

WORLD USA

Envoy: US, China should work for greater global good

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2024年春招待  
五周年纪念  
the United States  
Establishment  
the 2024 C

Solar panels put rural homes on energy map

GOING GREEN, PAGE 5



Passion for plants

Botanist honored for outstanding work, often in challenging terrain

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# CHINA DAILY

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## Gala performance



Members of the China National Acrobatic Troupe perform a bicycle act on Monday during the gala show at the 15th Budapest International Circus Festival in Budapest, Hungary. The troupe won the gold prize and the "Budapest Grand Prix" at the festival. ATTILA VOLGYI / XINHUA

## Economy set to grow at a steady pace in 2024

Steady recovery expected amid continuous deepening of reforms and ample policy scope

By OUYANG SHIJIA  
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China's economy is likely to pick up pace and grow steadily in 2024 after a bumpy recovery last year, propelled by the gradual increase in domestic demand and with more stimulus policies in the offing, officials and economists said on Wednesday.

As the broader economy is still facing pressures from a property downturn, lack of effective demand and risks associated with local government debts, economists said the country needs to set an annual GDP growth target of around 5 percent to boost business confidence, and the policy easing should focus on housing and fiscal measures.

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed on Wednesday that China's GDP expanded by 5.2 percent year-on-year in 2023 to 126.06 trillion yuan (\$17.63 trillion), surpassing the country's preset annual growth target of around 5 percent.

In the fourth quarter of 2023, the Chinese economy grew 5.2 percent year-on-year, following a 4.9 percent growth in the third quarter. "China's 5.2 percent growth rate is higher than the anticipated global growth rate of around 3 percent, outpacing many major economies," Kang Yi, head of the National Bureau of Statistics, said at a news conference

in Beijing on Wednesday. "China is projected to have contributed more than 30 percent of global economic growth in 2023, making it a primary engine driving global growth."

Despite the challenges and difficulties ahead, Kang said that China possesses many advantages and enjoys several opportunities, which outweigh the challenges.

He said that China's economy is bound to see a steady recovery and improvement in 2024, given the continuing recovery trend, the continuous deepening of reforms and ample policy scope.

Louise Loo, lead economist at British think tank Oxford Economics, said: "There's plenty to be positive about in China's year-end reported numbers. The cyclical trough is likely behind us."

She added that industrial production is likely to accelerate on improved capacity utilization, higher industrial profits, and forward-looking restocking needs.

Industrial production is already showing signs of improvement, with China's value-added industrial output growing by 6.8 percent last month after a 6.6 percent growth in November.

She said that keeping up with the current growth momentum will require an ongoing and coordinated stimulus effort over the next few quarters.

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## Premier: Uphold free, open global trading system

By CAO DESHENG in Dublin  
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Premier Li Qiang has underscored the need for China and Ireland to jointly uphold a free and open international trading system and maintain stable and unimpeded global industrial and supply chains to give positive energy to the world as it faces uncertainties.

Li made the remarks on Wednesday during a meeting with Irish President Michael D. Higgins in Dublin, the Irish capital, while on an official visit to the country.

While calling for promoting true multilateralism, the premier said that both countries should bridge differences through dialogue and resolve disputes through cooperation.

He emphasized the need for both countries to work together to

improve global governance and better promote common development.

On bilateral ties, Li said that China is willing to uphold mutual respect and equality with Ireland, continue to enhance mutual understanding and trust, fully take into account each other's major interests and core concerns, and continuously enhance bilateral cooperation in various fields.

Higgins said that the relationship between Ireland and China maintains a good momentum of development as they always adhere to mutual understanding and respect.

When meeting with Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar on Wednesday, Li called on the two countries to keep expanding trade, strengthen cooperation in areas such as sustainable agriculture and finance, and explore innovative cooperation in the digital economy and artificial intelligence, among others.

To facilitate personnel exchanges

between the two countries, China will extend unilateral visa-free treatment to Ireland, Li said.

The premier also said it is hoped that Ireland will provide an open, fair and nondiscriminatory business environment for Chinese companies.

China is willing to strengthen coordination and cooperation with Ireland within the United Nations and other multilateral frameworks to uphold true multilateralism and jointly address global challenges, Li said.

China expects Ireland to play a bigger role in promoting the sound and stable development of relations between China and the European Union, he added.

Noting that Ireland and China have always respected and trusted each other, Varadkar said his country firmly adheres to the one-China principle and hopes China will achieve peaceful reunification at an early date.

Ireland will actively consider

offering more convenience for Chinese citizens to travel and welcome more Chinese enterprises to invest and start businesses in the country, he said, adding that his country supports the further deepening of EU-China cooperation.

Economic and trade cooperation between China and Ireland has developed rapidly in recent years. China is Ireland's fourth-largest trading partner in the world. Ireland has maintained a trade surplus with China for several years. In 2022, bilateral trade reached \$23.8 billion, a year-on-year increase of 3.8 percent, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

Li arrived in Dublin on Tuesday after attending the 54th Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum and paying an official visit to Switzerland. He wrapped up his whirlwind trip to Ireland on Wednesday and flew back to Beijing.

Mo Jingxi in Beijing contributed to this story.



A production line is seen at a smart factory of the automaker Seres, which has worked with tech giant Huawei to develop the AITO Wenjie SUV model, in Chongqing, on Nov 15. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Western democracy sees increasing erosion of trust

Western nations are always ready to proclaim their system of governance as superior, particularly in regard to China, which they dismiss as being "authoritarian". Increasingly, however, Western liberal democracy finds itself under scrutiny, with trust in government falling.

Growing numbers feel alienated, believing that the democratic system has been taken over by elites with little or no interest in their plight, with government viewed more and more to be under the sway of big media, business, lobbyists and moneyed interests.

Political parties, understood to have been captured by such interests, attract diminishing members, further enabling concentrated control by the few. Parliaments increasingly are seen as places of theater, where often nothing substantive is discussed, never mind

### WORLD WATCH

By John Queripel

achieved, while political action through protest movements is falling on deaf ears. At the edges, growing numbers believe a range of conspiracy theories.

Disillusioned and alienated, many have turned to a right-wing populism that promises simplistic solutions to the ordinary voter as an alternative to a "failed" political establishment. Such parties have gained, or threaten to gain, power in Italy, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Argentina, Brazil and the United States.

There is good reason for disillusionment. The wealth gap between the rich and the poor continues to grow in some of these countries. Ordinary people have experienced

a depreciation in their economic status, housing has become less affordable and employment less secure, while the prices of staples such as food have escalated, with wages stagnating.

Researcher Simon Bienstman, citing numerous studies, has detailed the connection between social inequality and the erosion of trust in government.

After surveying trust in public institutions across member countries, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development concluded that "public confidence is now evenly split between people who say they trust their national government and those who do not. Historical data show that it takes a long time to rebuild trust when it is diminished. ... Many people in OECD countries see equal access to policymaking processes as falling short of their expectations."

The OECD found in 2022 that average trust in government was 41.4 percent, with 41.1 percent not having trust. For Australia, the respective figures were 38 percent and 43.8 percent.

Trust levels fell further among disadvantaged groups, younger people, women, those feeling financially insecure and people with low levels of income and education.

Political polarization is related to trust, with those not voting for the incumbent government much less likely to trust it.

In Australia, the slide in trust has been precipitous. As recently as 2014, 72 percent had trust in government. Now, less than 41 percent of Australians surveyed said they were satisfied with the way democracy works in Australia, down from 86 percent in 2007.

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## DEDICATED EFFORTS BOLSTER NATION'S HEALTH DEFENSES

Measures taken during pandemic safeguard public, prepare for future outbreaks

By WANG XIAOYU  
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After the height of the COVID-19 pandemic passed more than a year ago, China took steady and solid steps to improve its public health system in preparation for future outbreaks and to safeguard the health of its people.

The legal framework regarding the response to public health emergencies has been reinforced, while lessons learned during the three-year battle against COVID-19 have been used to draw up new guidelines.

Over the past year, upgraded disease control measures, including regular pathogen surveillance and quickly increased capacity to handle an acute health event, have also been

introduced. These measures have tackled sporadic outbreaks of COVID-19, cases of monkeypox that spread to more than 20 provinces, and a number of respiratory pathogens that caused an increase in hospital admissions this winter.

The mission of "building a powerful public health system" was proposed by the central leadership in June 2020, several months after the pandemic emerged. Efforts to achieve this goal have been accelerated in the past year and will continue in the years ahead.

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## PAGE TWO

## Medicine: Science, technology help fight viruses

2023  
year in  
Review

From page 1

Late last month, the State Council's General Office released a guideline aimed at promoting high-quality development of China's disease control system. Enhancing the role of science and technology in combating viruses, and nurturing more public health professionals, were among the key tasks.

Wang Hesheng, director of the National Disease Control and Prevention Administration, said during a recent news conference, "The new document puts forward a blueprint and vision for China's disease control sector and will play an essential role in establishing a powerful public health system and contribute to the grand goal of building a healthy China for all."

#### Restrictions eased

On Jan 8 last year, China downgraded its management of COVID-19 from the top-tier category A to category B, meaning that infected patients would no longer be quarantined or their close contacts traced. Inbound passengers would not face mandatory isolation.

In early May, the World Health Organization ended the designation of COVID-19 as a global health emergency, as the number of cases was falling and life in much of the world had returned to normal.

However, the relief brought by the eased restrictions was also intertwined with increased alertness and an urgent need to reflect on the pandemic.

WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said: "COVID-19 has left — and continues to leave — deep scars on our world. Those scars must serve as a permanent reminder of the potential for new viruses to emerge, with devastating consequences."

"We owe it to those we have lost ... to learn those lessons and to transform that suffering into meaningful and lasting change."

Liang Wannian, head of an expert panel on epidemic control at the National Health Commission, said the WHO's decision does not mean that the virus can be left to run rampant.

Continuous monitoring of variants, expanding vaccination among vulnerable groups, and improvements to the public health system and grassroots medical facilities remain essential ways to cope with the disease, he said.

While China swiftly noted the significance of committing to a stronger public health system during the pandemic, a series of concrete steps were taken in the legal field, along with institutional reforms.

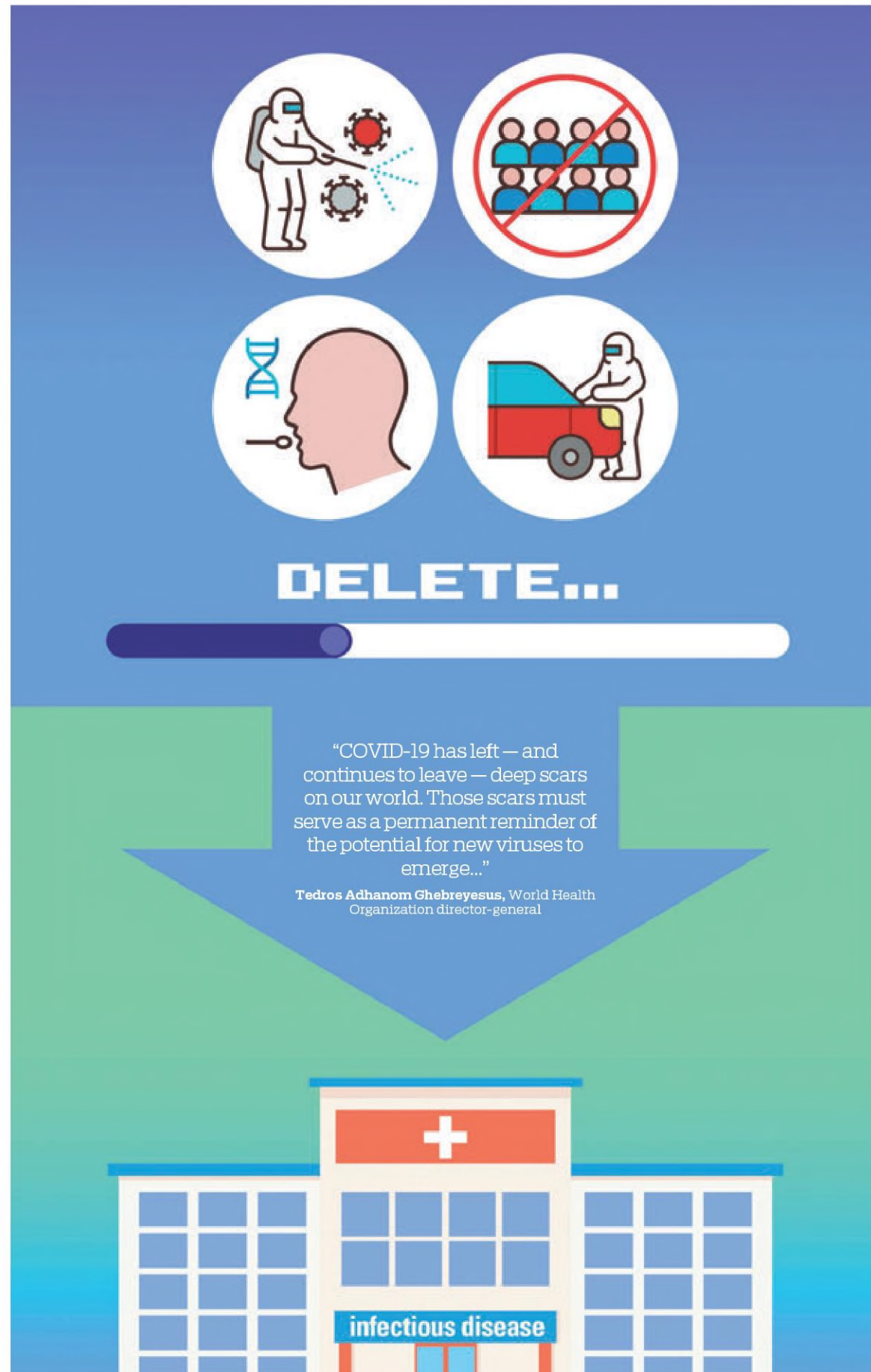
In May 2021, the National Disease Control and Prevention Administration, a new central-level body, was inaugurated.

Shen Hongbing, deputy director of the new administration and director of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, said during an event in April that the year 2023 would be an important one for disease control system reforms that would spread from central to regional level.

"Provincial-level disease control administrations should also be set up in reference to the central model. At municipal and county level, disease control bureaus should be established within the local health commissions, and local disease control centers should be set up," he said.

By the end of June, nearly all provincial-level regions in China had announced the establishment of their own disease-control facilities.

For example, the disease control administration in Yunnan province was unveiled in late May. Local authorities said the new institute would strengthen leadership and coordination across different tiers of disease control bodies throughout the province. They also noted that the



LU PING / CHINA DAILY

administration would improve communication with many ports in Yunnan, which shares long borders with Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam.

The legal foundation for disease control work has also been strengthened in the past year.

In late October, a draft revision of the Infectious Disease Prevention and Control Law was submitted to the nation's top legislature for review. The focus was on improving China's epidemic surveillance and early warning and reporting system, including prohibiting interventions and providing incentives for early reporting.

Li Wei, a senior legislator, said the draft added an entire section on monitoring and early precautions against contagious diseases, and also clarified legal responsibilities. "Effective approaches and experiences such as scientific-based disease control and a whole-of-society approach toward coping with the epidemic have also been incorporated into the law, which is of great significance toward building a sound legal system on public health," he said.

Last month, Chinese lawmakers reviewed draft revisions to

the Frontier Health and Quarantine Law aimed at bolstering emergency response measures against major outbreaks at ports across the country.

Shen, head of the China CDC, said, "The legal landscape surrounding disease control work in China, with the law on infectious disease and control, the law on vaccine management, as well as the regulation on emergency response to acute public health events that are in the pipeline, has become more sophisticated in recent years."

#### Reporting systems

The pandemic prompted disease control authorities and experts to decide on the key capabilities needed to tackle such an outbreak or other acute health emergency.

Building a regular surveillance and early warning system for pathogens, as well as implementing triaged treatment systems during outbreaks have been emphasized repeatedly, and the results of immediate efforts have already been used to cope with threats of infection.

Wang, head of the national disease control administration, said China has built the world's largest

online reporting systems for contagious diseases, reducing the time it takes to report a new outbreak from five days to four hours.

A nationwide network of facilities capable of testing for contagious diseases and pathogens has also been established. Within 72 hours, more than 300 types of pathogens can be rapidly identified, and all provincial-level CDC centers and 90 percent of such centers at the municipal level can perform nucleic acid tests and isolate viruses, he added.

Zhang Guoxin, an official at the administration, said 84,000 medical institutions nationwide have been linked to the direct reporting system.

"We are carrying out regular surveillance of key infectious diseases such as plague, polio, malaria and influenza. For COVID-19 and other acute respiratory illnesses, we have established a 10-pronged surveillance system that integrates monitoring of hospital visits, variants and urban wastewater," he said.

Work on a pilot surveillance program dedicated to acute respiratory illnesses is also in progress, he added.

In June, the number of monkeypox cases in China began to

rise due to stealth transmission of the viral disease among high-risk groups, and a rising number of imported cases.

Shi Guoqing, a researcher at the China CDC's emergency center, said that to enable swift detection of new cases, the nation has established a multi-channel monitoring and early warning system for monkeypox, and carried out tests among inbound passengers suspected of contracting the virus.

"HIV clinics at hospitals and dermatology and sexually transmitted disease departments are also required to inquire about the epidemiological history of visitors with monkeypox-like symptoms," he said. "We have also strengthened education among key groups — men who have sex with men — and asked them to seek treatment promptly upon exhibiting suspicious symptoms."

Meanwhile, the number of medical facilities considered essential in tackling epidemics has increased.

Zhuang Ning, an official at the National Health Commission's Department of Healthcare Reform, said 98 percent of grassroots medical institutions and



For COVID-19 and other acute respiratory illnesses, we have established a 10-pronged surveillance system that integrates monitoring of hospital visits, variants and urban wastewater."

Zhang Guoxin, an official with the National Disease Control and Prevention Administration

hospitals have set up their own fever clinics, while more intensive care unit beds and equipment have been provided at major hospitals.

Since October, China has witnessed a surge in patients at major hospitals, driven by the circulation of various pathogens, including COVID-19, mycoplasma pneumoniae, and influenza.

Mi Feng, spokesman for the commission, said lower-level hospitals, traditional Chinese medicine and primary health institutions have been mobilized to relieve pressure on large hospitals during the peak of respiratory illnesses.

"Fever clinics and fever rooms at grassroots level have handled 44 percent of visits at all fever departments across the nation, effectively meeting patients' demands," he said during a news conference last month.

"Given the complicated situation this winter, with multiple pathogens circulating simultaneously, we have attached greater significance to coordinating resources across different regions and hospitals, and added treatment areas and personnel to improve services."

Gao Xiang, president of the ECO-City Hospital of Tianjin Fifth Central Hospital, said that during the peak in patient visits, the hospital coordinated resources between emergency care, fever and respiratory clinics and used real-time data monitoring to allocate patients and maintain services in an orderly manner.

Zhuang, the health official, said the commission is also drafting diagnosis and treatment plans for contagious diseases such as plague, cholera and anthrax in an attempt to enhance the knowledge and skills of medical workers and promote standardized treatment of infectious disease patients nationwide.

#### New requirements

The guideline released last month has resulted in new requirements for disease control development in China, including enhancing the scientific process of relevant institutions and cultivating high-quality public health professionals.

It states that central- and provincial-level CDC centers should also develop functions as preventive medicine academies.

Zhang, the administration official, said: "Reflecting on the domestic battle against COVID-19, science and technological research have played a significant role in isolating and decoding the genome sequences of the virus, developing vaccines, testing kits and therapeutics. Big data and artificial intelligence tools have also been widely used in epidemiological investigations."

The new requirements are expected to concentrate resources and personnel to resolve problems in disease control and ease channels for converting research results into real-world applications, he said.

Wang, the administration head, said a task force dedicated to cultivating talent was recently set up within the administration, to improve the quality of public health colleges and introduce programs to support the nurturing of high-level talent.

The guideline also states that when assessing the performance of public health workers, less attention should be paid to the number of papers they have published, and more emphasis attached to the outcomes of their disease control work.

# TOP NEWS

## Moving to new home

Veterinarians and members of the Kenya Wildlife Service try to move a sedated rhino out of the water to safety at Nairobi National Park, Kenya, on Tuesday as part of a plan to translocate 21 rhinos to Loisaba Conservancy in Northern Kenya. The operation, which officially started on Tuesday, had to be postponed due to technical reasons. After completion, it will be one of the largest translocations of rhinos in Kenya's history.

