

Making strides

Chinese firms unveil advanced technologies, new products at CES BUSINESS FOCUS, PAGE 10



Veteran climate diplomat leaves center stage

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Animating the ancients

New cartoon offers a fantastical account of Sanxingdui civilization LIFE, PAGE 14

# CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中国日报 FRIDAY, JANUARY 19, 2024

## Aid convoy



Police secure trucks carrying fuel and humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip through the Karm Abu Salem commercial crossing in Gaza on Wednesday as part of an agreement between Israel and Hamas. ABED RAHIM KHATIB / AP

# People benefit from optimized border policies

Better immigration services lead to major increase in exchanges with other countries

By YANG ZEKUN yangzekun@chinadaily.com.cn

China's border authorities handled over 424 million entries and exits by individuals in 2023, a significant increase of 266.5 percent year-on-year, the National Immigration Administration announced on Tuesday. Of the 424 million entries and exits, 206 million crossings were made by mainland residents, an increase of 218.7 percent year-on-year, and 183 million were made by residents of Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, up 292.8 percent from 2022. In addition, nearly 35.48 million crossings were made by foreign nationals, a year-on-year increase of 693.1 percent.

In 2023, comprehensive measures were taken to fully restore the process of accepting and approving entry and exit documents of Chinese citizens, which had been affected during the pandemic. Also restored were the processes of granting port passenger clearance, regional visa exemption and port visas or visa on arrival for foreigners, and the nationwide service of granting entry permits to mainland residents for travel to Hong Kong and Macao, she said. Together with other departments, the NIA made multiple adjustments to the entry policies for foreigners, optimizing regional visa exemptions, transit visa exemptions and port visa policies. Visa fees were reduced, and Norway was added to the list of transit visa exemption countries, she said.

The total volume of crossings in 2023 accounted for about 63.3 percent of that in 2019, before the COVID-19 outbreak. Zhang Ning, a spokeswoman for the immigration administration, said that China has continued to optimize immigration policies and improve immigration services, facilitating exchanges between people from China and other countries.

Furthermore, a new version of the foreign permanent resident ID card was introduced in December 2023, with more convenient social applications, effectively promoting normal individual exchanges and stable industrial and supply chains between China and foreign countries.

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## WORLD WATCH

By Dennis Munene

# 'Small yet smart' to be highlight of the BRI's next decade

Launched in 2013 to revive the ancient Silk Road and Maritime Silk Road, the Belt and Road Initiative has empowered civilizations across the world for the past 10 years.

While taking stock of the BRI's achievements, President Xi Jinping, during the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in October in Beijing, elaborated on the philosophy that is driving the cooperation.

Anchored on the three pillars of "planning together, building together and benefiting together," the BRI is lauded as the most ambitious and influential infrastructure project that the world has ever seen. It has created more than 3,000 projects and 420,000 jobs while advancing an investment of about \$1 trillion.

The first decade of the BRI has indeed delivered fruitful results to the more than 150 participating countries and over 30 international organizations involved. These countries have experienced world-class development and modernization from the construction of roads, railways, airports, ports, pipelines and energy infrastructure, among other projects that have significantly transformed their economies.

According to the United Kingdom-based Centre for Economics and Business Research, the BRI is likely to increase the world's GDP by \$7.1 trillion per year by 2040. Furthermore, the World Bank indicated in a 2019 report that, when fully implemented, the BRI will contribute to lifting 7.6 million people out of extreme poverty and 32 million people out of moderate poverty, mostly in corridor economies.

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# Oral accounts of 2012 terror attack unveiled

By LI LEI in Guangzhou lilei@chinadaily.com.cn

Chinese researchers published on Thursday oral accounts by survivors of a terrorist attack that occurred in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region 12 years ago, turning the spotlight on a group of people who they say have long been understudied by scholars and have remained hidden from the public eye.

The report, titled "Victims and Survivors of Terrorism in China: An Oral History", was released at a seminar held at Jinan University in Guangzhou, Guangdong province. It reveals the harrowing experiences of those who lived through the atrocities that took place on a pedestrian street in southern Xinjiang's Yecheng county on Feb 28, 2012.

Nine terrorists, who failed to execute their original plan that involved attacking students of nearby elementary and middle schools, went on a killing spree on Xingfu Road that evening, leaving 13 people dead and 16 injured on the spot, most of them passers-by or shopkeepers. Two victims later died in a hospital.

Local authorities quickly swung into action. Seven terrorists were shot dead, one was fatally wounded and one was arrested.

Zheng Liang, lead author of the report and director of the university's Institute for Communication and Borderland Governance, said the document was the first of its kind in China and was aimed at shedding light on terror attack survivors who have so far received little or no attention from academia and the media.

Studies on terrorist attacks in China have mostly focused on the perpetrators in the past, he said, adding that it was high time that survivors who grapple with life-

long trauma receive the attention they deserve.

"They are also heroes, unsung heroes," Zheng said. "They refused to be beaten down. They tried to stand up again. They tried to carry on with their lives."

Tursun Talip, who lost his son Turghunjan, an auxiliary police officer, in the attack, was among the six people — survivors of the attack or relatives of the victims — interviewed for the report.

The 68-year-old, then an employee of the local education bureau, was working at a school that was among the original targets. He received a phone call warning him of the impending attack. He was told to inform the security staff and close the school gate.

"I learned something had happened at the market's entrance (on Xingfu Road)," Tursun Talip said during his interview with the researchers in July 2022. "My heart skipped a beat as I realized that my son was on duty there."

He hopped onto a motorbike and raced to the scene of the attack, but by the time he reached there, his worst nightmare had come true. Police escorted him to a hospital. After waiting anxiously for hours, he was informed that his son was dead, and he needed to identify the body. "I saw the wounds on my son's neck, and here (shoulder and neck), and there (right arm)."

The report published on Thursday was part of a project formally launched by the researchers in 2021 to catalog stories told by survivors of terrorist attacks in China.

"Starting in 2020, I have used my personal connections to find these people," Zheng said. "We locate one person, and through that particular person we eventually meet more. In academic parlance, it is called snowball sampling."

He said the team interviewed more than 60 survivors over the

past three years, and amassed more than 1 million Chinese characters of transcripts and 90 hours of audio and video clips.

The researchers also cross-referenced their stories to ensure the accuracy of the accounts, given that the events happened more than a decade ago and many survivors had tried to leave their traumatic experiences behind.

Zheng said the task of compiling the report had not only been physically challenging — the interviewees were scattered across Xinjiang, which accounts for about one-fifth of China's territory — but also psychologically difficult.

"They walked us through their traumatic experiences, and we actually felt their pain and agony, and their unwillingness to accept the fact that they've lost their loved ones," he said.

The report will help the world better understand what happened to the survivors of the Xinjiang terrorist attack more than a decade ago, and it will also help them understand China's counterterrorism efforts, according to Zheng.

The Chinese approach to counterterrorism is tackling the root cause, he said, adding that the approach is multifaceted, ranging from anti-poverty efforts to projects aimed at creating local jobs and promoting schooling for children.

Speaking at the seminar virtually, Ma Dazheng, a borderland governance researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said that history must not be forgotten as these stories can help people stay vigilant.

He said the accounts of atrocities will deal a heavy blow to those external forces seeking to smear Chinese counterterrorism efforts. "The evil nature of such attacks must be fully explained to the public," he said.

In its foreword, the report said that Zheng's project will continue to seek out eyewitnesses and survivors of terrorist attacks nationwide, focusing on their experiences and stories. It also welcomed more witnesses to share their stories by contacting o\_ichg@jnu.edu.cn.

## Putting safety first



A Lufthansa aircraft is de-iced at Frankfurt Airport in Germany on Wednesday. Heavy snowfall and freezing rain across Germany on Wednesday led to the cancellation of hundreds of flights and trains, as well as crashes on icy roads and school closures. BORIS ROESSLER / VIA AP See story, page 6

# PROVINCES WAGE CUTTHROAT COMPETITION TO WOO VISITORS

Pop stars among celebrities recruited to promote local attractions

By ZOU SHUO zoushuo@chinadaily.com.cn

Numerous short-video clips posted by local authorities on social media platforms are attracting widespread attention from netizens across China.

The footage is aimed at turning online engagement into tourism revenue.

Hashtags such as "local culture and tourism bureaus going crazy, trying to outperform each other, and open to online suggestions to promote themselves" are trending on several platforms.

The cutthroat competition began as authorities attempted to copy the success story of Harbin,



the capital of the northeastern province of Heilongjiang, which has become an internet sensation and a must-visit destination this winter.

The unprecedented influx of tourists, captivated by the stunning icy landscape in Harbin and the warm hospitality of local people, has resulted in the city becoming the most talked-about and sought-after travel destination in China this winter.

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INSIDE Australia, China need practical agenda to boost relations Global Views, page 13

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## PAGE TWO

# Tourism: Footage trends on social media

From page 1

In the first four days of this year, 55 topics about tourism in Harbin trended on Sina Weibo, generating more than 1 billion views. Douyin, the name TikTok uses in China, and Xiaohongshu have also witnessed numerous trending hashtags related to how Harbin has "spoiled" travelers, along with the hospitality shown to them by local people and the authorities.

During the three-day New Year holiday, Harbin attracted more than 3 million visitors, generating a record-breaking 5.9 billion yuan (\$830 million) in tourism revenue, with both figures setting records.

Harbin's success has spurred other areas to compete for online attention on the Douyin platform.

The battle began with the Department of Culture and Tourism in Henan province posting 23 videos on Douyin on Jan 9. Over a four-day period, the department posted 112 videos to promote the province's tourist attractions.

The footage attracted nearly 1 million new followers, with the hashtag "How many videos have the Henan culture and tourism authorities posted on Douyin?" trending on the platform. Netizens joked that the authorities in Henan were attempting to attract visitors with the sheer number of videos they posted.

Meanwhile, footage of bare-chested male models at the Yuntai Mountain scenic spot in Henan has been posted on a local tourism account run by people born after 2000. The videos have become popular with netizens who joke about visiting the province to see "the hot guys."

With the authorities in Henan showing their muscle, other areas do not want to be left behind.

In Shanxi province, the culture and tourism authorities posted 57 videos on Douyin between 8 pm on Jan 11 and 6:35 am the following day. At the peak, they posted two videos in one minute and 12 in an hour.

In Hebei province, the authorities have termed themselves "King of the competition", and vowed to fight to the end to attract visitors.

On Jan 12, they changed their name on Douyin from "Hebei tourism" to "Hebei culture and tourism", as "culture and tourism" has become a popular catchphrase on the platform. They also declared a "war" with other provinces to attract visitors, and vowed to win.

Next day, they posted 75 videos, all with the hashtag "Hebei is king of the competition".

The authorities were even told by Douyin to "take a rest", as they had posted too many videos, to which they responded that 75 a day is the platform's limit, not Hebei's.

The authorities in Shandong province have joined the competition in a way that has proved a little embarrassing for some locals.

On Jan 11, the Culture and Tourism Department in Shandong posted a video on Douyin claiming the province's last name is Dong rather than Shan (the last name for Chinese is reversed from that of Westerners). They also tried to cash in on the fame of Harbin, which is located in Dongbei, or Northeast China.

However, some local netizens said they were embarrassed for people in other areas to see the video, as they believe the authorities in Shandong are trying too hard to attract visitors.

However, the efforts made have paid off. On Douyin, the number of followers of Henan's culture and tourism authorities rose from 156,000 to more than 1.5 million in a week.

In Hebei, followers of the provincial authorities almost doubled

Tourists enjoy a trip to Volga Manor in Harbin, capital of Heilongjiang province, on Jan 7. The ice and snow at the venue attracts visitors from across China. ZHANG TAO / XINHUA



Such cities become famous because travelers want to go to places where there are large numbers of people, as they are longing for social contact after ... the COVID-19 outbreak."

**Deng Ning**, vice-dean of Beijing International Studies University's School of Tourism Sciences

to 910,000 in a week, while in Shandong, the authorities attracted 200,000 new followers during this period.

Deng Ning, vice-dean of Beijing International Studies University's School of Tourism Sciences, said that with people's attention being diverted to short-video platforms, promoting tourism resources on such outlets has become an "inevitable trend" for culture and tourism authorities.

Figures from the China Internet Network Information Center show that as of June, the nation had nearly 1.08 billion internet users and 1.02 billion short-video users.

Deng said short-video platforms can transform unlikely places into popular travel destinations due to the large number of followers and online feedback they generate.

Some of the best-known travel destinations last year gained popularity on such platforms.

For example, Zibo, Shandong, became known for its barbecue food early last year. Tianjin then followed, with footage of retirees diving from local bridges, before Harbin drew attention with its spectacular ice and snow landscape, Deng said.

"Such cities become famous because travelers want to go to places where there are large numbers of people, as they are longing for social contact after three years of social distancing due to the COVID-19 outbreak," he said. "They need to do some traveling to 'find a cure', preferably at relatively cheap destinations."

He added that local authorities

post so many short videos because this is the quickest and easiest way to replicate the success of other "online celebrity cities", but it is impossible to predict which locality will become the next "hit city". Also, if there is too much similar content, netizens easily become bored, he said.

#### Celebrity endorsement

With more provinces joining the competition, celebrities are being invited to advertise local attractions.

Pop star Wang Yibo posted a video to promote his hometown of Luoyang, Henan. Actress Zhao Liying recorded footage for her hometown in Hebei, while a promotional video recorded by actor Xiao Zhan for his hometown of Chongqing trended on Douyin, attracting some 120 million views.

The authorities in Hunan province, using the pulling power of the popular Hunan Satellite TV, have called on the services of pop stars and other celebrities, some of whom are not from the province but have strong connections with the television station. Composer Tan Dun, singers Liu Huan, Li Yuchun and Zhou Bichang, and TV hosts He Jiong and Wang Han are among those promoting the province's tourist attractions.

Footage of celebrities such as Wang Yibo saying, "I'm waiting for you in Luoyang" struck a chord with Wu Jiahui, an undergraduate student in Beijing, who comes from Luoyang.

"I feel proud to see Wang using his influence and popularity to promote my hometown. I am also happy to see Luoyang getting the attention it deserves online," she said.

However, Zhang Dan, a postgraduate student in Changsha, capital of Hunan, who is also an avid fan of Wang, said the star's efforts have not persuaded her to visit Luoyang.

#### Official participation

In addition to pop stars, local tourism officials have joined the battle to attract visitors. On Saturday, Wang Dianyou, head of Harbin's Acheng district culture and tourism bureau, performed a hit dance at Harbin Ice and Snow World.

In Zhangjiajie, Hunan, Peng Zhenhua, head of the Wulingyuan district culture, tourism, radio and television bureau, danced with sev-

eral young men wearing local costumes.

Both videos attracted a considerable number of online views. While some netizens were not so appreciative of the two officials' awkward dance moves, they valued the efforts made by officials to win them over.

Netizens are also joining the competition to attract visitors.

In Sichuan province, known for its giant panda bases, people jokingly claimed that the head of the local culture and tourism bureau has the extraordinary ability to give birth to pandas.

Meanwhile, netizens in Hunan, which is known for its spicy dishes, boasted that the local culture and tourism head can eat 50 kilograms of red peppers, while those in Jiangxi province claimed the culture and tourism head can swim several laps of Poyang Lake, the largest freshwater lake in China.

Wei Changren, founder of btii.com, a tourism-related financial news portal, said the videos and online banter show that local authorities and people have made great efforts to revive the tourism sector.

"As long as the videos are not vulgar and do not violate laws and regulations, we should applaud these efforts for being creative and using thinking outside the box, which are not always local governments' strengths," he said.

If a city is to become a hot tourism destination for the long term, it needs to give full play to its unique strengths and characteristics, and stand out from its competitors in order to attract visitors repeatedly, Wei added.

He added that winter is not the best season for traveling in many areas of China, so not all places are able to emulate Harbin's success.

However, if netizens remember certain content from the videos and want to visit the city in the future, then such footage has achieved its goal, Wei said.

Apart from online promotion, which has become increasingly essential in the age of social media, it is equally important for local authorities to improve their tourism services and infrastructure, and make their cities hospitable for travelers, he added.

## Standout online promotional tourism videos attracting young students in numbers

By ZOU SHUO

Promotional videos posted by local culture and tourism authorities on the Douyin short-video platform are attracting young students, who view such footage as being unconventional and trendy.

The students said they often watch the videos on the platform, as they provide them with useful information for their travel plans.

Xu Bo, a postgraduate student at Lomonosov Moscow State University, said she has watched the videos in the Russian capital, and finds them "novel and entertaining".

She added that they give her a new understanding of many regions she is not familiar with. Videos from her hometown of Harbin, Heilongjiang province, have also renewed her love for the city, she said.

Xu said that to attract tourists, the authorities in Harbin have tried everything from rolling out carpets on Central Street to installing an artificial moon over Saint Sophia Cathedral.

Some popular videos only feature handsome, shirtless men or beautiful women, but as they are not unique to a particular area, they might soon become outdated, she said.

Feng Weiyi, a postgraduate student in Changsha, Hunan province, believes such promotional videos deserve praise, as they feature content that appeals to young people and also target a huge number of followers on short-video platforms to achieve results.

Instead of spending a fortune on advertising, these videos are much more cost-effective, she said, adding, "After watching the footage about Harbin, I would love to visit the city someday."

Feng said some of the videos might be a little "tacky", but as long as they feature distinctive local attractions and tell the sto-

ries of tourist sites, they can attract large audiences.

Li Ke, a postgraduate student from Hunan University, said she has been entertained by the videos. She also often checks the witty remarks made by netizens about such footage.

As long as the videos promote local tourist sites and specialties, they can be entertaining and funny, she said.

"I believe local authorities should give young people more say in creating and editing the videos, as the younger generation knows what the online trends are and how best to attract netizens," Li added.

Ao Simin, a postgraduate student from Central South University in Changsha, said she likes the videos posted by the Jiaozhou culture and tourism authorities in Shandong province the most, because they are not only entertaining but also informative.

She said she has learned about local food culture, customs and traditions from the videos, adding that after seeing the footage, she really wants to visit Jiaozhou.

Ao believes promotional videos should give a true picture of local situations. Otherwise, if people visit a particular destination and it fails to match the videos, they will leave with a bad impression of the place.

Cao Danning, a first-year undergraduate student in Hefei, Anhui province, said she liked the videos posted by the Henan Culture and Tourism Department the most because they featured content about traditional Chinese culture, enabling her to appreciate the province's rich past.

People travel not only to see a local landscape, but also to appreciate a destination's culture, she added.

Tang Xiaoping and Fu Bingqian contributed to this story.



Left: Travel blogger Jin Yu (center), wearing traditional Man ethnic clothes, hands out free specialties to tourists on Jan 12 in Shenyang, Liaoning province. CHEN HONGBO / FOR CHINA DAILY. Center: Members of the Hezhe ethnic group wearing traditional costumes, and local tourism promotion officials, interact with tourists in Harbin, on Jan 6. WANG JIANWEI / XINHUA. Right: Residents prepare for a hot pot banquet in Yunnan province. ZHA YUBO / XINHUA

## TOP NEWS

## Beijing, Manila hold candid, in-depth talks

Nations agree to advance practical cooperation and efficiently manage maritime emergencies

By ZHANG YUNBI

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A maritime affairs meeting attended by a large number of senior Chinese and Philippine officials has agreed to efficiently manage emergencies at sea, a move that analysts said will help prevent bilateral differences regarding the South China Sea from spiraling out of control.

However, Manila's top priorities should be to avoid further provocation on matters of China's core interests, such as the Taiwan question, and to "walk the walk" regarding its verbal commitments, the analysts added.

Assistant Foreign Minister Nong Rong co-chaired the eighth meeting of the China-Philippine consultation mechanism on the South China Sea with Philippine Foreign Undersecretary Theresa Lazaro in Shanghai on Wednesday.

A wide range of government departments sent representatives to the meeting, including those in charge of foreign affairs, defense, natural resources, ecology, transportation, agriculture and coast guards.

The ties were strained last year by Philippine provocations around Ren'ai Reef of China's Nansha Islands, and have been further aggravated by Manila's recent response to topics concerning Taiwan.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, the Foreign Ministry said the two sides had "a candid and in-depth exchange of views" on the situation in the South China Sea and maritime issues.

