

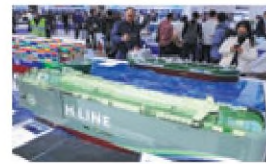
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CHINA DAILY

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Firefighters work on Wednesday at the scene of a blaze that killed 39 people in Xinyu, Jiangxi province. ZHOU MI / XINHUA

Curbing repeated accidents urged after fire kills 39

By XU WEI in Beijing and ZHAO RUINAN in Nanchang

President Xi Jinping called for resolute steps on Wednesday to curb the repeated occurrence of accidents to ensure the safety of people's lives and property as well as social stability.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the instruction after an afternoon fire at a street shop in Xinyu, Jiangxi province, on Wednesday killed at least 39 people and left nine injured. The injured were taken to hospitals, where eight were reported in stable condition, and one in critical condition.

The fire broke out at 3:24 pm on Wednesday in the basement of a street shop on Tiangongnan Road, Yushui district, the local Emergen-

cy Management Department said in a statement.

The president urged all-out efforts to treat those injured in the accident, saying that meticulous efforts must be made to help families of the victims.

He stressed that the fire was another major workplace safety accident, and the cause of the deadly incident must be investigated as soon as possible.

Those who are found responsible must be held accountable in accordance with the law, and authorities must conduct profound reflection, he added.

He stressed that all regions and relevant departments should learn serious lessons from the incident and overcome any complacency or the mentality to take chances and risks.

Authorities must assume their due responsibilities to ensure work safety, actively identify potential

risks and ensure that all due measures are put in place, and guarantee the safety of people's lives and property as well as the overall stability of society, he added.

Premier Li Qiang said in an instruction that maximum efforts must be made to keep the number of casualties low, and sound arrangements must be made to comfort families of the victims.

The Work Safety Committee of the State Council must urge authorities in various regions and departments to beef up efforts to identify and rectify safety hazards in key areas and weak links, leaving no blind spots, he added.

Vice-Premier Zhang Guoqing has led a team of officials to the scene of the fire in order to oversee the rescue efforts and investigation.

Videos circulating on social media showed thick, dark smoke billowing from the building and

firetrucks and ambulances at the scene of the accident.

The building where the fire broke out housed internet cafes and training institutions, China Central Television reported.

Top medical experts specializing in respiratory, critical care and burn treatment have been deployed to provide guidance and support.

Late on Wednesday, experts conducted remote, case by case consultations with the hospitals treating the injured. Together with local medical staff, they assessed the injuries, offered psychological counseling, and formulated treatment plans tailored to each individual.

The Ministry of Emergency Management said 102 firefighters and 17 fire and rescue vehicles had been rushed to the scene.

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Sino-Uzbek relations lifted to new height

Presidents agree to upgrade ties, boost bilateral cooperation at Beijing meeting

By CAO DESHENG caodesheng@chinadaily.com.cn

China and Uzbekistan elevated their ties to an all-weather comprehensive strategic partnership for a new era on Wednesday, as part of their efforts to boost bilateral cooperation in various fields and to enhance strategic communication to promote regional and global governance.

President Xi Jinping and Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev signed a joint statement on the upgrading of the bilateral ties after they held talks at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing.

They also witnessed the signing of an array of documents on bilateral cooperation in a wide range of fields, including joint building of the Belt and Road, implementing the Global Development Initiative, economic and technological cooperation, mutual connectivity and environmental protection.

Mirziyoyev was in Beijing on a state visit to China from Tuesday to Thursday. He told Xi that his first visit abroad this year to China is of great symbolic significance.

During their talks, the two presidents exchanged views on deepening the countries' cooperation in an all-around way as well as international and regional issues of common concern, and reached a broad consensus.

Xi commended the development of bilateral ties, saying that in the face of the current complex international situation, both sides should firmly support each other, strengthen strategic communication and deepen strategic mutual trust.

Speaking of the countries' cooperation, Xi underlined the need for both nations to tap into the potential of traditional cooperation, implement medium- and long-term plans for economic, trade and investment cooperation, and introduce more measures to facilitate investment and trade.

He called for beginning the construction of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway project as early as possible to promote interconnectivity.

China is willing to strengthen cooperation with Uzbekistan in the entire industrial chain of new energy vehicles, carry out major projects in photovoltaics, wind power and hydropower, and support Uzbekistan's green development strategy, Xi added.

