrayed the facial expressions of women from different time periods, capturing their uncertainty in the 1920s, their helplessness during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45), and their confidence as female workers in the 1950s after the founding of the People's Republic of China.

Despite a lack of formal acting training, Zhu studied women in old photos and movies instead to imitate their expressions, striving for accuracy.

Over time, Zhu's videos shifted to an even greater focus on women, exploring other changes in women's images from the past to the present.

Since last year, she's started paying more attention to current social phenomena and the issues women face. "I think it's a necessary growth both for myself and my creation," she said.

One of Zhu's productions from last year highlights the transformation of Chinese women's hairstyles. At the end of the video, she depicted a character with pink hair, inspired by Zheng Linghua, a 23-year-old who faced cyberbullying due to her hairstyle and tragically ended her life while battling depression in January 2023.

"I want everyone to see that online violence can be fatal," Zhu said.

Zhu's recent videos demonstrate a more compassionate approach toward women from historical periods. For instance, she released an anti-war video on Dec 13, the annual National Memorial Day for Victims of the Nanjing Massacre, portraying the transformation of an ordinary Chinese woman before and after the massacre. This video, which took two months to create, drew inspiration from Iris Chang's book *The Rape of Nanking*, in

which women cut their hair short to disguise themselves as men during the war.

As a native of Nanjing, Zhu felt a deep connection to the subject matter, and as a woman, she naturally focuses more on topics related to women. "I want to express my observations and thoughts through my videos," she said.

"Purfect" protector

"Benmiao Jiao Tutu" — literally meaning "Meow name is Tutu" — is a vlogger dedicated to saving stray cats. He is so engrossed in this task that immediately after receiving the award at the Power Up ceremony in Shanghai, he promptly returned to Jinan, the capital city of Shandong province, to continue his work in catching stray cats.

The nickname "Benmiao Jiao Tutu" originates from his first cat's name, "Tutu", which is why many followers affectionately refer to him as "Daddy Tutu". Soon after adopting Tutu in 2019, he directed his attention toward abandoned cats, leading to his involvement in their rescue.

In his videos, Daddy Tutu amusingly describes the act of catching stray cats as "kidnapping" and portrays the rescue process with engaging and humorous narratives, all delivered in his distinct Shandong accent.

He is also known for giving rescued cats random and funny names. "This cat was caught in Building 3, so I'll call it 'Building 3'", he said in one of his videos.

This unique style of his videos has not only amassed a large following but also facilitated suitable adopters for the rescued cats.

As more people sought Daddy Tutu's assistance in aiding stray cats, he decided to leave his previous occupation in 2021 and become a full-time vlogger.

"I never intentionally scripted my videos," he said. "During the rescue process, I focused solely on the task at hand. Only afterward, I would find a way to transform the recorded video clips into an engaging story."

He established three guiding principles for his videos: adherence to facts, avoidance of eliciting sympathy, and the creation of interesting content.

Capturing homeless cats is a risky task. In fact, right before attending the Power Up ceremony, Daddy Tutu was bitten by a cat despite wearing protective gloves. In his videos, he consistently emphasizes the importance of self-protection when aiding these felines.

There are currently over 10 people on his team, spanning various age groups: Daddy Tutu belongs to the post-80s generation while most team members are from Generation Z. Daddy Tutu's friend, known by the pseudonym "Maodaodao", is from the post-60s generation and has also joined their efforts. "After turning



From the top: Zhu Ruoxuan, known as "Duoduo Hualin", explores Chinese women's evolution in terms of fashion and makeup. Simoyao (pseudonym) is known for her distinctive "musical crosstalk". Daddy Tutu (pseudonym) shares exciting and hilarious videos of his team rescuing stray cats. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

50, I wanted to pursue something I truly like. But it seems that I've increased the team's average age," he joked.

To enhance their ability to professionally aid stray cats, team members have studied cat behavior, psychology, as well as the habits and history of cats.

Daddy Tutu and his team have so far assisted over 700 cats, rescuing nearly 400 of them last year alone. Substantial expenses, including medical care and feeding, have become a huge burden. Despite having a partnership with a pet hospital that allows for a significant discount, they spent at least 400,000 yuan (\$55,680) solely on medical care last year.