The two countries agreed to continue to advance practical maritime cooperation and create enabling conditions for the sound and stable development of bilateral relations, according to the statement. In particular, the two sides agreed that they would "efficiently manage maritime emergencies, especially the situation on Ren'ai Reef".

Chen Xiangmiao, associate research fellow of the National Institute for South China Sea Studies, said, "China and the Philippines should further clarify priorities in their relations, and step up coordination and contacts in order to

boost their economic and social development and public well-being." "Some Philippine politicians are expected to stop taking advantage of the maritime disputes and fanning up nationalistic sentiments for their selfish political gains back in their country," he added.

Manila should also be more self-reliant in policymaking and work to rule out disturbances caused by countries outside the region, such as the United States, he added.

During the talks on Wednesday, the two nations agreed to further improve the communication mechanism on the South China Sea and continue to properly manage differences related to the sea through friendly consultation.

Officials from both sides reiterated that the maritime dispute does not constitute the entirety of bilateral relations, and they endorsed maintaining communication and dialogue.

"We have a thousand reasons to live in harmony and create a better future, but no single reason to let specific differences define our overall relationship and hinder our win-win cooperation and progress," said Huang Xilian, Chinese ambassador to the Philippines, in a signed article published in Philippine media.

At the meeting, China also made serious protests to the Philippines on Taiwan-related affairs, asking Manila to effectively abide by the one-China principle. The Philippine side reiterated that it adheres to the one-China policy and will continue to implement it.

Regarding Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr's remarks on Monday on Taiwan election results, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said on Tuesday that the remarks "seriously go against the Philippines' political commitments to China".

Mao made a further response on Thursday, saying: "The one-China principle is a red line as well as the bottom line. China will never accept anyone making provocations on the Taiwan question and will resolutely fight back".

Beijing urges Manila to stop its wrongful words and actions in affairs related to Taiwan, she added.



## Deadly explosion

Rescue workers retrieve remains of victims on Thursday from the site of a firework factory explosion in Suphan Buri Province, central Thailand. The blast on Wednesday killed 23 people, according to provincial officials.

SAKCHAI LALIT / AP

## Expert: China poised to witness solid economic growth in 2024

By ZHOU LANXU

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China's economy is on track for solid growth in the first quarter after registering a full-year growth of 5.2 percent in 2023, with economic momentum set to further strengthen in the second half of the year, a senior economist said.

"Favorable conditions have set the stage for the Chinese economy to start the year on a firm footing," said Wang Yiming, vice-chairman of the China Center for International Economic Exchanges and former deputy director of the Development Research Center of the State Council.

The special treasury bonds worth 1 trillion yuan (\$139 billion), approved in October, will drive project investments and create physical work volume in the first quarter, Wang said in an exclusive interview with China Daily.

Consumption is also expected to spur economic growth in the first quarter, thanks to the repricing of outstanding mortgages for first-time homebuyers that has boosted household income and the seasonal surge in consumer spending around Spring Festival, he said.

Wang said these positive factors will help offset the impact of an unfavorable comparison base on first-quarter GDP growth, as economic activity had sharply rebounded from COVID-19 in the first quarter of 2023.

Economic growth is expected to further accelerate in the second half of the year, he said, adding that consumption may contribute about 70 percent of GDP growth this year, down from 82.5 percent in 2023, as investment activity and net exports pick up and make more contributions.

Wang made the remarks after the National Bureau of Statistics said on Wednesday that China's GDP reached 126.06 trillion yuan in 2023, expanding by 5.2 percent year-on-year in real terms, up from 3 percent in 2022.

He attributed the 5.2 percent growth to policy support, recovering consumption, brightening expectations and a low comparison base. Though China's economy faces a less favorable comparison base this year, he said that multiple economic drivers are gathering momentum, laying the foundation for China to maintain GDP growth of about 5 percent this year.

"Support from macroeconomic policies is set to intensify," Wang said. "New policy measures will be introduced and these will work together with existing ones, effectively fueling a robust recovery and upward trend in economic performance."

On Wednesday, Kang Yi, head of the NBS, said the country has ample room for boosting macroeconomic policy support, given that the levels of government debt and inflation are relatively low, after the tone-setting Central

Economic Work Conference in December called for more efforts to strengthen macroeconomic policy adjustments.

Wang said that improving social expectations will catalyze a further recovery in demand for consumption and investment. "With the economy on an upward trajectory, sentiment among microeconomic entities is likely to pick up gradually."

The United States and Europe are likely to start an interest rate-cutting cycle and ease the pressures on China's cross-border capital flows and the renminbi, helping stabilize China's capital market performance and social expectations, he said.

New growth drivers of technological innovation as well as green and low-carbon transition will also bolster economic growth this year, with the application of new technologies to boost sectors such as intelligent vehicles, new energy, new materials, high-end equipment and biomedicine, he said.

However, given that the size of green industries and high-tech sectors remains limited and cannot fully make up for the contraction in demand caused by the property sector weakness, China's economy still faces a prominent problem of insufficient effective demand, he added.

While high-tech sectors saw buoyant investment growth of 10.3 percent year-on-year in 2023, the country's total fixed-asset invest-

ment expanded by 3 percent, dragged by the 9.6 percent slump in real estate development investment, NBS data showed.

"The property sector has a significant bearing on household wealth, consumer behavior and social expectations. After three years of deep adjustments, the real estate market is in the process of bottoming out," Wang said.

It is important to boost new growth drivers while further stabilizing the property sector. Measures should be taken to equally meet the reasonable financing needs of real estate enterprises of different ownership types and to encourage basic housing demand and demand for better homes, Wang said.

He said it is advisable for local government special bonds to provide more funding support for the development of affordable housing projects, a process that can be coordinated with consumption of housing inventory.

He also suggested vitalizing consumer spending by boosting the supply of mid-to-high-end services such as education, healthcare, tourism and leisure, while easing any restrictions on consumption of these services.

The recent rise in the popularity of Harbin, the capital of Heilongjiang province, as a tourist destination, along with last spring's craze for barbecue in Zibo, Shandong province, underscores the trend that new drivers of consumption are continually emerging, particularly in the services sector, Wang said.

"As the economy sustains its rebound this year, the potential for consumption, especially in the services sector, is expected to be further unlocked," he said, adding that consumption of services now accounts for over half of residents' consumption spending in big Chinese cities.

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in an exclusive interview with China Daily.

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## Immigration: Increase in foreign visitors expected

From page 1

Throughout the year, 18.43 million ordinary passports were issued, an increase of 1,625.4 percent year-on-year, along with 86.09 million documents and endorsements for travel to Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, up 1,318 percent year-on-year, according to the NIA.

Additionally, nearly 1.71 million visa documents were issued, up

158.3 percent year-on-year. The authorities also issued various residence permits to a total of 711,000 foreign nationals residing in China, marking a recovery to 85 percent of the level at the end of 2019.

"Considering the continued expansion of the country's openness to the outside world, and the implementation of a series of convenient measures to facilitate the movement of people between China and other

countries, a steady increase in the number of foreign individuals coming to China is expected," she said.

In January, the NIA announced several new measures to facilitate the entry of foreign individuals into China, including relaxing the conditions for applying for a visa on arrival, allowing 24-hour direct transit without inspection procedures at key hub airports like Beijing Capital International Airport, enabling for-

eigners in China to handle visa extensions, renewals and replacements locally, and simplifying the application material requirement for visa documents.

These measures further broaden the channels for foreigners to come to China, providing efficient and convenient immigration management services for those working, studying or living in China, said Zhang.

## Initiative: Programs will help countries achieve national aspirations

From page 1

In setting the agenda for the BRI's second golden decade, President Xi noted at the BRI forum in Beijing the eight major areas of focus for continuing to promote a community with a shared future for mankind and jointly pursuing high-quality Belt and Road cooperation.

One key area will be carrying out practical cooperation through the undertaking of signature projects as well as "small yet smart" livelihood programs. To actualize this agenda, Xi pledged to set up a 700 billion yuan (\$98 billion) financing window through the China Develop-

ment Bank and the Export-Import Bank of China to finance people-centered projects.

Touching the hearts and minds of people in BRI participant countries, China plans to carry out 1,000 small-scale livelihood assistance projects. China will also enhance vocational education cooperation through initiatives such as the transformative Luban Workshops, which promote professional and technical skills of young people in Africa and other parts of the world to meet the requirements of the emerging global market.

According to China's Ministry of Education, about 27 Luban Workshops have been established in

These "small yet smart" projects do not burden any country or increase their fiscal debt. ... This is a clear show of confidence that the Belt and Road Initiative will emancipate civilizations from absolute poverty and under-development.

countries participating in the BRI.

According to Yang Yan, deputy director of the Tianjin Luban Workshop Research and Promotion Center, more than 50 course majors have been offered under Chinese-foreign cooperation within the framework of the program, providing degrees to 9,000 students and training 18,000 people for local communities.

These programs are implemented in vocational middle and high schools, as well as in application-oriented bachelor's and master's degree programs. They have nurtured a workforce that is highly skilled, professional and innovative. In Africa, nearly 50 percent of the

population is under the age of 18, according to the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies. This demography fits within the target population of Luban Workshops. Thus, the workshops provide a platform to advance people's aspirations for a better life.

China has also implemented other small yet smart programs in areas that enhance food and water security. According to the China International Development Cooperation Agency, since 2012, China has built 1,000 wells in Zimbabwe, greatly alleviating the country's water shortage in approximately six provinces and benefiting more than

400,000 local people. In Rwanda, China Geo-Engineering Corp has successfully drilled about 150 wells in different parts of the country.

These "small yet smart" projects do not burden any country or increase their fiscal debt. On the contrary, they will help developing countries achieve their national aspirations as well as the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This is a clear show of confidence that the Belt and Road Initiative will emancipate civilizations from absolute poverty and under-development.

The author is executive director of the China-Africa Center at the Kenya-based Africa Policy Institute. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## CHINA



**Left:** An electric bus made in China provides convenient transportation for people at the 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) in Dubai on Dec 3. **Middle:** Xie Zhenhua (center), then China's special envoy for climate change, and other participants celebrate the closing of COP28 in Dubai on Dec 13. **Right:** Conference participants get a taste of Chinese tea on Dec 6. PHOTOS BY WANG DONGZHEN / XINHUA

Xie Zhenhua was like a COP28 superstar, often finding himself surrounded by a crowd at the United Nations climate change conference in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

People greeted the veteran Chinese climate diplomat everywhere he went, and he would respond with a smile, nodding his head.

The 74-year-old was busy. Aside from participating in the COP28 agenda's many multilateral conferences, he also addressed many sessions at the China pavilion and elsewhere.

Xie also made full use of the gaps between those events to engage in bilateral meetings. He tried to move quickly from one event to another, despite having had slightly limited mobility for many years.

At a news conference in Dubai, Xie described COP28 as the "most difficult COP" he had participated in since he began to steer China's climate diplomacy in 2007.

Every single minute of Xie's time at each COP had been scheduled, people close to him said when explaining why he was so popular at home and abroad.

The gray-haired veteran might now be able to enjoy a well-earned rest, with the Ministry of Ecology and Environment announcing on Jan 12 that Xie had stepped down from his position as China's special envoy for climate change for health reasons.

Liu Zhenmin, a former vice-minister of foreign affairs, has been appointed as his successor.

Jia Feng, former head of the Center for Environmental Education and Communications affiliated with the Ministry of Ecology and Environment, said of Xie that it would be difficult to find another person who had led negotiations on one topic for so many years in Chinese diplomatic history, and especially in environmental diplomacy.

"It seems that everybody knows him once he enters a conference room, no matter where it is," Jia said.

After graduating from Peking University in 1988, Jia joined the national environmental watchdog's department for institutional reform and human resources, which was headed by Xie, and worked directly under him for over two years.

Xie then served as head of the country's national environmental authority from 1993 to 2005 before moving to the National Development and Reform Commission as deputy director in 2006.

Jia said Xie's good reputation as a climate diplomat was a result of his character, and also the consistency of the country's climate policy.

He described Xie as a trustworthy person who was adept at listening, had a fine sense of humor and

## Superstar climate diplomat leaves center stage

COP28 the closing act for Xie Zhenhua in a role he had played since 2007. **Hou Liqiang** reports.



Xie Zhenhua (right), then China's special envoy for climate change, speaks during a news conference with John Kerry, US special presidential envoy for climate, at COP28 in Dubai on Dec 13. RAFIG MAQBOL / AP

always adhered firmly to principles.

Listening is key in international negotiations, Jia said, because the parties involved cannot reach a consensus without learning about the stances of other delegations. Other parties should be given both opportunities and time to express themselves, he said.

"He is not a person who likes expressing himself," Jia said. "Usually, he squints at you with a smile. He listens quietly. At times, he utters a few words that make people feel at ease."

He said Xie was not the kind of speaker who could spark an enormous belly laugh among listeners, but instead exhibited a more deadpan sense of humor, giving the climate diplomat's response to a reporter from The Associated Press at COP26 in the United Kingdom in 2021 as an example.

"Would it be possible to answer in English?" the reporter asked, as Xie blinked his eyes.

Xie shook his head five times, before his face bloomed into a big smile. He then stretched out his left hand in a leisurely manner and replied in Chinese: "How about you raise questions in Chinese?"

Many reporters burst into laughter after that exchange.

"Xie keeps his promises and treats others sincerely," Jia said, adding that senior climate diplomats from many other countries could not be as trustworthy because their governments were not as consistent as the Chinese government when it came to climate policies.

He said Xie had never wavered on issues concerning China's interests and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities,

which is enshrined in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

"He is a symbol that represents not only the credibility of China, the country's image of always honoring its commitment with concrete actions, but also representing the voices of developing nations," Jia said.

Li Shuo, director of the China Climate Hub at the Asia Society Policy Institute, has been a regular participant at UN climate change conferences since 2011, and has talked with Xie in many meetings between his organization and the Chinese delegation.

Li, who worked with Green Peace before COP28, described Xie as a truthful man who had proved that different languages are no barrier to communication. Many countries had seen a new generation of senior climate diplomats assume their posts

when the Paris Agreement was reached in 2015, and later during the COVID-19 pandemic, Li said, while Xie had been one of the very few veterans still engaged in global climate negotiations till COP28.

Li said he had been quite impressed by Xie's people-oriented communication style.

"When sitting in front of him, you can always feel he is a truthful person," he said. "This is something very important, as it can close the gaps between people."

The veteran climate diplomat always presented himself first as an individual and then as a representative of an agency and the State, which helped him do his work well, Li said.

And Xie always faced up to problems, he added. Instead of depicting China as a "straight-A student" in tackling climate change, he also detailed the inadequacies in the

country's work and why they had occurred.

"When you talk in this way, people think you are a truthful person and you are representing a truthful country. Why? Because everyone has challenges," Li said.

Xie communicated with the help of interpreters, he said, "but his experience showed that has posed no problems".

Overcoming the language barrier, Xie had developed very good personal relationships with many people.

Todd Stern served as the special envoy for climate change at the United States Department of State from 2009 to 2016.

In a video interview for the Obama Presidency Oral History project recorded in early 2021, Stern said: "Xie and I had become rivals to be sure, but better and better friends."

"I'd had him over to our house for dinner with my wife and kids. He took me to his hometown in China."

During a bilateral session in his hometown Chicago, Stern took Xie to a Chicago Cubs baseball game and also a meeting with Rahm Emanuel, then mayor of the city.

"We were really quite friendly, and we joked a lot and all of that," he said.

Guardian journalist Fiona Harvey, who attended many of Xie's news conferences at UN climate summits, described him as "a colossus in climate negotiations".

He was hugely respected and always worth listening to, she said.

"It was always useful to attend his press conferences, and I interviewed him many times, from which I always came away more enlightened," Harvey said.

At his COP28 news conference, Xie expressed his gratitude to Harvey and another foreign journalist for attending "every one of my news conferences".

But he especially singled out his long-standing friendship with US counterpart John Kerry.

"Kerry and I have known each other for over 20 years. We are good friends. Why? Because we share a common idea," Xie said. "That is being committed to protecting the environment and addressing climate change."

"We think this is a great cause because it benefits future generations and also can make our planet more beautiful."

Kerry also recently announced that he will step down from his role.

But Xie emphasized that he and Kerry will not leave the climate community.

"Both of us will continue to make a contribution, and make efforts to bring this process forward," he said.

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## Negotiating a big breakfast can help at talks

By **HOU LIQIANG**

Getting up early for a large breakfast was often part of the daily routine for Wang Tian, a Chinese negotiator at the COP28 United Nations Climate Change Conference.

A substantial breakfast was a key preparation for the long days at COP28 that could see her have to skip lunch and dinner as fierce and sometimes tedious negotiations took place on the content and wording of statements on transparency issues.

Negotiations at the conference, which was held in Dubai from Nov 30 to Dec 13, would often go long into the night, and with agreements requiring the signatures of all parties, a consensus was difficult to achieve.

Negotiations on a transparency framework at COP28 were aimed at tracking how each country is progressing toward its climate

commitments. The key task at COP28 was how to help developing countries fulfill their implementation of the enhanced transparency framework under the Paris Agreement, with a biennial transparency report to be submitted by the end of this year.

Having participated in climate negotiations since 2014, Wang is used to being engaged in tense discussions.

"Quite often, discussions over just a few words of draft text can last for an hour," she said.

Sometimes, negotiators were only able to reach consensus on several sentences after a sleepless night, she added.

Wang compared climate negotiations to playing Go, a strategy board game in which a player tries to surround their opponent's territory. Some negotiators might insist on something only because they wanted to make gains on other issues, she said.

"On many occasions, nobody knows what will happen until the last moment," Wang said. "It's possible that negotiations are at a stalemate 99 percent of the time, but consensus is reached all of a sudden in the last 1 percent of time."

The stickiest time for negotiations is usually in the last few days before the final decisions on the text are reached. "Then, it's normal that negotiations continue non-stop during the night," she said.

Many negotiators fall asleep at the venue while waiting for the text to come out. "You can sleep, but you may have to get up at any time to read the latest version of the draft text," Wang said.

In such situations, having dinner is something of a luxury. "Quite often, we eat a lot at the hotel in the morning and then go without food for the rest of the day," she said.

At UN climate change conferences, it is quite common for Chinese negotiators to bring a small pot

along with them so that they can cook noodles when they go back to their hotels late at night. "At least it's better than instant noodles," Wang said.

She said climate negotiators also have to take part in many discussions before each COP while performing their duties in their posts in various government bodies and institutions.

In years when parties had key issues to negotiate over the modalities, procedures and guidelines of the transparency framework, which needed to be adopted by the end of 2018, she took part in overseas meetings once a month and participated in at least one virtual conference a week.

She has been confronted with even more challenges since she started to work as a co-facilitator in the negotiations in 2022, but is determined to continue to forge ahead with climate negotiation.

"You have to consistently look for



Wang Tian (fourth from left), a Chinese climate negotiator, speaks during one of the discussions held during the COP28 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Dubai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

common ground among different parties, and you often need to reach out to different negotiators through 'corridor talk' to understand their true concerns," she said.

Negotiators from different parties have quite diverse cultural backgrounds and different communication styles, she said. While some

delegates talk in a bold and unrestrained manner, some express themselves very conservatively.

But they always recognize those who can really facilitate something. "Sometimes the recognition is not for me as an individual, but because they think China has played a major role in the process," Wang said.

## CHINA

# University offers love, happiness courses

Classes put students on path to spark positive changes within themselves

By XU ZHESHENG

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In recent years, Tianjin University has introduced "love and happiness" as a discipline on campus, offering courses on the subjects and incorporating them into the general elective curriculum.

The courses have become some of the most sought-after classes on campus, gaining popularity among students who long to find love and experience happiness amid their academic pursuits.

A doctoral student who boasts outstanding research achievements expressed his feelings to China Youth Daily, stating that love is much more challenging than research.

"Research can be achieved through effort, but not love," said the student, who declined to give his name.

After attending the courses, students are not expected to immediately find a partner, nor will they necessarily experience an overwhelming sense of happiness. However, they may discover subtle positive changes within themselves, some say.

Undergraduate student Zhong Hongkun said that he used to think pursuing happiness was like chasing an elusive shooting star. However, he now realizes that happiness comes from within.

This realization has given him the courage to face difficulties and setbacks on his life journey.

Wang Xiaoling, who teaches the love course at Tianjin University's mental health education center, is frequently asked by students, "Can taking the love course help me find a partner?" She said she always smiles in response and says that it is not a "course on finding a partner," nor does it teach dating skills.