LUIS TATO / AFP



## 'De-risking' hindering clean energy transition

By LIA ZHU in San Francisco  
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The United States, seeking to assert its leadership and reduce dependence on the clean energy sector, has embarked on a "de-risking" strategy, aimed at "decoupling" its supply chains from China. However, insiders warn that the approach could prove unsustainable, harming both the US and the global fight against climate change.

"De-risking" through measures such as subsidies and tariffs to reduce dependence on China-dominant supply chains and implementing trade protectionism won't work, they said. A complete "decoupling" from China is impossible, H.L. Yiu, chief corporate development officer of Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks, told China Daily at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas last week.

He led a delegation from China's Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area to showcase innovations at the tech show, with a focus on sustainable technologies. Citing the region, a hub for clean energy technologies, as an example, he said that integrated supply chains, rapid tech-to-market pipelines and thriving startups hold the key to success.

He pointed at the opportunities the US lost as a result of offshoring decades ago for cheap production, leaving the country lagging in domestic manufacturing capabilities. The Barack Obama era's \$90-billion clean energy initiatives under the 2009 Recovery Act serve as a cautionary tale. Although well-intentioned, the initiatives ultimately stalled due to political interference and left many of the era's startups bankrupt.

### Market stimulus

"In contrast, Beijing proactively stimulated its domestic market. The government heavily subsidized electric vehicles and domestic solar installations," said Henry Sanderson, executive editor of Benchmark Mineral Intelligence, a London-based provider of data and analysis on the battery supply chain.

The result is China's current leading position in the manufacture and deployment of both technologies, he added.

"But that feat is not solely a result of subsidies. In many cases, the Chinese scaled up and manufactured better products than Western companies," Sanderson wrote in an article published in Foreign Affairs.

Chinese companies such as Shenzhen-based YJC Group, despite facing US tariffs, are finding success with cost-effective EV batteries, attracting attention at the Consumer Electronics Show.

"We have complete supply chains, and the competing EV market in China also drives up the demand and lowers the cost," said Denny Du, YJC's vice-general manager.

He sees potential in the US, with its demand for electric golf carts and electric pickup trucks. "There are about 18,000 golf courses in the US, and electric golf carts are in great demand," said Du. "And the surging gas prices are making more farmers embrace electric vehicles."

Acknowledging that the company's US dealers have expressed concerns over supply chains, Du said, "Cost-efficient solutions win market share, regardless of origin."

In the clean energy sector, China is far ahead in terms of access to critical minerals: China produces almost 70 percent of the world's graphite for batteries, processes more than 90 percent of the manganese for batteries and produces most of the world's polysilicon for solar cells.

The US tariffs on Chinese solar products have caused the US Solar Energy Industries Association to reduce its 2023 and 2024 installation projections by 46 percent, after major developers warned of significant project delays.

Meanwhile, US renewable subsidies jumped to \$15.6 billion in 2022 from \$7.4 billion in 2016, according to a report by the Energy Information Administration.

Simply throwing taxpayer money at the problem, as the US has done with its renewable energy subsidies, is considered unsustainable by industry players.

In the clean energy sector, "the difficulty of successfully de-risking with respect to China has not been adequately understood by Western leaders or communicated to the public," said Sanderson of Benchmark Mineral Intelligence.

His opinion is echoed by the findings of an October report by the European think tank Bruegel.

"Part of the European Union and US response to reduce reliance on China is reshoring production, but this is economically inefficient given their limited access to critical raw materials and high production costs. Moreover, Chinese firms are far ahead of the rest of the world in green tech manufacturing and innovation," said the report.

## Population drop brings call for focus on quality

Improvements in education, health help sustain growth, expert says

By WANG XIAOYU  
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China's population fell by about 2 million last year, prompting experts to say that, with continued but mild declines likely in the foreseeable future, more attention should be paid to improving the quality of human resources and implementing fertility support measures.

### Inside

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The number of babies born went down by about 540,000 year-on-year to 9.02 million in 2023, according to official data released on Wednesday by the National Bureau of Statistics. With 11.1 million deaths recorded last year, the total population dropped by 2.08 million to around 1.41 billion.

Meanwhile, the proportion of the working-age population — those aged 16 to 59 years — decreased slightly year-on-year to 61.3 percent in 2023, while the proportion of people aged 60 and above rose by 1.3 percentage points to 21.1 percent.

The decrease in total population last year aligned with demographers' predictions. Due to fewer women of childbearing age, a low willingness to have babies and delays in marriage — coupled with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in

It is necessary to take a comprehensive approach that incorporates quality, structure and distribution of population when evaluating population development."

He Dan, director of the China Population and Development Research Center

the past four years — China's birth rate has been falling gradually, contributing to the historic drop in total population that was recorded in 2022.

"The general, long-term trend in China is that we will see a steady decline in total population, but it is also important to note that global fertility is falling and modernized development will inevitably result in an aging society and low birth rates," said He Dan, director of the China Population and Development Research Center.

She said that despite the decrease in population, the total number

remains massive and the quality of the population is now a more important criterion than the number in assessing demographics.

"It is necessary to take a comprehensive approach that incorporates quality, structure and distribution of population when evaluating population development," she added.

Yuan Xin, a professor at Nankai University's School of Economics and vice-president of the China Population Association, said it is projected that by 2050, China will still have 1.2 to 1.4 billion people — accounting for 14 to 18 percent of total global population.

Wang Jinying, a demographer at Hebei University, said the education levels of the working-age population and of the entire population have both markedly increased in the past two decades.

"In particular, the number of talent with a master's degree spiked tenfold between 2000 and 2020," he said. "The average life expectancy also rose from 71 to 77.93 years during that period."

"With great improvements in education and health, China's human capital has increased substantially, helping drive a steady supply of labor and high-quality economic development," he added.

However, experts have also warned of a considerable downfall in the population in the longer

term due to the lack of concrete steps to encourage births.

In July 2021, the central leadership released a decision that allows all couples to have three children and strengthens fertility support, prompting the rollout of a variety of local policies to encourage births.

He, director of the China Population and Development Research Center, said that these policies have yielded positive results, including improvements in prenatal and postnatal care and an increase in the number of babies born as a second or third child. But the policies have not fully met the demands of the public.

"The current fertility level in China stands around one (birth per woman of childbearing age), and nearly 40 percent of fertility intentions are not realized, primarily due to lack of housing and nursery care services, high education costs and infertility conditions, among other factors," she said. "These problems can be addressed through proactive action and policy interventions."

"The younger generation's perception on marriage and childbearing is moldable, and it is important for us to help them foster a positive attitude toward getting married and having children, and give them support," she said, adding that the convention of starting a family and having children over a lifetime is still widely accepted.

She noted that to build a sound fertility support system, practical problems such as steep housing costs, anxiety over education and the burden of medical care should be tackled. It is also vital to elevate the system for maternity insurance, child-care support and fertility health protection from the local to the national level, and have statutes in place to ensure their implementation, she said.

## Democracy: US is marked by massive polarization

From page 1

We have entered what the Pew Research Center called in 2017 a global "democratic recession".

Loss of trust has been the strongest in the US, the leading Western democracy.

The US is marked by massive polarization. Thus, during the presidency of Donald Trump, 36 percent of Republicans surveyed

said they trusted government, while only 12 percent of Democrats did. With the election of Joe Biden to the presidency, the figures reversed.

Veteran Singaporean diplomat Kishore Mahbubani has said that democracy needs to be guided by two principles. The first principle emphasizes that each person should have "an equal right to the most extensive liberty," while the

second says that social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are to "every-one's advantage", he said.

Under the neo-liberalism of small government, the second of these principles has been absent. This rising inequality and financial hardship have led to a sea of despair, in which lies great risk.

What makes this worse for the US, with its loss of assumed hege-

monic dominance, is that it faces a highly virile counterpart in China, whose level of trust in its government stands at around 90 percent.

The author is a historian, theologian and social commentator. This article was first published by Pearls & Irritations, an Australia-based public policy discussion platform. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## Dalian meets Davos



Guests attend a reception hosted by the northeastern Chinese city of Dalian, Liaoning province, in Davos, Switzerland, on Tuesday evening during the 54th Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum. Dalian is the host city of the Annual Meeting of the New Champions 2024. LIAN YI / XINHUA

## Recovery: Robust policy support to propel economy this year

From page 1

Zou Yunhan, deputy director of the macroeconomic research office at the State Information Center's Department of Economic Forecasting, said she expects the nation's economy to expand by around 5 percent in 2024.

"The momentum of China's economic recovery is poised to undergo further consolidation this year, propelled by robust policy support, the advancement of industrial transformation and upgrading, and the continuous deepening of reforms."

Meanwhile, due to the "scarring effect" of the COVID-19 pandemic over the past few years, it could still take time for people's spending power to recover, Zou said.



Retail sales, a key measurement of consumer spending, increased by 7.4 percent in December, down from the

10.1 percent growth a month earlier. Yu Yongding, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences,

said the contributions of consumption and net exports to GDP growth will likely be lower compared

with 2023, and capital formation will thus play a bigger role in maintaining a high growth rate this year.

"If the growth rate of consumption in 2024 is lower than that in 2023, achieving a 5 percent GDP growth may require double-digit growth in infrastructure investment," he said.

Yu said that China should set an annual growth target of at least 5 percent, and the focus should be on expanding budgeted fiscal deficit rates and increase in treasury bonds to provide funding for infrastructure investment.

NBS data showed that China's fixed-asset investment rose by 3 percent in 2023. Infrastructure investment and manufacturing investment grew by 5.9 percent and

6.5 percent, respectively, while real estate investment fell by 9.6 percent in 2023.

Tom Orlik, chief economist at Bloomberg Economics, said that China's policymakers have been doing the right thing by attempting to manage the problem of oversupply without triggering a complete collapse in the real estate sector. He said there will be enough stimulus, financing and support for homebuyers this year.

He said that China has the scope to keep monetary and fiscal policies supportive to help bolster the economy's recovery, adding that a forceful fiscal policy will play a bigger role in boosting domestic demand.

Zheng Houcheng, chief macroeconomist at Yingda Securities, said a further reduction in the reserve requirement ratio as well as policy rate cuts will likely happen in the first half of 2024.

## CHINA

# Guizhou region sets example for rural vitalization success

Valuable flatland in hilly province serves as hotbed for agricultural production

By YANG JUN in Guiyang and WANG SONGSONG

Six years after China proposed its rural vitalization strategy, Guizhou province has emerged as a noteworthy example of success by boosting agricultural production and new media promotion, paving the way for a brighter future.

The challenging terrain of Guizhou, in southwestern China, poses a severe challenge to agricultural production, with data from the provincial forestry bureau showing that 92.5 percent of its land is mountains and hills, making flatland extremely valuable.

Covering an area of 700 hectares, the Chejiang flatland in Rongjiang county has attracted 26 market entities to engage in agricultural production. Peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers, luffas, eggplants and other vegetables are grown on a large scale and sold to vendors in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

"We are grateful to receive help in marketing and technology from Foshan city's Nanhai district," said Qiu Jinyu, deputy general manager of an agricultural production company in the county. "As transportation facilities improve, vegetables from Rongjiang can arrive in the Greater Bay Area within a day."

Agricultural production on the flatland is boosting residents' incomes. They receive 24,375 yuan (\$3,419) per hectare a year from the transfer of land use rights and can work as vegetable farmers.

"During harvest season, the flatland provides more than 20,000 job opportunities to residents," Qiu said.

Since 2021, Rongjiang has helped local companies establish cooperative business relations with counterparts in Guangdong province that have resulted in the sale of 160,000 metric tons of vegetables valued at around 500 million yuan, Tianyan News, a news outlet in Guizhou, reported.

Several regions in China went viral last year because of local attractions.

In Zibo county, Shandong province, it was barbecue, while in the city of Jiangmen in Guangdong, it was the television series *The Knockout*. Rongjiang county went viral thanks to the Rongjiang Village Super League — a soccer competition dubbed *cunchao* by netizens.

Behind the viral success stories, new media promotion helps cities and counties stand out and inspires less-developed parts of the country



anchors sell local products in the new media cultural creativity industry park in Rongjiang county, Guizhou province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

**“We train anchors according to their personality and products. Generally, it takes seven to eight months.”**

Ouyang Zhangwei, who has trained livestreaming anchors in the new media cultural creativity industry park in Rongjiang county, Guizhou province

to catch up. Promotion efforts require professional new media teams, and Rongjiang trains them.

Established in November 2021, a new media cultural creativity industry park in the county features a talent training base, livestreaming center, product workshop and storage and logistics facilities. It aims to turn cellphones into new farm tools, data into new agricultural materials and livestreaming into new farm work.

The park has attracted more than 40 enterprises, provided training to 35,000 people, and helped over 8,000 people increase their incomes. It also cultivated about

2,200 livestreaming marketing teams, making it a valuable business model.

A county government work report released last year said the park sold more than 400,000 tons of agricultural products online in 2022.

Ouyang Zhangwei, who has business interests in the beverage and homestay industries, joined the park about a month after its establishment.

When he arrived in Rongjiang, Ouyang told residents he and his staff would teach them e-commerce operations free of charge.

"Our training consists of two parts: content production and live-stream marketing," he said. "We train anchors according to their personality and products. Generally, it takes seven to eight months."

He has trained 26 anchors to sell agricultural products so far.

*Gastrodia elata*, an orchid commonly used in traditional Chinese medicine, is an excellent example of his efforts to boost rural vitalization through new media platforms such as Douyin, the Chinese version of short video app TikTok.

"*Gastrodia elata* sales are now over 30,000 yuan a day, topping the Guizhou agricultural product ranking list on Douyin," Ouyang said. "On Oct 25, *gastrodia elata* sales on

Douyin reached 372,100 yuan.

"After the orchid exploded in popularity in 2022, Jihua town in Rongjiang decided to expand its planting area. This year, all *gastrodia elata* in the area will be sold by my team. Apart from the plant, we also sell its processed products like noodles and shampoo."

Ouyang said he has developed over 40 *cunchao*-related cultural and creative products, including soft drinks and bayberry juice. By leveraging the popularity of the Rongjiang Village Super League, he has made them hot-selling products.

He has also invested in local tourism. Xiaodanjiang Miao village, a traditional village in Rongjiang, boasts an untouched forest, a waterfall and the culture of the Miao ethnic group.

"That's why we invested in the homestay and marketed it," he said. "Residents told us there are so many tourists that they don't have enough reception capacity."

Ouyang plans to find more agricultural products with local advantages that he can sell in large quantities while also redoubling his efforts to develop cultural tourism.

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## Cities say it's the end of the road for 'old man's joy'

By XU ZHESHENG  
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A growing number of cities have banned slow, small and unlicensed electric-powered three-wheel or four-wheel vehicles — known as *laotoule*, "old man's joy" in Chinese — because of safety and management concerns.

Beijing banned them from the start of this year, with the vehicles, commonly used by seniors running daily errands, no longer allowed to travel on roads or be parked in public places.

Other places, including Tianjin, Hefei in Anhui province and Dezhou in Shandong province have also prohibited their use on roads since Jan 1.

*Laotoule* started to appear on roads in China around 2007, with people joking that one could bring a whole day of happiness to an elderly owner. They could head to the market in the morning and easily bring back a cart full of fresh produce. In the afternoon they could pick up their grandchildren from school, and in the evening they could ferry their spouse to a public square and end a fulfilling day with dancing.

Because they were cheaper than most conventional gasoline- or electric-powered cars, and operating them did not require a driver's license or vehicle registration, they became a convenient choice for the elderly and their popularity grew in the 2010s.

According to an industry report, there were more than 10 million *laotoule* in China in 2020.

After becoming common sights in small towns and rural areas, *laotoule* gradually spread to big cities, including Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou and Shenzhen in Guangdong province.

However, the poor quality of their construction and the frequent traffic violations committed by the unlicensed elderly drivers — such as driving in the wrong direction, illegal parking

and running red lights — led to a lot of traffic accidents.

Figures from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology show there were some 830,000 traffic accidents involving low-speed electric vehicles across the nation from 2012 to 2016, resulting in around 18,000 deaths and 186,000 injuries.

In November 2018, the ministry and five other government departments issued a notice on strengthening the management of *laotoule* and strictly prohibiting increased production capacity.

In 2019, various regions began introducing two- to five-year transition periods for taking them off the roads.

In Beijing, authorities initiated a campaign in 2021 to phase out unlicensed electric vehicles by the end of last year, encouraging owners to switch to better regulated options.

Over the past six months, Beijing established recycling channels to encourage residents to dispose of unauthorized vehicles, and the city government also offered subsidies to those who recycled their vehicles through official channels.

The capital is also providing more convenient public transportation services, including dedicated buses running to medical facilities and schools and easier taxi-hailing services for the elderly.

Zhang Zhuting, an expert from the Ministry of Transport's Transport Management Institute, said the impact on elderly people's travel needs had to be considered when banning electric vehicles.

"We need to find alternatives for the elderly," Zhang said. "Most buses in cities offer free rides for the elderly, which can solve the travel problems of some elderly people. In areas without public transportation, some communities are exploring the use of regulated electric vehicles as a means of transportation."



Two *laotoule* are driven on a street in Anyang, Henan province, on Jan 4. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Hebei braces for busy winter sports season

By ZHANG YU in Shijiazhuang  
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North China's Hebei province, which helped stage the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games, has seen a winter sports boom since a series of measures were rolled out to promote related activities, leading residents to gradually fall in love with them.

The total output of the ice and snow industry in Hebei in 2022 reached 58.71 billion yuan (\$8.23 billion), up 10.2 percent year-on-year, according to an announcement jointly released by the Hebei Provincial Bureau of Sports and the Hebei Provincial Bureau of Statistics in November.

The announcement detailed the total scale and added value of the province's ice and snow industry in 2022, which included related sports services, equipment and related product manufacturing, and related construction.

According to Liang Huiying, a marketing director of the Wanlong Paradise Resort in the Chongli district of Zhangjiakou in Hebei, in the first month of this snow season, the resort has received around 85,000 tourists, an increase of about 5 percent compared to the previous two years.

The district, which is about 300 kilometers northwest of downtown Beijing, staged most of the skiing events during the 2022 Winter Olympics.

"The main reason for the slight increase is that this warm winter delayed the opening of the season by about 10 days compared to 2022," Liang said.

She added the enthusiasm for skiing this winter is actually



Enthusiasts enjoy skiing at the Thawoo Ski Resort in the Chongli district of Zhangjiakou, Hebei province. REN XIAOQIANG / CHINA DAILY

much higher than last winter, especially among novice skiers.

"In previous snow seasons, there were predominantly experienced skiers, but this season, a large number of newcomers have actively participated in the sport," Liang said.

As one of the major ski resorts in Chongli, Wanlong has 36 ski trails, with a total area of 123 hectares and a trail length of 44.99 kilometers, according to Liang.

There is also a wild snow forest area of 230 hectares for skiing, and the resort can accommodate up to 15,000 skiers a day, she said.

It is expected that the 2023-2024 snow season will end in ear-

ly May, and Wanlong is expected to welcome about 600,000 visitors, Liang said.

Liu Wei, an outdoor extreme sports enthusiast from Beijing, has enjoyed skiing at Wanlong on several occasions since the beginning of the season.

"I usually come with my friends and family. We enjoy how skiing can bring us together," said the 30-year-old, who has been skiing for five years.

"Whether you're a child or an adult, you can feel the freedom and excitement that skiing can bring."

The snow season in Chongli started on Nov 8. "The ice and snow sports have been very popular in Chongli since the beginning of the snow season," said Wu Yan, deputy head of the district.

According to Wu, Chongli has made full preparations for the tourism boom anticipated during the season.

"Excluding several major ski resorts, we have prepared all-around entertainment options, including Chinese acrobatics, symphonies and music galas," Wu said, adding that they hope to provide a good vacation experience for visitors.

Other cities in Hebei, including Shijiazhuang and Tangshan, have also started their annual ice and snow sports season as more people are emerging as ski or skate enthusiasts.

In Yutian county, Tangshan, ski resorts have scrambled to make snow to draw visitors.

## Fenggang county drives tourism with famed tea

By QUAN ZHANFU  
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Fenggang county, home to the renowned Fenggang zinc selenium tea, has leveraged its favorable natural environment to become stronger economically in recent years, creating a slew of tea-tourism activities that support rural vitalization.

The county in Southwest China's Guizhou province has undergone significant transformations in its tea industry. The county has revised and improved product standards and processing techniques for Fenggang tea. A total of 287 tea processing enterprises have been established, including one national-level tea producer and 32 provincial-level companies.