After receiving essential medical treatment and undergoing neutering, the rescued cats are taken to Daddy Tutu's shelter, where they learn to socialize with humans. This unique approach has led to the team being affectionately referred to as the "Cat Academy" by their followers.

The team also seeks suitable adopters who meet the adoption criteria and conducts follow-up visits to ensure proper care.

"For cats unable to establish trust with humans and unwilling to stay at the shelter, we release them back into their familiar environment after neutering," Daddy Tutu said. Due to illness or other reasons, some cats remain in the shelter as they are unsuitable for release into the wild.

"Rescuing stray cats extends beyond our individual capabilities," he said. "Through my videos, I hope to motivate more people to pay attention to this cause."

In the comment section, followers nationwide have connected, finding adopters for cats in their regions, thereby promoting the "Adopt, Don't Shop" concept.

Musical crosstalk

Simoyao (pseudonym) has maintained her position as one of Bilibili's top 100 content creators for two consecutive years.

As a member of the post-90s generation, she took pleasure in watching auto-tune remixed-themed content videos and also embarked on her creative pursuits during her student years.

Starting in 2019, Simoyao began sharing her cover song creations on video platforms under the nickname "Simoyao smile".

"At that time, I did it just for fun," she said.

In 2020, when the Chinese suspense drama *The Bad Kids* gained widespread online popularity, Simoyao took on the perspective of the protagonist Zhu Chaoyang and composed an original piece of music. It incorporates witty lyrics and the distinct Tianjin accent, conveying her interpretation of the character.

This video attracted a considerable following and guided Simoyao toward her own creative path. "I aim to convey and share

my thoughts through music," she said.

Tianjin is recognized as the hometown of many renowned crosstalk performers. As a native Tianjin resident, humor comes naturally to Simoyao. She incorporates Chinese crosstalk techniques into her musical compositions and introduces elements of northern traditional arts — such as *kuaiiban*, a form of Chinese storytelling accompanied by the rhythm of bamboo clappers — into her music. She labeled this distinctive style as "musical crosstalk".

"Although telling jokes comes easily to me, harmonizing music with humor is actually quite challenging," she said.

Growing up in an environment enriched with music — with her mother being a jazz drum teacher and her father skilled in playing the guitar — Simoyao learned to play musical instruments at an early age and began composing songs in primary school.

After graduating in engineering in college, which did not interest her, she explored several types of jobs. But her different life and work experiences turned out to be a continuous wellspring of inspiration, nurturing her creativity after her full-time transition to a vlogger in 2020.

One of her video series, themed around school subjects, continues to be highly appreciated by her followers. This series humorously depicts a student's experiences and frustrations, which resonates with many viewers.

"Having been both a student and a teacher, I deeply empathize with them," Simoyao said.

To create this series, Simoyao would review the outlines of high school textbooks and even did the national college entrance examination papers every year.

Since 2022, this series has been consistently updated for two years, with each video receiving more than 3 million views, and some even surpassing 10 million views.

According to Simoyao, her greatest strength lies in her ability to precisely connect her videos to the everyday occurrences in the lives of ordinary people. She uses music and witty lyrics to analyze and dispel life's obstacles while conveying a positive energy.

"I'm good at expressing my feelings in words and documenting small details in daily life. I believe every little thing in life holds meaning," she said.

Simoyao recognizes that creating content in isolation can easily lead to mental stagnation, prompting her to actively pursue innovation. "In the coming year, I plan to collaborate with vloggers from diverse fields, fostering new videos and sparking fresh ideas," she said.

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Z WEEKLY

Global rise of TCM

Traditional Chinese medicine gains global popularity, influencing health trends, and becoming a lifestyle choice for many.



From left to right: Zou Haoyan from Singapore took a class in TCM orthopedics. Phan Thi Kim Chi from Vietnam applied acupuncture to a patient. Khiev Ken from Cambodia learned about meridians and collaterals using a medical human model. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

By GUI QIAN and LIU MINGTAI
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Phan Thi Kim Chi's connection with Traditional Chinese Medicine began at an early age. Growing up in a small village in Hanoi, Vietnam, it was inconvenient for Phan to travel to hospitals in neighboring cities. Whenever she caught a cold or experienced a headache as a child, her family would seek the help of a local TCM practitioner, whose prescriptions often included many herbs that could be found in the nearby woods of the village.