With over 10 years of experience in mental health education, Wang has discovered that relationship issues and emotional confusion are common concerns among students seeking psychological counseling.

According to the 2022 College Students' Mental Health Status Survey Report jointly published by the Institute of Psychology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Social Sciences Academic Press last year, college students in romantic relationships had the lowest scores in "depression" and "boredom". Meanwhile, those who wanted to "find a partner" were more prone to anxiety.

The love course at Tianjin University teaches students how to better communicate and interact with others, how to establish healthy views on love, marriage and family, and how to enhance their capacity for love, including self-love, love for their families and love for their country. "Whether or not they find a partner is not the standard for assessing their success in the course," Wang said.

She said she hoped students can

develop the ability to love and gain more happiness through what they learn in the classroom.

Practice is a vital part of the love and happiness courses.

During a class on "positive emotions" that is part of the happiness course taught by Zhao Jianbo, deputy director of the School of Earth System Science at Tianjin University, students shared milk tea and desserts, sang with the teacher and exchanged messages in their online group chat whenever they had ideas.

In a joyful and relaxed atmosphere, Zhao discussed psychological experiments and taught scientific methods for emotional regulation. "Happiness doesn't have a formula, but it can be experienced," Zhao said. "Although the classroom interactions may seem fun, each part actually combines theoretical research results and focuses on providing students with practical methods that are simple and effective."

Wu Fengwei, a teacher specializing in quality development at Tianjin University's mental health education center, held one of his recent happiness classes at an outdoor training ground. During the class, he divided students into groups and engaged them in games or tasks.

"Students in the class come from different grades and faculties, and they are relatively unfamiliar with each other. Through outdoor experiences, previously unfamiliar students establish contact and emotional connections, which itself is a relaxing and happy experience," Wu said.

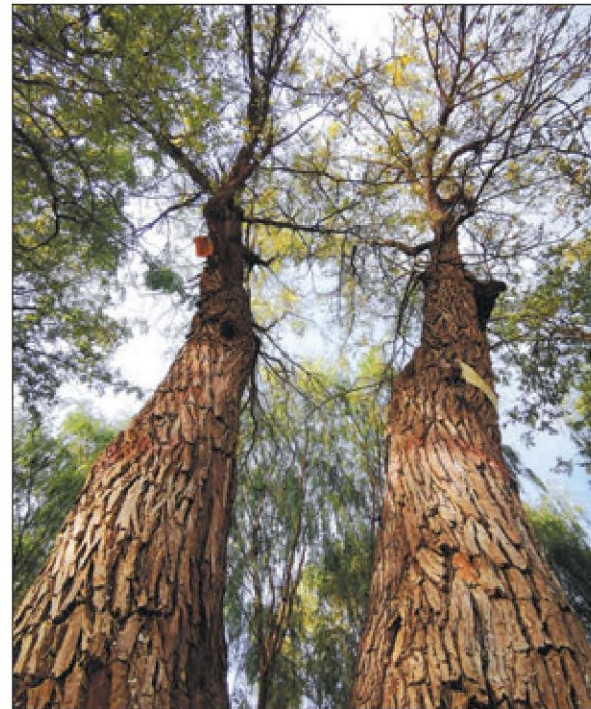
Meanwhile, in Wang's love class, she gave communication assignments to her students, including having them interview their parents, during which their parents are invited to discuss matters such as the most touching moments of their lives or the qualities they admire or cannot accept in each other. "Many students are pleasantly surprised to find that such conversations can be very rewarding to both themselves and their parents. Many students even invite their parents to attend the class with them online and listen in," Wang said.

The love course also employs various experiential teaching methods, including simulated confessions to encourage students to be more courageous, as well as simulated arguments to help them learn to consider others' perspectives and express themselves reasonably. Additionally, volunteer activities and social events have been organized to enhance students' interpersonal skills.

Tianjin University is among the first universities in China to offer love and happiness courses. Other universities, including Wuhan University in Hubei province and Xiamen University in Fujian province, also have similar courses.



From left: Ripe jujubes on trees growing at the Lingwu World Jujube Trees Expo Park in Lingwu, Ningxia Hui autonomous region. The park has more than 4,000 jujube trees. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



## Ancient jujube forest flourishes at Ningxia park

By HU DONGMEI in Yinchuan and CHEN MEILING

A natural park with one of the world's largest and oldest jujube forests allows residents in Lingwu, Ningxia Hui autonomous region, to enjoy pastoral scenery while tickling their taste buds.

Its broad collection of jujube trees and its germplasm resource bank also contribute to scientific research and better preservation of the plant.

Built in 2009, the Lingwu World Jujube Trees Expo Park has 4,167 jujube trees. About 62 percent of them are ancient, with the oldest being 277 years old.

People of all ages can enter the park and observe the trees, eat jujubes and exercise free of charge. More than 100,000 tourists have visited since its opening in 2010.

Zou Xuanxuan, an 8-year-old from Qinghai province, was excited as he picked jujubes off the ground at the park. With one bite, his mouth was filled with fruit juice.

His mother, Zhao Meng, said the fruit in the park tastes better than those found at the supermarket, and the color is more enticing.

Zou Sanshan, her husband, said: "The management is also good, and the park has a clean and tidy environment. There are areas available for people to enjoy leisure activities and exercise. This is a window to showcase the most beautiful ecological landscapes of Lingwu."

Years ago, an impoverished village occupied the land where the park is now. In 2008, Lingwu relocated 1,922 families living among the ancient jujube trees and resettled them in residential areas featuring better infrastructure.

"The city has become green and beautiful thanks to the trees, and the existence and roots of the trees have become symbols of the city's spirit and its historical significance," said Kang Zijun, director of the city's urban landscape greening and maintenance center. "The park has a natural oxygen environment and

has provided the best leisure, entertainment and fitness facilities for the residents of Lingwu."

The park has 326 species of jujube trees, about half of all the species found in China. Staff members have conducted research on the rejuvenation and revitalization techniques of the ancient trees. Age determinations and classifications have also been carried out.

In addition, studies on growth indicators and the economic characteristics of the fruits have been conducted. Among the trees in the park, the most unique species is the long jujube, whose fruit is a specialty and a national geographical indication product in Lingwu.

Compared to winter jujubes, long jujube trees are tall and upright. The fruit has a short ripening period, early maturity and high productivity, and is large and elongated or cylindrical in shape, according to Tang Wenlin, senior forest engineer at the Lingwu Natural Resources Bureau.

Fresh long jujubes have 25.3 percent sugar, 68.6 percent water and contain 378.8 milligrams of vitamin C per 100 grams of fruit. They also have a large amount of adenosine triphosphate, a nucleotide that helps stave off cancer, Tang said.

The Lingwu jujube tree has been cultivated for 1,300 years and was used to pay tribute to the imperial court during the Tang Dynasty (618-907). Since 2003, this ancient variety has been massively developed, with a total planting area of about 4,533 hectares.

"In recent years, sales of Lingwu jujubes have been booming and have played a significant role in promoting economic development," Tang said. "We have training classes for farmers to improve taste and production, and we sell the fruit both online and offline. The products have been sold across the country and to Thailand and Russia."

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## Art project gives Chongqing village a new lease on life

CHONGQING — Jiangjun, a village in the green hills of Chongqing's Bishan district, used to be a dreary place during winter, plagued by poverty and a dwindling population.

But the development of art areas has spurred tourism, giving it a new lease on life and making the winter scene much brighter nowadays.

Art galleries, museums, theaters and homestays can now be found nestling among its small cottages, while pigsties and cowsheds have been converted into restaurants and teahouses.

In 2021, the village government, the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute and several other bodies established a rural artist construction pilot project centered on a dilapidated village courtyard called Lotus Cave. The project involved the building of 10 core art areas, aiming to integrate the new facilities with the village's environment, culture and local characteristics.

When the project was launched, Lotus Cave was a rundown collection of residential buildings in poor repair, many of them empty.

"The total population here is 151 people, but only 21 live here permanently, and most of them are the elderly and left-behind children," said



Visitors admire an installation artwork at Jiangjun village in Chongqing's Bishan district on Oct 15. TANG YI / XINHUA

Su Chenghong, the first secretary of the village Party committee. "Seven of the 24 buildings are in a dilapidated condition, and most of the remaining habitable brick houses are empty."

Su said the Lotus Cave courtyard has now been largely transformed by the hard work of artists and villagers.

The art museum in the center of the village used to be a dilapidated house that was overgrown with

weeds, according to villagers. During the renovation work, the building's original framework was restored and part of the adobe wall was preserved.

Villager Gan Xiaoxue, 50, worked in a shoe factory for nearly 30 years. After the completion of the art courtyard, she chose to stay in her home village and use her skills to become a leather artist.

She now divides her time between making leather handicrafts for tourists and working as a barista at a new coffee shop.

"I used to be reluctant to buy bags, so I often made leather waste into various bags and pendants," she said. "Artists who came to the village encouraged me to combine this craft with art and make leather crafts for sale."

"Now I work at home, earning nearly 50,000 yuan (\$6,994) a year, which is stable and reassuring."

More exhibitions and art activities are now being held at Lotus Cave, attracting tourists from far afield. Gan said that the injection of new life had tempted many villagers who had moved away to return and take a look.

"Many people can't believe that plays and exhibitions normally only found in big cities can be seen in our hometown, and everyone is very happy," she said.

Su said the project has brought villagers and artists together and given the village an injection of creative energy.

"Many villagers used to think that art was far away from them," Su said. "Now, everyone cannot only appreciate but also participate in art activities."

XINHUA

## County hotline helps farmers resolve problems in Hebei

By QUAN ZHANFU

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In Jiangdian township in Gaotang county, Hebei province, a special hotline was set up in 2019 for farmers to provide agricultural technical support to each other and address questions and difficulties they encounter, a local media outlet reported.

The person behind the hotline is Zhang Caiyun, head of the agricultural technology station in Jiangdian and a member of Du Lizhi's

agricultural technology office.

Seeking assistance from the Caiyun hotline is now common among the farming community in the township.

"With the guidance of a specialist, I feel more confident in growing greenhouse vegetables," said farmer Zhu Aibin, whose tomato greenhouses have benefited from Zhang's expertise.

Though Zhu had spent years growing greenhouse tomatoes, most of his fruits were of lower quality, categorized as second-

grade. Feeling disheartened, he called the Caiyun hotline for help.

Upon learning about the situation, Zhang promptly arrived at Zhu's greenhouse to offer advice. She discovered that the temperature of the greenhouse was too low, hindering the growth of the tomatoes.

Zhu made the necessary adjustments in accordance with Zhang's suggestions to improve the temperature conditions inside the greenhouse. As a result, the quality and yield of his tomatoes significantly improved.

Zhu's case is just one of many instances in which the Caiyun hotline has played a crucial role in supporting local farmers.

By providing on-site agricultural consultations and technical guidance, the hotline has become an indispensable resource for farmers seeking solutions to their problems.

The hotline is one of the endeavors Gaotang has made in recent years as it looks to achieve rural revitalization through the establishment of an agricultural technology

promotion system to boost its agricultural yields.

In 2018, the county established an office for agricultural expert Du Lizhi to help her develop techniques and cultivate more experts in the area.

The office now boasts over 90 agricultural specialists selected from the county's agricultural departments, with Zhang Caiyun being one of them.

The specialists provide agricultural technical services to farmers by regularly visiting fields throughout the year. At the same time, efforts have been made to cultivate a group of 1,395 field experts.

The specialists also focus on pro-

viding efficient services to people by solving technical problems farmers encounter through a combination of online and offline services.

From the experts at Du's office, Gaotang has established three-tier agricultural technology volunteer service networks across the county. Twelve agricultural service stations at the township level and 746 village-level service points have also been set up.

Gaotang's efforts to offer rural technology services have played a significant role in promoting rural revitalization, improving agricultural productivity and increasing farmers' incomes.

# WORLDUS

## Envoy calls for harmony in China-US relationship

By MINLU ZHANG in New York  
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Beijing has no intention to challenge or unsettle Washington, a Chinese diplomat has said on the 45th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and the United States, calling for mutual trust and cooperation between the two sides.

"China never intends to challenge or unsettle the US," said Chinese Consul General in New York Huang Ping. "Instead, we will be glad to see a confident, open, ever-growing and prosperous US. Likewise, the US should welcome a peaceful, stable and prosperous China."

"It is hoped that the US side can work with China to enhance mutual trust and cooperation, properly manage differences and sensitive issues, and implement 'San Francisco Vision' in the interest of the two countries and the two peoples," Huang said.

He made the remarks at a reception held by the Chinese Consulate General in New York on Wednesday to commemorate the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the US. About 150 guests, including diplomatic and policy experts, and religious and social leaders, attended the reception.

Expressing a welcoming attitude, Huang urged US companies to continue investing in China.

Chinese market is not only big, but also highly profitable and full of talented innovators, he said, adding that it is a testing ground for international businesses to improve their competitiveness.

"We also welcome more American people to China to see Chinese culture with their own eyes, hear Chinese stories with their own ears and feel the Chinese people with their own hearts."

Given the two countries' significant global influence, Huang said only by taking a big and long view on China-US relations can we make the right decision serving the interests of both countries and peoples.

### Peaceful coexistence

China and the US account for more than one-third of the global GDP and nearly one-fourth of the global population. "Turning our back on each other is not an option; for one side to change the other is not realistic; the consequences of conflict and confrontation will not be bearable. So, peaceful coexistence is a baseline that our two countries must hold on to," Huang said.

In the past 45 years, the rise in two-way investment and bilateral trade has created millions of jobs in the US, generated substantial revenue for US companies, and provided benefits to households in both countries.

What remains unchanged is "the fact that the shared interests of the two countries are much larger than differences," Huang said.

Susan Elliott, president of National Committee on American Foreign Policy and former US ambassador to Tajikistan, said: "We've had relations for 45 years and... we've had ups and downs, but what family members haven't had ups and downs? So I look forward to another 45 years."



Artists from the New York Philharmonic perform during the 2024 "Happy Chinese New Year" launch ceremony at the Chinese Consulate General in New York on Tuesday. LI RUI / XINHUA

## Extreme weather upsets travel across Europe, US

FRANKFURT/OSLO/PORTLAND, Oregon — Heavy snow and freezing rain in parts of northern and central Europe grounded hundreds of flights and disrupted train travel on Wednesday, while an ice storm in the US Pacific Northwest turned roads and mountain highways treacherous.

Germany's massive Frankfurt airport canceled all flights in the early afternoon as jets could no longer be de-iced, but later resumed service with a limited capacity, a spokesperson said, adding that the situation remained uncertain.

The airport in the Norwegian capital, Oslo, also reopened but said it faced big delays that had left many passengers stranded.

"This is extremely rare... there is so much snow that the pilots can't see the lights on the ground, so we've halted all incoming and outgoing flights,"

said a spokesperson for Norway's national airport operator Avinor.

In neighboring Sweden, heavy snow led to multiple traffic incidents in the western and southern parts, causing traffic jams along several key roads.

In the United States, a power line fell on a parked car in northeastern Portland, Oregon, on Wednesday, killing three people and injuring a baby. Around Portland, driving and even walking were virtually impossible as slick ice coated roads and sidewalks. Icicles dangled from roofs and cars, and ice encased branches, plants and leaves like thick glass.

Freezing rain could return to the region on Thursday evening through Friday morning, the National Weather Service said.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Happy for manatee



Rescue workers roll a large manatee named Reckless onto her side before releasing her into a canal on Thursday at Port Everglades in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Reckless was rescued alongside her newborn calf following a May 2022 boat strike that left Reckless with catastrophic injuries and little hope for survival. WILFREDO LEE / AP

## Trade still robust amid noise over competition

Leading economies need better strategic approach for risk management: Experts

By RENA LI in Los Angeles  
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In a recent forum commemorating the 45-year diplomatic legacy between the United States and China, economic experts contended that trade relations have shifted from cooperation to competition, and that the governments need a more strategic approach to risk management.

The business relationship has often been described as the ballast of bilateral ties since China and the US established diplomatic relations in 1979, and the win-win philosophy has been a mainstay of that history over the past 45 years.

The US and China have developed a high level of economic interdependence since China's reform and opening-up to the world. China rapidly developed to be a major center of manufacturing and supply chains in the world, becoming the US' third-largest trading partner.

In the forum hosted by The Carter Center in Atlanta, Georgia, last week, Anna Ashton, director of China corporate affairs and US-China at Eurasia Group in New York, said there has been a definite "philosophical shift" in the US from the concept that economic interdependence is good for conflict deterrence, to the idea that economic interdependence increases vulnerability.

Arthur Kroeber, founding partner and head of research at the Hong Kong-based financial research company Gavekal Dragonomics, said the economies of the US and China were largely complementary 15 or even 10 years ago, and that is changing rapidly now.

Chinese companies are now seen as a "direct competitor" to US companies, especially "in the cutting-edge industries," he said.

The business relationship has proved to be a key cornerstone of US-China relations during the early years of China's opening-up, said Ka Zeng, a professor and director of international and global studies at the University of Arkansas.

However, increasing economic interdependence has also generated domestic backlash in the US, Zeng said, and the country's politicians have blamed China for "a host of economic problems".

"This has paved the ground for (former US) president (Donald) Trump to launch the great trade war against China," she said. "It is an important political implication in the trade relationship when the (US) threatened to impose sanctions against China for its 'unfair' trade practices."

There have been persistent issues around fairness, market access, third markets and intellectual property protection. The trade conflict between the two sides has continued for more than five years as a new normal, with current US tariffs on more than \$300 billion worth of Chinese goods.

### Continuing connectivity

On the other hand, data showed that US companies continue to be connected to the Chinese market through China's trade and investment activities with third parties, even though US sourcing is increasingly switching to low-cost manufacturing countries such as Vietnam.

Last year, a business climate survey conducted by the American Chamber of Commerce in China found 73 percent of US companies are not moving their supply chains outside of China, while 23 percent of them are either considering relocating or are already doing so.

"We can see a bit more stickiness that China is the second-largest economy in the world," Zeng said. "It offers huge market opportunities for American companies; it will be harder for American companies to completely shut themselves out of the Chinese market."

Craig Allen, president of the US-China Business Council, suggested a review of US-China economic relations from a historical perspective.

Trade and investment between the two countries have experienced cycles of cooperation and tension. China has a population 4.5 times larger than the US' and has had to cope with a long semicolonial history, Allen said.

"And therefore, the domestic changes and demands in China had enormous impact on the bilateral economic relationship for many years," he said.

Although China's dual circulation policy has a potential impact on US-China trade and investment, he said the policy is really something that "we should applaud", because it aims to expand domestic consumption while promoting self-reliance among China's innovative industries.

In talks with her Chinese counterpart before the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in San Francisco in November, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said the US "has no desire to break economic ties with China", and that imports from China benefit US companies and consumers.

"So, the most recent signals are very positive, (except) that we're going to maintain restrictions around tech. Other trade is very, very welcome," Allen said.

"We hope the trade will flourish in both imports and exports between the two countries, as both governments have signaled their willingness to bring more stability to the relationship."

## Trump gets judge's rap as he heads off to rally

NEW YORK/ROCHESTER, New Hampshire — The woman whom Donald Trump was found liable of sexually assaulting faced off with the former president on Wednesday in a New York courtroom to say he subsequently ruined her reputation.

E. Jean Carroll, 80, is seeking more than \$10 million alleging that Trump defamed her in 2019, when she first made her assault allegations public, by saying she "is not my type".

"It means I'm too ugly to assault," Carroll told the court.

There were tense moments in court as Carroll gave evidence just a few rows away from where Trump sat.

Carroll's legal team complained that Trump was making audible comments about her evidence and that jurors could be influenced, CNN reported.

The judge in the civil case asked Trump to lower his voice when conferring with his legal team.

"Mr Trump has the right to be present... That right can be forfeited," the judge said. "I understand you're probably eager for me to do that."

"I would love it," Trump replied.

Following the day's proceedings, Trump used a media briefing to attack the judge for his refusal to delay the trial by a day so he could attend his mother-in-law's funeral.

"He said 'absolutely not'... I thought it was terrible," Trump said before heading to New Hampshire to give a speech ahead of the state's primary vote. "He's a nasty judge."

Trump spoke more than two hours later than scheduled in a location that was much smaller than his normal venue — a hotel ballroom that could only accommodate some 300 people. He concluded his long day with a rambling speech that lasted more than an hour.