Mirziyoyev said that Uzbekistan-

China relations are based on high-level political mutual trust, mutual respect and mutual assistance, and he is fully confident about the prospects of the countries' relations.

Uzbekistan firmly adheres to the one-China principle, resolutely opposes external forces interfering in China's internal affairs, and is willing to firmly support China on issues related to its core interests, such as the Taiwan question, issues concerning the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, and human rights, the Uzbek president said.

He said that the China-Central Asia Summit, held in May in Xi'an, the capital of Shaanxi province, was of historic significance for enhancing regional connectivity and development, and Uzbekistan is willing to work closely with China to establish the secretariat of the China-Central Asia mechanism as soon as possible and promote the development of the China-Central Asia mechanism.

Uzbekistan will continue to strengthen communication and coordination with China within multilateral frameworks such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, he said.

China-Uzbekistan cooperation has become an important driver of China-Central Asia cooperation and continues to revitalize regional development and integration. Given Uzbekistan's central position in Central Asia, its openness and connectivity facilitate regional integration and its security and prosperity are key to the stability of the entire Central Asian region and China's northwestern borders, analysts said.

Both sides will firmly support each other on issues concerning their core interests such as sovereignty, security and territorial integrity, and oppose the politicization of human rights issues by a third country, according to a joint statement on the upgrading of the countries' ties. Both sides are opposed to any third country or organization engaging in activities that harm the sovereignty, security or territorial integrity of the other country, the statement said.

China became Uzbekistan's largest trading partner in 2023, with bilateral trade exceeding \$10 billion. The statement said both countries welcome this positive trend and agree to promote the balanced development of trade and strive to achieve the goal of increasing bilateral trade to \$20 billion at an early date.

Economic corridor brightens Pakistan's economic future

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, a key component of the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative, represents a monumental partnership between Pakistan and China that aims to drive economic growth and regional connectivity.

As we look toward the second phase of this ambitious project, it is important to understand its significance and the potential it holds for Pakistan's future.

The first phase of the CPEC stands as a transformative period in Pakistan's economic history, and it has had a profound impact on the



country's infrastructure and energy landscape. This phase was marked by a series of ambitious projects, each playing a crucial role in addressing some of Pakistan's most pressing development challenges.

One of the most significant achievements of the first phase was the substantial improvement in Pakistan's energy sector. Before

the CPEC, Pakistan faced a severe energy crisis, with frequent power outages severely affecting industrial output as well as daily life. The first phase of the CPEC focused heavily on energy projects, including the construction of coal, wind, solar and hydroelectric power plants. These projects collectively added thousands of megawatts to Pakistan's national grid, substantially alleviating the energy shortfall and contributing to economic stability and growth.

Infrastructure development was another key focus of the economic

corridor's first phase. The construction and upgrading of highways and other roads across Pakistan, including the Karakoram Highway, significantly enhanced connectivity. This improved infrastructure not only facilitated domestic trade and mobility, but also positioned Pakistan as a critical transit route for regional trade, particularly between China and the Middle East.

Among the highlights, the first phase saw the development of Gwadar Port, a strategically located

See *Corridor*, page 3

CO-BRANDED PRODUCTS SAVOR THE TASTE OF SUCCESS

Pooling of ideas achieves mutually beneficial outcomes

By LI YINGXUE liyngxue@chinadaily.com.cn

Every time a new co-branded drink is launched, Xu Jian, the 23-year-old branch manager of a chain store selling the popular Chinese drink Heytea in Beijing's Sanlitun area, and his team, prepare for a challenging day.

The store boasts an abundance of materials for such drinks, including cups, cup sleeves and

paper bags, and the 30-plus employees stand ready to help customers.

The store opens at 10 am, but Xu and his team start preparing for work at 8 am. By 9 am, there is already a long line waiting outside.

As the doors swing open, cus-

tomers and online orders flood in. However, about an hour later, Xu takes the tough decision to close the delivery channel, as the huge number of orders for the latest co-branded drinks are overwhelming, and ensuring prompt delivery becomes a challenge.

Xu said it also takes about 40 to 50 minutes for in-store customers to receive their drinks.

See *Market*, page 2

Warriors travel North



A visitor poses for a photo near an ice sculpture of a Terracotta Warrior at Harbin Ice and Snow World in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, on Tuesday. XIE JIANFEI / XINHUA

INSIDE
Oceans' critical climate-solution role overlooked
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"The majority of orders are for new co-branded products. Many customers also come to the store for related giveaways, repeatedly buying drinks to obtain items such as badges," he said.