Moreover, Fenggang has made great efforts to promote branding. A company was set up to accelerate the development of a tea brand, and by 2022, the value of Fenggang zinc selenium tea brand exceeded 2.94 billion yuan (\$411 million).

At the Chashou Mountain Organic Tea Garden in Fenggang, owner Wang Liquan told local media that the company has expanded its operations and scale

of its tea garden by incorporating tourism.

The company has constructed fitness trails, agricultural folk culture halls, orchards and unique homestays inside the tea garden. It has also become an environmental and scenic agricultural demonstration park where flowers bloom throughout the year, the fragrance of tea and medicinal herbs fills the air, and tea and tourism merge seamlessly. During weekends and holidays, tourists flock to the garden.

"I can feel that the air in Fenggang is very good," a visitor surnamed Li said. "The environment is pleasant, and the Fenggang zinc selenium tea is excellent. It's truly worth the visit."

Usually, the tea garden receives 200 to 300 visitors a day, and at peak times, there are six to seven groups that come to experience tea picking, observe the production process and purchase products, Wang said.

In 2022, the total tea plantation area in the county reached 33,333 hectares, with 57,000 metric tons of tea produced and an output value of 5.8 billion yuan. The tea industry has become a distinctive sector driving the development of Fenggang.

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

Viewed from a distance, Lianxing looks more like a solar energy farm than a rural village of 457 households. There are solar photovoltaic panels on almost all its rooftops and in every courtyard.

For generations, residents of the village in Wuyuan county, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, depended on straw, firewood and coal for cooking and heating.

But they have now abandoned those fuels, which often made their homes dirty, 40-year-old villager Shi Baohong said.

The new power generation facilities have also brought villagers a consistent stream of income with little effort. Shi earns almost 10,000 yuan (\$1,400) a year from his solar PV panels and said there is still enough space between them to plant herbs and other cash crops in his courtyard of more than 300 square meters.

As China forges ahead with energy transition and rural vitalization, Lianxing and its almost 1,400 residents are a microcosm of the synergy that can be generated when the two campaigns are promoted simultaneously.

Different development modes have emerged, with rural residents being major beneficiaries.

The National Energy Administration said the installed capacity of household distributed solar PV power generation reached about 105 gigawatts by the end of September. That's over four times the capacity of the Three Gorges Dam project — the world's largest hydropower facility.

To date, more than 5 million rural households have been covered by the distributed power generation facilities — systems installed close to the place the electricity will be used. The rapid development has not only boosted energy transformation, but also driven the growth of farmers' incomes, the administration said in November.

It said roughly half the growth in the capacity of distributed solar PV in the first three quarters of last year — almost 33 GW — was contributed by household panels.

The administration also noted the huge potential for distributed solar PV power development in rural China, saying almost 27.3 billion square meters of rooftops belonging to more than 80 million rural households are suitable sites for panels.

It vowed to further promote its "whole-county" distributed solar PV development pilot program as part of efforts to drive even greater adoption.

Launched three years ago in 676 pilot county-level areas, the program aims to tap the potential of the rooftops of government and public buildings, industrial and commercial complexes and rural homes for distributed solar PV development.

Local authorities said the distributed solar PV system in Lianxing went into operation in 2017, three years after villagers moved into new homes fitted with solar panels. Households in the village now make an average of 8,000 yuan a year from selling solar energy to the grid.

Villagers did not have to pay for the new houses or power generation facilities thanks to a land-use rights transfer project. After their resettlement, the land previously covered



Left: Solar photovoltaic panels are placed on the rooftops of residences in Donglian village in Gansu province. CHENG GANG / FOR CHINA DAILY  
Right: Two workers install PV panels on the rooftop of a factory in Tangshan, Hebei province. YANG SHIYAO / XINHUA



## Panels put rural homes on energy map

Villagers benefit from 'whole-county' pilot program's encouragement of distributed solar photovoltaic development.  
Hou Liqiang, Yuan Hui and Ma Jingna report.



Arrays of PV panels in the yards and on the rooftops of Lianxing village in Wuyuan, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, in June.  
LI ZHIXUAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

by the villagers' old, dilapidated houses was turned into more than 130 hectares of farmland.

All the costs for the new houses and solar panels were covered by the company that invested in a large-scale agricultural development project.

"Villagers didn't pay even a single penny. It was a house-for-house deal, and that's not half bad," the village's Party chief, Li Chou, said.

He said people from nearby rural communities have been impressed by the progress made by Lianxing's residents after seeing the way the distributed solar PV program has resulted in a significant transformation of the village's living environment.

"The village is spotlessly clean.

So is every household," Li said.

With vast stretches of desert and wasteland, Inner Mongolia is particularly suitable for large-scale, concentrated solar PV energy development, but the region has also made continued progress in household solar PV installation.

Inner Mongolia's distributed solar power generation capacity increased by 400 megawatts in the first three quarters of last year, the National Energy Administration said. That took the total in the region to over 1.6 GW, with more than a quarter contributed by household panels.

The neighboring province of Gansu has also seen remarkable progress in household solar PV adoption.

While some rural residents paid for installation themselves, many others were offered another option — leasing their rooftops to solar energy development companies.

Liang Hongqi, from Dujiahe village in Hezheng county, Gansu, learned about distributed solar PV from the internet in 2017.

After the local grid company told him that preferential prices could lower the cost of installing a solar PV power generation system at his home, and that he could sell the surplus power it generated to the grid, the 59-year-old quickly decided to spend 34,000 yuan to put one on his rooftop.

His six-member family, which usually consumes 120 kilowatt-

hours of electricity a month, now enjoys free power supply, Liang said, adding that he has also made 24,500 yuan from sales to the local grid.

The service life of a distributed solar power system is usually 20 to 25 years, and workers from the local grid company inspect his system regularly.

"What I need to do is to occasionally clean the PV panels to ensure that their power generation capability is not disrupted by sand and dust," he said.

In Donglian village, in Gansu's Gaotai county, many families can earn 1,000 yuan a year without having to make any investment or do maintenance work. They lease their

rooftops to a company for distributed solar PV development.

Hu Zongren, a village committee official, said that after seeing a news report about a nearby village installing distributed solar power systems, he called his counterpart there to learn more about it.

His decision to bring in the company to tap the solar energy potential of rooftops in the village and increase residents' incomes soon won support from 36 families.

"Villagers don't have to worry about how much power the facilities can generate. They only have to check whether the rental is paid in a timely manner every season," he said, adding the company pays villagers 50 yuan a year for every piece of panel installed on their rooftops.

Niu Jianping, the head of the new energy department at the Gansu Provincial Development and Reform Commission, said the development of distributed solar PV is of great significance for the country's climate targets and rural vitalization.

The province has seen roughly 910.4 MW of distributed solar PV put into operation, he said, with over 40 percent linked to rural vitalization efforts.

"By promoting demonstration projects with guiding roles, we aim to drive widespread adoption of experiences gained from these projects to promote the clean, low-carbon transition in the rural energy system and effectively boost the construction of necessary infrastructure," he said.

Juungar Banner in Inner Mongolia is one of the 676 pilot areas for whole-county distributed solar PV development. Under the pilot program, the banner government plans to install solar panels on more than 3.3 million square meters of rooftops, providing a total capacity of 243 MW.

After the pilot program is completed, the solar panels are expected to generate 360 million kWh of electricity a year. That would help eliminate the use of 113,000 metric tons of standard coal a year and reduce carbon dioxide emissions by over 300,000 tons, the banner government said.

It added, however, that it had encountered some challenges in promoting household solar PV development in rural areas.

The cost of a household solar PV system is relatively high for rural residents, with a long payback period, it said, adding that had made rural residents less willing to install panels.

Some old rural houses also had small rooftops, and some farmers were worried installation would damage their houses, it said.

To address the problem, it urged the central government to introduce more subsidies to encourage the development of distributed solar PV and also increase the price paid by grids for power generated by rooftop panels.

The banner government also stressed the need to upgrade rural grids to improve their ability to access distributed solar PV power.

In Lianxing, Shi is looking forward to seeing more rooftop solar PV panels.

"It makes our village clean," he said. "I hope more will be installed because, if that happens, more job opportunities will be created for those with economic difficulties. They can clean the panels to make a living."

There were still many spaces suitable for panel installation, he said, adding "It's really something good."

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## Industrial and commercial rooftops have big potential

By HOU LIQIANG

China is expected to see robust growth in the development of distributed solar photovoltaic systems mounted to industrial and commercial buildings, industry insiders said.

While the high price of electricity for businesses provides an economic driver for the potential boom, the increasingly high demand for green power from enterprises, especially listed ones, will also add impetus, they said.

The development of distributed solar PV in China has gained momentum in recent years.

In 2022, the nationwide increase in solar PV power generation capacity stood at roughly 87.4 gigawatts, 51.1 GW of which was contributed by distributed facilities — those installed close to the place where the electricity will be used. That marked the second straight year that the proportion of distributed solar PV reached more than half of the newly added capacity.

It was a trend that continued in the first three quarters of last year, with the National Energy Administration saying that 67.1 GW of new distributed solar PV capacity was connected to the grid from January to September, representing almost 52.1 percent of newly added solar PV capacity.

Often installed on a building's rooftop or facade, distributed solar PV electricity systems avoid the high distribution losses that occur in traditional centralized power generation and transmission.

Qian Jing, vice-president of Jinko Solar, a major Chinese PV player, said she believes distributed solar PV will play an increasingly bigger role in promoting the growth of solar PV capacity, with a bigger contribution coming from industrial and commercial solar PV.

The development of centralized ground-mounted solar PV stations is restricted by the availability of land, she said, as well as the grid's inability to absorb large amounts

of intermittent solar power.

She said tapping industrial and commercial distributed solar PV has great potential in China because of the country's special national conditions.

In many foreign countries, most residents have their own rooftops on which solar panels can be installed. In China, that is not the case, she said.

Most urban residents in China, who are major electricity consumers, live in apartment buildings, Qian said. As urbanization continues, the number of residents in rural parts of China has declined substantially, and many of those left in rural areas are elderly people with low electricity demand.

Qian said distributed solar PV systems offer a viable solution for enterprises to address their high electricity costs and demand for green power.

The prices businesses pay for electricity are much higher than those paid by households, she said,

and many companies are subject to power rationing during summer, the peak season for electricity consumption.

Installing solar panels is a good way for businesses to solve these problems, Qian said, especially because summer is the best season for solar PV power generation.

She said listed companies in many countries, including China, are required to disclose details of their carbon emissions, which will potentially increase such companies' demand for green electricity.

One option is to have their own solar power generation systems, she said, while another is moving factories to western parts of the country where green electricity is more readily available and accessible.

Wang Weiquan, deputy secretary-general of the Chinese Renewable Energy Industries Association, also said industrial and commercial distributed solar PV will play an increasingly dominant role in solar PV power development in China.



Workers check the PV panels installed at a stock farm in Zhangye, Gansu province, on Jan 4. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

He said highly developed regions in eastern China that are still heavily dependent on fossil fuel cannot solely rely on importing green electricity from western parts of the country as they work toward carbon neutrality.

They also need to produce green electricity to meet part of their power demand, Wang said.

"It's almost impossible for these regions to develop many large-scale ground-mounted solar PV stations, as they have limited land but dense populations," he said, adding that tapping the potential of rooftops was an inevitable choice.

Compared with rural houses, industrial and commercial complexes have much bigger and stronger rooftops, making solar PV installation safer and more efficient, he said.

## WORLD

## Putin slams 'pointless' meet as Zelensky presses West

By REN QI in Moscow  
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Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Tuesday that Ukraine's statehood could suffer an "irreparable blow" if the pattern of the conflict continued, as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky urged political and business leaders facing conflict fatigue in the West to offer aid in Davos, Switzerland.

Putin made the comments a day after Switzerland agreed to host a global meeting later this year at the request of Zelensky.

Putin dismissed "so-called peace formulas" being discussed in the West and Ukraine and what he called the "prohibitive demands" they entailed.

"Well, if they don't want (to negotiate), then don't!" he said. "Now it is quite obvious, not only (Ukraine's) counteroffensive failed, but the initiative is completely in the hands of the Russian armed forces. If this continues, Ukrainian statehood may suffer an irreparable, very serious blow."

A peace formula put forward by Zelensky calls for the withdrawal of all Russian troops from Ukraine, recognition of its 1991 post-Soviet borders and a mechanism to bring Moscow to account, media reported.

Putin said talk of negotiation was "an attempt to motivate us to abandon the gains that we have realized over the past year and a half. But this is impossible. Everyone understands that this is impossible."

The Kremlin said any negotiation would have to take account of the "new realities" created by its forces on the ground.

Zelensky promoted his peace plan on Tuesday during his speech at the

annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, calling for the restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity, cessation of hostilities and withdrawal of Russian troops, among other points.

Zelensky called for stiffer sanctions on Russia. But in contrast to his comments at the forum last year, he made no direct appeals for weaponry for new offensives on the battlefield.

Zelensky highlighted his country's plan to end the conflict, an initiative called the "Peace Formula", which has gained the backing of dozens of countries. But those countries do not include Russia. Moscow has rejected its terms.

## Differences exposed

Russia's Foreign Ministry's website said the meeting in Davos had exposed differences between participants and produced no increase in support for the proposals.

"All such meetings ... including the Davos gathering and those to follow it, are pointless and harmful for settling the Ukrainian crisis."

Also on Tuesday, Putin met the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's top diplomat at the Kremlin in the latest sign of deepening ties between the two neighbors.

Putin met the DPRK's Foreign Minister Choe Son-hui on Tuesday in Moscow, the Kremlin said. Pictures of the meeting were broadcast on state TV, but the Kremlin did not provide any details of the discussions.

Earlier on Tuesday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Choe hailed the strengthening of ties between the two nations in a separate meeting.

Agencies via Xinhua contributed to this story.



Palestinian children wait to receive food cooked by a charity amid shortages of food supplies in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Tuesday. IBRAHEEM ABU MUSTAFA / REUTERS

## Israel, Hamas agree on medicine delivery

Humanitarian aid brings relief amid fears of widening regional conflict

RAFAH, Gaza Strip — A shipment of medicine for Israeli hostages and Palestinian civilians was en route to Gaza on Wednesday under a deal France and Qatar mediated between Israel and Hamas, giving a glimpse of relief amid growing concerns of widening conflicts.

The medicines will be shipped through Egypt and delivered to the International Committee of the Red Cross, which will then be handed over to the militant group.

Qatar said the deal also includes the delivery of additional medicine and humanitarian aid to Palestinians in the besieged coastal enclave.

Militants took about 240 hostages during the Oct 7 attacks, killing some 1,200 people. Israel has also vowed to return the more than 100 hostages still held inside Gaza after Hamas released hostages in November in exchange for Palestinians imprisoned in Israel.

The fate of those remaining in captivity has gripped Israeli society, while a broader humanitarian crisis in the besieged territory marked by the threat of famine and disease has fueled international calls for a cease-fire.

In a statement to the official Qatar News Agency, Doha on Tuesday announced a deal "between Israel and (Hamas), where medicine along with other humanitarian aid is to be delivered to civilians in Gaza ... in exchange for delivering medication needed for Israeli captives in Gaza."

Qatari Foreign Ministry spokesman Majid al-Ansari told the Qatar News Agency the medicine and aid would leave Doha on Wednesday for the Egyptian city of El-Arish before being transported to the Gaza Strip.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office confirmed the deal.

Forty-five hostages are expected to receive medication under the agreement, according to the French presidency.

The Israeli public has kept up intense pressure on Netanyahu's government to secure the return of the hostages, with officials repeatedly insisting military pressure is necessary to bring about any kind of deal.

The deaths of two hostages were confirmed on Tuesday after Hamas said they were killed in Israeli airstrikes.

Meanwhile, fears of an all-out conflict across the Middle East have continued to mount, which has sparked tensions, with a dizzying array of strikes and counterstrikes in recent days from northern Iraq to the Red Sea and from Lebanon to Pakistan.

The US military said it carried out fresh strikes in Yemen on Tuesday after the country's Houthi fighters claimed another missile attack on a cargo ship in the Red Sea.

It came just days after the United States and Britain bombed scores of targets inside Houthi-controlled Yemen in response to attacks by the militia, who say they were targeting Israeli-linked ships in the Red Sea in solidarity with Gaza.

US media reported that Washington would on Wednesday redesignate the Houthis a terrorist group, after previously dropping the classification in 2021.

## Two-state solution

Qatar Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani at Davos said: "We should focus on the main conflict in Gaza. And as soon as it's defused, I believe everything else will be defused," he said, adding that a two-state solution was required to end the con-

flict and warned that Hamas' Oct 7 attack and the Israeli response showed the region could not go back to the way it was before.

Saudi Arabia's foreign minister said the kingdom could recognize Israel if a comprehensive agreement were reached that included statehood for the Palestinians.

"We agree that regional peace includes peace for Israel, but that could only happen through peace for the Palestinians through a Palestinian state," Prince Faisal bin Farhan said.

Iran has struck what it described as an Israeli spy headquarters in northern Iraq and militant bases in Pakistan and Syria, while Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah have escalated the intensity of their fighting across the border.

Both Pakistan and Iraq have recalled their ambassadors from Teheran.

In Gaza, Palestinian militants are still putting up resistance across the narrow coastal strip in the face of one of the deadliest military campaigns in recent history. Some 85 percent of the territory's population of 2.3 million people have fled their homes and the UN says a quarter of the population is starving.

Gaza's Health Ministry said on Wednesday at least 24,448 Palestinians have been killed since the start of the conflict.

Tensions are also soaring in the occupied West Bank, where Israeli forces have conducted near-daily raids that often trigger shootouts with Palestinian militants, The Associated Press reported.

Senior UN officials have warned that Gaza is facing widespread famine and disease if more aid is not allowed in.

UN officials say aid delivery is hobbled by the opening of too few border crossings, a slow vetting process, and continuing fighting throughout the territory.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Tech focus lays base for Ireland, China ties

By WANG MINGJIE

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China's green transition and emphasis on technology, and research and development form the bedrock of a promising partnership between Ireland and China, according to Michael Lohan, the CEO of IDA Ireland, the agency responsible for promoting foreign direct investment into Ireland.

Speaking with China Daily on Chinese Premier Li Qiang's visit to Ireland, Lohan underscored the common values shared by both nations — open economies with a steadfast commitment to innovation and economic development.

"From an Ireland perspective, we believe that we should be engaging openly and collaboratively. And we believe that China, given the scale of China's economy, given the innovation within China, they're the same traits that the Irish economy has," he said.

Li's visit to Ireland is perceived as a substantial step in enhancing bilateral relations, with Lohan highlighting the significance of Li's visit following his engagement at Davos. This decision symbolizes a unique relationship extending beyond business to encompass broader global affairs and societal impacts, he added.

"I believe it speaks of the unique relationship between China and Ireland, demonstrating the willingness of both parties to actively contribute, as all relationships require multiple factors and players," Lohan added.

Lohan pinpointed key areas of collaboration, notably foreign direct investment, R&D, and economic development, with a specific focus on digital and sustainable sectors. Ireland sees itself well-positioned to capitalize on the global shift toward digital and sustainable practices. He stressed Ireland's commitment to carbon reduction and renewable energy, identifying these as areas where appropriate partnerships with China can drive innovation and growth.

Sustainability stressed  
"Within the areas of sustainability, digitalization, and healthcare innovation, they're all key areas that Ireland has a strong value proposition and a track record of success," said Lohan.

Recent exploration by IDA representatives in China, particularly in the sustainable energy sector, reflects Ireland's eagerness to identify collaboration opportunities. As IDA Ireland celebrates its 75th anniversary of attracting and supporting FDI, Lohan sees the collaboration between China and Ireland poised to usher in a new era of economic and technological cooperation. The focus on green transition and technology could be the driving force behind a mutually beneficial partnership, elevating both economies on the global stage, he added.

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Xinhua contributed to this story.



Russian President Vladimir Putin meets DPRK's Foreign Minister Choe Son-hui in Moscow on Tuesday. ARTEM GEODAKYAN VIA AFP

## EU gears up to put lid on Hungary's voting rights

By CHEN WEIHUA

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The European Parliament will vote on Thursday on a resolution that calls for stripping Hungary of its voting rights at the European Council for its rule of law and democratic principle issues.