### Make-or-break

On Wednesday, Nikki Haley wooed voters in New Hampshire as the Republican presidential nomination contest moves to the eastern US state seen as make-or-break for her bid to reel in runaway front-runner Trump.

Once considered an outside bet, the former United Nations ambassador — the only woman in the race — has emerged as the main threat to Trump's dreams of a White House return.

Her polling numbers, donations and endorsements have surged in recent weeks.

"If Haley has a good showing in New Hampshire, it's going to shift the momentum, energy and excitement behind her campaign going into South Carolina," Haley backer and former Maryland governor Larry Hogan said.

Haley has pegged back Trump's average polling lead from 35 points in the fall to just 14 — and she has dismissed Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, who is running a distant third in New Hampshire, to cast the Republican primary as a two-horse race.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## New York proposes \$2.4b to care for new migrants

By BELINDA ROBINSON in New York  
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New York Governor Kathy Hochul has proposed that \$2.4 billion in her \$233 billion state budget be used to help New York City manage an estimated 70,000 migrants whose care has strained finances and overwhelmed homeless shelters.

The funds would be directed toward the city, as it has become the epicenter of the issue in the state after it was swamped by migrants who have mainly come from the US southern border illegally. But the cash also would be allocated to the rest of the state wherever it's needed.

Hochul said: "We must support the city of New York in this moment."

Both the governor and New York

Mayor Eric Adams have had to allocate a large chunk of their financial resources and planning toward caring for and housing the asylum seekers.

Starting on Jan 16, Adams also implemented a strict curfew at four migrant shelters from 11 pm to 6 am.

It came after local residents reported that some shelter residents had engaged in petty crime, panhandling and shoplifting. Other asylum seekers reportedly went door to door seeking work or clothes.

The curfew has been enforced at the Lincoln shelter on 110th Street in Manhattan, the Stockton Street shelter in Brooklyn, the JFK respite center in Queens and another on 35th Street in Astoria, Queens.

New York City Emergency Management Commissioner Zach Iscol told CBS News:

"Part of it is just sort of to help us better manage things at the site. Part of it is community feedback."

Iscol said that the mayor may expand the curfew to another 200 shelters to keep order.

Hochul unveiled the budget on Jan 16 for the fiscal year that begins April 1. The budget aims to close a \$4.3 billion deficit.

In November, Adams said that libraries would have to close on Sundays; police and firefighters' ranks would have had to be trimmed; and funding for some community schools could be halted.

However, this week the mayor reversed course, saying that some of the cuts will no longer be necessary, as the city has been able to reduce estimates of how much it will spend by roughly \$1.7 billion

over two fiscal years.

The Adams administration had previously estimated that the migrant crisis would cost \$12 billion. But it now expects to spend \$10.6 billion up to 2025.

Savings were made due to a new rule that migrants must leave homeless shelters after 30 or 60 days.

The mayor has repeatedly said that the added cost already has cut into essential services.

Adams faces a \$71 billion deficit. He will continue to negotiate with the City Council over a projected \$109 billion budget for the fiscal year that starts July 1.

Under Hochul's plan, the proposed funding will be spent to pay for 3,000 beds at shelters at Floyd Bennett Field, Randalls Island and Creedmor Psychiatric Center in Queens.

It also will cover legal services, expenses related to the deployment of the National Guard, and health services and programs to relocate migrants to other parts of the state.

Hochul said in a statement: "We're doing this not just because it's the right thing to do for the migrants and for the city of New York. We also know that companies won't do business in New York if there are thousands of people sleeping on the streets or the quality of life is dramatically impacted because the city is forced to cut essential services."

The influx of tens of thousands of migrants to the Big Apple was partly engineered by some Republican governors located near border states.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott bused in thousands of migrants to the city to share the burden on the Southern border.

Asylum seekers continue to arrive in New York daily. Both Adams and Hochul, who are Democrats, have

urged the federal government and Democratic President Joe Biden to do more to help fix the border crisis.

If not, New York's Democratic lawmakers have hinted that they may have to raise state income taxes, although Hochul has ruled that out.

Despite the urgency of the migrant crisis, the immigration system is backed up with a record 3 million cases, The Associated Press reported.

The backlog does not just include the new influx of migrants but those who have been in the United States for decades.

The number of people awaiting their time in front of a judge is triple what it was in 2019, according to Syracuse University's Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse.

Many are claiming asylum in the US while saying that they will be persecuted or killed if they return home.

The cases of around 261,000 migrants who are facing removal proceedings in Miami also are on hold.

# GLOBAL LENS



**Left:** Farmers reap paddy rice in the Guiguidou hydro-agricultural area, which involves a demonstration base serving as a training ground to help local residents enhance agricultural productivity and sustainability, in Divo, Cote d'Ivoire, on Jan 8. **Right:** Farmers pose with a delivery truck amid the paddy rice harvest in the Guiguidou hydro-agricultural area in Divo, Cote d'Ivoire, on Jan 8. PHOTOS BY HAN XU / XINHUA



Farmers harvest paddy rice in the Guiguidou hydro-agricultural area in Divo, Cote d'Ivoire, on Jan 8.



**From left:** Farmers work at a rice-processing mill in the Guiguidou hydro-agricultural area in Divo, Cote d'Ivoire, on Jan 8. Experts from China's agricultural technology cooperation team train local farmers in Divo, Cote d'Ivoire, on April 29, 2023. Guo Changyou (second from right), who heads China's agricultural technology cooperation team in Cote d'Ivoire, packs newly harvested paddy rice with local farmers in the Guiguidou hydro-agricultural area in Divo on Jan 8.

## Seeds of success

Chinese expertise helps farmers in Cote d'Ivoire reap rich rewards

In Divo, Cote d'Ivoire, the Guiguidou hydro-agricultural area reflects growing cooperation between China and the West African country in agriculture. The region, known for its thriving paddy rice cultivation, hosts a unique demonstration base which serves as a training ground — a Chinese technology cooperation team imparts advanced agricultural practices to local farmers, aimed at enhancing agricultural productivity and sustainability. Chinese President Xi Jinping said in a phone conversation with Cote d'Ivoire's President Alassane Ouattara in December 2022 that China stands ready to strengthen cooperation with Cote d'Ivoire across the board. The two countries agreed to expand trade in agricultural produce, as well as enhance bilateral cooperation in planting and pro-

“Africa is where China was, but China has gone past that and this is the way today, with abundant food everywhere for people to eat and making new products out of the food.”

**Felix Dapare Dakora,**  
former president of the African Academy of Sciences

cessing rice. Over the past year, collaborative efforts have led to notable improvements in Cote d'Ivoire's paddy rice

production. The cooperation supports the local economy and facilitates a meaningful exchange of ideas and techniques. By investing in agricultural technologies and establishing the world's largest repository for gene resources of wild rice varieties of its kind, China is helping to share knowledge and resources globally. Felix Dapare Dakora, former president of the African Academy of Sciences, said that Africa, in working closely with China, can soon emulate that progress in food production and achieve self-sufficiency. “Africa is where China was, but China has gone past that and this is the way today, with abundant food everywhere for people to eat and making new products out of the food,” Dakora said.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



Guo Guangyu (left) from China's agricultural technology cooperation team packs newly harvested paddy rice with local farmers in the Guiguidou hydro-agricultural area in Divo, Cote d'Ivoire, on Jan 8.

## WORLD

## Argentina's Milei discusses inflation with IMF chief

DAVOS, Switzerland — Argentina's President Javier Milei held a positive meeting with International Monetary Fund chief Kristalina Georgieva in Davos on Wednesday, focused on the South American country's deep economic crisis and its \$44-billion IMF program.

"Very good meeting with Argentina's President Javier Milei," Georgieva wrote on X, formerly Twitter, after meeting the right-wing leader who is pushing a tough austerity package to bring down the inflation rate, which is above 200 percent, even while two-fifths of people are living in poverty.

"We talked about Argentina's deep economic and social challenges and decisive steps underway to bring down inflation, promote private sector-led growth, and use scarce public money to help the most vulnerable people," she said.

Earlier in the day, Milei had praised free markets. "Free enterprise capitalism is the only tool we have to end hunger and poverty," he said.

Milei shot to power last year on the back of voter anger at the worsening economic crisis, often campaigning with a chainsaw to underscore his plans to slash the size of the state. He needs to rebuild depleted foreign currency reserves and spur growth.

He is pushing major economic reforms, including spending cuts and deregulation, in a bid to improve the government's finan-

ces and boost the economy. But he faces high poverty levels and the real threat of social unrest.

Milei earlier met with British Foreign Minister David Cameron, discussing "deepening commercial ties, the support they will give us in the IMF and how to promote British investments in Argentina," Milei's office said in a readout.

Argentina is racing to salvage its massive loan program with the IMF, the Washington-based lender's largest globally. Last week, it secured an agreement with the IMF over the program's latest review, which should unlock funds worth \$4.7 billion.

According to a Davos briefing on Argentina, the country's relationship with the IMF is "very good" and the government is confident of meeting objectives in a tough economic plan that surpasses what the fund is demanding.

Milei's libertarian coalition, which only has a small bloc in Congress but has won over conservative allies, is confident of passing its major reform bill, part of a first wave of economic reforms, but has backup plans if it fails.

Planned tax hikes as part of these reforms — going against campaign pledges to cut taxes — were a necessary step to bring in revenues to pay for social programs for the most vulnerable, but the aim was that these would last no more than a year.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



Sanaa University students stage a protest in Sanaa on Wednesday against US and UK attacks in Yemen. MOHAMMED HAMOUD / GETTY IMAGES

## US strikes Houthi missiles in Yemen

Medical aid for hostages enters Gaza as conflict sees no signs of ending

WASHINGTON — The United States military said on Wednesday its forces conducted strikes on 14 Houthi missiles that were loaded to be fired from Yemen as a shipment of medicine for hostages held by Hamas arrived in Gaza on the same day.

"These missiles on launch rails presented an imminent threat to merchant vessels and US Navy ships in the region and could have been fired at any time, prompting US forces to exercise their inherent right and obligation to defend themselves," the US Central Command said.

Hani Kayed, a 44-year-old resident of the Yemeni port city of Hodeida, told Agence France-Presse he heard an explosion at around 2:16 am in the east of the city near the airport.

Hodeida and the city of Ta'ez were among the targets of the first round of US and UK strikes in Yemen last week. Houthi media outlet Al-Masirah TV said both were hit again in the latest strikes, along with three other areas.

The Houthis earlier on Wednesday said their missiles had made a "direct hit" on the US bulk carrier *Genco Picardy*.

Shipping operator Genco confirmed the attack, and said its vessel was hit by a projectile while it was transiting through the Gulf of Aden with a cargo of phosphate rock.

The Houthi militants said they were acting in solidarity with Pal-

estinians and have threatened to expand attacks to include US ships in response to the US and British strikes on the group's positions.

The US announced earlier on Wednesday that it would return the Houthis to the list of "terrorist" entities.

"The Department of State today is announcing the designation of Ansarallah, commonly referred to as the Houthis, as a 'Specially Designated Global Terrorist' group, effective 30 days from today," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement.

US officials said naming the Houthis as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist was aimed at cutting off funding and weapons the movement has used to attack or hijack ships.

A Houthi spokesman told Reuters that attacks on ships heading to Israel would continue and the designation would not affect its position.

## Calling for cease-fire

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said an end to the conflict in Gaza was needed to remove the threat to shipping.

"The security of the Red Sea is tied to the developments in Gaza, and everyone will suffer if Israel's crimes in Gaza do not stop," Amir-Abdollahian said at the World Economic Forum in Davos.

Also speaking in Davos, Blinken said Israel cannot achieve "genuine security" without a

pathway to a Palestinian state.

In Gaza, a shipment of medicine for dozens of hostages held by Hamas entered the territory late on Wednesday, Qatar's Foreign Ministry said. The Gulf nation and France worked out a deal between Israel and Hamas to deliver medicine to the hostages and to Palestinians.

The deal could bring respite to some of the roughly 100 hostages who remain in captivity, as well as to Palestinians in Gaza in desperate need of aid. But fighting still rages in many parts of the beleaguered enclave, and an end to the conflict — or the release of the hostages — seems nowhere in sight.

Qatar's Foreign Ministry spokesman Majed al-Ansari announced late Wednesday on X that the shipment had crossed into Gaza, without saying when or how the medicine would be distributed.

A senior Hamas official said that for every box provided for the hostages, 1,000 boxes of medicine would be sent in for Palestinians. The deal also includes the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza residents.

The agreement came 100 days into the conflict and Palestinian militants are still putting up resistance across Gaza in the face of one of the deadliest military campaigns in recent history. More than 24,000 Palestinians have been killed. Some 85 percent of the narrow coastal territory's 2.3 million people have fled their homes, and the United Nations says a quarter of the population is starving.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Briefly

## GERMANY

## Schwarzenegger held at Munich Airport

Hollywood action hero Arnold Schwarzenegger was held at Munich Airport on Wednesday for failing to declare an expensive watch, a customs spokesman told Agence France-Presse. The Austrian-born actor and former California governor, 76, was detained in the customs area on Wednesday afternoon after arriving from the United States, spokesman Thomas Meister said. Schwarzenegger was expected to be able to continue his journey later in the day, but "the watch will probably have to stay", Meister said. Criminal proceedings were initiated against the *Terminator* star and former bodybuilding icon for tax evasion, he said.

## Women found to earn 18 percent less than men

Women in Germany earned 18 percent less on average than men last year, due largely to a leveling-off in earnings after having children and taking part-time work, the Federal Statistics Office said on Thursday. The data shows that the gender pay gap in Europe's biggest economy has remained unchanged since 2020. That is down from 23 percent when records started in 2006. On an adjusted basis, the gender pay gap for 2023 was 6 percent, said the office. Women's earnings start to stagnate from the age of 30, the average age for women to have their first child in Germany, said the office, while men continue to earn more.

## UNITED KINGDOM

## Sudden inflation rise dashes rate cut hopes

British annual inflation unexpectedly picked up in December, data showed on Wednesday, dashing hopes of an early cut to UK interest rates and prolonging the cost of a living squeeze before an election. The Consumer Price Index accelerated slightly to 4.0 percent from 3.9 percent in November, the Office for National Statistics said, confounding expectations of a modest slowdown. The news dented hopes the Bank of England would cut interest rates in the first half of this year, boosting the pound versus the dollar and, but sending the London stock market slumping.

## SINGAPORE

## Transport minister resigns, faces 27 charges

Singapore's former transport minister S. Iswaran was charged with 27 offenses in court on Thursday, according to local media reports. Iswaran was charged with corruption, obtaining items from someone he had business dealings with as a public servant, and obstructing the course of justice, the reports said. He was reported to receive benefits from local business tycoon Ong Beng Seng. Iswaran rejected the charges and reiterated his innocence, noting that he will focus on clearing his name. He resigned his post on Tuesday.

AGENCIES—XINHUA



Argentina's President Javier Milei (fourth from left) poses for a picture with IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva (third from left) during a bilateral meeting in Davos on Wednesday. LUDOVIC MARIN / AFP

## Potential for Sino-US cooperation on AI seen

By MINLU ZHANG in New York  
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Will artificial intelligence replace the work of humans?

Here's what an AI business leader in the United States thinks: AI systems are meant to assist and enhance human work, potentially bringing increased efficiency and productivity benefits.

Jeff Wong, global chief innovation officer at Ernst & Young, or EY, highlighted the potential for positive applications of AI, ranging from cancer research to solving pharmacological problems and addressing environmental, social and governance challenges.

Wong told China Daily at the Asia Society in New York last week that he hopes that government and policymakers will "race to keep up with the ideas that are coming out."

The call to "go faster" shows the belief in the transformative power of AI. Despite calls to slow down, the truth is these powerful AI systems keep developing without pause.

Generative AI is improving by about 10 times every 18 months, according to Wong. For example, each release of ChatGPT comes out much more remarkable and powerful than before, he said.

The rapid development of AI, however, has led to legal and ethical concerns.

The New York Times and famous authors like John Grisham are suing OpenAI, the company that developed ChatGPT. The Times filed the case in December, claiming intellectual property infringement. The company says ChatGPT and Microsoft's Copilot copy the Times' work, divert website visitors, and harm their reputation and revenue.



Jeff Wong

Wong emphasized global cooperation for shared values and the need for policies, research and legal frameworks to catch up with the technology.

While OpenAI has an early lead, various companies and open-source initiatives in the United States and Asia, including China, also have their own players catching up, Wong said.

"Out in Asia and China, they have to have their own series of different sort of large language model providers. They're certainly racing along the way. And, as we're seeing with all the regulatory pull-apart, a lot of the Asian companies obviously have to play off the Asian platform. So we're seeing that as well," said Wong.

"A lot of the Chinese platforms that are out there are being galvanized by the Chinese companies that have to use them," he added.

He said he "absolutely" sees value in the cooperation of scientists and researchers from China and the US.

AI companies in the US, including OpenAI, Anthropic, and Cohere, have engaged with Chinese AI experts on the risks associated with the technology and encouraged investments in AI safety research, according to the Financial Times.

The cooperation of scientists and researchers from China and the US "will hopefully mean that not just can they cooperate at the academic or company level, but these two societies can come together and start operating around a whole bunch of things and realize that we have a lot more shared values," Wong said.

## World's richest offer to pay more tax at Davos

By JULIAN SHEA in London  
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Hundreds of the world's richest people have sent an open letter to international leaders at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, asking to be taxed more heavily, to lessen the impact of growing societal inequality.

In a letter titled "Proud to Pay", more than 250 billionaires and millionaires, including entertainment company heir Abigail Disney and Valerie Rockefeller from the famously wealthy US dynasty, argue that they would not feel any financial impact from paying more tax because of their extreme wealth, but that what they called "unproductive private wealth" would become "an investment for our common democratic future".

"Our request is simple: We ask you to tax us, the very richest in society," said the letter, signed by people from 17 countries. "This will not fundamentally alter our standard of living, nor deprive our children, nor harm our nations' economic growth ... inequality has reached a tipping point, and its cost to our economic,



Marlene Engelhorn, who inherited from her family which owns Germany's chemical giant BASF, holds a placard reading "Tax the rich!" at the opening of the Davos meet on Monday. FABRICE COFFRINI / AFP

societal and ecological stability risk is severe — and growing every day. In short, we need action now."

A recent survey carried out on behalf of campaign group Patriotic Millionaires questioned more than 2,300 people with wealth of more than \$1 million.

It showed that 74 percent backed

higher taxes on the rich to subsidize public services and address the challenges of the cost of living crisis.

"This poll seems to show that the whole world, including the richest people, wants to tax the super-rich," United Kingdom agriculture entrepreneur Guy Singh-Watson told The Guardian. "So where on

earth is the leadership from our elected representatives who have the power to actually do it? We, the very richest, are sick and tired of inaction, so it's hardly surprising that working people, at the sharp end of our rigged economies, have lost all patience."

The letter said: "Every moment of delay entrenches the dangerous economic status quo, threatens our democratic norms, and passes the buck to our children and grandchildren. Not only do we want to be taxed more but we believe we must be taxed more."

The idea of trickle-down economics, it said, was proved not to work, and unless it is rejected, could even pose a threat to democracy.

"It has given us stagnating wages, crumbling infrastructure, failing public services, and destabilized the very institution of democracy," the letter continued.

"It has created a shameful economic system incapable of providing a brighter, more sustainable future. These challenges will only worsen if you fail to address extreme wealth inequality."

## BUSINESS

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## Measures to foster recovery coming

NDRC: Law to promote private sector, revised negative list will boost biz mood

By OUYANG SHIJIA and LIU ZHIHUA

China will implement several measures to foster a robust economic recovery throughout this year, the country's top economic regulator said on Thursday.

The planned measures will include acceleration of the legislative process to enact a law on promoting the development of the private sector and revision to the negative list for foreign investment access.

"The country is gearing up to take a series of practical measures to

boost growth of the private sector," said Yuan Da, deputy secretary-general of the National Development and Reform Commission, at a news conference in Beijing.

"The focus will be placed on effectively addressing the challenges faced by private businesses, boosting business confidence and ensuring tangible benefits."

He said the legal and institutional arrangements will be made to ensure the equal treatment of private and State-owned enterprises. More efforts will be made to better implement the existing supportive policies

and encourage more private capital to participate in the construction of major projects at the national level and projects that address weak links in the economy.