On Jan 8, Heytea announced a new co-branded drinks collaboration with Hongshan Forest Zoo in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, featuring three animals from the zoo — Dudu, a white-faced saki monkey; Almond, a capybara (a type of rodent); and Jasmine, a koala.

In addition to special drinks launched with the zoo, Heytea introduced badges and fluffy bags. By lunchtime, the bags had sold out on the online platforms of many stores in Beijing.

On the same day, Luckin Coffee partnered with the popular domestic animation series *Xiaolan Friends* to introduce co-branded stickers.

Customers received a free sticker on buying any two drinks, and each sticker came with a scratch card for the chance to win a free cup of coffee. Luckin Coffee also added co-branded emojis.

Over the past year, co-branded beverages have become increasingly popular among younger consumers in China, creating a new market for drink brands. This has led to a noticeable increase in the frequency of co-branded product launches, coupled with the diverse exploration of collaborative strategies.

Intense competition in the beverage industry triggered the fervor for joint marketing. In their quest for market share, brands have transitioned from products and supply chains to engage in an all-out commercial battle.

In October, the Hongcan Industry Research Institute, which focuses on the catering sector, released its Beverage Brand Co-Marketing Observation Report for 2023. The report predicted that the beverage market would reach 261.3 billion yuan (\$36.32 billion) last year, a 22.8 percent year-on-year rise.

In the first three quarters of last year alone, 18 popular brands producing freshly made beverages collaborated 236 times. During this period, brands such as ChaPanda, Naixue, and Mixue Ice Cream & Tea doubled their joint marketing efforts compared with the whole of 2022.

Naixue, in particular, launched 33 collaborations, staging three to five joint marketing campaigns every month. Other brands, including ChaPanda, Heytea, and Luckin Coffee are also jumping on the co-branding bandwagon. In September, as singer Jay Chou's album *Fantasy* marked its 22nd anniversary, Naixue teamed up with the Boohee app to launch Fantasy Milk Tea, riding on Chou's influence. This collaboration was hugely successful, with more than 1.46 million cups of the beverage sold on the first day, netting sales of over 300 million yuan.

Young audience

Researcher Chen Shenghua, who authored the marketing report, said there are two main types of beverage co-branding — collaborating with another brand, or teaming up with intellectual property.

IP collaborations have become popular, as they offer a broad audience, significant influence, strong customer loyalty, deep emotional connections, and easy complementary effects, Chen said.

The target audience for beverage co-marketing is primarily the 18-30 age group, especially Generation Z consumers (those born in the late 1990s or early 2000s), he said.

"This group enjoys trying new things, actively engaging in discussions on trending topics, has a strong desire for social sharing, and possesses robust purchasing power, influence and creativity. It also closely follows trends in movies, games and other popular fields," Chen added.

Heytea and Luckin Coffee emerged as top players in the competitive field of co-marketing last year.

Moutai-flavored latte, a joint venture between Luckin Coffee and China's leading liquor maker Kweichow Moutai, grabbed the beverage co-marketing limelight. Launched in September, the product proved an outstanding success, with more than 5.42 million cups sold on the first day and daily sales revenue exceeding 1 billion yuan.

Chen attributes the product's success to two key factors. First, it triggered category innovation by combining coffee and Moutai liquor. Second, in terms of marketing, it broke through social barriers, increased the visibility of Moutai,



A Luckin Coffee store is decorated with elements from the *Tom and Jerry* cartoon series. Last year, Luckin Coffee collaborated with makers of the series to introduce themed items such as cups and cup sleeves for consumers. HE JING / FOR CHINA DAILY



A specialty crafted drink introduced by Heytea. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

and precision-targeted young consumers seeking fresh, creative flavors, and social experiences.

Last summer, Heytea collaborated with luxury brand Fendi to introduce the specially crafted Fendi Joyful Yellow drink. The launch trended on Sina Weibo for seven hours and more than 1.5 million cups of the drink were sold in just three days, setting records for Heytea's first-week sales of a new product. The color yellow also quickly became a fashion trendsetter last year.

Chen views this success as a chance to expand the creative possibilities for cross-industry marketing in the beverage sector, adding that Fendi's influence elevated the Heytea brand image.