"For me and the villagers, TCM is a convenient and effective choice," said the 27-year-old. "I thought maybe one day I could use it to help people, too."

This led her to major in TCM at a traditional medical school in Vietnam and later pursue further studies in acupuncture and *tuina* (Chinese therapeutic massage) at Changchun University of Chinese Medicine in Northeast China's Jilin province as a master's student.

According to Phan, even though TCM has long been commonly practiced and accepted in Vietnam as it shares similarities with Vietnam's own traditional medicine, finding a good doctor or school to learn TCM in Vietnam is not easy. This is why she aims to bring the knowledge she has gained in China back to her own country. "I plan to become a TCM doctor and teacher after graduation," Phan said.

Overseas students of TCM, like Phan, are not rare. According to a report co-published in April 2023 by Guangzhou University of Chinese Medicine and Social Sciences Academic Press (China), the total number of international students studying TCM in China was 8,187 in 2020, with the largest population of 6,441 coming from Asian countries, followed by 832 from Africa and 432 from Europe.

Khiev Ken, 21, from Cambodia, is one of them. Always fascinated by ancient Chinese culture and dreaming of studying in China one day, she started learning Chinese in the fourth grade of primary school. In 2020, her dream came true as she was enrolled at the same university in Jilin as Phan.

As a foreign student, Khiev finds the TCM basic theory course to be the most challenging one in the curriculum. "We need to memorize all the meridians and collaterals and more than 200 acupuncture points in the human body," she said. "Being extensive and profound, TCM is deeply connected with Chinese philosophy. It requires years of learning and practice to truly under-



Many people of my generation signed up for universities following our parents' or teachers' orders, but students nowadays choose to study TCM mostly out of their own passion and curiosity."

Ma Huifang, a professor at Beijing University of Chinese Medicine

stand the concepts of yin and yang, harmony between human and nature, and the five elements of wood, fire, earth, metal, and water." Sometimes she even translates the vocabulary and scripts into Khmer so she can remember and comprehend them better.

However, Khiev finds the efficacy of TCM much more immediate and straightforward. After practicing acupuncture on small pillows and medical human models, she and her classmates applied the treatment to themselves and on each other. When she accidentally broke her leg months ago, her teacher used acupuncture as a conditioning therapy and helped her recover "sound and rapid".

"TCM has been winning hearts because of its efficacy," said Ma Huifang, a professor at Beijing University of Chinese Medicine. "Whether at home or abroad, it is the actual effect that can dispel doubts and concerns over TCM."

Ma has extensive experience teaching TCM to international students overseas. In 2007, for example, she taught at the Department of Medicine at the University of Florence in Italy. "All my students were experienced doctors, and they highly recognized TCM, especially its use in pain treatment and flatulence expulsion."

According to Ma, Beijing University of Chinese Medicine had projects that sent professors overseas to Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, the University of Florence, and other academic institutions to teach TCM. It has also established the International School on campus, providing short programs for overseas students, and opened courses of professional English in TCM for Chinese students.

Many other Chinese medicine universities have adopted similar strategic initiatives to promote the globalization of TCM, including those in Shanghai, Nanjing, and Guangzhou.

"The younger generation's interest in TCM is rising. When I'm on duty at the clinic, many young patients consult me not only about their health but also about the application of TCM majors," said Ma. "Many people of my generation signed up for universities following our

parents' or teachers' orders, but students nowadays choose to study TCM mostly out of their own passion and curiosity."

Although the years of study are long and demanding, the employment prospects for TCM students are promising upon graduation, according to Zou Haoyan, a Singaporean who is now in his second year of a doctorate in TCM orthopedics.

According to Zou, there are many TCM centers in Singapore. In 2018, he worked in one where treatments like bone setting, moxibustion, acupuncture, and *guasha*, or scraping therapy, are highly popular. Apart from medium-sized centers, TCM practitioners are also in demand by larger TCM hospitals, health clubs, *tuina* shops, or even foot massage parlors in Singapore, which have been booming in recent years. And for those with bigger ambitions, opening their own TCM stores overseas is also a common option. "I know many of my peers building a career in the US, Türkiye, Kazakhstan, the Middle East, and mostly Southeast Asia," he said.