During the news conference, Liu Sushe, deputy head of the NDRC, said the country will promptly introduce policies to promote high-standard opening-up. It will continue to revise the national version of the negative list for foreign investment access, comprehensively eliminate restrictions on foreign investment access in the manufacturing sector and expedite the introduction and implementation of comprehensive policies to attract and utilize foreign capital.

The negative list specifies the industry sectors that are off limits to foreign

investors. Global businesses can operate in any sector that is not on the list.

Through a package of practical measures, such as aligning with high-standard international economic and trade rules, the NDRC will focus on addressing the difficulties and obstacles faced by foreign-funded enterprises.

The NDRC has recently launched its seventh batch of major foreign investment projects. The new batch includes 11 foreign-funded projects with a total investment of over \$15 billion, mainly in fields like biomedicine, automobile manufacturing, new energy batteries and the chemical industry, Liu said.

Despite facing challenges from a more complicated environment, a

lack of effective domestic demand and weakening expectations, China still possesses favorable conditions and great opportunities, which outweigh the challenges, Liu said.

Elsewhere, at a forum hosted by China News Service in Beijing on Thursday, Zhang Junkuo, chairman of the China Development Research Foundation, said that China should urgently deepen reform and expand opening-up centering on promoting high-quality economic development, by paying attention to social concerns and making substantial breakthroughs in solving problems.

The country can better implement policy measures promoting the growth of private enterprises, he said, suggesting the authorities roll out

detailed implementation measures for policies already in place, to make them more feasible and effective in addressing problems facing private enterprises. For instance, the private sector faces some invisible barriers when it tries to take part in government procurement bidding and finance, and also when it seeks to take part in major sci-tech projects.

At the same forum, Wei Jianguo, former deputy commerce minister, said that among the three main drivers of growth — consumption, exports and investment — exports will be the first to rebound this year.

"China's foreign trade has already become stabilized with an upward momentum, and growth rates of exports and imports will both enter expansionary territory during the first quarter, thanks to effects gradually delivered from supportive policies," Wei said.

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## Tax and fee cuts bolster companies' R&amp;D, innovations

By CHENG YU

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China's tax and fee cuts last year were worth more than 2.2 trillion yuan (\$305 billion).

Tax deductions extended to companies' research and development expenses rose significantly, said the State Taxation Administration on Thursday.

These measures are believed to have greatly boosted companies' confidence to spend more on technological innovations. This, in turn, will inject greater vitality into corporate development as well as economic growth, said industry experts.

The top tax authority said at a State Council news conference that companies saved 1.85 trillion yuan in the form of tax deductions for R&D expenses in the first three quarters, up nearly 14 percent year-on-year.

Corporate taxpayers from the manufacturing sector benefited the most, receiving 60 percent of such R&D tax deductions totaling over 1.1 trillion yuan.

The R&D tax deduction was introduced as a preferential tax policy, allowing companies to save more by way of a certain percentage of their R&D expenditure. In March last year, China lifted the percentage to 100 percent from 75 percent and made the policy a permanent one. For eligible companies from the integrated circuit and machine tool sectors, the percentage is even higher at 120 percent.

Huang Yun, spokesman of the STA, disclosed that though the full-year figure for R&D tax deductions



Taxation officials inspect an industrial park in Lianyungang, Jiangsu province.

ZHANG ZHENGYOU / FOR CHINA DAILY

is still being worked out, the figure for 2023 will "only be bigger".

"More favorable tax policies will be implemented to facilitate convenience of companies and better support their innovative development, as well as the country's self-reliance on high-level science and technology," Huang said.

Li Xihong, head of fiscal taxation policy and application at the Beijing National Accounting Institute, said: "Such efforts will help (corporate) taxpayers save fully on operating costs through R&D expense deductions. Relief will further stimulate their vitality and drive innovation capability, all of which will be strong drivers of the country's economic development."

Jiao Jian, taxation affairs head of display panel maker BOE Technology Group Co Ltd's branch in Hefei, Anhui province, said in an interview with China Daily that the company has been able to sustain the momentum it had gained in key display technologies, mainly because tax reliefs stabilized its finances.

Jiao also said that as of the end of

October, BOE Technology had enjoyed a super deduction of nearly 1.6 billion yuan in R&D expenses, which greatly reduced the company's costs, helping it to pursue more innovations.

On Thursday, the tax authority also noted that the country's full-year tax revenue, which excludes the export tax rebate, reached 31.7 trillion yuan last year. Revenue from social security fees was 8.2 trillion yuan.

Notably, tax deferrals for foreign-funded enterprises saw a stable 0.8 percent year-on-year increase in 2023 to 141.2 billion yuan. Tax deferral is a preferential policy extended to foreign companies to delay tax payments to some future date, which helps them invest the money that might otherwise go toward taxes, in areas with greater long-term growth potential.

To facilitate international taxation services, the STA has been working to promote global taxation services using TaxExpress, a long-term mechanism to help better understand taxation policies and related information for foreign companies

investing in China and Chinese companies investing abroad.

On Wednesday, the STA held a symposium with some foreign chambers of commerce in China, including those from the United States, the European Union, South Korea and Japan, to address tax-related appeals of foreign-funded enterprises and help solve related problems.

On Tuesday, the tax authority released an updated tax policy guideline on stabilizing foreign investment and foreign trade. The guideline includes 51 detailed entries.

Li Ping, deputy director of the STA's tax science research institute, said that foreign trade and foreign investment are indispensable for stabilizing the country's economic and social development.

"Such efforts sent a positive signal about the country's determination to open up more to the outside world and vigorously consolidate the fundamentals of foreign trade and foreign investment, which will further boost market confidence," Li said.

## China calls for better coordination to stabilize shipping in Red Sea

By ZHONG NAN

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China has called on relevant parties to restore and ensure the safety of the Red Sea maritime passage to jointly uphold the smooth operation of global supply chains and the normal order of international trade, said the Ministry of Commerce on Thursday.

Speaking at a weekly news conference in Beijing, He Yadong, a ministry spokesman, said the Red Sea is an important international trade route. The ministry will strengthen coordination with other government branches, closely monitor the situation in the region, and provide timely support and assistance to Chinese companies.

The current reluctance of many global shipping companies to transit through the Suez Canal has affected China-Europe trade and exerted pressure on operational costs of businesses on both sides.

When container ships avoid the Suez Canal and instead navigate around the southern tip of Africa, it considerably increases sailing costs, extends shipping durations and creates cascading delays in delivery schedules.

Starting from mid-December, due to security concerns in the Red Sea region, there has been a significant increase in prices for global maritime shipping and air freight services, as well as China-Europe Railway Express operations, said Zhou Zhicheng, director of the research department at the Beijing-based China Federation of Logistics and Purchasing.

The escalation of the situation in the Red Sea region will impact shipping between Asia and Europe in the first quarter, leading to concerns about the possibility of a resurgence in container shortages, said Chen Zhen, an analyst at the research institute of Founder CIFCO Futures,

which has 36 branches across China.

Because of the intricate and inter-related nature of the situation in the Red Sea region, Chen said that substantial uncertainty will persist for the coming months, and it is expected that shipping rates will consequently exhibit greater volatility.

Japan's three major shipping groups — Nippon Yusen, Kawasaki Kisen Kaisha and Mitsui OSK Lines — also announced on Wednesday they will suspend routes through the Red Sea waterway to ensure operational safety.

In another development, as China and Switzerland jointly announced that they had completed a joint feasibility study on upgrading the China-Switzerland Free Trade Agreement and agreed to support the early launch of formal FTA upgrade negotiations early this week, He, from the Ministry of Commerce, said that both China and Switzerland will proceed with their respective domestic procedures with the aim of initiating negotiations to upgrade the FTA as soon as possible.

The two sides will engage in in-depth discussions in various areas, including goods trade, trade in services, investment and rules, as well as focus on crafting a high-level upgraded agreement to bring greater benefits to businesses and people in both countries, he added.

Since 2010, China has been Switzerland's biggest trading partner in Asia and third largest globally after the European Union and the United States, according to information released by the Swiss government.

Despite the disruption in global supply chains, weakening demand in many countries and socioeconomic challenges, the trade value between China and Switzerland grew by 9 percent year-on-year to 416.93 billion yuan (\$57.94 billion) in 2023, said China's General Administration of Customs.

## Briefly

## China cuts retail prices of gasoline, diesel

China reduced retail prices of gasoline and diesel on Thursday, based on recent changes in international oil prices. Gasoline and diesel prices will both fall by 50 yuan (\$7.03) per metric ton, according to the National Development and Reform Commission.

## CNPC renewables capacity surges in 2023

China National Petroleum Corp, the country's largest oil and gas producer and supplier, made historic breakthroughs in the scale of new energy development last year, with renewable power generation capacity surging 3.4 times from that of 2022, the company said on Thursday. CNPC witnessed a 60 percent increase in the production of new materials, which are now considered critical to the development of high-tech industries. The new materials industry is considered an important entry point for building new growth engines.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

## Huawei Technologies launches new HarmonyOS version

By MA SI

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Huawei Technologies Co unveiled a new version of its self-developed operating system HarmonyOS on Thursday, as the Chinese tech company speeds up efforts to cut reliance on foreign technologies and build an indigenous software ecosystem amid US government restrictions.

The move comes as Huawei announced that more than 800 million devices, including its own-brand products and devices from third-party companies, have now been equipped with HarmonyOS, up from 700 million devices five months ago, marking a significant milestone in its rapid expansion.

Yu Chengdong, CEO of Huawei's consumer business group, said at a conference in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, that the native HarmonyOS Next operating system, roughly translated as the Star River Edition, is targeted at software developers.

This version is more user-friendly, smooth, secure, intelligent and

interconnected, and HarmonyOS can open up a trillion-dollar industrial new frontier, Yu said.

"A genuine operating system requires a foundation and an ecosystem. HarmonyOS has evolved into an operating system running seamlessly across a diverse array of devices," Yu said.

HarmonyOS Next will no longer support Android apps or read Android code, according to Huawei.

Highlighting its commitment to promote the ecosystem of HarmonyOS, Huawei said that over 200 leading applications have accelerated their integration into the HarmonyOS ecosystem.

Major partners like Ant Group and China UnionPay, leveraging their innovation prowess and HarmonyOS' foundational capabilities, provide software developers with efficient end-to-end tools and expedite application development.

Meanwhile, Yu said the HarmonyOS campus courses have reached 135 universities, involving 305,000 students, with 286 companies participating in HarmonyOS ecologi-

cal workshops. Over 380,000 developers have obtained HarmonyOS certification.

The self-developed operating system was first unveiled as an Android alternative in August 2019, three months after the US government added Huawei to its Entity List, restricting the Chinese company's access to crucial US technologies.

Since then, Huawei has been working hard to push for wider adoption of HarmonyOS, which is projected to surpass Apple's iOS as the second-biggest smartphone operating system in China in 2024, according to Canadian research firm TechInsights.

Though Google's Android and Apple's iOS will continue to dominate the global smartphone operating system sector, Huawei's HarmonyOS will take some ground in China, driven by the firm's 5G smartphone comeback with the Mate 60 series, TechInsights said in a report.

Dai Wei, deputy secretary-general of the Internet Society of China, on Thursday called on Chinese



A view of Huawei's flagship store in Shanghai.

FAN JIANLEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

internet enterprises and every link in the industry chain to embrace and support the HarmonyOS ecosystem.

Zhou Hongyi, founder and chairman of Chinese cybersecurity company 360 Security Group, said multiple high-quality applications under the company will join the HarmonyOS ecosystem, promising

users a smoother, more intelligent and secure experience.

Zhu Yonggang, president of Huawei's device cloud business, said that the HarmonyOS application ecosystem is entering its second phase, and expressed hope for collaboration with more developers to accelerate the integration of diverse industries into the ecosystem.

# BUSINESSFOCUS

## Tech firms making strides in consumer electronics

Over 1,100 Chinese enterprises unveil advanced technologies, new products at expo

By FAN FEIFEI  
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When TCL participated in the Consumer Electronics Show for the first time in 1991, its booth encompassed just 9 square meters, Li Dongsheng, founder and chairman of the Chinese consumer electronics maker, recalled.

This year, though, its booth covered an area of nearly 1,700 sq m, the largest exhibition space among all Chinese enterprises taking part in the CES 2024, the world's largest consumer technology show that was held from Jan 9 to Jan 12 in Las Vegas, the United States.

"Just like our TV, it is becoming bigger and bigger. In fact, the products we show at CES have expanded from consumer electronics to different smart devices and display technologies," Li said at a product launch during this year's CES.

Currently, the company offers smart devices, displays and new energy products in over 160 countries and regions.

The remarkable change in TCL's presence at the CES over the past decades provides a glimpse into Chinese technology enterprises' increasingly important role in bolstering the development of the global consumer electronics sector and spearheading technological progress worldwide.

Over 1,100 Chinese enterprises, more than double the number of exhibitors last year, unveiled an array of cutting-edge technologies and new tech products, including new-generation semiconductor displays, artificial intelligence, robotics, autonomous driving and augmented reality, at the show.

The annual show drew more than 130,000 attendees and over 4,000 exhibitors from over 150 countries and regions, including over 1,200 startups.

Industry experts said the resilient performance of Chinese tech companies at the CES 2024 demonstrates China's latest breakthroughs in world-leading technologies and its growing capacity for independent innovation in tech frontiers.

Highlighting that Chinese tech companies are playing a vital role in promoting technological innovation and accelerating efforts to expand their overseas footprint, they said the rapid integration of artificial intelligence with a wide range of hardware devices is fueling the evolution of the global consumer electronics industry.

China's leading TV brands and display panel makers showcased their latest innovations at the show.

TCL demonstrated over 120 pieces of intelligent terminal devices, such as the world's largest quantum dot mini LED TV with a 115-inch screen, smartphones, AI-powered tablets, AR goggles, vehicle-mount-



Attendees walk past a display of televisions at the TCL booth during the 2024 Consumer Electronics Show, which was held from Jan 9 to Jan 12 in Las Vegas, the United States. STEVE MARCUS / REUTERS

ed displays and a smart cockpit.

Sun Li, chief technology officer of TCL Industries, said the company has always attached great importance to the exploration of state-of-the-art technologies and has established a research and development center in Silicon Valley in the United States.

"The R&D center will help us keep abreast of the latest technological trends, obtain new technical information, better integrate the company's products with advanced technologies, as well as deepen cooperation and exchanges with local high-tech companies in the US," Sun said.

Eyeing the fast-growing generative AI wave triggered by the ChatGPT chatbot, Sun said the company is ramping up efforts to integrate AI large language models into its various terminal devices, hoping to provide better voice interaction experiences and personalized content recommendation services.

It is also boosting production capacity at its Mexican factories, given that building global competitiveness has always been important for TCL.

In the first three quarters of last year, shipments of TCL's smart TVs in North America rose 11.4 percent year-on-year, driven by increased demand for large-sized TV models.

BOE Technology Group, a major Chinese display panel manufacturer, rolled out a slew of new products, such as a flexible organic light-emitting diode, or OLED display, a transparent display panel, a 4K mini LED curved display and a 45-inch 8K borderless cockpit screen equipped in automaker Geely's new electric vehicle, Galaxy E8.

BOE will step up investments in

technological innovation, especially in fundamental and cutting-edge technologies, and collaborate with global tech heavyweights, including Samsung, LG, HP and Qualcomm as well as carmakers, the company said.

Hisense Group, a leading Chinese home appliances manufacturer, unveiled its latest ultra light-emitting diode or ULED TV and innovative laser display technology at the CES.

David Gold, vice-president of Hisense International and general manager of Hisense Americas, said the company is integrating display technology into homes, and providing consumers with high-quality home entertainment. He said its display technology is widely applied in the sports, education and medical fields, and continuously pushing technological boundaries.

### AI push

AI-powered terminal devices have attracted attention this year.

Lenovo Group Ltd, the world's largest personal computer maker, unveiled a full lineup of more than 40 new devices and solutions powered by AI at the CES, furthering the company's vision of AI for all.

The company said it believes this year will mark the advent of AI-based PCs.

According to a report released by market research company GfK, with the meteoric rise of generative AI technology, it is clear that the application scenarios of AI are expanding from personal computers to more intelligent hardware, including smartphones, smart speakers and smart home devices.

In addition, AI-enabled consumer electronics devices, such as virtual reality and augmented reality, are



Visitors check out Hisense Group's latest ultra light-emitting diode, or ULED, TV at the 2024 CES in Las Vegas on Jan 11.

WU XIAOLING / XINHUA

expected to experience explosive growth and become a key driving force for the global consumer electronics industry, it noted.

Zhu Keli, founding director of the China Institute of New Economy, said, "By participating in the world's premier tech show that involves top-notch consumer electronics companies and innovative forces, Chinese tech companies can directly present their innovative products, technologies and solutions to a global audience, and boost brand awareness and influence in the international market."

It will also let more overseas consumers learn about their technological prowess and innovation capabilities in emerging technologies, Zhu added.

Chinese robotic companies gained a strong foothold at the tech show and displayed their latest products ranging from service

robots to robots that accompany children and yard cleaners.

Dreamer Technology presented its multiple innovative robotic products such as robotic vacuum cleaners and mowers.

Chris Lin, general manager of Dreamer Technology North America, said, "Our series of new robot vacuum cleaners and other home products will give more leisure time to customers by providing greater convenience, performance and quality."

Robotics technology company Segway-Ninebot showcased its leading portfolio of innovative technologies across multiple categories, including an autonomous robotics development platform, a range of robots designed for specific tasks such as food delivery robots used in restaurants and hotel service robots, as well as AI-powered smart lawn mowers.

The updated lawn mower models feature a real-time kinematic sys-

tem to improve accuracy and stability in positioning, and provide enhanced obstacle avoidance capabilities that can tackle a variety of more than 20 obstacles, including trees, curbs, running children, and small animals, the company said.

Hong Yong, a research fellow at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation's e-commerce research institute, said Chinese tech companies are at the forefront of technological innovation, and have made remarkable breakthroughs in cutting-edge technologies such as vehicle-mounted displays, AR, and smart home devices.

This, Hong said, will help boost their competitiveness on the global stage and drive the transformation from "Made in China" to "Created in China".

These companies are actively promoting the application of AI in consumer electronics, intelligent devices and electric vehicles, Hong said.

They should further expand their global foothold, strengthen international cooperation and share their technical advantages with the world by participating in important industrial exhibitions with global influence, he added.

China's innovations in AR, extended reality (XR), autonomous driving, and e-bike sectors have also grabbed global attention.

For instance, Chinese AR company Xreal displayed its latest AR-powered devices, such as AR glasses, by partnering with companies such as Qualcomm and BMW.

XR technology company Nolo showed up with its new virtual reality all-in-one machine, and an upgraded version of its wearable ring that provides XR interactive experience.

Xpeng Aeroht, a flying car unit of Chinese electric vehicle maker Xpeng Motors, showcased its innovative "Land Aircraft Carrier" modular flying car.

It said the flying car will be available for preorders in the fourth quarter of 2024, with delivery to individual users commencing in the fourth quarter of 2025.

The vehicle boasts a two-part design, seamlessly switching between terrestrial and aerial modes. As the company's second breakthrough vehicle, its electric vertical takeoff and landing flying car made its international debut at the CES.

In addition, self-driving startup WeRide launched its autonomous minibus, offering an on-site Level 4 autonomous driving experience.

Aima, one of China's biggest e-bike makers, made its CES debut this year and showcased its diverse range of products, including brand-new electric bikes.

Chinese tech companies have shown the potential to lead the industry, not only in mature categories such as display technology and smartphones, but also in emerging fields such as autonomous driving, AR and VR, said Pan Helin, co-director of the digital economy and financial innovation research center at Zhejiang University's International Business School.

## China seen as innovation engine by CES participants

LAS VEGAS — At the CES 2024 in Las Vegas, cooperation with China was not a fresh topic, and this year's tech show saw foreign companies continue to seek opportunities in the Chinese market.

For these companies, China's rise as an innovation hub was viewed as an opportunity for collective progress.

"Qualcomm does not simply see China as a market, but as an opportunity for win-win cooperation between Qualcomm and the Chinese ecosystem," said Meng Pu, chairman of Qualcomm China.

The rapid development of China's mobile communications industry has benefited from Qualcomm, and without Chinese partners, Qualcomm would not have been able to develop rapidly, said Meng.

"As China's technology and economic and social development improve, Qualcomm faces more opportunities," Meng said.