Xu, the Sanlitun branch manager, has been with Heytea for three years, starting as a store employee and working his way up to become a beverage mixologist. He became manager of the outlet in April.

Last year was particularly busy for Xu, with Heytea collaborating on several co-branded beverages with different brands and IPs.

One collaboration that stood out for him was with the action role-playing game *Genshin Impact*. One day, a group of teenagers visited the store, spending the entire time passionately explaining each character



Left: Grid Coffee, a chain focusing on single-origin coffee, stages an exhibition featuring coffee from Yunnan province at Beijing's Sanyuanli market in October. Right: A saleswoman from Heytea displays the specially crafted Fendi Joyful Yellow drink, produced last summer in collaboration with luxury brand Fendi. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Market: Younger generation targeted

"This group enjoys trying new things, actively engaging in discussions on trending topics, has a strong desire for social sharing ..."

Chen Shenghua, author of the 2023 Beverage Brand Co-Marketing Observation Report

in the game to customers ordering the co-branded products.

"Before launching such a product, we undergo training to ensure all staff members are familiar with the brand or IP, making it easier to introduce to customers. These students volunteered to provide explanations because they love *Genshin Impact*," Xu said.

After the initial collaboration between Heytea and the makers of *Genshin Impact* in September 2022, the two partnered again in August last year.

On the day co-branded products featuring the 2.0 version of *Genshin Impact* were launched, several Heytea stores experienced overwhelming demand. Nearly 3 million cups of co-branded beverages were

sold in three days, with the highest daily sales at a single store exceeding 3,600 cups.

Other activities initiated by both parties also received positive responses from the games community. At the *Genshin Impact* offline carnival, Heytea, the first tea brand to take part in the event, set up a booth. During the four-day carnival, the booth was highly popular, selling more than 5,000 cups of co-branded drinks on its busiest day.

Heytea customized the presentation of two popular characters from *Genshin Impact* — Gan Yu and Shen He — along with the development of beverage products and related designs.

For example, the drink named after Gan Yu draws inspiration from



Moutai-flavored latte, a joint venture between Luckin Coffee and Kweichow Moutai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Gan's basic skills. It blends imported pineapple chunks with slow-fermented yogurt, resulting in a rich milky flavor with a lively pineapple twist.

Ideas shared

Co-branded products are here to stay. Last year, Luckin Coffee collaborated with makers of the *Tom and Jerry* cartoon to introduce themed items such as cups and cup sleeves for consumers. On the lifestyle-focused social media platform Xiaohongshu, users share how they transform such items into pen holders, for example.

Xiaohongshu features a tag for *Tom and Jerry* merchandise transformations, with users sharing their creative ideas. Some turn paper bags into tissue boxes, and cups into pen holders, while others make decorative art, fridge magnets, and night lights. Users also craft bookmarks, phone cases, themed calendars, and even a Christmas tree.

One user, "Bizhi Niangaogao", shared the step-by-step process of turning stickers into fridge magnets. Using materials such as cold laminating film, soft magnets, scissors and a carving knife, she spent an afternoon transforming nearly 20 sticker designs into these magnets.

Co-branding has extended beyond being a sales competition

among major labels. Beverage companies are using various methods to showcase the cultural essence behind their products to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.

In October, an exhibition featuring coffee from Yunnan was held at Sanyuanli market in Beijing to promote four key coffee destinations in the province — Menglian, Simao, Mangshi, and Ning'er.

For the event, the entire market — inside and outside — was adorned with numerous captivating hand-drawn illustrations. Visitors sampled the latest coffee from Yunnan and exchanged stamps they collected at booths for exclusive refrigerator magnets.

The event was a joint venture between Grid Coffee, a chain focusing on single-origin coffee, and the animation director Hu Rui.

Hu, director and art designer for the second episode of the highly popular series *Yao-Chinese Folktales*, created a short animation film for the event titled *Red Deer Dance*, drawing inspiration from the culture and art of the Dai ethnic group in Yunnan.

Chen Ziyu, founder of Grid Coffee, said it plans to host promotional events on the origins of coffee beans, twice a year, and the second event will always feature such beans from Yunnan.

"We're a Chinese brand, and Yunnan is an important place for coffee in China, making our connection even stronger. Our annual event not only bolsters our ties, but also brings more business and income to local coffee farmers," Chen Ziyu said.