The move is widely seen as putting pressure on Hungary, which blocked a four-year funding package of 50 billion euros (\$54 billion) to Ukraine from 2024-27 at the European Council Summit in December. Hungary will also assume the presidency of the Council of the European Union during the second half of this year.

Petri Sarvamaa, a member of the European Parliament from Finland, said the five political groups in parliament discussed the resolution on Tuesday morning.

The resolution calls on the European Council to strip Hungary of its voting rights under Article 7.2 of the EU Treaty, which allows the punishment in case of a "serious and persistent breach" by a member state.

But member states must decide unanimously whether the breach is still occurring, to be followed by a vote by a two-thirds majority to suspend the rights of the accused state.

Some political groups also want to dig into the European Commission's decision to unfreeze some 10.2 billion euros in funds for Hungary on the eve of the December EU summit, after Hungary agreed to open accession talks for Ukraine. The commission argued that its decision was made due to judicial reforms undertaken by Hungary.

The groups also want to warn the commission against unfreezing more funds to Hungary in exchange

for its support to funding the Ukraine package ahead of the next special EU summit on Feb 1.

Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico offered his support to Hungary on Tuesday.

During a joint news conference with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban in Budapest, he criticized Brussels for trying to punish Hungary over its stance on the funding package to Ukraine.

"As long as I am the head of the Slovak government, I will never agree that a country should be punished for fighting for its sovereignty. I will never agree with such an attack on Hungary," Fico said.

## Separate budget

Orban argued that further financial aid for Ukraine should come from a separate budget rather than from the EU budget.

"If we want to help Ukraine, which is necessary, we must do it in a way that does not damage the EU budget," he said on Tuesday, a view which was backed by Fico.

There are indications that a compromise might be reached over the coming weeks for Hungary to remove its veto of EU funding to Ukraine.

Budapest has floated the idea of splitting the package into four annual envelopes, worth 12.5 billion euros each. It means that unanimous approval is required each year by the 27 EU member states. Budapest also hopes to extend the deadline to spend COVID-19 recovery funds, which would give it more time to unlock the frozen funds.

On Tuesday, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said it is important to engage with all 27 member states to get the 50 billion euros for Ukraine up and running.

## Manila does damage control after 'playing with fire'

By PRIME SARMIENTO  
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The Philippine government has reaffirmed its commitment to the one-China principle, which is its long-standing policy and enjoys wide support from local people.

The country's foreign affairs department issued a clarification on Tuesday after President Ferdinand Marcos Jr made remarks on social media on the Taiwan leadership election, which were strongly opposed by Beijing.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning warned Manila not to play with fire on the Taiwan question and to stop sending wrong signals to the "Taiwan independence" separatist forces. She suggested that President

Marcos read more to develop a proper understanding of the ins and outs of the Taiwan question and come to the right conclusion.

Philippine Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Maria Teresita Daza said the government reaffirms the principles stated in the joint communiqué signed in 1975 by Chinese premier Zhou Enlai and Philippine president Ferdinand Edralin Marcos, father of the current Philippine leader.

Under the one-China principle, the Philippines recognizes the People's Republic of China as the sole legal government of China and that Taiwan is an integral part of Chinese territory.

The Philippine Association for the Promotion of China's Peaceful Reunification issued a statement on Monday, saying: "The Taiwan election is a local matter in China. No matter

what the election results are or how the situation on the island changes, there is only one China in the world and the fact that Taiwan is part of China's territory will not change."

It said the Democratic Progressive Party of Taiwan, or DPP, which has been in power for eight years, has stepped up "de-Chinaization", carried out "Taiwan independence education", colluded with external forces and resorted to militarism.

The association said the members of the Philippines hope for peaceful development across the Taiwan Strait and oppose "Taiwan independence".

Marcos' remarks in congratulating DPP candidate Lai Ching-te on social media on Monday night is the first time that a Philippine leader has commented on any Taiwan election, and Philippine news site GMA News, citing government

sources, reported that even the foreign affairs department was caught by surprise by Marcos' statement.

Anna Rosario Malindog-Uy, vice-president for external affairs at the Asian Century Philippines Strategic Studies Institute, questioned Marcos' statement on social media, noting that it is "ironic" that Marcos made those remarks considering that it is his father who spearheaded the establishment of official diplomatic ties between the Philippines and China in 1975.

The Philippines adheres to the one-China principle, and that is why its envoy to China was summoned after Marcos sent the message to Lai, according to Ernesto Abella, former undersecretary of the Philippine foreign affairs department.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

## WORLDUS

## New York ends 'snowless' streak; West in deep freeze

NEW YORK/PORTLAND, Oregon — Millions of people in the US awoke on Tuesday to snow, freezing rain and frigid temperatures as an Arctic blast gripped much of the United States, ending a nearly two-year "snow drought" in New York and putting much of the West into a deep freeze.

"It's been 701 days since Central Park last recorded an inch of snow on a calendar day," the National Weather Service announced on X, formerly Twitter.

Since midnight, 2.5 centimeters of snow had fallen at an official measuring point in Central Park, the weather service said, adding that a total of 3.6 cm of accumulation was logged since the storm began on Monday.

"The streak has ended!" it posted on Facebook.

Other parts of the city such as Brooklyn were clearing the white stuff from sidewalks after a long holiday weekend. In the northern suburbs, some schools were closed and public transport had slight delays.

New York — home to 8.5 million people — had not seen perceptible snow since early 2022.

More than 80,000 US homes and businesses were without power by Tuesday afternoon, most of them in Oregon. Portland General Electric warned that freezing rain could delay restoration efforts. Tennessee Valley Authority, which provides electricity in seven states, asked customers to voluntarily cut back, citing a high demand for power because of the cold. A similar plea came from the grid operator in Texas.

Schools were closed in major cities, including in Portland, Oregon; Chicago; Detroit; Denver; Dallas; Houston; Memphis, Tennessee; across New England and in Washington, DC, region. Federal offices in the nation's capital were closed



A man warms his hands by the fire across the street from a homeless encampment under an interstate freeway in Chicago on Tuesday. CHARLES REX ARBOGAST / ASSOCIATED PRESS

as roughly 5 centimeters of snow hit the area.

A man in Chicago fought off the Arctic-like cold on Tuesday with a fire made from cardboard, splintered pallets and other trash under Interstate 90/94. Others without a secure home sought shelter in more than 20 tents erected nearby.

## Cold snaps

Snow also blanketed the Appalachians and Western North Carolina, with southern states experiencing unusual cold snaps, according to Bob Oravec of the Weather Prediction Center in College Park, Maryland.

Nashville, Tennessee, "which doesn't see a lot of heavy snow," received 15 to 20 cm, Oravec said. Residents of Mobile, Alabama — in

the heart of the Deep South — woke up to freezing rain and a rare -0.5 C.

Parts of the Pacific Northwest were under an ice storm warning through Wednesday morning, threatening to add to the damage brought by a powerful winter storm that hit the region over the weekend.

Areas of southwestern Washington state and western Oregon were expecting to see 6 to 25 millimeters of ice, while freezing rain was forecast in the Seattle area.

The Pacific Northwest is more known for rain and was not set to experience such Arctic temperatures, but the heavily forested region is especially prone to the danger of falling trees, particularly during ice storms.

"We're lucky to be alive," said Justin Brooks, as he used a chainsaw on Tuesday to cut up the trunks of two massive trees that narrowly missed his home in Lake Oswego, Oregon, when they fell on Saturday.

Nationwide, at least five people have died as a result of the weather since the weekend, including two from hypothermia in recent days in Oregon, local media reported.

More than 3,000 flights into, out of or within the US were canceled or delayed, with Houston's George Bush Intercontinental Airport and New York's LaGuardia Airport experiencing some of the worst disruptions, according to flight-tracking website FlightAware.com.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## China, US back need for healthy competition

Both sides should work with future of humanity and Earth in mind: Envoy

By ZHAO HUANXIN in Washington  
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China and the United States can compete to do a better job in running their country, contribute more to the world and deliver more benefits to people around the globe, Beijing's top envoy in Washington said on Tuesday.

The two largest economies need to envision their relationship with the future of humanity and the Earth in mind, rise above the zero-sum mentality and move in the same direction to make the world a better place, Ambassador Xie Feng said.

He made the remarks at a reception marking the 45th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and the US, as well as the 2024 Chinese New Year.

Xie seemed to be making a fresh take on the issue of competition, which has been increasingly highlighted and often overemphasized by Washington as a dominant feature of ties with China.

For example, Xie's counterpart, US Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns, said on Dec 15 that competition and engagement with China are "not weighted evenly".

"The competitive balance is certainly weightier, but that we have to engage this country," Burns said at an event at the Brookings Institution in Washington.

Xie said early last month that China will not flinch at competition, but opposes using competition as a pretext to disadvantage and weaken the other side.

"Decoupling between us will not work and will produce no winner," Xie said on Tuesday. "Both our peoples want cooperation, and our cooperation is driven by win-win outcomes."

The two sides need to strengthen communication and coordination on hot spot issues, such as the Palestine-Israel conflict and the Russia-Ukraine conflict, as well as global challenges such as climate change and artificial intelligence, and provide more public goods conducive to world peace and development, he said.

Both countries need to draw inspiration from history, view the relationship from a strategic and long-term perspective and make the right decisions to ensure sustained growth of the relationship in the next 45 years, he said.

Among the important lessons drawn from the past 45 years of bilateral relations, the first one is that for China and the US, turning their back on each other is not an option, and that dialogue and win-win cooperation should be their common goal, the envoy said.

In addition, it is unrealistic for one side to try to remodel the other, he said, and respecting each other and seeking common ground while reserving differences are the prerequisites.

Furthermore, conflict and confrontation have "unbearable" consequences for both sides, so coexisting in peace and managing differences is the basic principle, he said.

"Today, the Taiwan question remains the most important, sensitive and explosive question in China-

US relations. Without stability across the Taiwan Strait, the China-US relationship would be on shaky ground."

He continued that maintaining cross-strait peace and stability serves the best interests of both China and the US.

"To achieve this, the most important guardrails are the three Sino-US joint communiques, and the most pressing task is to curb 'Taiwan independence' forces, which pose the fundamental menace to peace and stability in the Strait," he said.

Also speaking at the reception, US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Kritenbrink said the leaders of the two countries

have just exchanged New Year's greetings and letters recognizing the 45th anniversary of bilateral ties.

In his letter, US President Joe Biden's message was clear — the relationship has promoted prosperity and opportunity in both countries and around the world, Kritenbrink said.

## 45th year of ties

"So as we celebrate this 45th anniversary of bilateral relations, and as we usher in the Year of the Dragon, let us work together to renew our commitment to responsibly managing the US-China relationship," he said.

"Let us sustain high level interaction, follow through on implementation and build on the foundation set in Woodside for the benefit of our two peoples and people around the world," he said, referring to the summit between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Biden on Nov 15 at the Filoli estate in Woodside, California.

At the reception, Stephen Orlins, president of the National Committee on US-China Relations in New York, recalled what then-Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping said during a visit to the White House, where he met then-US president Jimmy Carter shortly after the two countries forged diplomatic relations.

"The normalization of Sino-US relations is a victory for both the American and Chinese people, because it supports the aspiration and interests of the two peoples in promoting world peace and stability," Orlins quoted Deng in Chinese.

"If it was true then, and it's true now," Orlins said. "So today we need to celebrate the wisdom, vision and courage of president Carter and Deng Xiaoping, and in this time of difficulty, emulate that courage."

Craig Allen, president of the US-China Business Council in Washington, said the business community has the expertise, motivation and energy to effectively support bilateral cooperation to the extent that both governments can find common ground.

"I look very much forward in the Year of the Dragon to stepping up our activities to support this most important bilateral relationship in the world," Allen said.

## Experts concerned about future of relations

By MAY ZHOU in Houston  
mayzhou@chinadailyusa.com

At a recent forum examining US-China relations, both Chinese and American experts shared the same concern — the crises and conflicts between the two countries are likely to increase, and war is a possibility if such conflicts aren't managed properly.

Wu Xinbo, professor and dean of the Institute of International Studies at Fudan University said he is quite pessimistic about future conflicts and crises in the relationship at a forum commemorating the 45th anniversary of the normalization of US-China diplomatic relations. It was held at The Carter Center in Atlanta in early January.

Past incidents such as the US bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999 and the collision of military planes near Hainan Island in 2001 were mostly incidental, said Wu. Now, the bilateral crises are increasingly structural in nature.

"For the first time since the normalization or [President Richard] Nixon's visit, the US and China have locked into a series of strategic competitions in the last couple of years with the Trump administration declaring China as America's arch strategic competitor or rival, and to some extent, sometimes even a major threat," said Wu.

Dennis Wilder, senior fellow at the Initiative of US-China Dialogue on Global Issues at Georgetown University and former China director at the National Security Council, echoed Wu's sentiment: "We are in a period where we just don't know where this is going to go," he said.

Wu said, "Both militaries are preparing for some contingencies either in Taiwan or other part of the world."

Da Wei, director of the Center



Both sides (the US and China) show a kind of willingness to accept the price of a crisis."

Da Wei, director of the Center for International Security and Strategy at Tsinghua University

for International Security and Strategy at Tsinghua University, agreeing with Wu, said that "there are some changes in our beliefs in the two capitals regarding the bilateral relations. Both sides show a kind of willingness to accept the price of a crisis."

Several trends make managing crises between the two countries more difficult, said Bonny Lin, senior fellow for Asia Security and director of the China Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

The trends include "domestic situation, public opinion, lack of people-to-people contacts, the general lack of trust, the hardening political positions within both countries, and a more anti-other attitude," Lin said.

There is a lack of trust between the two countries. Wilder said that in Washington and the Republican Party, "many think that China has a new inclination to use global conflicts to undermine the United States."

"China believes the US is doing something because the US wants to keep China down, while the US believes China is doing something because China wants to replace or displace the US," Da said, believing both assumptions aren't necessarily right.

Much faster information flow also makes it more difficult to

control how crises might escalate compared with 10 or 15 years ago, Lin said.

"There are incentives for both sides to respond quickly and take control of the situation, to try to dominate and control the narrative," she said. "That creates disincentives for both sides to communicate effectively beforehand."

Of all the factors that make it difficult to manage the bilateral crises, domestic politics might contribute most to the unpredictable and difficult nature of crises management, the experts said.

Taking the balloon incident as an example, Wu said the Biden administration viewed it as a structural crisis, which showcased how China is a major challenge and threat to the US national security interests before they did any investigation to find out the truth: There was no intelligence collection device in the balloon, and there was no evidence that China collected data from the US and relayed it to China.

Conversely, US Representative Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan last year was a structural crisis for Beijing, but it was incidental for the US and didn't necessarily reflect the US government's intention to provoke or challenge China on the Taiwan issue, Wu said.

Despite the November summit in California between Chinese President Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden having brought some stability to bilateral relations, but whether that continues beyond 2024 is uncertain.

Wilder pointed toward the Mandate for Leadership 2025: The Conservative Promise published by the Heritage Foundation. What a possible Trump administration would do if it followed this document is staggering, Wilder said.

"We are talking about the end

of trade with China, tax incentives to get American companies back home, banning all [Chinese] social media in the United States, prohibiting investments by the Chinese in the US high tech, and a reduction if not elimination of Chinese students in the United States," Wilder said. "We are in a very, very precarious and uncertain period with the American election coming up."

Da agreed: "Depending on the election outcome, the worst-case scenario is that it could shape a long-term trend for much more serious crisis and conflict between our two countries. The US election in November could generate big risk and crisis for this relationship next year."

War isn't a prospect the experts want to see down the road. Rorry Daniels, managing director at the Asia Society Policy Institute, said, "If there was a war between the US and China, winning would also be losing because of all the costs of prosecuting such a conflict."

The experts agreed that keeping the dialogue open at all levels is the way to prevent crises from escalating.

Wilder recalled time spent at the hometown of Dai Bingguo, then-director of the Central Foreign Affairs Leading Group outside of Beijing under the George W. Bush administration during strategic dialogue, and how then-Treasury secretary Henry Paulson's relationship with Chinese official Wang Qishan "was critical to keep American markets stable" during the 2008 financial crisis.

"That's the kind of thing we have to find a way to get back to," Wilder said.

"Make sure all channels of dialogue remain open; dialogue should not be cut off as punishment for one side or another," said Lin.

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## Honoring Uvalde victims



Artist Abel Ortiz gives US Attorney General Merrick Garland and Associate Attorney General Vanita Gupta a tour of murals of the Uvalde shooting victims, in Uvalde, Texas, on Wednesday. The Justice Department is planning this week to release findings of an investigation into the 2022 school shooting in which 19 children and two teachers died. ERIC GAY / REUTERS

## BUSINESS

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## DATA

## Retail sales bounce back last year to hit record

By ZHU WENQIAN  
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China's retail sector recovered rapidly in 2023 after the country optimized its COVID-19 response measures, with total retail sales hitting a record high and accommodation and catering businesses witnessing significant growth, the National Bureau of Statistics said on Wednesday.

Last year, total retail sales stood at 47.15 trillion yuan (\$6.5 trillion), up 7.2 percent year-on-year. Retail sales of merchandise stood at 41.86 trillion yuan, up 5.8 percent on a yearly basis, the NBS said.

The rapid recovery of services consumption was a major highlight of recovery last year. Retail sales of services in 2023 increased 20 percent over 2022, and per capita service consumption expenditure rose 14.4 percent on a yearly basis.

"The consumption market was previously greatly affected by the pandemic, and many contact-based services were restricted. With the economy fully resuming regular operations, consumption showed a good trend of recovery and stood as an important force that drove economic recovery in 2023," said Kang Yi, head of the NBS.

"We remain optimistic about consumption growth in 2024. With the continuous recovery of the economy and overall improvement of employment, household incomes are expected to maintain stable growth, which will support consumption growth," Kang said.

China's economic structure has continued to improve, highlighting the role of the services sector and consumption as engines driving economic growth.

Last year, the contribution rate of consumption to economic growth reached 82.5 percent, up 43.1 percentage points over 2022. In addition, the added value of the service sectors accounted for 54.6 percent of the GDP, an increase of 1.2 percentage points from the previous year.

In 2023, retail sales in urban areas came in at 40.75 trillion yuan, up 7.1 percent year-on-year, with the corresponding figure for rural areas reaching 6.4 trillion yuan, up 8 percent year-on-year, the NBS said.

Sales of everyday products such as clothing, footwear, grains and edible oils saw steady growth. Sales of jewelry, sports and entertainment goods as well as telecom equipment also enjoyed robust expansion, the NBS said.

A number of major department stores expect to report rosy business performances for 2023, fueled by the continuously growing vitality of offline consumption. Chongqing Department Store Co Ltd is expected to report a net profit of 1.25 billion yuan to 1.37 billion yuan for last year, an increase of 41.5-55.1 percent compared with 2022, it projected on Tuesday.

Total online retail sales in China reached 15.43 trillion yuan in 2023, up 11 percent over 2022. Among the total, online retail sales of physical goods reached 13.02 trillion yuan, accounting for 27.6 percent of total retail sales, up 8.4 percent year-on-year, the NBS added.

Meanwhile, the country's total catering revenue reached 5.29 trillion yuan in 2023, growing 20.4 percent year-on-year.

Time-honored restaurant chain Tongqinglou said in its latest earnings forecast that its net profit in 2023 is expected to be between 273 million yuan and 320 million yuan, surging between 191.4 percent and 242.1 percent year-on-year. In the fourth quarter, it opened five new restaurants.

China's huge consumption potential is supported by a population of more than 1.4 billion. Ongoing urbanization and continuous upgrading of the consumption structure will provide broader space for further consumption growth, especially in the areas of medical treatment and healthcare, the NBS said.

"After the pandemic, Chinese consumers have been increasingly pursuing healthy and high-quality consumer goods and services, and paying attention to improving physical fitness. The habit of online shopping has further strengthened," said Fu Yifu, a senior researcher at the Star Atlas Institute of Finance.

"The government could help create more consumption scenarios and optimize consumer experiences to further whet consumers' spending appetites," Fu said.



Employees work on a tractor assembly line in Luoyang, Henan province. ZHANG YIXI / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Recovery of industrial economy seen steady

Demand rebound, some growing manufacturing segments key factors

By FAN FEIFEI  
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China's industrial economy is expected to maintain a steady recovery momentum this year on the back of factors like rebounding domestic demand, a series of favorable government policies encouraging industrial production and brisk expansion of high-tech equipment manufacturing, experts said.

Their comments came after data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed on Wednesday that China's industrial output, a gauge of activity in manufacturing, mining and utilities, grew 4.6 percent year-on-year in 2023. The figure rose 6.8 percent year-on-year in December after a 6.6 percent growth in November.