Qualcomm has long been integrated into the Chinese smart-phone supply chain.

In recent years, Qualcomm has forged close cooperation with the

Chinese automotive industry. The ecosystem formed by Qualcomm and the many supply chains in China is "a mutually beneficial relationship," Meng added.

This sentiment was echoed by John Couling, senior vice-president of entertainment at Dolby Laboratories.

Dolby's Atmos FlexConnect unlocks a more extensive and immersive Dolby audio experience through the ability to seamlessly pair accessory wireless speakers with the TV's sound system while unlocking the flexibility to place each speaker wherever consumers choose.

"We have seen that new experiences can first start in China, with our Chinese partners, and then be brought to the global (arena)," he said. "This isn't just about selling technology — it's about co-creating and pushing the boundaries of what's possible," he added.

Meng said China's "fast-paced" innovation and the consumers who are good at embracing new ideas and new technologies are driving Dolby's development and speeding

up its deployment of new technologies in the world.

Besides tech giants, smaller companies like German e-scooter maker Trittbrett also acknowledge the crucial role of Chinese innovation.

Yassine El Hajji, the company's marketing manager, said he saw "a lot of newest technologies" from China in the e-scooter industry.

"Without the new Chinese innovations, we won't get so far in Germany because lots of our technology and cooperation with international companies are established in China," he said.

"We have cooperated with Chinese companies and our e-scooters are manufactured in Changsha, China. China is strong in electric vehicle sectors, always keeping up with futuristic design and technologies," he noted.

John Morrow, insights lead of 3M Strategy and Business Development, believes China's focus on sustainability innovation holds immense potential.

"Expect to see Chinese innovations in sustainability and green

energy," he said. "There's not to be one solution that solves all problems of the climate crisis. So the more ideas there are, I think the better all would be."

Morrow told Xinhua that 3M works with several manufacturers in China, where innovations are developing at a fast pace. "China attaches great importance to innovation capabilities. It is way ahead of others in the installation of solar energy. They are driving the industry," he said.

Chinese companies have been important forces at CES in recent years, impressing global exhibitors with innovative products and solutions, and showcasing the latest trends and innovations in the consumer electronics industry.

In an exclusive interview with Xinhua, Liu Chun, vice-president of the China Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Machinery and Electronic Products, expressed her confidence in China's increasingly important role in the consumer electronics industry.

She said with the development of China's economy, the expansion of



A flying car developed by Xpeng Aeroht, a subsidiary of Chinese EV-maker Xpeng, is on display at the 2024 CES in Las Vegas on Jan 11.

WU XIAOLING / XINHUA

market scale, the revolution of the technology sector, and the elevation in the value chain of the industry, the nation's status will be further consolidated.

"Judging from CES, an important global industry exhibition, in recent years, more Chinese technological innovation companies participating in the exhibition rely on quality and technology to win," she said. "In the global consumer electronics

industry chain, especially in the upstream and midstream, more powerful Chinese suppliers have emerged."

Moreover, she said innovative consumer technology companies in China are also paying more attention to international operations, localization and global cooperation.

XINHUA

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## With recovery of Chinese economy on solid footing, it will remain a driver of global growth

Given the giant size of the Chinese economy, about 17 percent of the global economy, and the tremendous headwinds it has had to overcome, that it sustained a 5.2-percent growth last year, 2.2 percentage points higher than the previous year, is undoubtedly a hard-won result.

As the majority of the key indicators point to the recovery momentum of the world's second-largest economy consolidating and strengthening, it can be said that China is quickly adapting to the complicated geopolitical situation and uncertainties.

It is expected that China will have contributed about 30 percent of world economic growth last year, which means that it will have continued to be a major growth engine for the world, as it has been over the past more than three decades.

Beijing's release of the annual economic data on Wednesday coincided with the annual gathering of the World Economic Forum being held in Davos, Switzerland, and the prospects for the Chinese economy have been much discussed at the gathering.

The data and the Chinese delegation's productive and warm exchanges with their counterparts from other countries have boosted the global community's confidence that the recovery of the Chinese economy is sustainable and thus it will provide strong impetus to the global economy.

No wonder World Economic Forum President Borge Brende told the media that "the steps that China takes are incredibly important for the world".

The warm welcome Premier Li Qiang has received in Switzerland and Ireland, which he visited after leaving Davos on Tuesday, as well as the in-depth discussions he had with his hosts in the two countries on green development, high-tech and innovation show the great potential that exists to be tapped.

Although the current external environment is complex and China's economic development still faces difficulties and challenges, China, as many analysts have observed, has a solid industrial foundation and broad macroeconomic policy space for its pursuit of high-quality development.

With the fundamentals of its economy still strong and the cultivation of new productive forces accelerating, China's status as a world-class market, global trade hub, a world manufacturing base and a magnet for talents, investment, innovation and technology will only continue to rise.

China's commitment to opening up remains unwavering and that means it will continue to share its development dividends with the world and create favorable conditions for the world to share in the opportunities created by its pursuit of sustainable growth.

## EU's Red Sea plan shows it seeks autonomy

By moving ahead with its plan to establish its own naval operation to protect commercial shipping in the Red Sea, the European Union has shown it wants to keep strategic autonomy and not act under the banner of the United States.

According to reports, Spain, which opposed previous plans, will not block the latest one, clearing the way for the details to be worked out. There is now a push to get final approval of the plan at the EU foreign ministers' meeting on Jan 22. "The idea is to have a European mission that can be operational as soon as possible," Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said.

While 10 countries supported the US-led air strikes on Houthi targets in Yemen, including the EU members Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands, vowing in a joint statement released by the White House "not to hesitate to defend lives and protect the free flow of commerce in one of the world's most critical waterways," the EU is right to try and unite the bloc so it can act on its own initiative.

To join a US-led operation in the Red Sea for shipping protection means, first of all, submitting to US decisions on what actions are to be taken, and thus becoming tools for its pursuit of its broader agenda in the region.

US "interests" in the crisis do not necessarily align with the priorities set out by the EU.

Besides, in response to the intensifying US-led air strikes, Houthi militants have reacted fiercely

by vowing that all US and UK ships are "legitimate targets". "The ship doesn't necessarily have to be heading to Israel for us to target it," said its spokesperson.

The UK has already set a not-so-smart precedent in making its flagged vessels targets by Pavlovianly following the US' lead. The EU is wise to avoid doing the same.

The EU already has an independent maritime security operation, the Spain-led Atalanta mission in the northwestern Indian Ocean, which was launched in response to piracy off the Somali coast. By not joining US-led military operations in the Red Sea, the EU would also reinforce the possibility of easing the tensions in the Red Sea, which are a spillover effect of the Gaza conflict, via peaceful, political means. The key solution to the problem in the Red Sea lies in ending that conflict.

While the importance of the Red Sea as a global goods and energy trade passage is beyond question, and the need to protect commercial shipping is imperative, the US' use of force is only aggravating the risks and does not address the root cause, which is its refusal to restrain Israel's military operations in Gaza.

The EU is showing good judgement in not wanting to be party to the US' murky, and clearly self-serving agenda in the region. It's time for reason to prevail and the US' unconscionable actions not to be supported, so that concerted efforts can be made to end the conflict in Gaza. That is the best way to extinguish the fire in the Red Sea.

## Canada up to its bootlicking tricks again

The Canadian government on Tuesday published a list of 11 "Sensitive Technology Research Areas" along with a list of 103 "Named Research Organizations" with which cooperation in the areas identified would be considered a potential national security risk.

Any research in such areas involving collaboration with the named entities, which are allegedly connected to foreign military, defense or security apparatuses, would be disqualified for federal funding.

While the policy will not take effect before September, the government may act accordingly now "should risks be identified," said a statement issued by three government ministers, citing Canada's new "Policy on Sensitive Technology Research and Affiliations of Concern".

In the current atmosphere of geopolitical complexity, it has become habitual for countries to worry about national security and for them to make moves to address perceived risks, real or otherwise. The politicizing of such concerns, however, and the abusing and manipulating of remedial actions not only poison international relations, but also impede scientific and technological advancement.

The 11 research areas cover literally all the realms of emerging technologies that are believed to be of critical importance for future scientific and technological advancement.

Among the "Named Research Organizations" that allegedly "may pose" a threat to Canadian

national security and sensitive research are 85 Chinese research institutions supposedly suspected of being "military, national defense or state security entities".

The Canadian move will deal an additional blow to the already icy ties with China. In Beijing's eyes, this is but another sign that Ottawa is determined to follow in the United States' footsteps.

The move "seriously undermines scientific exchanges and cooperation between China and Canada, and is not conducive to improving and stabilizing bilateral relations," said Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning.

"The Chinese side is strongly dissatisfied with and resolutely opposes it," she said.

Scientific and technological exchanges and cooperation between the two sides are two-way and mutually beneficial, she pointed out.

And as many have observed, such national security scrutiny will inevitably have a chilling effect on both Canadian and international scientific and technological progress.

The Canadian policy is certainly detrimental to the scientific and technological communities of China and Canada, for it will erect insurmountable obstacles to normal exchanges and collaboration.

Instead of obstructing such exchanges and cooperation, Ottawa should create the conditions and atmosphere for improving and developing scientific and technological exchanges and cooperation.

Luo Jie



## Opinion Line

## China must take the initiative for security of its grain imports

China is the world's largest grain consumer, and although its own grain output has remained above 650 million tons for nine consecutive years, its food consumption has seen rigid growth, and food supply and demand have been in a tight balance for a long time. Moderate imports can effectively make up for the structural shortage of the country's domestic grain supply. This explains why strengthening international food security cooperation has been enshrined in the Food Security Law as an institutional arrangement for ensuring food security in China.

Over the years, China has strengthened its voice and bargaining power in the international food trade by diversifying its grain imports and expanding its import sources. On the basis of ensuring basic self-sufficiency in its grain supply and its absolute food security, China has adopted a global perspective in regard to its grain

imports, injecting vitality into the sluggish world economy.

China imported 162 million metric tons of grains in 2023, an increase of 11.7 percent on the amount in 2022. "Chinese demand" for grain imports can influence the flow of global food trade to a certain extent, but it still cannot influence international food prices. The fall in international food prices in 2023 is the result of a combination of factors such as lower-than-expected global economic recovery, declining food demand and aggressive interest rate hikes by the US Federal Reserve. As the world's largest grain exporter, the United States controls more than half of the world's grain market, and through international market regulation, data release and guidance of expectations, firmly dominates global grain supply and the pricing of the international grain trade.

China's domestic grain production is characterized by high costs and high prices, and thus it is at a disadvantage in the international grain trade. In order to protect domestic grain production from the impact of low-priced imports, China has implemented an import quota management system for major grains to prevent a large amount of food imports having adverse effects on the domestic food sector.

In the context of its greater efforts to promote wider opening-up, China should try to raise its international grain competitiveness and pricing power. It also needs to make good use of international food resources and the import tariff and quota management policy, well handle the scale and pace of its grain imports, and closely follow dynamic changes in the grain markets at home and abroad, taking possible timely measures in response.

— ECONOMIC DAILY

## Trump comeback as yet uncertain

On Jan 15, the Republican Party held a caucus in Iowa, marking the beginning of the Republican primary for the 2024 US presidential election. Donald Trump easily won with a 51 percent approval rate.

A poll conducted among over 1,500 voters planning to attend the caucus meeting revealed that about 90 percent of respondents believed that the operation of the federal government must undergo thorough or significant changes. At least within the Republican Party, Trump is viewed as the person capable of bringing about these changes.

Further, a Fox News poll found that if Florida governor Ron DeSantis won the Republican primary, 35

percent of Trump supporters would refuse to vote for him. However, if the winner was former US ambassador to UN Nikki Haley, the percentage would rise to 45.

Which indicates that Trump's supporters are more aligned with him personally than with the Republican Party — a reality enough to exert strong pressure on the Republican Party, compelling them to follow Trump's lead to avoid losing votes.

Moreover, there are quite a number of "middle voters" who don't necessarily support the Democratic Party but absolutely do not want Trump to be elected again. They might go to polling stations only to

prevent Trump winning.

On Jan 23, the next Republican primary election will be held in New Hampshire, where Republican supporters are more moderate and secular, and the party registration rules are relatively open, which means that there may be more supporters of the Republican Party but they do not support Trump in the voting. It is also Haley's home state, which adds more uncertainties to the result.

Should Trump still win in such a situation, the remaining opponents DeSantis and Haley will face stronger pressure within the party to withdraw from the race.

— BEIJING NEWS

## What They Say

## Decoupling proves to be wishful thinking

"Decoupling," under the guise of "de-risking," is something easier said than done. It is actually not as easy as some Western politicians think for manufacturing enterprises to relocate out of China.

For instance, over the first seven months of last year, toys produced in China still accounted for 79 percent of toy sales in the United States and Europe. Manufacturers have found that it is not easy to move production to other countries because other countries lack modern port facilities with such a large scale as those in China, and developed transport facilities like those in China. And in terms of work efficiency, other countries cannot compare with China either.

In the era of globalization, the relocation of some industries is a normal phenomenon. Every country's development strategy is adjusted at different times. Research shows that since the second half of the 19th century, significant cross-border industry chain

relocation has occurred at least five times around the world.

The transfer of the industry chain itself follows market rules. The hyping-up of the so-called "foreign investment and production withdrawal from China" is more of an exaggeration based on ideological bias and driven by political needs.

In fact, very few industries have moved out of the country in recent years. What China is experiencing is more like a readjustment of the division of labor in some upstream and downstream production links. For example, among the types of products exported from China to Vietnam, intermediate products account for more than 70 percent. And electronic integrated circuits, mechanical equipment parts and steel are the main products. According to statistics, from January to May 2022, 90 percent of Vietnam's imported goods from China are related to production equipment as well as intermediate products.

That means although the destination of some Chinese export products has changed, and some industry chains have seemingly moved to Southeast Asia, the final export destination still points to Europe and the US, and China is still the production center of the world.

The relocation of labor-intensive industries to other countries is natural as the wage level in the latter is lower. And the move is also in line with the new development model China pursues that stresses innovation, quality and efficiency.

As the global economic recovery is sluggish, China's economy is also in a transformation period shifting gears to a more sustainable development model. It is unavoidable that the country will have to face some challenges and pressure in the process. However, China's economy has its own operating logic and unique characteristics, and its resilience in the face of storms is unquestionable.

— BEIJING DAILY

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## COMMENT

Patricio Giusto

## Argentina's foreign policy erratic, misleading

There are pillars of Argentine President Javier Milei's foreign policy that were anticipated as he talked about them during the presidential campaign, such as his strong desire to realign with the United States and deepen relations with the European Union. During the campaign, his emphasis was also on boosting certain bilateral relations, such as Argentina-Israel ties, for personal reasons.

His new approach to foreign policy could have been defensible and even justifiable within Argentina as a consistent foreign policy strategy. Yet Milei's first foreign policy signals seem based eminently on ideological positions, prejudice and misperceptions, as is the case with his China policy.

Broadly speaking, Milei and his close aides appear to have a misleading view of the current state of international relations. To put it in another way, in a century which many say is of China and Asia, Argentina seems to be retreating toward an Atlantic-centric approach with the US at its epicenter, which is characteristic of the 20th century.

There's no doubt Brazil and China will continue to be Argentina's main economic partners. But despite softening his tone toward Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva after being elected, Milei may find it very difficult to appropriately manage Argentina-Brazil rela-

**China is the second-biggest trade partner of Argentina, as well as the main source of investment in big infrastructure projects.**

tions. From now on, we can expect minimum political interactions between the two biggest countries in South America. This in turn will have a negative impact on the functioning of MERCOSUR — Spanish initials for the Southern Common Market, which is a regional integration process initially launched by Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay and later joined by Venezuela and Bolivia, with the latter still complying with the accession procedure, and Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana Peru and Suriname being associated members.

Argentina's relationship with China will likely be even more complicated under Milei, not least because the new Argentine administration seems to misunderstand what China represents today for the world, and how important it is for Argentina's interests.

For instance, what does Buenos Aires gain by provoking Beijing on the most sensitive issue for China: the Taiwan

question? Some of Milei's political aides have also made some pathetic remarks in favor of the Taiwan island.

China is the second-biggest trade partner of Argentina, as well as the main source of investment in big infrastructure projects. It has also provided invaluable financial support for Argentina via currency swaps, not to mention the deepening cooperation both countries have fruitfully forged in fields such as science, technology, education, sports and tourism.

Argentina and China have been comprehensive strategic partners since 2014, with the former joining the Belt and Road Initiative in 2022. This mutually beneficial relationship should not be endangered by an ideology-driven foreign policy.

Another issue affecting Argentina's relationship with China is Milei's refusal to join BRICS. Instead of taking advantage of joining BRICS after the decisive support of Argentina's two main trade partners, Brazil and China, Milei chose to stay away from the grouping, arguing that it is a "geopolitical club" in which Russia and Iran also participate.

But what about Brazil, India and South Africa, as well as the five new members: Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates? The misleading assessment is a denial of the fact that

BRICS is a grouping in expansion which offers huge diplomatic and financial opportunities to Argentina. Rejecting BRICS also meant the absurdity of turning those countries away.

Diana Mondino's first trip abroad as Argentine foreign minister was to Paris, where she joined French officials in conversations on another "geopolitical club", the G7, which could be a "good" club from Milei's naive libertarian perspective. But unlike BRICS, Argentina has no chance of being included in the G7.

On the other hand, Mondino said Argentina wants to join the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which is an organization of a different nature and with different objectives than BRICS. Another poor decision driven by ideology.

Milei, who has already demonstrated a capacity for learning and made timely pragmatic turns in other political realms, still has time to prevent an erratic and misleading foreign policy from being the Achilles' heel of his presidency.

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Chen Weihua

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## Double standard of the West laid bare in the Gaza Strip

Both the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Pal-estine conflicts are tragedies, for they have claimed thousands of lives and caused massive destruction. Yet they have also exposed the double standard of Western politicians whose narratives on the two conflicts are wildly contradictory.

While sitting in the European Parliament's news briefing room in Strasbourg, France, on Tuesday morning and listening to the speeches of leaders of political groups, this contradiction became even more apparent.

Manfred Weber, president of the European People's Party, the largest political group in the European Parliament, repeatedly condemned Russia and voiced support for Ukraine while defending Israel's right to defend itself, without bothering to mention the alarmingly high number of Palestinian civilians' deaths.

More than 24,000 Palestinians, a majority of them children and women, have been killed since Oct 7 when Hamas militants launched a sudden, massive attack on Israel, killing about 1,200 Israeli citizens. Using data available in the public domain, Oxfam has said that on average 250 Palestinians have been killed every day — more than in any other conflict in the 21st century — since the beginning of the conflict.

Western leaders, from US President Joe Biden to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, have ignored the high number of Palestinian casualties in their speeches, reflecting their utter disregard for Palestinian lives. Biden has even questioned the accuracy of the death toll in the Gaza Strip, numbers that have been accepted by UN agencies and aid groups.

**This is reflected in the growing public outrage against Western leaders for their stance on the Israel-Palestine conflict.**

Some Western politicians argue that the two conflicts are totally different in nature. They say Russia's "special military operation" in Ukraine was unprovoked while Israel was attacked by Hamas on Oct 7. Yet the Western leaders and media never mention the fact that NATO's aggressive expansion since the 1990s and their arrogant reply letters to Russia in January 2022 are largely responsible for triggering the conflict.

As for Gaza, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that it's important to recognize that the attacks by Hamas did not happen in a vacuum as the Palestinian people have been subjected to 56 years of suffocating occupation. Guterres was referring to Israel's occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip since 1967. In addition, Israel's treatment of the Palestinian people has been considered illegal and inhuman by many in the world.

Western leaders not only refuse to condemn the crimes committed by their so-called allies and partners, they also try to whitewash them, as evident in Germany's announcement that it will defend Israel at the International Court of Justice in The Hague against South Africa's charge that Israel has committed genocide in Gaza. German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock notoriously said that "Israel does care about the people of Gaza, the Palestinians". Using the same logic, she should say that Russia cares about Ukrainians.

People like Baerbock don't hesitate to condemn Russia and use words such as war crimes and crimes against humanity whenever Russia launches an attack on Ukraine, but they have never used such words to describe Israel's indiscriminate bombings in Gaza, which have caused many more civilian deaths than in Ukraine.