He added that in the past, information about Yunnan coffee, such as cultivation and production methods, proved too technical for consumers to grasp. This year, the coffee has been introduced in a more collaborative manner, with the brand working with Hu to make a short film featuring stories about Yunnan to showcase the province's attractions.

"Hu Rui's style is distinctly Chinese, with an Eastern vibe. We wanted to connect with young people by using labels and keywords. As Hu's animation works have become a big deal this year, we decided to team up with him," Chen Ziyu said.

"Sanyuanli market is the perfect place to hold this event. Quality ingredients are always linked to a well-known place, so a top-notch ingredient, especially one from a specific region, is a great choice to be shown at the market."

The event not only attracted Grid Coffee's regular customers and Hu's fans, but also actively involved shoppers at the market. There was also lively participation in the exhibition on Xiaohongshu.

"In addition to showcasing coffee from Yunnan, the event produced increased foot traffic and sales for the market vendors," Chen Ziyu said.

Chen Shenghua, the researcher, views co-branding as a mutually beneficial choice for both parties, as it essentially involves an exchange of audiences.

By using each other's brand influence and resources, it enables channel expansion, mutual access to audiences, and resource sharing. This, in turn, brings together diverse audience groups, triggering traffic and ultimately boosting brand awareness and improving brand image, Chen Shenghua added.

However, last year, some co-branded products did not deliver positive marketing outcomes. For example, luxury skincare brand Helena Rubinstein's collaboration with Manner Coffee failed to attract potential customers.

Chen Shenghua said this lack of success may be due to the failure to choose the right co-branding partner, an inability to seize traffic opportunities, or the absence of distinctive features in the co-branded product.

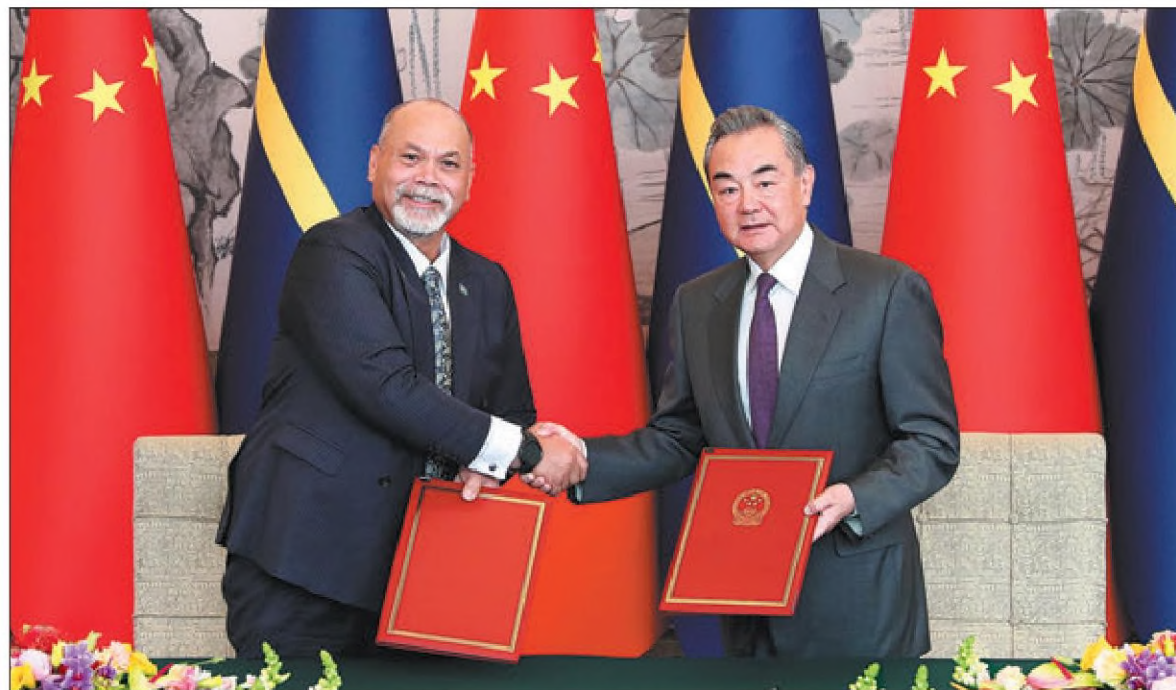
"Some brands have not invested in product or category innovation. Rather, they have engaged in co-branding simply for the sake of it, or pursued innovation without a clear purpose," the researcher added.