The thriving situation of TCM is not limited to schools and clinics. It has also become a lifestyle choice for many young people.

A survey conducted by China Youth Daily with 1,000 respondents in China revealed that 93.3 percent of them have tried various TCM diagnostic and treatment methods. It has also shown that 63.1 percent of the surveyed youth do so because of the fast-paced life and the increased pressures stemming from work.

Judging from the results, 52.9 percent of them feel that TCM health preservation has improved their suboptimal health conditions.

Ma mentioned the internet slang term "fragile university students", referring to the current generation who suffer from numerous health issues and are so fragile that they seem to break at the slightest touch despite being young.

"The phenomenon of aging-related diseases in younger people" is now very common. Many young people in their 20s come to the clinic for neck and back pain, as well as dry eye syndrome," she said.

Ma has also observed the phenomenon of young people making TCM fashionable and life-oriented, and she takes it as a good sign of the innovative development of TCM.

Based on the theory of the homology of medicine and food in TCM, Chinese herbal milk tea and a Chinese pharmacy version of plum soup have become trendy on social media. They are not only selling well in shops but also gaining numerous clicks online.

"I've seen tags of Chinese herbal milk tea on Xiaohongshu, and I really wanted to try it. It's a creative idea to combine TCM with trendy food among the young generation," said Khiev.

Young people are also posting pictures and video clips of practicing *baduanjin*, or Eight Brocade Exercises, a traditional Chinese fitness exercise. Even Pamela Reif, a workout vlogger with more than 10 million followers on YouTube and 11 million on Bilibili, tried out the exercise.

Phan also practices *baduanjin* regularly. "I do the eight sequences every morning just after I wake up. Although it only takes 12 minutes, it helps me awaken and connect with my body better," she said.

"I find that, after the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a trend among young people to place more emphasis on health conditioning and preservation, with TCM playing a significant role," she added.

Ma agreed. "The essence of TCM is preventive medicine, in which health preservation is crucial. The current popular products and movements are the embodiment of this idea."

However, Ma also reminded that TCM emphasizes the importance of diagnosing and treating based on differentiating syndromes. "Each person has a different constitution, and each herb has its own unique properties of cold, heat, warmth, and mildness. Even when drinking herbal milk tea, it's best to make choices accordingly," she said.

"Some people criticize TCM because it can't be quantified and standardized. In fact, this is TCM's characteristic and advantage instead of its shortcoming, as it is a more accurate and tailored medical method for different patients," Ma explained, adding that the popularity of TCM, both among international students and on social media, underscores "the tremendous potential for TCM's future development and prosperity".

Han Junhong and Yang Liu contributed to this story.

Z WEEKLY

Discovering China on foot

Abdusamat Keram, a Xinjiang native, undertakes a solo 5,000 km journey from Kashgar to Beijing, sharing his adventures, self-discovery, and newfound appreciation for China's vast beauty and unity.

By CHEN XUE and MAO WEIHUA
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A little over two months ago, on Nov 15, Abdusamat Keram completed a 280-day hiking journey covering more than 5,000 kilometers on foot. This expedition from Kashgar, Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, to Beijing brought him into the public eye as he documented his adventure on Douyin, China's TikTok, garnering over 440,000 followers and more than 8 million likes.

Abdusamat launched his account in July 2022 during his very first hiking trip, around the Taklimakan Desert — the largest desert in China and the second largest in the world, situated in Xinjiang. Before that, he knew little about video editing.

"I would snap a few pictures and clips, posting them on my WeChat Moments every one or two weeks when I had signal reception in the desert, but that's all," said the 24-year-old. "It wasn't until someone suggested that I could launch my own video-sharing account that I started teaching myself video editing skills."

After graduating from high school in 2021, Abdusamat had been employed in a factory, doing various kinds of work. He used to believe that, being a child from a rural area and born into a farming family, he would not have the privilege to explore the outside world. However, through television and the internet, he observed numerous hikers and adventurers on the road.