The selective application of international laws, the UN Charter and rules-based system by the small group of self-proclaimed "international community" could not have been more appalling in the case of Gaza atrocities. No wonder some Western analysts have said the Gaza crisis has exposed the moral bankruptcy of the West. This is reflected in the growing public outrage against Western leaders for their stance on the Israel-Palestine conflict.

On Tuesday, the walkout protest by US federal employees from nearly two dozen agencies under the banner "Feds United for Peace" showed that many people are still ready to risk their jobs to protest against the government they work for. A poll conducted by The New York Times/Siena College last month showed that nearly 75 percent of the young voters, aged 18-29, disapprove of Biden's handling of the Gaza conflict.

Western leaders and politicians nowadays condemn and designate the people they dislike as terrorists, but their rhetoric has become so hollow that few people, especially the billions of people in the Global South, take them seriously anymore.

Dan Steinbock

## Chinese economy still has lots of potential

Last year, international observers accused China of spreading global inflation and deflation, and causing economic collapse. In reality, the Chinese economy has achieved a soft rebound despite the dire global economic landscape.

As global business and political leaders swarmed to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Premier Li Qiang took the podium to tell the world that the Chinese economy rebounded and moved upward in 2023. The Chinese economy, in fact, grew by about 5.2 percent last year — at a slightly higher rate than the official target of "around 5 percent".

And, as Li said, no matter how the global situation changes, China will adhere to its fundamental policy of opening-up, and keep opening its door wider and wider.

In the fourth quarter of 2023, China's GDP growth reached 5.2 percent. While retail sales in December grew by 7.4 percent year-on-year, consumers remained cost-conscious despite gradually returning to the marketplace. However, the Spring Festival holiday is likely to generate "9 billion passenger trips", which will accelerate growth in the retail, tourism and transportation sectors.

As a matter of fact, there is significant pent-up demand in China. The need is to unleash that consumption power, and the first condition is a promising job market outlook.

According to China's National Bureau of Statistics, the surveyed unemployment rate in cities in December was 5.1 percent.

Also, industrial activities are picking up, with industrial production in December increasing by 6.8 percent year-on-year, thus beating forecasts. The same goes for fixed asset investment, which increased by 3 percent in 2023, slightly above the predicted increase.

Importantly, there is also broad expectation for targeted fiscal support. And in light of the raised real interest rates, there is still room for rate cuts. When will they come? The US Federal Reserve is likely to enter the rate cut cycle later this year, and China's cuts may ensue.

That's why China's top leader has put emphasis on making sustained efforts to develop the country's "financial power" so as to build a safe, efficient and internationally competitive financial system.

As Premier Li noted at Davos, China has now some 400 million people in the middle-income group, and that number is expected to double to 800 million in the next decade. In contrast, in the past four decades, the real income of the middle-class in the US has largely stagnated, with the situation in the European Union not being dissimilar.

As Li said at Davos, in the next decade, urbanization in China will create huge demand in sectors such as housing, education, healthcare and eldercare. And another 300 million people are expected to migrate from rural to urban areas in China and thus boost the secular potential for investments in upgrading the urban transport and telecom infrastructure, creating new opportunities for

domestic and international financial institutions.

After several years of deleveraging in the real estate sector, the Chinese economy seems to have made a soft landing which bodes well for a soft economic rebound in 2024. The full recovery of the property market will take time, though. The tier-one high-income mega-cities are usually able to borrow more to support local development, while relatively low-income cities are constrained by aggressive public finance.

As Standard & Poor's Global Ratings report said, the Chinese property sector, though evolving, seems to have steadied and struck a balance. At the same time, China has shifted from exports- and investment-driven growth to high-quality development driven by consumption and innovation, a massive process that took a century or so for the West, but just few decades for China.

In the mid-2000s, steel production growth peaked at 30 percent; today, it is decelerating into negative territory. In

two to three decades, China has moved from catching up with the West to becoming a leader in cutting-edge technologies and innovations. For instance, China is a leader in electric vehicles (EVs), both in terms of production and consumption. The country's booming EV sales is much higher than that of the US and other adopters of EVs.

Accordingly, economic reforms are likely to shift away from the supply side to the demand side. To expedite this transition, policymakers are likely to focus increasingly on the constraints of human capital rather than infrastructure, which has worked in the past. These changes require parallel reforms and support, particularly in the property, education and healthcare sectors.

However, unfinished housing units, local government debt and geopolitical challenges remain risks this year. The first two could now be regarded as soft risks; but the third is a black swan, highly consequential, yet unpredictable.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

## GLOBAL VIEWS



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

JAMES LAURENCESON

## Take it up a notch

Australia and China need a practical agenda to move relations beyond stabilization

Since the Anthony Albanese-led Labor government came to power in May 2022, Australia's bilateral relationship with China has been on a positive trajectory.

Dialogue between senior political leaders has been regularized. The highlight of the restoration of dialogue to date has been his official visit to China last November.



A positive trajectory in bilateral relations has been charted despite neither Canberra nor

Beijing making statements or adopting policy positions that have compromised their respective national interests.

And each side continues to have reservations about the other. Sometimes, as Chinese ambassador to Australia Xiao Qian acknowledged in January 2023: "We even have disputes."

Yet, entering 2024 there is considerable cause for optimism around the bilateral relationship.

This is because both sides have reverted to a tried and tested diplomatic formula: differences are acknowledged, but in light of the two countries' enormous common interests, there is agreement that these differences should not define the overall relationship.

To be sure, the differences are not trivial, and this means there will be an inevitable stream of developments requiring careful management.

The recent incident involving Australian and Chinese naval vessels in the East China Sea is a case in point. While the incident was plainly not a positive one, and the

two sides made clear their positions and these were at odds, neither sought to hype its significance and the overall positive trajectory in bilateral relations was not derailed.

The AUKUS agreement represents a greater challenge.

Canberra claims that AUKUS supports stability and state sovereignty by contributing to a "strategic equilibrium" in a multipolar region.

But Beijing, as well as a significant section of the Australian public, assesses that it effectively amounts to Canberra signing up to a Washington-led containment strategy of China. This grates because previous Australian prime ministers promised their Chinese counterparts that Australia's security alliance with the United States "was not in any way directed at China". Moreover, in November 2020, even then prime minister Scott Morrison insisted that while the US was in strategic competition with China, Australia was not.

The foreign policy stances that Beijing might regard as reasonable and measured can also easily be perceived differently in Canberra, driving it to tighten strategic alignment with other capitals that share these anxieties. In 2014, President Xi Jinping told the Australian parliament that he understood other countries see China as "the big guy in the crowd" and worry that the "big guy may push them around".

The danger is obvious: an insecurity spiral.

But while managing differences might not be easy, the benefits from constructive engagement are plain to see.

Last year, the two-way trade in goods hit a record high of \$230 billion, up 9.8 percent on 2022.

People-to-people ties are roaring back too, following the COVID-19 pandemic. Between July and November, 33,380 visa applications were lodged by prospective Chinese students at Australian universities. This was up 16 percent on the previous pre-pandemic high.

When speaking with my Chinese colleagues, they express a sense of satisfaction that the bilateral relationship has now been "stabilized". But there is also a strong desire to move beyond "stabilization". The risk they detect — correctly, in my view — is that if the two sides lack ambition, then fears and misunderstandings arising from differences can easily well up.

So, what might a practical agenda for positive and constructive Australia-China relations in 2024 look like?

Why not begin with a friendly port visit to Australia by a Chinese naval vessel? The howls by Australia's China hawks that would accompany such a visit are predictable. But it would be a powerful demonstration of the point made by Angus Houston, former chief of the Australian Defence Force, in October 2020: "China is our partner. China is not our enemy. Let's get that very straight." It would also follow naturally from the resumption of dialogue between the two militaries that took place in both Australia and China last year.

Beijing could also rescind the remaining sanctions imposed in 2020 that still affect Australian exports of wine, lobster and beef.

Canberra could make clear that there is no blanket ban on Chinese investments in Australia's critical mineral sector by approving some proposals.



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

Such moves do not represent "concessions". Both the Australian and Chinese economies would benefit and neither side would be compromising their national security. And mutual trust would be

enhanced, setting the stage for pursuing even more ambitious cooperation.

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For a considerable period of time in the 21st century, the development of China-Australia relations remained relatively positive. "Balanced diplomacy" was the fundamental stance of Australia's policies toward China and the United States. However, since 2016, China-Australia relations have rapidly deteriorated, as Australia's foreign policy has



increasingly tilted toward an imbalanced state of being pro-US and anti-China, and its perception of threats from China has increased significantly.

In recent years, affected by the deterioration of China-Australia political relations and other factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, bilateral investment flows between the two countries have declined sharply, and people-to-people exchanges have been hindered. Australian officials, scholars and the public have shown a clear decrease in their willingness to participate in activities related to China, due to a significant increase in domestic political and public opinion pressure.

In contrast, China-Australia trade relations have shown relatively strong resilience. Despite a series of restrictive measures imposed since the end of 2020, their bilateral trade volume increased by 35.1 percent year-on-year in 2021, among which Australia's exports to China rose 40.6 percent. In 2022, China's imports of iron ore from Australia increased by 5.1 percent year-on-year, accounting for approximately 66 percent of its total iron ore imports. Australia remains China's largest source of iron ore, and China remains Australia's largest importer of iron ore. In 2023, the bilateral trade volume reached \$230 billion, with a yearly increase of 9.8 percent.

These trends have deepened Australia's perception of contradictions with China and prompted the Anthony Albanese government to undertake a "rebalancing" of

Australia's China policy. Although Australia still harbors fear and resistance toward China's rise, it recognizes the strong complementarity in the economic structure between the two countries and the importance of handling the China-Australia relationship more cautiously.

With the step-by-step settlement of bilateral trade disputes, Australia's exports to China reached A\$19 billion (\$12.97 billion) in March 2023, a year-on-year increase of 31 percent, the highest since 1988. At the same time, personnel exchanges and cooperation have gradually resumed between Chinese and Australian universities, think tanks, enterprises, media and civil society organizations. In November 2023, Albanese paid a successful visit to China, which injected further momentum into the rapid thawing and turnaround of China-Australia relations.

Just as Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi put it in the 2023 International Situation and China Diplomacy Seminar on Jan 9, "China-Australia relations are coming back on the right track, and their comprehensive strategic partnership has been resumed, presenting a virtuous cycle of healthy and stable development."

In the foreseeable future, there are many opportunities for cooperation between China and Australia on the bilateral, regional and global levels. There is every reason to believe that healthy and stable development of China-Australia



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

relations will bring more benefits to the people of both countries and beyond. However, the two countries still need to overcome some disruptions to achieve further improvement in their relations.

The pressure exerted by the US on Australia has escalated enormously, which has become the most significant obstacle to the development of China-Australia relations.

With the US-Australia alliance becoming a key tool for the US to implement its "Indo-Pacific" strate-

JIANG FANGFEI

## Sustainable virtuous cycle

Joint efforts required to bolster the healthy and stable development of Sino-Australian ties now they have thawed

adds to China's anxiety and might further increase the danger of an insecurity spiral between the two sides.

Australia has been struggling between cultural independence and dependence since its founding. As a power in the Asia-Pacific, Australia desires to establish a relatively independent cultural identity by integrating into the region. However, as a member of the Western camp, Australia is also reluctant to sever its ties with Anglo-American culture amid fears of being completely abandoned by the West.

This dilemma has created a contradictory mindset in Australia, leading to a situation where it swings between East Asian and Western countries. From strongly supporting the US joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement and "pivoting to the Asia-Pacific", to actively participating in the Regional Compre-

hensive Economic Partnership and even advocated an "Asia-Pacific community"; and then swinging again to be in the "vanguard" of US-led negotiations to launch the "Indo-Pacific" Economic Framework for Prosperity and cementing a nuclear submarine deal with the US and the United Kingdom under the framework of their AUKUS security partnership targeting at China, these actions have severely damaged the trust between China and Australia, which might also constrain the stable development of China-Australia relations in the long term.

With the upcoming US presidential election creating additional uncertainties, China-Australia relations might encounter more challenges in 2024. Substantial progress can only be achieved through the joint efforts of both governments and peoples.

For China, it is important to maintain strategic confidence and show patience with Australia.

While seeking to stabilize China-US relations, it should avoid tying its Australia policy to its US policy. Additionally, China needs to counter the trend of "securitization" through "de-securitization" measures, such as settling bilateral disputes through equal consultation step by step. Moreover, China should keep supporting exchanges and cooperation between Chinese and Australian think tanks, universities and media, and provide more policy facilitation for Australian people to visit, invest and study in China.

For Australia, it is necessary to enhance its independent decision-making capabilities, avoid becoming a pawn in the US' strategy to contain China and to address the problem of "over-securitization" in its China policy. Canberra should view China and China-Australia relations from a more rational, pragmatic and balanced perspective and increase its strategic confidence through trust building and equal consultation with China and other stakeholders. It should also try to create a more favorable public opinion environment in Australia toward China-Australia relations, and provide more support for Australian people to learn about the real China, rather than being held hostage by Western media.

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## LIFE

Archaeologists are still working on unraveling the mystery of who the people were behind the marvelous artifacts found in Sanxingdui, one of the largest archaeological discoveries in the 20th century in China.

While nobody really knows the answer, a new animated film produced by China and Canada is boldly imagining and ultimately visualizing the identity of this civilization that flourished more than 3,000 years ago.

*Heroes of the Golden Mask*, directed by Canadian animation veteran Sean Patrick O'Reilly, was released in domestic theaters on Dec 29.

Combining elements of fantasy and adventure, the film fictionalizes an ancient realm ruled by a king named Yufu, and protected by a team of five warriors from various civilizations from China, East Asia, the Mayans and Atlantis. These fighters possess super-powers when they wear their golden masks.

Li Xian, the only female among the five, is entrusted by her father — a golden-mask warrior who dies in the battle against an evil invader — to find his successor. Fate leads the young woman to embark on a journey, traveling through time to the modern world, where she unexpectedly discovers that a troubled teenager named Charlie is the chosen heir. Despite their initial conflicts and differences, the two protagonists join forces with three other warriors, defeating their enemies and restoring peace to the kingdom.

Producer Zhang Zhihong recalls that the project, which was launched in 2015, featured plans to create a Sanxingdui culture-themed franchise, including a novel series, an animated movie, a computer game and a theme park.

After the Chinese creative team finalized the story outline, Canadian author John Wilson, who is known for historical tales, wrote *The Ruined City*, the first volume in the Golden Mask series. Following the novel's publication in 2018, the outline was developed into the film's script with a Chinese version for China, and an English version for North America.

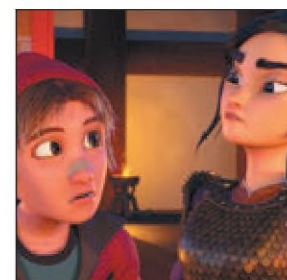
In order to seek more inspiration about the ancient civilization that once prevailed in Southwest China's Sichuan province, the film crew — consisting of animators and writers from home and abroad — went to several famous archaeological sites and historical attractions in the province, including the Sanxingdui site in Guanghan, the Jinsha site in Chengdu and the ancient ethnic Qiang city in Maoxian county in Aba Tibetan and Qiang autonomous prefecture.

Some of the most-celebrated artifacts on show at the Sanxingdui Museum, which has authorized their use in the movie, include a bronze mask with protruding eyes, a nearly 4-meter-high bronze tree, a



## Animating the ancients

A new cartoon flick imagines a fantastical account of the mysterious Sanxingdui civilization, **Xu Fan** reports.



**Top:** *Shan Hai Jing* (The Classic of Mountains and Seas), a collection of Chinese mythology, inspires the creation of several characters in *Heroes of the Golden Mask*, including a formidable tiger with white fur and a pair of wings. **Above:** The film unfolds with the fantasy journey of Li Xian (right, above), from the Sanxingdui civilization to the modern world in which she encounters a troubled teenager named Charlie (left, above). **Left:** The film seeks to inspire more international interest in ancient Chinese culture. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

jade tiger and a golden scepter.

"The many cultural relics and artifacts collected at the museum showcase exquisite craftsmanship, making them a treasure trove of great academic and archaeological significance. We hope that the movie will promote Sanxingdui culture to a broad international audience," says Zhang, who's also chairman of Sichuan Golden Image Cultural Communication Co.

In addition, some of the monsters in the movie, including a formidable tiger with white fur and a pair of wings, have been inspired by descriptions found in *Shan Hai Jing* (The Classic of Mountains and Seas), a collection of Chinese mythology believed to have been written more than 2,000 years ago.

Zhang recalls there were sometimes cultural differences with their Canadian colleagues when discussing the designs of the characters.

For instance, one of the five golden-mask warriors is a young man named Zhu Long, who can transform into any of the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac. However, due to his fear of heights, the creature he is most reluctant to transform into is the dragon.

In Chinese culture, the dragon symbolizes power and auspiciousness. Throughout history, dragons have been used by many Chinese emperors to adorn their palaces, representing the pinnacle of authority. However, Western legends and myths mostly portray dragons as fire-breathing and malevolent beasts.

"We want the movie to introduce Chinese culture to a wider foreign audience. Therefore, our Chinese team tried hard to persuade their foreign counterparts that Zhu's dragon avatar should emanate a noble temperament. Comfortingly, they accepted our suggestion," says Zhang.

Speaking of the design of Yufu, the ruler of the kingdom depicted as the creator of Sanxingdui culture in the movie, Zhang recalls that the creative team conducted extensive research. They delved into legends and literary works such as the famous poem *Shu Dao Nan* (The Difficulty of Shu Roads) by Tang Dynasty (618-907) poet Li Bai, which mention the King Yufu on which the film is based.

"Yufu was originally depicted as a fisherman in certain legends and myths," Zhang says.

"We can only imagine what he looked like. The Western team once envisioned him as a slightly hunched, skinny old man. However, we still wanted his appearance to be more majestic and noble. The final design combines elements from both teams."

He adds that he hopes the film will encourage more international interest in China's ancient civilization and culture, as more related products are in the pipeline.

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## From panettone to pasta, China's love affair with Italian food

CHONGQING — Panettone, a traditional festive pastry from Italy, has gained increasing popularity among young people in China over the recent Christmas and New Year holidays.

Liu Haozhe, who runs an Italian pizzeria in Southwest China's Chongqing, introduced panettone to his customers during Christmas. In five days, he baked nearly 30 loaves, which were snapped up by curious diners.

"This bread contains sugared orange peel, raisins and rum, which provide sweetness and flavor," says Liu.

"The addition of butter adds a dense taste to the bread body. The towering and fluffy shape is very festive and can be shared with friends."

In Chongqing, renowned in China for its crimson chili peppers and spicy cuisine, another red color has appeared on its food map — tomatoes, a common ingredient in Italian food.

On a local street famous for its exquisite bistros, a restaurant called Richang specializes in handmade pasta. In 2023, it was listed as a recommended restaurant by an online guide to local food. Their signature dish is spaghetti bolognese, and it also serves tagliatelle, a form of pasta from the Emilia-Romagna region, with beef and pork belly. The white wine in the sauce stimulates the aromas of tomato, carrot, onion and meat.

With such additions, the city is equipped to serve up authentic Italian flavors, with all kinds of pasta tempting the taste buds of young local people.

Richang is owned by Sun Wei, who studied overseas and loves to eat fresh homemade pasta. She opened the restaurant because she wanted people in her hometown to experience authentic Italian-style cuisine.

"The taste of Italian food is more based on tomatoes, which is in line

with the tastes of Chinese people," she says.

"With the growing awareness of catering, Chinese people are increasingly fond of a diverse array of food. Italian ingredients are very rich in taste and varied, so it meets the needs of different customers."

The Italian Food Week held in late 2023 saw a series of food activities in cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Chongqing and Hong Kong, including more than 30 activities in southwestern China. These included tasting events, cooking classes and various types of promotional activities. At Richang, diners took part in spaghetti-making classes and learned how wheat flour is turned into spaghetti.

At Bella Napoli, a restaurant in Shanghai, diners not only eat authentic oven-baked pizza but also enjoy Italian-style performances all year round, complete with Mediterranean-style decorations.

At bakeries across China, Italian-

"I think for contemporary cuisine, a fusion is inevitable ... something which underlines the success of cuisine."

Massimo Ambrosetti, Italian ambassador to China

style bread is favored by customers. Wang Yuxuan from Beijing is a lover of Italian bread. She believes that breads such as focaccia and ciabatta are not only chewy but also low in oil and sugar, making them a good carbohydrate choice for people who want to keep fit.