NBS data also showed the output of equipment manufacturing recorded a year-on-year growth of 6.8 percent last year, 2.2 percentage points higher than that of overall industrial output.

Output of solar cells, electric vehicles and power generating equipment jumped 54 percent, 30.3 percent and 28.5 percent year-on-year, respectively, during the period.

Wang Guanhua, an NBS spokeswoman, said at a news conference on Wednesday that the equipment manufacturing industry played a key role in promoting the steady recovery of the industrial economy last year, while new growth drivers

have become an important engine bolstering China's high-quality economic development.

The recovery of industrial production picked up pace last year, mainly fueled by the sustained rebound in domestic demand, gradual improvement in the operating conditions among industrial and manufacturing enterprises, and a series of supportive policies that helped drive recovery of the industrial economy, said Zhou Maohua, an analyst with China Everbright Bank.

New growth drivers that cover equipment manufacturing, solar cells, electric vehicles and other high-tech manufacturing segments continued to grow at a good clip, which has provided solid support for the growth of China's industrial output, Zhou said.

He said the country's industrial economy will likely maintain a good recovery trend this year.

The tone-setting Central Economic Work Conference in December stressed efforts to promote industrial innovation through scientific innovation, and in particular called for measures to forge new industries, models and impetus with disruptive and cutting-edge technologies.

Pan Helin, co-director of the Digital Economy and Financial Innovation Research Center at Zhejiang University's International Business School, said emerging industries, enterprises' intelligent transforma-

tion and digital infrastructure have become new engines bolstering growth of the industrial economy.

He emphasized the significance of developing the high-end manufacturing sector, which is playing an increasingly key role in bolstering technological innovation, safeguarding the stability of industrial and supply chains, and helping the country gain competitive advantages on the global stage.

More efforts should be made to step up policy support in the form of tax cuts, land and electricity supply for advanced manufacturing enterprises, to alleviate their pressure and channel capital into the manufacturing sector, he said.

Promoting technological innovation and increasing capital input are crucial for the growth of the high-tech manufacturing industry, said Li Dongsheng, founder and chairman of consumer electronics maker TCL Technology Group Corp.

China's manufacturers should transition from exporting products to exporting industrial capacities, ramp up localized operations abroad and speed up their layouts in overseas markets, so as to cope with changes in the global economic landscape and rising trade protectionism, Li said.

Denis Depoux, global managing director of market consultancy Roland Berger, said: "Technology and innovation are key to bringing disruptive changes to the Chinese economy. We have seen China leaping in some new areas, such as EVs (electric vehicles), energy storage, photovoltaics and wind power."

## Inflation primed for 'moderate' increase in 2024

By WANG KEJU  
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The consumer price index, a main gauge of inflation, is expected to witness a moderate increase this year, as China looks to bolster domestic demand and shift from the post-COVID consumption recovery to one of sustained expansion, officials and analysts said.

The underwhelming performance of the CPI over the past few months suggests certain challenges in maintaining price stability, and analysts said China's central bank may adopt a proactive approach, leveraging its monetary policy tools to further stimulate the economy and boost market confidence.

Data released by the National Bureau of Statistics on Wednesday showed that consumer prices in 2023 maintained a mild upward trajectory, with the CPI rising by a modest 0.2 percent over the course of the year.

The year-on-year decline in the CPI observed over the past three consecutive months has been, however, driven predominantly by structural and transitional factors, NBS head Kang Yi said at a news conference.

A closer examination of the structural factors influencing price levels reveals that the recent decline in prices has been primarily driven by a drop in food and energy prices, Kang said.

However, a look at the core CPI data — which excludes volatile food and energy prices — shows that it has demonstrated stability, he added.

**0.2 percent**  
growth rate of China's CPI last year

Meanwhile, the decline in prices within the food and energy sectors has been influenced by a range of factors that extend beyond traditional market factors such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Kang said.

Moreover, the decline in the CPI is primarily of a temporary nature.

The Chinese economy shows signs of recovery and improvement, with stable growth in household incomes and expansion in domestic aggregate demand, fostering enabling conditions for the rebound of commodity and services prices, Kang said.

As domestic consumption turns for the better, coupled with the gradual return to balance between supply and demand, a potential rebound in overall price levels is anticipated in 2024, said Zhou Maohua, a macroeconomic researcher at China Everbright Bank.

While there have been positive developments in various sectors, domestic demand overall has fallen short of the desired levels, emphasizing the need for measures to lower consumption and investment costs, improve the profitability of businesses, and boost job creation, Zhou said.

The domestic economy is currently in a critical phase of recovery, and uncertainties remain with respect to the outlook on overseas demand.

To ensure a sustained momentum of economic growth, the People's Bank of China, the central bank, is likely to utilize various measures to support the real economy since it has previously signaled its intention to adjust macroeconomic policies when needed, Zhou added.

"We expect the central bank to eventually deliver two rounds of policy rate cuts and one reserve requirement ratio cut in the first half of 2024," said Lu Ting, chief China economist at Japanese financial services group Nomura.

Ouyang Shijia contributed to this story.



Shoppers buy vegetables at a supermarket in Shijiazhuang, Hebei province. JIA MINJIE / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Briefly

## Jiangsu green power trading sets record

The trading volume of green electricity in East China's Jiangsu province reached 5.2 billion kilowatt-hours in 2023, hitting a record high, the Jiangsu Electricity Trading Center said on Wednesday. The green electricity helped reduce standard coal burning by about 1.66 million metric tons and also reduced carbon dioxide emissions by about 4.14 million tons, the center said. Green electricity refers to electricity with zero or near-zero carbon dioxide emissions in its production process, which is important for achieving carbon neutrality for a company as well as the transformation and upgrading of the entire industry.

## Guizhou air freight route links to Kolkata

Southwest China's Guizhou province has launched its first international air freight route, linking the provincial capital Guiyang with India's Kolkata, said Guizhou Civil Aviation Industry Group Co Ltd on Wednesday. During its inaugural month, 24 flights operated, shipping about 282 metric tons of cargo, valued at about \$8.2 million. The route was launched on Dec 13, and cargo transported included live crabs, frozen salmon, tuna, clothing fabrics, hardware components, chemical materials and electronic raw materials, according to the company.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

## Realty takes heart from 2023 positives

By WANG YING in Shanghai  
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China's property market saw some positive changes last year with declines in property investment and sales volume narrowing, suggesting the industry's long-term development remains on a solid and secure footing, given the continuing urbanization and the huge growth potential that the industry's new development pattern promises, officials and industry experts said on Wednesday.

"After more than two decades of development, the nation's property market is undergoing an adjustment and transition. Against such a backdrop, local governments and related divisions keep optimizing housing policies in a timely manner to be in tune with changing market dynamics," said Kang Yi, head of the National Bureau of Statistics, on Wednesday.

Kang said property investment in 2023 slowed at 9.6 percent year-on-year, narrowing by 0.4 percentage point from a year earlier.

The recovery is more apparent in property sales. Throughout 2023, commercial property sales fell 8.5 percent year-on-year in terms of floor area. And in terms of value,

they fell by 6.5 percent year-on-year. The drops themselves narrowed by 15.8 percentage points and 20.2 percentage points, respectively, from previous year.

Both new and pre-owned residential properties saw a mild pickup in transaction volume in the 70 large- and medium-sized Chinese cities tracked by the NBS, said Kang.

Meanwhile, thanks to the all-round efforts made to ensure timely delivery of property projects, completed real estate space surged by 17 percent year-on-year in 2023.

Yan Yuejin, director of the Shanghai-based E-house China Research and Development Institution, said he expects the market to warm up and confidence to recover in 2024 as adjustments take effect.

"Looking ahead, the long-term healthy development of China's property market is on a solid foundation, as there is still much room for the nation's urbanization to improve both in quantity and quality," said Kang.

"China's urbanization rate rose to 66.16 percent in 2023, still lagging developed economies whose rate is 80 percent. The urbanization in the past five years brought more than 10 million rural people

to urban areas each year, creating great housing demand."

Meanwhile, some people's quest for better homes will likely drive housing demand, said Kang.

On Wednesday, the NBS published data on major Chinese cities' home prices, showing 70 cities' differentiated performance in December, said Shen Yun, senior statistician with the NBS' urban division.

For example, China's four benchmark cities — Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen and Guangzhou in Guangdong province — registered a decline of 0.4 percent in new home prices in December from a month earlier, according to the NBS. Specifically, Shanghai took the lead by reporting 0.2 percent growth, followed by Beijing, whose index stayed flat, while Shenzhen and Guangzhou reported declines of 0.9 percent and 1 percent, respectively.

"Entering 2024, local governments have made various efforts to optimize homebuying policies, which will work together with the central government's measures to boost real estate developers' confidence," said Guan Rongxue, a senior analyst with the Zhuge Real Estate Data Research Center.

# BUSINESS

## Power service boosts tastier produce in Jiangsu

By ZHUANG QIANG  
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In Sihong county, under the prefecture-level city of Suqian in Jiangsu province, County Magistrate Geng Xiaoyun is ambitiously bolstering its agricultural sector, including the likes of raising hogs, cultivating aquaculture, as well as growing rice, fruits and vegetables.

"We are sticking to a goal that 'all agricultural products from Sihong must be gems,'" said Geng.

"We want to develop agriculture with a concept of industrialization, and boost it through industrial operations," she said.

Sihong, with over 1.1 million residents, was among the country's first batch of innovation bases to implement the idea that "green mountains and clear water are equal to mountains of gold and silver".

Currently, Sihong is known as the Chinese hometown of *bigenguo*, or pecans — a woody plant native to North America introduced to China in the 19th century and now growing across many regions of the country.

With improvements in income in recent years, people have begun to enjoy tastier produce, including *bigenguo*, which many say is both highly nutritious and delicious, with over 300 varieties.

Sihong began to cultivate the tree nuts in 2008, and now with a planting area of some 6,933 hectares, it offers around 12.5 percent of the total output of pecans in China.

Its successful cultivation, which helped to enrich local growers, drew



An employee collects kernels of pecans at a production facility in Sihong county, Jiangsu province. GUO PANPAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

investors from outside of the region. In 2017, Jiangsu Chengye Agricultural Technology Co Ltd invested 600 million yuan (\$84.5 million) in the county's Shuanggou township, setting up an innovation and incubation base that integrates tree planting, high-end edible oils and health product processing, as well as tourism and leisure.

With its rapid business expansion, in November 2023, the company bought a fully electrified production line used for drying, sorting, shelling and edible oil refining for *bigenguo*. But its fast industrialization also required professional and personalized power services, said Li Yunjian, its deputy general manager.

To meet electricity demand for its all-electric deep processing plant, the company applied to the local power supplier to build a 10 kilovolt power line 1 kilometer long, which was successfully set up. Zhou Biao, a project manager from

the Shuanggou subbranch of State Grid Suqian Power Supply Co, said his unit also helped install a 1,500 kilowatt specialized power transformer for Chengye to meet its growing production and everyday needs.

Li said: "With sufficient power support, we are fully confident in expanding our *bigenguo* business, increasing our profits, as well incomes of our employees who mostly live nearby."

To help boost growth of the *bigenguo* industry, State Grid Suqian Power Supply Co has improved its power grid construction, power supply services, as well as energy substitution technologies to support local growers in recent years, said Guo Panpan from the Suqian power supply company.

It has installed high-voltage 10kV power lines extending for 5.5 km, low-voltage 400 V lines extending for 5.1 km, in addition to adding seven power transformers,

and conducting over 40 on-site electricity inspections, she said. Guo noted that pecan trees can be used for both fruit and wood.

"It is suitable for landscaping as shade trees or roadside trees, or even as a scenic forest," she added, stressing that the plant is a globally recognized long-term economic forest and tree fruit species.

At present, the county supplies 3 million high-quality tree seedlings per year to other areas, Guo said.

In October, Sihong issued a plan to expand construction of a green and high-quality agricultural products (*bigenguo*) base in Yaogou township.

Currently, the township's green and high-quality agricultural product base is a cluster of *bigenguo*, rice, aquatic product breeding and processing enterprises.

With a total cultivation area of over 460 hectares for such products, the township's annual output surpasses 300 metric tons, Guo said.

## Zhejiang's new-round action plan to foster MNCs

Upgraded move to support over 300 players in extending overseas footprint

By MA ZHENHUAN in Hangzhou  
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East China's Zhejiang province has been fostering the growth of its private corporations in a bid to strengthen their global presence.

In 2017, Zhejiang took the lead nationwide in launching a three-year action plan to cultivate local private multinational corporations, aiming to bolster the provincial economy.

In 2020, the province initiated another three-year plan, "Silk Road Navigation", through which companies were encouraged to transform their local headquarters in Zhejiang into global operations centers, management hubs, and research and development centers.

Early this month, a new three-year "Silk Road Navigation" action plan that envisions continuous expansion of local private MNCs was launched.

According to the plan, over 300 companies will be included in the cultivation pool by 2025, accounting for more than 70 percent of Zhejiang's outward direct investment, and some 100 leading enterprises mainly covering advanced manufacturing and modern service industries will be cultivated.

Along with the plan, the Zhejiang Provincial Department of Commerce released a list of 60 leading private MNCs for 2023.

The evaluation criteria include four aspects: internationalization capability, industry chain layout, brand influence, and compliance with regulations.

The plan also outlines 10 measures, including building a dynamic mechanism for cultivating private MNCs and guiding their orderly expansion.

The dynamic cultivation mechanism will be established based on a comprehensive review of Zhejiang's private MNCs, with a focus on export-oriented enterprises in manufacturing, trade, digital economy and producer services.

To help private MNCs attain orderly expansion, the plan proposes deepening cooperation with ASEAN, member countries of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, and the Belt and Road Initiative partners.

"We will continue to leverage them (RCEP benefits) to achieve more breakthroughs."

Xue Qinfen, manager of the documentation department at Seduno

Loctek is on the list unveiled by the local government. Established in 2002 and headquartered in Ningbo, Loctek is an early entrant in the A-share market for the health ergonomics industry, and is currently developing a new business — overseas warehouses.

In 2013, Loctek built its first overseas warehouse in San Francisco and then expanded its footprint to Memphis and Houston in the United States.

The company now operates 13 warehouses globally and plans to build two more in the US that are expected to become operational in 2025.

"We are the largest overseas warehouse operator for bulk e-commerce products in North America, serving nearly 600 cross-border e-commerce brands from China," said Xiang Lehong, the company's chairman.

"I hope that Loctek will create more employment opportunities and help more foreign trade companies achieve high-quality development while it continues to grow," Xiang said.

With subsidiaries in Southeast Asian nations such as Cambodia, Vietnam and Myanmar, Seduno Group, an importer and exporter of textiles and apparel in Ningbo, is another notable company on the list.

Since the RCEP pact came into effect in 2022, Seduno, Ningbo's first RCEP-approved exporter, has leveraged 3,649 RCEP certificates of origin.

"RCEP has brought us a double benefit: preferential tax rates and approved exporter policy. We will continue to leverage them to achieve more breakthroughs," said Xue Qinfen, manager of the documentation department at Seduno.

## Wanli Tire eyes major capacity expansion

By QIU QUANLIN in Guangzhou  
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Wanli Tire Co Ltd, a State-owned enterprise based in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong province, has begun construction of a new-phase production base amid a recovery of the country's tire industry last year.

The company's third-phase expansion project, located in the existing factory area of its production base in Conghua, a suburb of Guangzhou, aims to create a green, intelligent and efficient tire-making demonstration factory, with a designed annual production capacity of 12 million units.

The company's production capacity expansion was driven by a sharp increase in orders, company executives said.

"Currently, market orders are full, especially for steel radial tires, which are in short supply," said Cao Xiandong, general manager of Wanli Tire.

In 2023, Wanli's production and sales volume surged 18.77 percent and 19.42 percent, respectively, with a profit increase of 292 million yuan (\$40.69 million), the company said.

Not only has the company turned losses into profits, but its sales performance has also achieved double-digit growth in the past two years. "We remain optimistic about future market growth," Cao said.

With expanded production capacity and deployment of smart technologies, the company's goal is to achieve a revenue scale of some 10 billion yuan by 2025, he said.

China's tire sector experienced a resurgence last year, with sustained strong demand from the automobile industry.

Production of steel radial tires in China reached 139 million units in 2023, an increase of 14 percent compared to the previous year. Production of partial steel radial tires reached 591 million units during the same period, or a 22 percent year-

on-year increase, according to a report by National Business Daily.

According to the report, many manufacturers in China said their tire orders are already scheduled for delivery two months ahead, and their tire product inventories have also dropped to record low levels, driven by strong demand from domestic automakers and increased orders from overseas.

Wanli has increased its investment in research and development, especially targeting the new energy vehicle sector.

Prior to construction of the third-phase project, Wanli Tire had carried out multiple technological transformation investments to enhance smart production at its two major production bases in Guangzhou and Hefei, Anhui province.

Its Hefei base is its first fully intelligent and automated green tire factory.

The company will also expand its overseas footprint, with plans to

build a factory in Cambodia, according to local media reports.

Market insiders said Wanli Tire expanding its production will trigger a surge in local industrial investment, especially in emerging industries.

Industrial investment in Guangzhou achieved rapid growth in 2023, with a year-on-year increase of 20.8 percent from January to November, according to local statistics.

Guangzhou's government work report said the value-added amount from strategic emerging industries accounted for more than 30 percent of the city's GDP, which is expected to surpass 3 trillion yuan in 2023.

"Investments such as Wanli's expansion in production will inject new impetus into Guangzhou's industrial development in the long run, helping promote continuous optimization of the city's industrial structure and enhancing competitiveness," said Zhang Zhengang, a professor at the school of business administration, South China University of Technology.

United,  
the future is bright!



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# BUSINESSFOCUS

## Changyi turns investor beacon on policy push

Locale in Shandong inks contracts worth over 100 million yuan for 104 new projects during Jan-Oct 2023

By LI JIAYING  
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Changyi, a county-level city in Weifang, Shandong province, is strategically positioning itself as an investment magnet to draw in more investors, as part of efforts to provide robust momentum and support for high-quality economic development.

During the January-October period of 2023, the city conducted 105 targeted investment promotion activities in first-tier cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, signing contracts for 104 new projects worth more than 100 million yuan (\$13.9 million).

Construction has begun on 36 projects, while 10 projects have been made operational, according to data from the local government.

"All that enterprises intending to invest need to do is to provide project information during the coordination process. We take care of the rest, in order to simplify the processes for businesses as much as possible," said Xia Haitao, director of Changyi's investment promotion center.

The city has so far successfully attracted major cooperative projects, such as an offshore wind and solar power integration demonstration project with the Three Gorges Group, marking the nation's first tripartite model combining wind, sunlight, and fishing farms.

"The decision to invest in and construct new energy projects here was supported by a series of project advancement services provided by the local government, allowing the project to transition from large-scale construction to grid-connected power generation in just 180 days," said Cao Jinchao, manager of the engineering management department at Three Gorges New Energy Shandong Changyi Power Generation Co Ltd.

Cao said the stable offshore wind speed and ample sunlight in the northern part of Changyi also provide unique advantages for developing offshore wind power.

The successful grid connection has not only filled a domestic gap and completed the industrial chain for local new energy development, but has also attracted a series of enterprises to invest in Changyi, leading to a virtuous cycle of business growth, said Sun Zhaoxing, director of Changyi's development and reform bureau.

### Adapting to local needs

According to the annual tone-setting Central Economic Work Conference held in December, China will continuously optimize its business environment and constantly stimulate enthusiasm and creativity among business entities.

However, achieving the goal means not only inviting businesses, but also helping them adapt to the local business environment and showing actual growth.

At a production line for new materials in Changyi, workers are busy efficiently fulfilling orders.

"Regular on-site coordination and timely communication with local government departments have



A vegetable grower tends to seedlings at a greenhouse in Changyi, a county-level city in Weifang, Shandong province, in September. XU SUHUI / XINHUA

significantly facilitated our operations, effectively boosting project progress and securing time for completion," said Liu Wengeng, head of the engineering department at Weifang-based Yaxing Chemical.

Similarly, a shrimp breeding company has made Changyi its home after the local government helped it overcome difficult industry bottlenecks.

"When it comes to shrimp breeding, water quality is most important. We found that Changyi's climate and geographical conditions are ideal for shrimp breeding. However, due to the presence of a chemical industrial park, there were concerns about possible minor groundwater pollution, which may have made it unsuitable for aquaculture," said Luo Kun, deputy general manager of Bangpu, a Changyi-based breeding tech firm.