"That was when it hit me — I was wrong. As long as I have dreams and the determination to pursue them, I can definitely go out and explore," Abdusamat said.

In April 2022, he decided to quit his job and embark on the Taklimakan Desert trip with his brother, who is 10 years older than him. The journey spanned five months, during which they primarily subsisted on *nang*, or Uygur flatbread, cooked rice, and boiled river water — if they were fortunate enough to find a river. They only reached a residential area every 15 or 20 days to replenish their supplies. Before arriving at the next resupply point, they often ran out of food and drinking water. They slept in tents and woke up covered in sand during sandstorm season, not to mention enduring the scorching heat of the desert.

"Tormenting" was how Abdusamat described the trip in retrospect. Yet, it was during that expedition that he learned valuable skills from his brother, such as driving away wild animals like boars and wolves and finding suitable spots to set up camp. It was also during that challenging journey that Abdusamat conceived a larger hiking plan: to walk from Kashgar to Beijing, alone. "I shared the plan with my brother one night in the desert, and his response truly impressed and encouraged me. 'If you have an idea, just go for it.'"

On Feb 7, 2023, Abdusamat set out on his solo journey. Well, not entirely alone — he was accompanied by his dog, Shunfeng, which means "downwind" in Chinese, and a two-wheeled cart he constructed to carry essential provisions on the road.

"Having a pet by my side made the long journey so much easier and happier," Abdusamat said. "My dog and I took care of each other, providing companionship. She is also



From the top: Abdusamat Keram posing for a photo at the foot of the Tianshan Mountains in Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. Abdusamat and his dog, Shunfeng, arrived in Korla, Xinjiang. Abdusamat and Shunfeng walking in Sanmenxia, Henan province. Abdusamat posing for a photo in front of the Dayan Pagoda in Xi'an, the capital city of Shaanxi province. Abdusamat posing for a photo at Tian'anmen Square in Beijing. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

very alert and stood guard for me at night."

However, having a dog also meant more responsibility. Two months into their journey, Abdusamat noticed a growth on Shunfeng's face and promptly took her to a vet to remove it. The operation and recovery took eight days before the duo could resume their travels.

Incidents like this caused Abdusamat to fall behind schedule. Despite initially planning to arrive in Beijing before Oct 1 to celebrate the National Day holiday, he didn't reach his destination until Nov 15.

Abdusamat himself also faced health issues. Crossing from Gansu to Shaanxi in August, he suffered heatstroke several times, necessitating hospitalization and days of rest.

"The climate in Xinjiang and Gansu is very different from that in Shaanxi," Abdusamat explained. "I can handle temperatures reaching 30 C or even 40 C in Xinjiang, but not in Shaanxi, where the humidity and stifling heat can easily overwhelm me."

But these challenges also made him appreciate regional differences. Hiking from the far west of China to the east — traversing Xinjiang, Gansu, Shaanxi, Henan, Hebei, and finally Beijing — and experiencing winter, summer, and winter again, Abdusamat gained insights into the vastness, greatness, and exceptional beauty of the country.

"As I covered the land of China inch by inch with my feet and was met with kind-hearted people who offered me help in every place I went, it deeply impressed upon me the unity of our nation," Abdusamat said.

The fact that China is a safe country and its people are reliable was a key factor in Abdusamat's parents allowing him to travel alone for nine months.

Regular internet connections also enabled Abdusamat to stay in contact with his family, talking via video calls almost every day.

From Abdusamat's perspective, the improved quality of life in Xinjiang was a crucial reason that he felt comfortable leaving his parents on their own.

"I remember the house I lived in as a kid was one of those traditional earth houses that posed risks during rainstorms or earthquakes. But when I was in primary school, the government provided us with welfare housing for free," Abdusamat said. "Also, many of the roads in my hometown used to be dirt paths, but now they are all paved roads, even alongside farmlands."

Now, having grown beyond his origins as the "kid from the rural area," Abdusamat has expanded his horizons and undergone significant personal growth during his hiking expeditions.

"I used to be introverted, keeping conversations to a minimum. But as I met different people on my trips and visited different places, I've gradually adapted to interacting with others and sharing stories," Abdusamat said. "I also have a firmer belief now — a belief that I can achieve anything as long as I put my mind to it."