As a representative of the Mediterranean diet, Italian cuisine is not just a list of foods, but more of a

lifestyle that helps people maintain their health while building and strengthening social interactions.

Olive oil provides healthy fats; tomatoes inhibit the oxidation of cholesterol and reduce the risk of heart disease; and the use of spices reduces the amount of oil and salt used, making dishes light and healthy. This kind of food has become increasingly popular on the Chinese dinner table, as people pursue a range of health options.

As traditional Italian cuisine grows in popularity among Chinese people, such dishes are also combined with local ingredients, creating a fusion of the two countries' food cultures.

In southwestern China, local ingredients fuse with Italian-style food, resulting in culinary innovations. Some restaurants use tofu as a white sauce, combined with beef, Sichuan peppercorns and other ingredients, to create a *mapo*-tofu style lasagna.

In another local innovation, fluffy focaccia bread is stuffed with a filling of salted vegetables, and the whole thing is topped with *shaobai* (a kind of preserved pork with mustard greens).

Likewise, in addition to traditional options like basil, locally smoked sausage can be used as an innovative pizza topping.

Italian ambassador to China Massimo Ambrosetti describes China and Italy as "two countries with these really amazing traditions in terms of national cuisines. From north to south in Italy, as in China, we have so many different dishes and so many gastronomic traditions, that these are really unique."

Innovation also gets the ambassador's seal of approval.

"I think for contemporary cuisine, a fusion is inevitable ... something which underlines the success of cuisine. I think fusion is good."

XINHUA

# LIFESHANGHAI

## Ancient art's new life

The public can learn about Chinese history this year through Shanghai Museum's forthcoming satellite venue and special exhibitions, **Wang Xin** reports.

Shanghai Museum is revving up for an eventful year, with the forthcoming opening of its new eastern campus in Pudong New Area, and 18 high-profile special exhibitions it will stage at home and abroad.

Its massive collection of over a million items related to ancient Chinese art is considered the most comprehensive in the world.

Spanning about 46,000 square meters and featuring a display area of 33,600 square meters, the new Shanghai Museum East will have 20 galleries, interactive spaces as well as shopping and dining options.

"(It) will put on the most comprehensive display of ancient Chinese art. We will also highlight the characteristics of Jiangnan and Shanghai cultures with exhibitions," says Chu Xiaobo, director of Shanghai Museum.

"We expect the new venue will become a critical cultural window for the world to learn more about China."

### Bronze shines bright

A section of the new campus showcasing ancient Chinese bronze works will open on Feb 2.

The gallery will feature over 500 pieces of bronze ware that illustrate the development and evolution of the medium over 3,600 years, from the late Xia Dynasty (c. 21st century-16th century BC) to the middle of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

The new wing will host a special exhibition about the 3,000-year-old Sanxingdui culture that runs until May 20. It will be the largest and most high-profile showcase of Sanxingdui artifacts outside of Sichuan province, where the ancient culture's archaeological site is located. Some of the 363 artifacts on show were restored by Shanghai Museum and will be on show for the first time.

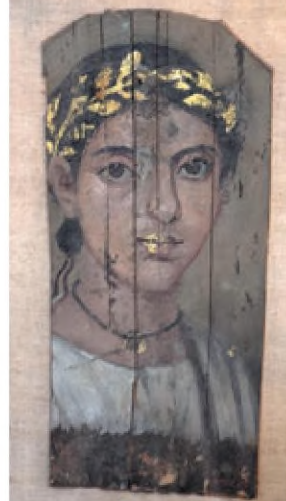
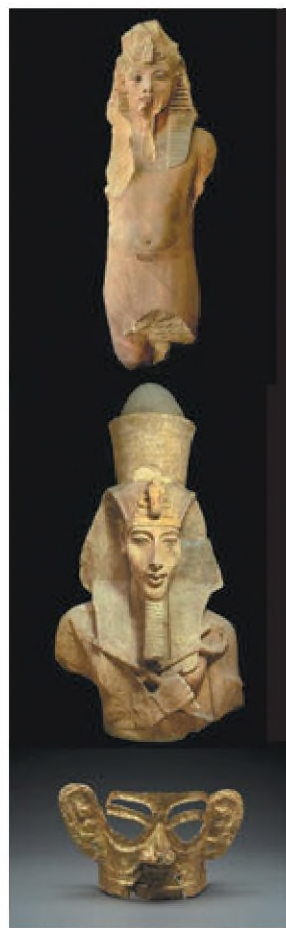
Shanghai Museum East will also host a digital art exhibition themed on Sanxingdui to offer immersive and interactive experiences to learn about the archaeological excavation cabins used at the Sanxingdui site.

Chu points out that the construction of Shanghai Museum East, which started in September 2017, will be sped up so that it will be fully completed by 2024. The new wing is expected to open to the public in three phases, with the first being the ancient Chinese bronze gallery.

The second will be open before the end of June. The launch of the final phase, which involves the opening of the painting and calligraphy galleries, is expected to take place by the end of November.

### North comes next

In addition to its People's Square and East venues, Shanghai Museum will also build a new North



**Left from top:** The statue of Tutankhamun from Egypt's 18th Dynasty. The statue of Amenhotep IV from Egypt's 18th Dynasty. The gold mask uncovered in 2021 at the Sanxingdui archaeological site, which is located in Guangan, Sichuan province. A mummy portrait from Egypt's Ptolemaic period. **Right from top:** The bronze statue uncovered in 2021 at the Sanxingdui site. The newly unearthed painted wooden coffin in Egypt's Saqqara archaeological site.



campus in the coming years. "After completion, the East venue will mainly focus on showcasing the history of ancient Chinese art. The People's Square venue will take advantage of our collection of international cultural relics, and enhance ties with global art and cultural heritage institutions to introduce more exhibits about overseas civilizations. It will be a platform to showcase diverse global cultures and promote international cultural exchanges," says Chu.

He adds that the northern venue in Yangpu district, which is expected to be completed during the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30), will have a special focus on ancient ships and archaeology.

"We hope and believe that tourists from all over the world will learn more about traditional Chinese culture when they come to Shanghai and visit our eastern venue," says Chu.

Fang Shizhong, director of the Shanghai Administration of Culture and Tourism, points out that the expansion of Shanghai Museum offers citizens better cultural services. The move is also in line with efforts to improve the city's cultural influence globally.

"Shanghai has taken the lead in the country to create a modern public cultural services system. We have seen a growing demand for high-quality, diverse and personalized services," Fang is quoted as saying by Shanghai Observer.

### Exhibition extravaganza

Shanghai Museum will hold 14 special exhibitions at its People's Square and eastern venues, and another four in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, and Hungary, Italy and Japan this year.

An exhibition at the People's Square venue from July 19 will showcase ancient Egyptian artifacts. Co-organized by Shanghai Museum and Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities, the exhibition will be the largest-ever display of Egyptian artifacts outside the North African country.

It'll showcase 800 objects that document the development of ancient Egyptian civilization and showcase the latest archaeological findings from Egypt's Saqqara archaeological site.

"Over 95 percent of the artifacts will be arriving in Asia for the first time, and almost all of them are being shown in China for the first time," says Chu.

The highest-profile exhibits include the statues of Amenhotep IV and Tutankhamun from Egypt's 18th Dynasty (c. 16th-13th century BC), a mummy portrait from the Ptolemaic period (305-30 BC) and a wooden coffin recently unearthed in Saqqara.

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An aerial view of the Shanghai Museum East, the new wing of the Shanghai Museum, which is located in the city's Pudong New Area. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

### TREASURE HUNTING

#### SHANGHAI MUSEUM

201 Renmin Avenue, Huangpu district

Entry is free (permanent exhibitions) through online bookings with a valid ID

This museum has over 1 million artifacts in its massive collection. It has 10 permanent galleries, four special donation showrooms and three temporary exhibition halls.

**DO NOT MISS**

Daike Ding, a bronze tripod that dates back to the 10th Century BC

#### SHANGHAI HISTORY MUSEUM

325 Nanjing Road West, Huangpu district

Free entry and no booking needed

Boasting a comprehensive collection of more than 110,000 antiques and documents related to the history of Shanghai, the museum was originally the Shanghai Race Club in 1934.

**DO NOT MISS**

Two bronze lions made in 1923.

#### SHANGHAI NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

510 Beijing Road West, Jing'an district

Online bookings with a valid ID; Admission: 30 yuan for adults, 12 yuan for students

A favorite amongst children, the Shanghai Natural History Museum was originally known as the Zikawei Museum, which was founded in 1868 by French missionary and zoologist Pierre Heude.

**DO NOT MISS**

The skeleton of a 24-meter-long fin whale.

#### WORLD EXPO MUSEUM

818 Mengzi Road, Huangpu district

Free entry; No bookings needed

Shanghai's hosting of the World Expo 2010 was one to remember as it was the edition that had the largest participation figures. The museum hosts regular themed exhibitions featuring the progress and achievements of human civilization.

**DO NOT MISS**

A 1:100 replica of the Crystal Palace, the venue of the inaugural London World Expo in 1851.

#### CHINA MARITIME MUSEUM

397 Shengyang Avenue, Lingang New Area, Pudong

Online booking with a valid ID; Admission: 30 yuan for adults, 15 yuan for students

Opened in 2010, the China Maritime Museum showcases China's rich maritime history, as well as its shipbuilding and naval sectors.

**DO NOT MISS**

A 30.6-meter-long, 8.2-meter-wide replica of a Fu ship from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

#### SHANGHAI FILM MUSEUM

595 Caoxi North Road, Kujiaji district

Online booking with a valid ID; Admission: 60 yuan for adults, 30 yuan for students

The Shanghai Film Museum documents the history of filmmaking in China and has exhibitions featuring draft drawings, set designs, and props that were used in famous movies. The city is considered the epicenter of China's film industry as this was where the first feature film was made and first cinema opened.

**DO NOT MISS**

The 4D projection of the popular cartoon Monkey King

#### SHANGHAI ENTOMOLOGICAL MUSEUM

300 Fenglin Road, Kujiaji district

On-site tickets; Admission: 15 yuan for adults, 7 yuan for children and students

Dubbed "The British Museum of Asia" because of its rich collection of specimens, the museum has one of the finest collections of insects in China.

**DO NOT MISS**

A specimen of the Morpho Helena butterfly, dubbed the most beautiful butterfly in the world.

#### WORLD SKILLS MUSEUM

1578 Yangshupu Road, Yangpu district

Entry is free (permanent exhibitions) through online bookings with a valid ID

It is the world's first museum dedicated to vocational skills. Located on the banks of the Huangpu River, the museum helps visitors better understand the importance and value of skills throughout history and in the future.

**DO NOT MISS**

A collection of 43 trophies and medals from almost all WorldSkills competitions held since 1950.

TEXT BY ZHANG KUN AND GRAPHICS BY LU PIN

## LIFE

## Stages of translation

The new Chinese-language play, *The Shawshank Redemption*, features an all-Western cast of Mandarin speakers, **Chen Nan** reports.



It has been 30 years since the premiere of the movie, *The Shawshank Redemption*.

The 1994 Hollywood film — written and directed by Frank Darabont and based on the Stephen King novella, *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption* — tells the story of Andy Dufresne, a banker who spends 19 years wrongly imprisoned in Shawshank State Prison for the murder of his wife and her lover. Over the following two decades, he befriends a fellow prisoner, Red, who has spent most of his life in the prison and is capable of smuggling in anything from the outside world.

Veteran Chinese actor-director Zhang Guoli says the film has always been one of his favorites.

"There are two scenes that touch me most," Zhang says.

"One is when Andy locks himself in the prison's office in an act of defiance against prison authorities and plays a piece of music from Mozart's opera, *The Marriage of Figaro*, over the loudspeakers. The other is the scene when Brooks Hatlen carves 'Brooks was here' into a wooden beam in his apartment and hangs himself."

Now, a Chinese-language stage adaptation of the timeless story, also titled *The Shawshank Redemption*, is holding its first round of performances in China, starting with its premiere in Shenzhen, where three shows were held from Jan 12 to 14. It continues its tour in Shanghai from Jan 18 to 21, followed by a presentation in Beijing from Jan 25 to 28. Its tour will extend to over 30 shows this year.

Directed by Zhang, the Chinese play features 11 actors from eight countries — an all-Western cast performing in Chinese, headlined by the narrator, Red, played by Canadian Mark Rowswell, who's better known among Chinese audiences by his Chinese name, Da Shan. James Clarke plays the role of Dufresne.

The Chinese version of *The Shawshank Redemption* is based on the stage adaptation of the original Stephen King story by Owen O'Neill and David Johns in 2009.

"Under the horrific circumstances — despair, distrust, abuse — there are love, resilience and friendship between Andy and Red, and strength coming from hope and the pursuit of freedom. We try to translate the story into a unique cultural context for Chinese audiences," says Zhang.

Zhang once worked with Tim Robbins — the award-winning actor who starred as Dufresne in the 1994 movie. In 2011, the two were cast in Chinese director Feng Xiaogang's famine-themed epic film, *1942*.

"I was so excited when I heard from Guoli that he is adapting the movie into a Chinese-language play with a full foreign cast speaking Mandarin. This is such a huge undertaking," Robbins says in his letter to the Chinese audience.

"I know *The Shawshank Redemption* has made an impact on generations of people, and I am so impressed that Guoli is going to bring it to the Chinese theaters and present it to a wider audience in China. Even if the play is in Mandarin, I gotta say — from all us actors across the world — that when it comes to performing, language doesn't stand in the way of reaching people's hearts."

Robbins also recounts his last visit to Beijing, nearly a decade ago, with a performance troupe staging *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

"I am so delighted that my reconnection with Guoli after 10 years is through this story that we both have passion for."



**From top:** *The Shawshank Redemption*, a new Chinese stage adaptation of the 1982 Stephen King novella, *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption*, is now playing in China, starting with its Shenzhen premiere on Jan 12, followed by shows in Shanghai and Beijing; Chinese veteran actor-director Zhang Guoli works with 11 foreign cast members from eight countries in the play; scenes from the performance, which includes Canadian actor Mark Rowswell as Red, and Australian James Clarke as Andy. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Zhang says: "It was very difficult for us to bring these actors together, just like looking for a needle in a haystack. They not only act very well, but also speak Mandarin just like native speakers, which took a great deal of training."

According to Yao Yi, CEO of the Chinese play's coproduction company, Longma Entertainment, which was cofounded by veteran scriptwriters Zou Jingzhi, Liu Heng and Wan Fang in 2008, the idea of adapting the classic work into a Chinese stage production started several years ago, but the

plan was postponed due to the pandemic.

"We had never produced a Chinese-language play featuring an all-foreign cast, which was a bold and challenging idea," Yao says.

"We had a team from the Beijing Language and Culture University provide language training to the actors. Zhang (Guoli) not only served as the director of the play but also coached performances."

Rowswell was approached by the production company and was intrigued by the role of Red, who acts and narrates throughout

the Chinese play. Rowswell became a household name in China after he achieved overnight fame by performing on CCTV's Spring Festival gala — one of the most-watched TV shows in the country — in 1988. Known as the first foreigner ever to master the Chinese traditional comedic performance art of *xiangsheng*, or cross-talk, Rowswell has been performing onstage for 35 years in many different formats.

"Our director, Zhang Guoli, explained that he chose me for this role specifically due to my training in *xiangsheng*, as well as the work I've done in recent years with narrating classical Chinese poetry, as Red is also the narrator of *The Shawshank Redemption* story, frequently speaking directly to the audience. That's exactly the kind of thing I am most familiar and comfortable with," says Rowswell.

He has mainly been producing his own show, *Dashan & Friends*, in recent years, and has been involved in almost every aspect, including writing, directing and acting.

Clarke, who plays the role of Dufresne in the Chinese stage production, was contacted by the production company Longma Entertainment through social media. When he was told about the Chinese play *The Shawshank Redemption*, Clarke thought it was "a scam". He didn't believe it until he saw a short video of Zhang and Rowswell rehearsing.

"I slapped myself, and then went through the messages on my social media for Longma Entertainment. I thought that I had missed the opportunity, and I sent an apology for thinking they were a scam, and that I was sorry to have missed out. The message came back, asking if I was still interested, and they offered me the lead role of Andy Dufresne," recalls Clarke.

"I was the last member of the cast to join and begin rehearsals. I have been trained in acting and know that theater is one of the most challenging forms of art. I saw it as an opportunity to stretch myself professionally as an actor," says Clarke, who lives in Tianjin and has been doing business in China since 2009.

He is the president of the Australia China Business Council.

"I had three days to try and catch up to where the rest of the crew were up to, which meant reciting my lines until late at night at airports and on planes. On the flight to Beijing, Mandarin-speaking passengers threw strange looks when they heard me reciting lines, such as 'I didn't murder my wife! I'm innocent!'"

American actor Matt William Knowles plays the role of Hadley, who is the chief guard of the prison.

"*The Shawshank Redemption* is a story that is full of hope. The message crosses cultures and breaks boundaries," says Knowles, who has featured in Chinese films and TV series.

In 2009, after a crushing knee injury that ended his professional American football dreams, Knowles moved to China to volunteer to teach English in the mountains of Guizhou province. After spending two years in Guizhou, he learned some Chinese, received a Chinese government scholarship and became the first non-Asian to study acting at the Beijing Film Academy.

"The most challenging part for me is the Chinese lines. Zhang (Guoli) has extremely high expectations for our fluency, and we have been working hard to make Hadley sound as local as possible," he says.

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## Acrobatics is more than poetry in motion in China

Nearly 20 years ago, as a rookie copy editor working for a business daily in my hometown, Bangalore, I had occasion to go on an official trip to London, my first to a foreign land, courtesy of a British air carrier that had decided to take a few business journalists on a junket to mark its inaugural direct flight from the city.

As I was running around frantically checking last-minute details, I vividly remember a senior colleague telling me how it was such a remarkable coincidence that I would be traveling to the very place and mingle with the very same people who had ruled us for around a century.

Be that as it may, I was nevertheless impressed by London's impeccable

architecture and, of course, its quaint double-decker buses and taxis.

Four years after that eventful journey, I was to make a second intrepid one to Beijing — an experience that is closer to my heart for a number of reasons.

China, I knew, could rival the UK any day

with its unique tapestry of history and culture.

However, it was not the pull of a mighty civilization, but four lines of dazzling beauty that had for long captivated me about all things Chinese.

"Flocks of birds have flown high and away,

A solitary drift of cloud, too, has gone wandering on,

And I sit alone with Ching Ting peak towering beyond,

The mountain and I, we never grow tired of each other."

It was in my fifth or sixth grade at school. I distinctly recall this intriguing verse snippet, attributed to the famed Tang Dynasty (618-907) poet Li Bai, tucked away in a chapter of my history textbook. To me, it didn't really matter why these sublime words happened to find place in a social sciences text, but suffice it to say, I was mesmerized by the poem, as well as the poet.

The nostalgia these words have evoked since for an unknown place and culture thousands of miles away is hard to describe. It was only last year, having returned to Beijing to work, that I learned more about the poem and the man who — along with fellow Tang Dynasty poets such as Du Fu — will remain forever etched in the hearts of poetry aficionados here.

Li manages to evocatively convey an emotion that vaults across centuries, time and language barriers.

It is probably this verse that made me inexplicably fall in love with Chinese music, movies, poetry and, not to forget, acrobatics as well.

While I have been a Chinese movie buff for years now, and was fortunate enough to witness a Chinese traditional music performance at the National Centre for the Performing Arts last year, its poetry is, of course, a different cup of tea, and I wouldn't dare approach it flippantly.

The life of Li and his close friend Gao Shi, another renowned poet from the same period, and Du have been chronicled in the animated movie *Chang'an*, which I missed when it hit the theaters last year but hope to watch once it appears on a streaming platform.

However, what I do not want to miss seeing live is a performance by the Chinese acrobatics team, which is showcasing its skills at an auditorium nearby.

My interest in Chinese acrobatics was also piqued back in the 1980s after watching an hourlong videotape somewhat misleadingly titled *Chinese Circus*.

So fascinated have I been with their performance that, I must confess, the tape has been reinserted countless number of times into the videocassette recorder and played over and over again at every available opportunity.

Now, at last, here's my chance to watch them up close, and regale friends and family back home about their daring as well as dexterity.

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