Upon learning of this, the local government immediately drilled a deep well at Bangpu's breeding site, and collected water samples before sending them to qualified testing institutions. The test results confirmed that it was a false alarm — the water quality met the requirements for shrimp breeding.

"It was this dedicated move by the local government that prompted us to establish a breeding base in Changyi," Luo added.

Through strategic cooperation with high-quality domestic resources, Bangpu has established China's largest and most genetically diverse living seed bank for white-leg shrimp.

Key genetic collections have been



A worker produces export-bound tires at a factory in Weifang in January. WANG JILIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

continuously selected for over five generations, with an annual capacity to breed 100,000 pairs of high-quality shrimp, filling a gap in the domestic market and overcoming the challenge from shrimp breeding technologies being monopolized for years by foreign entities, the company said.

### Meticulous planning

Changyi's proactive approach to

investment promotion also lies in its meticulous planning that focuses on key industrial sectors such as high-end chemicals, intelligent equipment manufacturing and new energy equipment.

It has outlined precise investment roadmaps for each industry, streamlining the process for interested businesses.

Through advanced technologies like 3D modeling, AI panoramas,

GPS positioning and GIS systems, the local government also aims to break constraints stemming from traditional investment practices.

Critical investment information about the city, such as location advantages, transportation, climate, power and land usage, as well as existing industrial structures, can be found on its WeChat mini-program.

This integration enhances the efficiency of attracting investment

by presenting a comprehensive overview of available resources, said the Changyi government.

To further enhance project management services throughout its full life cycle, Changyi has organized 14 rounds of bank-enterprise matchmaking activities since the beginning of 2023, benefiting over 700 enterprises.

Tax and fee reductions have amounted to 530 million yuan, injecting financial vitality into the city's development, data from the Weifang Investment Promotion Network showed.

Its dedication to simplified procedures, tailored investment roadmaps and a favorable business environment has translated into tangible success.

"In the year 2023, Changyi organized a series of project signing activities, inking 37 deals with a total investment of about 12 billion yuan, making investment attraction a strong force for high-quality development," said Xia of Changyi's investment promotion center.

The city's investment-related activities were even more active during the end-year period, Xia said.

From January to October, the total industrial output by entities above a designated size (20 million yuan in main business revenue) in Changyi reached 68.53 billion yuan, an increase of 7.4 percent year-on-year.

The operating income of such industrial players stood at 63.61 billion yuan, up 11.4 percent year-on-year, according to Changyi government data.

## City treads safely, smartly in cooking gas usage

By LI JIAYING

At a bustling food mall in Changyi, a county-level city in Weifang, Shandong province, a lively scene unfolds as people flock to dine.

What immediately captures their attention is the absence of traditional liquefied petroleum gas cylinders once favored by food stalls and small eateries.

This is because of a safer and more advanced alternative — smart LPG cylinders.

"The government has helped replace the old gas bottles with smart ones, which can ensure safety in operations; we finally feel relieved," said the owner of a barbecue diner surnamed Xu.

In recent years, safety concerns related to bottled LPG have garnered significant attention across the country due to their innate risks.

To address the challenge of using LPG cylinders safely, the existing market system has been innovatively transformed.

"Previously, small-scale companies usually dealt with bottled LPG businesses. They tended to be weak in management capabilities and safety controls," said Liang Yongyan, director of Changyi's housing and urban-rural development bureau.

Following a market-oriented approach to integrated development, the city has built standardized LPG stations with investments from State-owned companies.

Under a unified management of specialized firms, the stations are now at the forefront in scale, volume, as well as standardization and intelligence levels in Shandong, Liang said.

A platform for LPG cylinder trade-in services has also been established, exploring new methods such as cash discounts for old cylinders and leasing arrangements for new ones.

The initiative has so far successfully replaced a large number of potentially risky cylinders with new and reliable cylinders that adhere to

technical specifications on safety, the local government said.

Digital technology plays a crucial role in fortifying gas safety as well.

Through an intelligent LPG cloud supervision system, over 70,000 LPG cylinders have now been equipped with chips and QR code labels under an innovative move for LPG usage digitalization, according to data from the Changyi government.

Such smart cloud platforms enable "early detection and early response" in case of fire accidents, and mitigate the risk of major accidents caused by gas leaks, said industry experts.

The implementation of a "one cylinder, one chip, one code" system ensures traceability and evaluation throughout the entire circulation process of LPG cylinders.

Every stage — from filling, transportation, sales, distribution, utilization, to recycling — undergoes full-process recording and inspec-

tion, with data from various sources being collected and analyzed on the cloud.

Over 100,000 pieces of data have been gathered through the full life cycle system so far, the Changyi government said.

This well-structured market system has given rise to the concept of a "15-kilometer service circle" for LPG usage.

The streets of Changyi are now adorned with uniformly shaded yellow gas delivery vehicles, with delivery personnel providing door-to-door delivery of smart gas bottles.

The services also include domestic inspections and professional consultations for gas usage, resolving the "last mile" challenge in safe LPG distribution.

"Now, whenever we encounter gas-related problems, a single customer service call will bring door-step service," said a Changyi resident surnamed Jiang.

Gas safety coordinators also carry out inspections on a regular



Consumers gather at a food stall at a night market in Weifang, Shandong province, in July 2022. WANG ZHIDE / FOR CHINA DAILY

basis, significantly enhancing the safety level.

Furthermore, the city is also exploring the implementation of a "firewall" service model in LPG management — over 10 industry experts, 40 professional technicians, 80 gas delivery personnel, and 800 grassroots gas safety coordinators together serve as a firewall

against bottled LPG risks.

Aiming to prevent as many accidents as possible in the end-use phase, they conduct regular inspections for both household and business gas users, adhering to standards of no less than two visits for households and four visits for business users within a year, said the Changyi government.

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Actions must be taken to boost confidence as recovery on healthy upward trajectory

Despite external pressure and internal difficulties, China's economy rebounded with a growth rate of 5.2 percent last year, surpassing the official annual target of around 5 percent, according to the National Bureau of Statistics on Wednesday.

This has been achieved even without the government resorting to "massive stimulus", which reflects the country's "good and solid fundamentals in its long-term development", as Premier Li Qiang said at the World Economic Forum in the Swiss ski resort of Davos on Tuesday.

The government has obviously taken note of the need to shore up the market's confidence in the long-term growth prospects of the Chinese economy. To better boost the growth of the real economy, the central leadership stressed the need for the high-quality development of China's financial sector, vowing to accelerate the building of a modern financial system on Tuesday.

That China will make efforts to build itself into a financial powerhouse, and take measures to fend off financial risks, especially systemic risks, and will further strengthen the interconnectivity between domestic and overseas financial markets speaks volumes of the central authorities' resolve to steer the country's financial market out of its current woes onto a healthy path of sustainable development.

The growth of the national economy last year is hard-won and should be objectively observed. In 2023, the world economy was in a downturn, the international landscape was evolving fast, geopoliti-

cal conflicts occurred frequently, and the external environment was more complex, severe and uncertain than expected. There were many domestic cyclical and structural contradictions as well. Not to mention a series of natural disasters.

Generally speaking, the annual data for China's economy released by the NBS indicate, as it said, that the foundation of "stability" is more solid, the motivation for "advance" is more sufficient, and the characteristics of "quality" are becoming more obvious.

China's economy has withstood the external pressure, overcome the internal difficulties, and continued to develop while overcoming challenges. It has achieved a relatively high growth rate, low prices, stable employment, and a basically balanced international balance of payments. The main goals of economic and social development have been achieved, and high-quality development advanced.

But the national economic and social development tasks will still be arduous this year, and many difficulties and challenges will have to be overcome. The country must persist in seeking high-quality development while maintaining stability and promoting stability through the advancement of economic upgrading. Macro-control efforts should be strengthened so as to effectively enhance the country's economic vitality, and prevent and resolve risks with foresight.

In the process, authorities at various levels should take concrete measures to try and raise expectations, so as to further consolidate and enhance the positive trend of economic recovery.

## Tunisia visit reflects commitment to shared future

Mired in poverty and underdevelopment, countries of the Global South have long encountered many difficulties and challenges on their development journeys. Worse, each time Western countries have interfered in their internal affairs, seeking to force Western-style democracy onto them, or stirred up trouble in their region as part of the United States' hegemonic stratagems, they are the first to suffer from instability and even chaos.

In stark contrast, China's engagement with countries of the Global South has always been built on the principles of mutual respect, noninterference in a country's internal affairs and win-win cooperation based on mutual trust and equal treatment.

China-Tunisia ties are a good example of this, as apart from their pragmatic cooperation to improve people's livelihoods, the two like-minded partners, with similar views on regional and international affairs, continue to deepen their reciprocal cooperation on the bilateral level and strengthen their coordination on the multilateral level in pursuit of common development and a fairer world order; and they stand together in opposition to any country interfering in the internal affairs of others under the pretext of championing human rights and democracy.

This was the salient message in Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's meetings with Tunisian President Kais Saied and Tunisian Foreign Minister Nabil Ammar in Tunis, capital of Tunisia, on Monday.

While the US and its allies are trying to widen the North-South gap to maintain their privileged posi-

tions in the international order, China is working with other countries of the Global South to narrow it. Believing that true and good development is development for all, it aspires to flatten the world so that all countries can enjoy a fair share of the global prosperity.

Cherishing the achievements it has made in improving the lives of the Chinese people through its own development, China promotes cooperation and joint efforts so people of all countries can enjoy the fruits of common development.

Tunisia was the second leg of Wang's four-nation African trip. He will also visit Togo and Cote d'Ivoire, before heading to the Caribbean and Latin America for visits to Jamaica and Brazil.

The destinations of the Chinese foreign minister's first overseas visits of the year demonstrate China's determination to carry forward its engagement with the Global South.

Through this engagement, based on openness and sharing and mutual respect, China is working with countries of the Global South to realize their shared aspiration for a better future. At the same time, it is evident that greater trust, solidarity and cooperation among countries are essential for peace, prosperity and stability throughout the world. By promoting these among the countries of the Global South and demonstrating the shared benefits, China is not only working to build a Global South community with a shared future, but also striving to encourage the Global North to come into the fold of a truly global community with a shared future.

## Manila's island plan recipe for regional disaster

By stressing a plan for the development of disputed islands in the South China Sea does not include "fortifying the BRP *Sierra Madre*" it grounded on China's Ren'ai Reef in 1999, Manila seems to be trying to assure Beijing the plan newly unveiled by the Philippine military is harmless.

But Beijing is not going to buy that. The plan revealed by Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines Romeo Brawner Jr after attending a command conference led by Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr on Monday has even stirred wide domestic concerns.

According to Brawner's comments to the media, Manila plans to "improve" all the disputed islands it is "occupying" in the South China Sea. Also included in the large-scale plan is the acquisition of more ships, radar and aircraft as the Philippines shifts its focus from internal defense to "territorial defense", he said.

By whatever standard, the focus of the shift is anything but defensive in nature.

Since any attempt to fortify the crumbling World War II-era ship BRP *Sierra Madre*, in a bid to create a fait accompli, suffices to irk Beijing, Manila is certainly not naive to the degree to which the plan is a provocation to Beijing. In fact, it represents a grave

provocation to all the parties the Philippines has disputes with.

If the Philippines really follows through on its plan to develop the disputed islands to make them more habitable for its troops, as its military chief of staff said, it is taking the initiative to spark conflict in the waters.

Given the huge input the plan will necessarily entail and the lackluster economy of the Philippines, Manila must have received certain assurances of extra but sizable funding and material assistance before plucking up the courage to talk big.

But even if the United States, an ardent ally of Manila, has pledged support, the degree to which that will be forthcoming is open to question given it is already providing assistance to Ukraine and Israel, and the outcome of the US presidential election may temper its aggressive and troublemaking foreign policy.

After one and a half years in power, by shifting its focus from domestic development to betting the nation's future on power games, the Ferdinand Marcos government has downgraded the Philippines from a key regional player upholding strategic autonomy to a ludicrous puppet of the warmongering US.

Cai Meng



## Opinion Line

## Meeting needs of elderly drives development of 'silver economy'

The State Council, China's Cabinet, recently released a guideline outlining a variety of measures to promote the development of the "silver economy", economic activities that offer products or services for the elderly.

By the end of 2022, the number of elderly people aged 60 and above reached 280 million in the country, roughly 20 percent of its total population. Of the group, about 210 million are over 65 years old. It is estimated that by 2050, the country will have a population of 509 million aged 60 and above. The aging of society in China will be a basic national condition for a long time to come.

The country's social security expenditure has been increasing at the same time, and the contradiction between supply and demand of elderly care and health services has become increasingly prominent. It is imperative for the country to respond to the aging population and develop the "silver

economy" by constructing a sustainable multilevel social security system, improving the elderly service and healthcare system, and building a policy system and social environment friendly to senior citizens.

The willingness and ability of the elderly to consume have been enhanced, and the consumption pattern has become diversified, increasing the demand for health-care, continuing education, and cultural and sports tourism. The elderly's demand for e-commerce, telemedicine, and smart elderly care services has grown, producing great potential for the faster development of the "silver economy".

The country should promote the development of the industries related to elderly care services on the policy level, extend more support to them and encourage the research and development of products for the elderly, the agglomeration of related industries, and the planning

of a number of key areas for the development of the "silver economy". Increasing the proportion of the "silver economy" in the country's GDP will also help stimulate domestic demand, cultivate emerging industries and promote employment.

Compared with the various needs generated by its aging population, there is still much room for the country to develop its "silver economy". For example, more efforts are yet to be made to resolve the shortage of products, the low quality, unreasonable supply structure, as well as nonstandardized market order and imperfect service system.

Currently the scale of China's "silver economy" is about 7 trillion yuan (\$973 billion). It is expected to reach 30 trillion yuan by 2035. This underscores the need for the country to tap the huge potential through both government measures and the law of the market.

— BEIJING YOUTH DAILY

## 'Panda friendship' something to cherish

When the Smithsonian's National Zoo held a Panda Palooza to say farewell to the giant pandas Mei Xiang and Tian Tian, and their cubs in September 2023, long queues formed at the entrance while some of their fans even took a 10-hour night drive from Indiana only to say goodbye to them.

Which echoes the scene in 1972, when more than 8,000 people, despite the rainy weather, welcomed the first pair of giant pandas upon their arrival at the National Zoo. After 1984, the Chinese government stopped giving pandas as gifts, but instead provided them

under rent-lease agreements. Throughout the half century of their stay in the United States, whether as gifts or loans, giant pandas have been a living testimony to the friendship between the two peoples.

But with the loan periods coming to end, pandas at zoos around the country have been sent to China. Moves that have caused some to worry that rising tensions between Washington and Beijing could lead China to cut off the lending program altogether — depriving US people of the opportunity to see the pandas on US soil.

Thus by proposing on Jan 5 that pandas could return to the US by the end of 2024, China has sent a friendly message to the US that it wants the two countries to "peacefully coexist".

Yet some politicians in the US have been politicizing the matter by trying to snuff out China's panda diplomacy, claiming that Beijing uses pandas as a tool of "subversive" soft power.

Those China-bashers, for whom anything related to China is anathema, hope to prevent pandas from returning to the US.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

## What They Say

## Strong brands promote supply chain resilience

In the past few years, industry and supply chains have been reshaped as many developed countries have tried to promote near-shoring or friendshoring on the grounds of "de-risking". While in response to this, China has been vigorously enhancing its high-tech self-reliance and the security of its industry and supply chains.

Compared with the United States and Europe, China has markedly lower inflation and interest rates. Even if some enterprises in labor-intensive industries affected by high tariffs have transferred overseas, their production still relies on the supply chains in which China is a key link.

As the European and US consumer markets become more price sensitive due to the impact of inflation, China's cost advantages have been further strengthened. Its low-

er interest rates also add to its comparative advantages to keep production costs low.

Lower interest rates are also conducive to boosting manufacturing investment, digital transformation and R&D investment for domestic companies. This can help promote the forming of a new development pattern in which China can make the most of what it has to counter the US-led containment efforts. That entails China seizing the chance to further consolidate its competitiveness in the global industry and supply chains.

At the same time, this is a good chance for the country to support more Chinese companies to invest in strategic industries on a large scale. China has already established its global advantages in electric vehicles, lithium batteries and solar cells. China's large-scale

investment and application in the semiconductor field is also expected to change that industry's global landscape.

Chinese companies can take the opportunity to go global with their own brands. China's ability to produce high-quality, technologically advanced and cheap goods stems from its supply chain advantages, which are ingrained in the long-term labor distribution in the world market system and are therefore not easily changed.

Yet only by exploring the global market with its own brands can the country continue to strengthen its position in the global industry and supply chains. And only by creating more brands with global competitiveness can a virtuous cycle be formed for the country's industrial development.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

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## COMMENT

Yuan Xin

On Wednesday, the National Bureau of Statistics released data showing that the total population at the end of 2023 in the Chinese mainland was more than 1.409 billion, a decrease of 2.08 million from the previous year. The total number of births for the year was 9.02 million, and the total number of deaths was 11.1 million.

In the long run, negative growth and aging will be two characteristics of China's demography. In fact, China is undergoing a demographic transition, with its population peaking at 1.41 billion in 2021-22. The total fertility rate, a key indicator of demographic dynamics, nosedived to 1.1 in 2022, signaling a seismic shift in China's population. This unfolding narrative will not only shape China's future but also have a profound impact on the global demographic tapestry.

**Tech, retirement reforms key to aging challenges**

Looking ahead to the next three decades, China's demographic future hinges on the trajectory of the fertility rate: a gradual recovery to 1.8 promises a stable population of about 1.4 billion; a conservative increase to 1.4-1.5 hints at a population of about 1.3 billion; and a decline to 0.8-0.9 would mean China's population dropping to 1.2 billion by 2050.

These scenarios, however, suggest China will remain one of the two most populous countries in the world, with a projected range of 1.2-1.4 billion people by mid-21st century.

The peak population of over 1.41 billion in 2021-22 indicates China has reached a significant juncture in demographic development. Aligned with China's "two-stage, two-step" approach to modernization, the population peak coincides with the efforts to realize socialist modernization by 2035. China's colossal population, accounting for 14-18 percent of the global total, is poised to embark on a transformative journey toward modernity.

The year 2022 ushered in a period of negative population growth. As a result of the three-year COVID-19 pandemic, diminishing fertility rate and deferred marriages, this trend signals a fundamental shift in social values. Addressing this requires recalibration of social and economic policies.

By the end of 2023, the population aged 60 and above is 296.97 million, accounting for 21.1 percent of the total population, among which the population aged 65 and above is 216.76 million, accounting for 15.4 percent of the total population. Projections indicate that by the middle of this century, there will be a peak of 520 million elderly people, leading to an aging population that is likely to approach 50 percent. That poses a great challenge to existing social and economic structures, and demands innovative solutions.

First, the working-age population continues to decrease. The population aged 15 to 59 is projected to decrease from the current 864 million to 650 million by the middle of this century. But the shrinking labor force may not necessarily lead to a shortage of labor. On the one hand, the modernization and digitalization of society are deepening, with technology, artificial intelligence, robots, and large-scale equipment increasingly substituting for labor. On the other hand, the annual number of graduates from institutions of higher education exceeds 10 million, and the number of graduates from secondary vocational and technical schools surpasses 5 million, leading to intense competition for employment and long-term pressure on the realization of a full employment strategy.

Second, there is a vast population of younger elderly individuals. Over the next 30 years, population aging will exhibit a typical pattern of aging at a younger age. Those aged 60 to 69, considered as younger elderly, will account for approximately 40-50 percent of the total elderly population, increasing from 150 million to 210 million. This presents a window of opportunity for implementing retirement system reforms and promoting the social participation of the elderly.

Third, there is a shift from a society primarily focused on raising children to one primarily focused on elderly care. Since 2021, the elderly dependency ratio has exceeded the child dependency ratio. Experiences from developed countries indicate that the social investment per capita for elderly care is several times that for childcare. With the increasing elderly population, longer lifespans, and improved pension standards, the social pressure for elderly care is growing.

Just as the General Office of the State Council's recent document promoting the silver economy indicated, silver economy can also bring golden opportunities. The silver economy refers to the sum of economic activities that provide products or services to the elderly, as well as preparations for the aging stage, involving a wide range, a long industry chain, diverse formats, and enormous potential.