Returning from his journey, Abdusamat is actively promoting Xinjiang on his Douyin account, encouraging people from other parts of the country to visit his hometown, just like how he traveled to theirs.

From chemical reactions to financial actions

By LIXINRAN
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"Being a leader does not give you the power to command your members. Rather, it empowers you to foster their growth and to grow with them," said Cai Weiyuan, a young but seasoned leader.

At 23, Cai is a senior who is pursuing a double major in financial mathematics and economics at Ohio State University, the United States.

He discovered his gift for organizing student groups during high school in Fuzhou, East China's Fujian province, where he started a chemical club. Upon his appointment as the president of the student organization association, he played a key role in establishing an additional 38 clubs.

In an interview with Panopath, a social media account dedicated to creating an online community and information platform for Chinese students abroad, Cai said, "Compared with acquiring knowledge from textbooks, the planning and implementation of projects stimulate me better. It seems that discovering and motivating others are my innate skills."

After completing three years of high

school in the US, Cai continued his education at OSU, a university with a substantial Chinese student community.

Reflecting on his journey, Cai said, "Inevitably, I have run into many bumps and taken detours in the past. I hope that I could point others in the right direction in the future."

Leveraging his leadership experience from high school and co-founding a successful social media account, Booky Island, Cai received invitations from numerous student organizations at OSU. Eventually, he chose to lead Ingress Chinese Stock Investment (ICSI).

ICSI, a financial club established in 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic, aims to provide comprehensive support for Chinese students aspiring to major in finance or economics and foster a strong sense of belonging in the US.

Thanks to Cai's strategic planning, ICSI quickly became one of the largest student organizations on campus, with 200 out of 700 Chinese students annually applying at one point. Notably, Cai transformed ICSI from an online student organization into a thriving community.

"The sense of gaining and belonging is crucial to a member's adherence. They need



Cai Weiyuan posing for a photo at the Bund in Shanghai in December 2020. PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

to be willing to contribute to the club on their own will," Cai said, which was why he introduced the "Peer Mentor" program, guiding members through orientation, course selection, and career development.

According to Cai, students hoping to work in the finance and business industry need to start early, and each step is interconnected.

"If you want to get a job right after graduation, freshman year requires you to equip yourself with at least basic knowledge and skills such as financial reporting and valuation. Then, in sophomore year, you would be able to get into programs for undergrads," he said. "And in junior year, you need

to apply for a summer internship. After all that, you may be able to secure a return offer in senior year."

To aid members in their career paths, Cai designed extensive training courses and plans that would require the members years to complete.

"Many members have come back to me saying what I have taught came in handy during their interviews or internships. They have also become more and more active in the club and willing to help with club affairs," Cai said. "During their time as members, their contribution is somewhat like 'tuition'. It's a very healthy and benign cycle."

Cai's commitment to the club is evident as he manages his dual majors, plans financial courses during weekdays, and teaches them to members on weekends. For him, 24 hours a day are not enough. And his biggest motivation is his sense of responsibility.

"I once read in a book that you should treat everything you do as your career," he said. "Running a student club has always been a huge part of my life, as important as academics. It's like I'm the boss of a startup company. If something goes wrong, I will be held accountable. I ought to put in more work because I have big shoes to fill."

Personal gain is another motivator for Cai, who views his time at ICSI as an opportunity for personal experimentation and development. "With ICSI, I've been trying out theories and methods of my own, in terms of strategic planning and team management," he said. "The lessons and time spent at ICSI would benefit me for life."

Having now "retired" from the leadership team of ICSI, Cai envisions a future where the club continues to be a helpful home for every Chinese student aspiring to a career in business and finance.

In response to criticisms that Chinese student clubs are insular, Cai strongly disagrees and emphasizes their collaboration with US and international students. "There are cases where, for example, Chinese students tend to select the same courses, but it is only because we share a similar educational background," he said. "I embrace and endorse my own background."

As an "expert" in extracurricular activities and clubs, Cai advises students to consider their ultimate goals when choosing a club.

"I would suggest that they evaluate the gain, value, and long-term effects a club can offer based on their individual needs and mindset."