**Urban-rural disparity in eldercare should be narrowed**

After the launch of reform and opening-up, internal labor migration unleashed a formidable force driving China's economic ascension. In 2023, the urban population was 932.67 million, an increase of 11.96 million from the end of the previous year. The rural population was 477 million, a decrease of 14.04 million. The proportion of urban population to the total population (urbanization rate) was 66.16 percent, an increase of 0.94 percentage points from the previous year.

The floating population and migrant workers comprise individuals moving from rural areas to urban centers, with young and middle-aged indi-



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

## Nation can cope with demographic 'new normal'

**The central and local governments' support policies for couples who have two-three children are complex. The policy disparities are substantial, even though they provide economic incentives, extended maternity leave and caregiver leave.**

viduals making up the majority. The migration of young and middle-aged people from villages to cities means an inadvertent increase in the aging population in rural areas, and a relative decrease in the aging population in urban areas, creating an inverted demographic pattern wherein rural areas face early, rapid aging, and have a relatively large elderly population. So to address the population aging problem, the authorities have to first address the problems in rural areas.

According to its urbanization road map, China wants to achieve an urbanization rate of 70 percent by 2030 and 75-80 percent by 2050, with the urban population crossing 1 billion and rural population falling below 300 million.

In the long run, with the falling fertility rates in all regions, human migration may no longer be an effective means to regulate regional population distribution.

Against the backdrop of low birth rates and longer lifespans, the loss of demographic dividends has created a series of challenges. The population aging trend will continue throughout the 21st century, intertwining with challenges created by slower economic development. These challenges will raise social concerns, encompassing, among other things, economic, social, health, regional distribution, and gender-related factors.

Addressing these challenges requires a paradigm shift, fostering a proactive attitude toward aging society, and adopting a threefold approach — scientific understanding, proactive adaptation, and positive response. Scientific understanding entails analyzing population decline and aging from the perspective of demographic principles without exaggerating the negative impacts of population aging and acknowledging its positive impacts.

To overcome the impacts of rapidly rising numbers of elderly people and a shrinking population, adapting to the changing situation is crucial. There is also a need to recognize and explore new opportunities, and adopt a pragmatic

approach to overcome the difficulties.

To deal with the challenges created by an aging society, in order to promote sustainable development, we need robust and comprehensive reforms. First, it is necessary to not view the aging society through the lens of declining demographic dividends. Second, it is also necessary to extend the scope of the policies beyond the elderly population to achieve high-quality development. And third, it is important to move beyond the accepted policies to address this modern development problem.

**Encourage couples to have at least one kid**

To encourage young couples to have two, if not three, children, support policies should not be focused on couples who have two-three children; instead, they should also be targeted at couples who have just one child. In short, implementing a fair and equitable policy for all types of childbirth is reasonable.

The central and local governments' support policies for couples who have two-three children are complex. The policy disparities are substantial, even though they provide economic incentives, extended maternity leave and caregiver leave. Moreover, the authorities should explore the possibility of including assisted reproductive technologies in the healthcare policy. Beyond financial support, creating a supportive environment for families with multiple children requires public and government support.

The use of funds alone, even up to 3 percent of GDP, may not necessarily increase the fertility rate. Cultural shifts, especially among the younger generation, emphasize individual development. To increase the fertility rate, comprehensive and long-term efforts, marked by unwavering determination and patience, are required.

The social pattern of negative population growth and a rising aging population is likely to persist. Accepting the fundamental shifts in perspective, developing scientific understanding, adapting to the changing times, and responding positively are the logical steps toward overcoming these challenges. Only by adopting a creative approach to navigating the socio-demographic complexities can we achieve steady, sustainable high-quality development. And China is capable of doing so.

*The author is deputy chief of the China Population Association and a professor of demography at Nankai University. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

Chris Pereira

## Company innovations boost resilient economy, benefit consumers

How will the Chinese economy grow in 2024? A recent expo may provide insights.

At the world's premier annual consumer technology expo, Chinese companies provided the real surprises. Despite China's slowing economy, the innovation, pragmatism, ambition and entrepreneurial energy on display from Chinese companies at the recently concluded Consumer Electronics Show called for optimism.

Hundreds of thousands of attendees come together at the CES in Las Vegas every year to get a glimpse of the future. With thousands of companies displaying their latest ware, the competition to stand out from the crowd was intense at this year's show, held from Jan 9 to 12. Some of the bigger global companies spent millions of dollars on just their presence and displays at the CES.

This year saw many Chinese companies take part in and steal the show. More than 1,100 companies registered in China, a new record, with many more of Chinese-origin companies registered with their US subsidiaries took part in the show. As such, Chinese companies accounted for more than a quarter of the over 4,000 companies participating in the CES this year.

While many of the world's biggest tech companies had attractive booths at the CES, their presence felt almost routine, and their new tech announcements lacked the excitement that their R&D budgets should have aroused. The music, videos, and the booth design were far more impressive than the technologies on display from these huge companies. Instead of breakthroughs, they showcased incremental advancements: a slightly clearer screen, faster computing speeds or additional new features.

Some of the biggest tech companies from China did have similar, incremental advancements on display as well, and companies such as Hisense and TCL had gigantic booths that were on par with the other global giants. But the real excitement came from China's younger companies.

In particular, several sectors were highlighted by Chinese innovations. The one that most aptly showcased China's strengths in high-quality manufacturing, comprehensive supply chains, fast product development, and thoughtful innovations was the smart home products sector.

The Chinese companies presented innovative products that directly improve the quality of life and add a sense of freshness to the home. Nothing represented China's advantage in the smart home sector more than robotic vacuum cleaners. This highly competitive and surprisingly large product category featured numerous Chinese companies making robotic vacuum cleaners that are both affordable and more advanced.

Multiple companies presented colorful indoor lighting displays which could be controlled

remotely or be automatically adjusted through artificial intelligence technology to detect the mood in the room. Also on display were products made by a company which specializes in tiny drones that take off from the palm of your hand and film you without any need for remote control. This innovative and easy-to-use product was one of the darlings of the visitors to the CES, with one journalist exclaiming "it's a great idea and it actually works".

There were bird feeders with video cameras, too, showing a whole different view and birds' species identification. Another company combined health and smart innovation to make the smallest and most affordable over-the-counter hearing aid. A clever but simple towel warmer bucket greeted nearly every passerby suffering from tech fatigue with a smile.

**The energy of these companies shows the Chinese economy will continue to be robust and globally connected despite the many challenges it faces to maintain strong growth.**

Apart from the smart home product companies, China's strength lies also in clean energy technology. Despite the United States' heavy restrictions on the supply of goods, especially high-tech goods, to Chinese electric vehicle (EV) companies, many of them still exhibited exciting technologies, including X Peng's flying EV and U Power's plug-and-play EV chassis, which allows for faster development of the EV sector.

Home energy storage products showcased Chinese companies' knack for both clean energy and smart home products. Nearly all of the companies in this sector were from China including Jackery, Bluetti, Gendome and Ecoflow, and they all had prominent displays at the CES.

While the companies from China at the CES ranged from the smallest companies to massive global tech powerhouses, they combined innovation and thoughtful products that are more affordable while being of high quality. This makes Chinese companies indispensable for the global economy.

The energy of these companies shows the Chinese economy will continue to be robust and globally connected despite the many challenges it faces to maintain strong growth. This is good for China, good for the world, and even better for the global consumer.

*The author is the Founder and CEO of iImpact, a communications and business consulting group. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

## GLOBAL VIEWS

DIMITRI DE BOER

## Renewable energy sector is shining

Accelerating global energy transition would help solve many other pressing problems

China has experienced a tremendous surge in green sectors in recent years, including solar and wind power, batteries, electric vehicles and more. China's rapid deployment of renewable energy and increased renewable energy generation could soon overtake the increase in total energy consumption. If that trend continues, China's greenhouse gas emissions may peak well before 2030. This provides some hope after what has been a difficult year for many countries.

On top of geopolitical tensions and sluggish economic recovery, the year 2023 has been confirmed to be the warmest year on record, resulting in extreme weather on all continents. Beijing was hit by floods in the summer, and the Amazon rainforest experienced its worst droughts ever recorded. The United States and European countries were hit by deadly heat waves in July. Canada faced record-breaking wildfires, over double the previous burned area. Heavy rains caused dams to collapse in Libya, killing thousands of people.

For global climate action, the most important trend is the transition from fossil fuel to renewable energy. In turn, China's energy transition is one of the most important in the world, as China accounts for about 30 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. Solar power has emerged as the most important renewable energy source. So for global climate action, one of the most important trends to watch is the installation of solar power in China, and the manufacturing rate of new solar panels. China is estimated to have installed about 230 gigawatts of solar power in 2023, with its solar panel manufacturing capacity likely to have exceeded 600 GW, both far exceeding all expectations. For reference, 230 GW is more than twice the cumulative solar power ever installed in the US (113 GW), and more than what the world installed in 2022 (192 GW).

The energy transition in Europe also continues unabated. Amid shocks in the supply of fossil fuels, European countries have stepped up energy saving measures and increased their pace of renewable energy

**For global climate action, the most important trend is the transition from fossil fuel to renewable energy. In turn, China's energy transition is one of the most important in the world, as China accounts for about 30 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions.**

deployment. As a result, combined with the warm weather, consumption of coal and gas in Europe saw a huge annual drop of about 20 percent in 2023.

If the world's emissions have indeed hit a peak and started to decline, that would mark a key turning point. However, unfortunately that doesn't mean global temperatures will come down right away. In fact, temperatures are rapidly increasing, and will continue to increase until the world achieves net zero emissions. So we face the prospect of much more serious impacts from climate change in the coming decades, making it all the more urgent to reduce emissions now.

At the 28th session of the Conference of Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which took place in the United Arab Emirates in December, the world agreed to triple renewable energy capacity by 2030. According to a recent report by the International Energy Agency, this means the world will need to install about 1,000 GW of renewable energy every year between now and 2030.

To achieve this ambitious goal, the world must cooperate on ramping up the manufacturing and deployment of renewable energy technologies, as well as the technologies and systems which are needed to utilize them, such as more flexible power grids and power

storage solutions.

Broadly speaking, it looks like this is happening. For example, at the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in October last year, an Indonesian state-owned power company secured smart grid, storage and solar panel manufacturing deals worth \$54 billion with Chinese partners. It could be the backbone of Indonesia's energy transition. Organizations including ClientEarth, the Belt and Road International Green Development Coalition and the Institute for Essential Services Reform in Indonesia helped advance the cooperation. At the forum, the Chinese government also launched the Green Investment and Financing Partnership, a special facility for financing green overseas investments.

Renewable energy provides much greater energy independence than fossil fuels, because being reliant on fossil fuel imports is very risky — if you can't secure supply, the lights go off. By contrast, solar panels or wind turbines require no fuel to keep producing energy, so every solar panel and wind turbine installed provides greater energy independence.

Indonesia is partnering with the world's leading solar companies to produce solar panels locally, thus greatly benefiting the Indonesian economy and facilitating transfer of technology and production capabilities.

If other countries with strong manufacturing capabilities did the same, it would help solve many of the world's most pressing problems, stimulating economies, accelerating the global energy transition, decreasing the impacts of climate change, reducing the risk of geopolitical tensions, and increasing energy security across the world.

*The author is regional director for Asia at ClientEarth and special adviser of the China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development. 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.*



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

LU GUOXUE

## Fit for purpose

Getting the World Trade Organization back on its feet is essential to promoting healthy global trade

In recent years, globalization has encountered headwinds, trade protectionism has risen, and the progress in economic globalization has been hindered. As a representative of the current global trade system, the World Trade Organization has seen its operation mechanism seriously disrupted, and the Appellate Body in the organization's dispute settlement mechanism has been suspended due to the "empty seats" phenomenon.

The WTO Appellate Body is the core department of its dispute settlement mechanism. Since 2017, the United States has consistently rejected proposals for the selection of new judges, resulting in a continuous decrease in the number of judges as their terms expire. On Dec 11, 2019, two out of the remaining three judges in the Appellate Body ended their terms. The WTO General Council held a meeting a day in advance, aiming at approving a draft decision to improve the Appellate Body's function. However, despite opposition from 163 countries, the United States blocked the draft for the 29th time with its veto, leading to the suspension of the Appellate Body.

On the issues of WTO reforms and selecting new judges for the Appellate Body, the US, disregarding the 30 accumulated appellate cases, attempts to suppress multilateral mechanisms through "America first" policies and nearshoring and friendshoring strategies. The US' policy and attitude toward the WTO harms other countries without benefiting itself. Pascal Lamy, vice-chairman of the Paris Peace Forum and former WTO director-general, recently stated "the essential is whether the US accepts or not the binding nature of the dispute settlement mechanism".

Last year witnessed persistently sluggish global trade, with the growth rate of the commodity trade reaching only 0.8 percent and the global trade volume significantly decreased. The main reason is that regions such as the US and the European Union have felt the impact of sustained inflation and tightening monetary policies, intensified geopolitical risks, and a significant increase in trade restrictions by major economies, especially non-tariff measures, which has cast a shadow over the prospects for global trade. Furthermore, the decline in demand from developed countries, decrease in East Asian trade, increase in trade restrictions, fluctuations in commodity prices, excessively long supply chains, and escalating debt problems, are all major factors affecting world trade. Several institutions, including the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, have made "highly uncertain and generally pessimistic" predictions about the outlook for 2024. At present, the world still faces daunting challenges with no signs of the geopolitical tensions easing. The worsening climate and environment, and new issues such as the regulation, storage, availability and security of data brought about by rapid digitization, will be urgent problems affecting future global trade, which require time-

ly regulation and adjustment by the WTO.

As far as the selection of judges is concerned, the WTO has always adopted a policy that only when all members agree can seven appellate judges take up their positions. In theory, every WTO member has veto power. The fact that the US could prevent the selection of appellate judges multiple times is actually exploiting a loophole in the WTO's selection process. Therefore, almost all members agree that it's necessary to reform the Appellate Body through negotiation and consultation to quickly bring world trade and global development back to a stable state that is rules-based, law-based and trustworthy. The reason is that if countries or economies set their own standards and use their veto power recklessly due to dissatisfaction, the existing WTO system will be destroyed, and international trade will return to an era of the law of the jungle. The US is the largest developed country worldwide, while China is the largest developing country. Both sides cannot do without the global market. Although the US has many advantages in the high-tech field, it lacks a huge market for its tech, and its technological progress will slow down. Meanwhile, China boasts huge production and manufacturing capacity, but its economic development will also be affected without a matching consumer market and technological exchange.

The interdependence between developed and developing countries was specifically explained in a series of research reports published by the Independent Commission on International Development Issues led by former German chancellor Willy Brandt in the 1970s and 1980s, which stated that the interests of countries worldwide are interdependent now, and countries from the Global South cannot do without those from the North, and the latter cannot do without the former. Therefore, the US, as the world's largest trading nation, should understand the situation and take WTO reform issues seriously so as to put the international trade system on a benign and healthy track as soon as possible.

The 13th WTO ministerial conference is about to be held, which will focus on the revitalization of the multilateral institution. The US administration should be encouraged to change its stance on WTO reform and the dispute resolution mechanism. The 30th APEC economic leaders' informal meeting was held in San Francisco in November 2023. In the Golden Gate Declaration issued after the meeting, it was reiterated that a commitment to WTO reforms was necessary to improve its functions, including discussions aimed at restoring a comprehensive, well functioning dispute resolution mechanism with the participation of all members. All the APEC economies should timely and effectively implement WTO agreements, reaffirm their commitment to constructive participation in the 13th Ministerial Conference, and ensure the success and positive outcomes of the conference. As today's largest regional economic cooperation forum in the

world, APEC has not only consistently been a strong supporter of international multilateral organizations, but also played multiple roles as a "pathfinder" and "daring vanguard" in WTO negotiations. As major members of APEC, both China and the US are obligated to respond to APEC initiatives and shoulder the important task of promoting reform of the WTO and its Appellate Body.

China is a beneficiary, firm supporter, and builder of the WTO. Since joining the organization, it has gradually established a domestic economic management system that is in line with the international economic and trade system, and fully fulfilled its accession commitments, aligning itself with WTO rules. The country has continuously opened its market, lowering the tariff rate from 15.3 percent to 7.4 percent, and more than 120 categories in the service industry have been opened up. These exceed China's promised targets when joining the WTO. For years, China has been promoting trade and investment liberalization and facilitation, maintaining the multilateral trading system, jointly building new technologies, industries, and models, and advancing economic globalization toward a more open, inclusive, balanced, and win-win direction. Over the past 20 years, China's total trade volume in goods has grown by 11 times and it has become the world's largest trading country in goods and a major trading partner of over 140 countries and regions. Its annual contribution to global economic growth is nearly 30 percent. The relationship between China and the WTO has undergone historic changes, as it has gradually transitioned from being a passive acceptor of the international economic and trade rules to being an important participant in their formulation. In addition, China actively assists other developing countries, helping improve their trade, enhance their independent development capabilities, and achieve common prosperity within the framework of South-South cooperation.

China will firmly uphold true multilateralism, support necessary WTO reforms and play a role in international economic governance; and it will support the Appellate Body resuming normal operation. The country is willing to actively participate in negotiations on issues such as the digital economy, trade and environment, industrial subsidies, and State-owned enterprises with an open attitude, maintain its position as the main channel for the formulation of international rules in the multilateral trading system, and provide more opportunities and inject strong impetus into the world's economic growth.

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WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

## LIFE

## Plant specialist's passion still flowers

Beijing honors botanist for outstanding work in often-dangerous circumstances, **Yang Feiyue** reports.

**W**ang Qiang's dark skin and weather-beaten face quickly conveys his sometimes-extreme experiences, on the road and out of doors.

Right after taking a short break for the New Year's holiday in early January, Wang has already taken trips to the United Kingdom and Kenya, each for about half a month, to study plant specimens.

"Those countries preserve records of plants that existed more than a century ago, which are crucial for botanical studies," says Wang, a professor at the Institute of Botany of the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Beijing.

For Wang, who is originally from Sichuan province, being on the road has come with the territory since he chose to pursue his PhD at the Beijing institute in 2008. He has focused on plant taxonomy, which has widely been considered by the academic circle as the most challenging, fundamental and crucial studies in the field.

The two recent overseas trips might seem like a breeze to Wang, considering how he has spent more than a decade trekking to the depths of the snow mountains on the treacherously rugged plateau, searching for rare plant species in harsh environments around the Himalayas.

To date, he has collected over 100,000 valuable plant specimens and more than 200,000 related images.

In December, Wang was among the 10 people from all walks of life who were named Beijing role models of the year by the municipal publicity department.

He was acknowledged for his many achievements, such as completing the first English monograph on *Microtoena*, a perennial or annual herbaceous genus (part of the mint family), that covers about 20 species distributed throughout Southeast Asia and southern China.

Widely used as a spice in South and Southeast Asia, *Microtoena* is also commonly applied by some ethnic groups as a medicine in the southwestern region of China.

However, disputes had never ceased about the true nature of the species that were published before, and the phylogenetic relationships between those species were also unclear, Wang says.

To resolve the issue, Wang traversed through the mountainous areas of the Himalayas in search of every possible place where *Microtoena* could be distributed.

After three years of field research, he collected numerous valuable specimens and experimental samples, and analyzed specimens from more than 40 important herbaria at home and abroad.

Based on statistical analyses of population-level traits of various species within the genus and additional comprehensive systematic analyses, he successfully completed the first global taxonomic revision of the genus and published it in 2018.

Studying life science in his undergraduate years at Sichuan University, Wang opted for botany as his graduate focus at the university.

At first, he just wanted to focus on his studies and explore science behind their exceptional beauty, but as he delved deeper, Wang says he came to realize the importance of plants to everyone's lives and even the national economy.

"For example, major discoveries, such as hybrid rice by Yuan Longping and artemisinin (drugs that have redefined the landscape of antimalarial therapy) by Tu Youyou, were all inspirations from seemingly insignificant plants," Wang says.

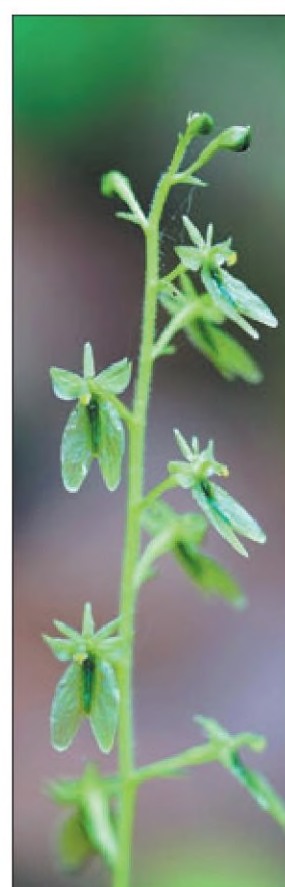
"It's proof of how a single species can change the fate of a country and transform lives."

It determined his mind to go down the road and help lay a foundation for future development and utilization of plants.

However, many rare plants grow in harsh environments, like cliffs and steep slopes. Wang was well aware of the hardships and dangers involved in conducting research in this field. The Himalayan area is habitat for rich flora and fauna, including dangerous animals.

Wang says he and his colleagues are most afraid of the wild buffalo herds, rather than bears, wolves and other beasts of prey.

"They charge ahead recklessly and



Closewise from top left: *Himalacodon dicentrifolius*, which is a perennial and grows primarily in the temperate biome; *Meconopsis horridula*, the prickly blue poppy, is an endangered species that grows in high altitudes; Wang Qiang leads a team to study biodiversity in the southern Xizang autonomous region; *Neottia pinetorum* is a rhizomatous geophyte and grows primarily in the temperate biome; *Paeonia ludlowii* is an open, upright medium-sized deciduous shrub with large, divided leaves. **Left and above left:** Wang has come across blizzard and bad road conditions in his quest for rare plant species. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

can overturn tents and trample over anything in their path," Wang says.

He's had many close calls during his career.

In 2008, Wang was interrupted by a thunderous roar when he was pressing plant specimens at a makeshift tent against a cliff in Muli Tibetan autonomous county, Liangshan Yi autonomous prefecture, Sichuan province.

"It was from a boulder with a diameter of over 1 meter rolling down the cliff, which narrowly missed the tent," Wang recalls.

In the following expeditions in the Xizang autonomous region, Wang often came across blizzards, rendering the mountain roads all the more slippery and difficult to drive on.

"A few times, the brake system failed to work, sending us on the verge of falling off the cliff," he says.

Worse still, years of working on the plateau have taxed Wang's body. He has suffered from sleep disorders and has to use a machine to aid his breathing.

Yet, fascination with plants and the commitment of his teacher, Hong Deyuan, to the field have kept him going.

"He ascended a snowy Himalayan mountain that is 5,000 meters above sea level at 80 years old in 2017 and he is still coming to the institute for work," Wang says.

Wang says he feels obliged to carry on Hong's spirit.

At the moment, Wang is working with international botanical experts on a compilation of the flora of the pan-Himalayan region, a major international collaborative research project in plant taxonomy led by China.

"The plant survey in the broader Himalayan region is crucial because this area represents the most unique geographical area on Earth," Wang says.

It features over 50 percent of the world's 7,000-meter-high snowcaps and the most spectacular alpine plant communities, hosting nearly 20,000 plant species.

More importantly, the region is home to over 20,000 vascular plant varieties, accounting for about two-thirds of China's botanical diversity, he adds.

"Most of the region is in our country, and we should take the lead in sorting them out," Wang says.

Lu Limin, Wang's lab colleague, says going to the wildness is like going home to Wang.

"Plant taxonomy requires a good deal of fieldwork, and I can only bump into him during occasional meetings," Lu says.

"When I call him, he's usually back in the mountains in the pan-Himalayan area," she says.

Lu believes Wang's persistence stems from a heartfelt passion that has enabled him to achieve a series of significant accomplishments.

"His love for his research subjects is evident, because he has affectionately called them 'little fairies' or 'snowy spirits,'" Lu says.

The tough working conditions and position of plant taxonomy as one of the most basic foundations for advanced research have made the discipline less favored by students. So, Wang has made a point of publicizing the field among young people.

In 2018, he made his way into the Youth Innovation Promotion Association of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, where he has actively carried out various popular science activities and delivered botanical science presentations for students in places including Beijing, Hong Kong, and Chengdu, Sichuan.

With his efforts, more students have developed an interest in the discipline.

He still remembers how local students gave him warm applause when he finished introducing how Chinese botanists were surveying plants in the Himalayan area.

Some even came to his office and inquired more about the field, he says.

Wang says he's grateful to be named as a role model by Beijing, because it's a recognition of his mission.

"However, I really hope the award can get more people to pay attention to our work and give us more support," Wang says.

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## LIFE



# Beijing's guilds enter golden era

Renovated historical buildings find new life as cultural centers and theaters, offering visitors a glimpse of the past, **Chen Nan** reports.

**T**ucked away in a *hutong* area in downtown Beijing, the Huguang Huiguan, or the Huguang Guild Hall, a complex of buildings over 200 years old, is in the process of being reborn.

After over a year of renovations, it is finally ready to reopen as a theater for performances of traditional Chinese operas, among them Peking, Kunqu and Yueju opera.

The Huguang Guild Hall dates back to 1807 and was built by Liu Quanzhi, a scholar from Changsha in Hunan province, and Li Junjian, a government official from Huanggang in Hubei province. It originally functioned as a cultural, business, and social center, and served the increasing number of people from the two provinces living in the capital.

With its courtyards and halls, the complex is most famous for its center stage, where Peking Opera masters such as Mei Lanfang (1894-1961), Tan Xinpei (1847-1917) and Yu Shuyan (1890-1943), once performed.

"Everything has come together and we are just thrilled," says actor Song Yan, who heads the Beijing Fenglei Peking Opera Company.

On the night of Jan 10, the company put on a performance of *Huguang Hui Meng*, an opera production Song wrote especially for the Huguang Guild Hall, and which is currently in a trial run.

As giant red doors open, the audience is greeted by performers, who serve as narrators ushering them into the show's dream world. Since the show takes place at night, the performers hold red lanterns to light the way as they guide the audience around the complex.

The first performance space is a small courtyard located to one side of the complex, where actors do their training and rehearsals. The rooms here are packed with costumes, accessories, and stage props, and give the audience a backstage glimpse into an old Peking Opera troupe.

On the other side of the complex, an actress stationed on the second floor sings and dances from above. She practices the Peking Opera skill of playing "water sleeves" as she sings. Before wrapping up her performance, she allows her long sleeves to unfurl from the second floor to the ground, to the audience's delight.

To the characteristic sound of Peking Opera, the thin, high-pitched strains of the *jinghu* (a two-stringed fiddle) and the sharp, dry thump of the *banggu* (a frame drum), the show starts in the old, two-floor



building, which is decorated with lanterns. Wooden tables and chairs are arranged around a stage in the middle.

Different characters are introduced as martial arts, songs and dances are performed by young Peking Opera actors. Song, who will turn 60 this April, brings the show to an end with a display of martial arts movements in tandem with the other young actors.

"The show is centered on the theme of *meng*, or dreams. We want to take audience back to the olden days, when Peking Opera masters regularly performed here. The building proves that there is more to heritage than age and architectural aesthetics. It is about memories, too," says Song. "I am proud to be performing here because it's where great Peking Opera masters once performed."

Born in Beijing and embarking on a career in Peking Opera at the age of 6, Song is director of the Beijing Fenglei Peking Opera Company, which was founded in 1937 and is dedicated to preserving the 200-year-old art form that is also known as *jingju*.



**Top from left:** Huguang Guild Hall, which has a history of over 200 years, is scheduled to reopen with a new show featuring Peking Opera. **Above top:** *The Drunken Concubine* is performed by young actresses, which is part of the new show choreographed for the reopening. **Above:** Peking Opera actors perform in a courtyard of the hall with artificial snow effects. PHOTOS BY ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

“When visitors enter, it is like traveling back to olden times, which makes the experience of attending a performance in them very special.”

**Dong Ning**, deputy general manager of the Beijing Performance and Arts Group

"I can still remember that when I was in my early 20s, I performed two shows a day at the Huguang Guild Hall, because lots of tourists, especially from the West, loved coming here to watch Peking Opera," says Song, who joined the company when he was 12 years old.

According to Xu Xiaohui, general manager of the Tianqiao Zenith Group, the Beijing-headquartered company in charge of the renovation of the guild hall, the complex has undergone several renovations. In 1984, it was placed on the cultural heritage protection list by the Beijing municipal government.

"This ancient complex is a wooden structure, so a key part of the renovation was to protect its buildings, while focusing on effective fireproof methods," says Xu. "Repair and reinforcement of the buildings was also very important."

After it opens formally to the public, the 2,000-square-meter complex is intended to become a new hub for tourists and fans of traditional Chinese opera.

Xu says that one highlight is a museum dedicated to the history

of Peking Opera, where visitors can learn about the art form in the form of videos, pictures and books, and where they can get a close look at the costumes and stage props used by the masters of the past, an example of which is a costume made using the *kesi* technique — a pictorial silk tapestry technique — that was donated by the Beijing Fenglei Peking Opera Company. According to Song, it is over 100 years old. A paper fan, given by Mei Lanfang to Chen Delin (1862-1930) as a gift, is also on display.

There is also a space dedicated to the history of the Huguang Guild Hall. Song says that he is working on a new production, *Night of the Museum*, to teach audiences about Peking Opera, from its costumes and makeup, to the choreography used for hand and eye movements.

Beijing's guild halls first appeared during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and reached their peak during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), when there were over 500 guild halls in the capital, mainly serving as functional spaces for students traveling from different parts of the country to take imperial examinations, and for the use of local officials.

Since 2021, the Beijing government has been busy reviving these old buildings and promoting their re-use.

"One of the most important aspects of keeping these old buildings alive is to protect them first. They are hundreds of years old, and when visitors enter, it is like traveling back to olden times, which makes the experience of attending a performance in them very special," Dong Ning, deputy general manager of the Beijing Performance and Arts Group, states in a previous interview.

In addition to the Huguang hall, increasing numbers of the city's old guild halls have been opened to the public, among them the Yanliao (Pigment) Guild Hall which was built by pigment merchants from Shanxi province in 1741, and the Shaozhou Guild Hall, which is 155 years old and was built by people from Shaozhou (modern day Shaoguan city) in Guangdong province. They have become new tourist sights, and present a range of programs, including live performances, exhibitions, and workshops highlighting items of intangible cultural heritage.

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## Traditional Chinese *hanfu* makes mark in Malta

VALLETTA — Enthusiasts of Chinese culture in Malta can now learn all about *hanfu*, the traditional style of clothing worn by the Han people, thanks to a new cultural platform dubbed the "Hanfu Costume Society" that was launched at the island's China Cultural Center on Friday.

The initiative is expected to enhance cultural exchange between China and Malta and showcase the richness of traditional culture, Yuan Yuan, director of the China Cultural Center, said at the launch event.

*Hanfu* is known for its distinctive design, exquisite craftsmanship,

and cultural significance. The historical form of dress has been rediscovered by young Chinese, with more and more opting to wear it.

Yu Cheng, who has lived in Malta for nearly five years, has decided to share her exquisite collection of *hanfu* whenever the China Cultural Center hosts *hanfu*-themed activities, allowing participants to travel through time by trying on some of her 40-plus traditional garments.

"This is my opportunity to participate in the dissemination of Chinese culture, and to allow more people to understand and fall in love with it

through the allure of traditional Chinese clothing," says Yu, who is responsible for managing the *hanfu* society.

Her passion for traditional clothing led her to include styles dating back to the Western Han (206 BC-AD 24), the Tang (618-907), the Song (960-1279), and the Ming (1368-1644) Dynasties in her collection. About half are custom-made, with some made from silk by people who practice the art of making *kesi*, a form of silk tapestry, and Suzhou embroidery.

Wearing *hanfu* has become part of daily life for Yu. She wears differ-

ent outfits when she goes out for a stroll or shopping, inevitably attracting curiosity.

"Gradually, more and more people realize that traditional Chinese clothing is rich and beautiful. Many people are attracted to it, and I feel very proud," she says. "I aspire to contribute with my efforts to preserving and promoting traditional Chinese culture."

The China Cultural Center will build on Yu's initiative by purchasing more *hanfu* outfits, both for exhibition purposes and for people to try on.

XINHUA



Yu Cheng, a *hanfu* costume collector, shows a set of such attire at the China Cultural Center in Valletta, Malta, on Friday. XINHUA

## LIFE

# A global village where the world's a stage

A small settlement in Jiangxi province that's the ancestral home of big-name theater director Stan Lai is raising a curtain on its performing arts, **Cheng Yuezhu** and **Tang Ying** report.



On Jan 5, Huichang county in Ganzhou, Jiangxi province, hosted an unprecedented scene when over 200,000 visitors celebrated the Huichang Theater Village's opening, including theater practitioners, performing arts groups, experts and tourists.

Contemporary performing arts and traditional Chinese celebrations took place throughout the theater village, from an opening ceremony held at the Lai Family Mansion Plaza in front of the former residence of renowned theater director Stan Lai's family, to an outdoor performance by Taiwan-based performing arts group U-Theatre around an ancient banyan tree at the village's entrance.

When dusk descended, Lai's classic play *The Village* was staged at Theater Converse, one of four major theater venues inside the village, marking the 100th performance of the play's special edition.

"*The Village* tells the stories of people who moved from the Chinese mainland to Taiwan. These, in fact, also included people from Huichang, my father being one of them. I felt greatly moved when I saw the rehearsal," Lai says.

"I am even thinking, if this play will be performed frequently here, one of the characters should learn to speak the Huichang dialect, so that the audience will know this character is from Huichang and feel a sense of affinity."

Since his father left Huichang for Taiwan and then the United States, Lai hadn't visited his ancestral hometown until 1997, when he got in touch with his uncle.

From 2015, Lai started bringing one of his theater productions to Huichang each year, and he has since worked with Huichang's government to transform the Xibei community, located in Huichang's ancient city, into the Huichang Theater Village.

While preserving the historical buildings, many of which were built in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), four theaters have been revamped or built to host a variety of productions at international standards.

Apart from Theater Converse, the venues also include the Courtyard Theater, revamped from the historical Wu family's ancestral hall, and the Open Space which features experimental theater and a rehearsal hall.

The revamped squares, including the Lai Family Mansion Plaza and Wisdom Square, also allow for a variety of outdoor performances.

Unlike conventional theater festivals, such as the Wuzhen Theatre Festival, of which Lai is a founder and festival director, the theater village is envisioned as functioning as a year-round base for theater productions.

"Our wish is that performances will be staged throughout the year, so that visitors can travel here, perhaps for a lovely weekend with cultural activities, see a few plays and go sightseeing in nearby areas," Lai says.



**From top:** Taiwan-based group U-Theatre performs at the opening of the Huichang Theater Village on Jan 5; a panoramic view of the grand opening of the Huichang Theater Village; U-Theatre performers present an outdoor show around an ancient banyan tree at the village entrance; Hong Kong Repertory Theatre stages the play *Soeurs* at the Open Space in the Huichang Theater Village. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The theater village will host spring and autumn performance seasons every year. Its first spring season following its opening ran until Sunday.

It included three plays by Stan Lai — *The Village*; a new play titled *Flower in the Mirror, Moon in the Water* that staged its world premiere in Huichang on Jan 10; and a localized version of Lai's classic *Secret Love in Peach Blossom Land* performed by the Huichang Tea Harvest Opera Theater.

"This is my hometown, so whenever people come here, at least one or two of my plays will be available," Lai says.

Other theater troupes from home and abroad presented their productions, such as Hong Kong Repertory Theatre which staged *Soeurs*, U-Theatre which staged *Meeting With Vajrasattva* and French troupe Compagnie des Quidams which staged *Herbert's Dream*.

"The Huichang Theater Village isn't just putting up a setting for a single play. It is a real village, yet I can experience the atmosphere of theater in its every corner. I've never seen anything like it anywhere else in the world," says Liu Ruo-yu, founder of U-Theatre.

Liu says that when she first visited the Lai Family Mansion Plaza, where *Meeting With Vajrasattva*

was to be staged, she thought it was unnecessary to bring the original stage set because the mansion provided a perfect backdrop for the production.

The same went for her experience seeing a performance of *Flower in the Mirror, Moon in the Water* at the Courtyard Theater. Prior to the performance, the crew appealed to Huichang residents to donate old chairs, many of which were handmade and had been used for decades, to provide seating for the audiences.

"The moment I saw the theater's door, I exclaimed that this is where drama belongs. There is no fabricated scene inside the theater. The walls, the chairs and the objects are all authentic and antique. That's why I feel walking into the theater village is like stepping into a play. It's an environment filled with a theatrical ambience," Liu says.

Lai says the theater village project is creating an ecosystem that's conducive to the sustainable development of cultural and creative industries.

It has already attracted cultural production companies, an immersive experiential theater, as well as a film-and-theater costume rental and photography service.

Huichang entrepreneur Wang Mingfu has collaborated with Lai to establish the Hesheng Institute of Theatre Technology, which offers training for future theater technicians, and Lai's own Theatre Training Above center is also based in the village to provide theater education to enthusiasts.

"I'd like to see what changes a small town will undergo because of theater, because of culture," Lai says.

"It is our wish to witness whether the Huichang Theater Village will turn out to be a piece of fertile land, where all sorts of new things grow and thrive."

Over 200,000 people visited on Jan 5 and 6, respectively, and more than 160,000 came on Jan 7.

The theater village's opening and the first theater season offer a great opportunity to boost Huichang's culture and tourism industries, Zeng Junhua, head of the county's bureau of culture and tourism, says.

"We will focus on improving the five aspects of overall planning, quality, supporting facilities, services and marketing to drive the integrated development of theater, intangible cultural heritage, education and tourism," Zeng says.

Huichang has also established a fund to attract artists from around the world to be based in the village long term. Selected participants will have access to the creative facilities, equipment, technical support and living amenities.

"The theater village is dedicated to creating a vibrant and creative artistic community, providing a platform for artists who are passionate about theater, and are imaginative and dream driven, to showcase their work and exchange with one another," Zeng adds.

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## When the dragon takes flight as a new element

The five elements of the Chinese zodiac (wood, fire, earth, metal and water) combine with the 12 animals to create a 60-year cycle. Feb 10 begins a year for the Wood Dragon. What does the year have in store for you?

The Wood Dragon symbolizes vitality and promise, ushering in a year when growth and benevolence intertwine. It is a year for working to understand someone you disagree with and extending a hand to build something new together. The dragon represents strength, charisma and leadership, so if you want to embody the creature this year,



**Haydn James Fogel**  
Second Thoughts

aim to be the impetus for bridging gaps and building roads.

This may be a year to catch up with an estranged sibling, apologize for whatever you did that made your college roommate stop speaking to you or get to know someone with opposing

political philosophies. As you develop in these directions, keep the ideas of leadership and new beginnings at the forefront of your mind.

Combining the wood element and the dragon, we find the promise of exploration, creativity, adaptability and spirited progress. The dragon is a call to adventure — to set off on a risky path, hoping to find great rewards.

With the energy of the Wood Dragon, it's a great year to embrace creativity. Don't be afraid to infuse your work, relationships or hobbies with your unique touch. The dragon is not timid about sharing its ideas, nor should you be. Allow your imagination to soar, explore new avenues and push the boundaries of your conventional thinking.

While you're at it, keep your eyes open for opportunities. The dragon is prone to adventure, and the outcomes can often be brighter when imbued with wood. If you trust your instincts, especially your creativity, your courage will pay off handsomely.

Leading is natural to the dragon, who possesses innate courage, tenacity and intelligence.

Dragons are often connected with emperors, and are born rulers. Rather than waiting sharp-eyed for the perfect opportunity, this is an excellent year to create your opportunities. An emperor cannot wait for a mountain to move; he must carry it himself.

As you go about conquering the world this year, maintain balance and adaptability. The Wood Dragon thrives in equilibrium, harmonizing work, leisure, ambition and relaxation. They may be prone to work hard and play harder, but a proper balance will ensure you don't burn out before completing your new project.

Dragons possess abundant charisma. Channel the dragon to foster your relationships this year. Have more one-on-one lunches with friends or colleagues and allow your authentic charm to shine. Your social circle will support you and open doors to new possibilities.

Wood Dragons are signs of spring and rebirth, which is why this is a year for exciting adventures.

Achievements will follow if you are brave enough to be determined, as a dragon would be. A dragon delights in celebrating accomplishments. Take time after you've accomplished something to look at your work and admire it. Perhaps you can even share that joy with your inner circle.

Don't forget to celebrate theirs as well.

The dragon is auspicious — a sign of good fortune. As you embody the Wood Dragon this year, remember that the universe has given you abundant opportunities for growth and fulfillment. This is your year; if you can embrace it with open arms, you will find exciting changes just around the corner.

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