Chen Shenghua predicts that this year a wider variety of co-branded products will match consumer trends such as individualism, practicality, and a laid-back lifestyle.

He said the approach to co-marketing will become more diverse, with a shift toward digital and intelligent strategies.

"For example, advanced artificial intelligence will be used in consumer goods technology for analysis and to create smart marketing plans. This also involves using smart devices to enhance human-machine interaction," he added.

TOP NEWS



Foreign Minister Wang Yi (right) and Nauru's Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Lionel Aingimea shake hands on Wednesday in Beijing after signing a joint communique on the resumption of diplomatic relations. WANG ZHUANGFEI / CHINA DAILY

China, Nauru resume diplomatic relations

Two sides also agree to exchange ambassadors as early as possible

By ZHANG YUNBI

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Lionel Rouwen Aingimea, minister for foreign affairs and trade of Nauru, said on Wednesday that the Pacific island nation looks forward to the bright prospects offered by cooperation with China, as he and Foreign Minister Wang Yi signed a landmark joint communique on the resumption of bilateral diplomatic ties at a ceremony in Beijing.

Joined by officials from both sides as well as news media at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse, Aingimea spoke of how impressed he was with China's economic growth after touring Guangdong province in southern China.

"We have been amazed. But (given) what we have seen in Guangdong, I said to the foreign minister that the visit to China stole my heart," he said.

Noting that Nauru looks forward to future cooperation with China, he said: "The prospect is bright. The horizon is full of light, and we look forward to sailing into it."

Earlier this month, the government of Nauru officially announced its decision to recognize the one-China principle, sever its "diplomatic ties" with China's Taiwan region, and seek to reestablish diplomatic ties with China.

As the two foreign ministers held talks and signed the communique on Wednesday, the Pacific island nation became the 183rd country to have diplomatic ties with China.

Wang pointed to the two countries' shared identity as developing countries, and he shed light on the driving forces which had brought the two countries closer.

"Both sides are faced with the common task of developing their economy, improving people's

livelihoods and realizing modernization," he said.

Both countries are part of the Global South, and they share a common will in safeguarding sovereignty and independence, safeguarding the common interests of developing countries, and promoting the world's multipolarization and economic globalization, he added.

The annual trade volume between China and Nauru registered \$13.19 million in 2022, a year-on-year increase of 15.89 percent, according to Xinhua News Agency.

In his talks with Wang, Aingimea, the Nauru minister, said his country is ready to take part in the series of global initiatives proposed by President Xi Jinping.

"Nauru admires that China says what it means and does what it says, with the resolve to ensure the success of its actions," he told reporters after the talks.

Observers noted that behind some Pacific island nations' establishment or resumption of diplomatic relations with China in recent years is the great appeal of win-win cooperation and China's growing reputation in the region.

"By being part of the Belt and Road Initiative, Pacific island countries have benefited from cooperation with China and got a ride on the rapid development of Chinese modernization, and all these efforts help boost domestic political stability, social development and people's well-being," said Zhao Shaofeng, a professor at the Research Center for Pacific Island Countries at Liaocheng University in Shandong province.

"Through reinforced exchanges, more and more people from the island countries look to study and do business in China," he added.

In the communique, the two governments agreed to exchange ambassadors "as early as possible".

Nauru said it recognizes that "there is but one China in the world", and said it "shall no longer develop any official relations or official exchanges with Taiwan".

Speaking to the media, Wang said the resumption of diplomatic relations once again made it clear to the world that "adhering to the one-China principle is an irresistible historical trend".

Stabilization fund expected to boost investor sentiment

By SHI JING in Shanghai and ZHOU LANXU in Beijing

Supportive market measures such as an expected stabilization fund, on which investors are pinning much hope, will not only inject liquidity into the currently depressed A-share market but also promote confidence, which is crucial at this point in time, said industry insiders and experts.

Chinese authorities are seeking to mobilize about 2 trillion yuan (\$278 billion), mainly from the offshore accounts of State-owned enterprises, as part of a stabilization fund to buy A shares via the stock connect program linking the Shanghai, Shenzhen and Hong Kong bourses, Bloomberg reported on Tuesday, citing people familiar with the matter who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The Bloomberg news came a day after Premier Li Qiang said during a State Council meeting on Monday that China will roll out more measures to stabilize its stock market and introduce more long-term capital.

While policymakers have not yet commented on the news about the stabilization fund, the benchmark Shanghai Composite Index jumped 1.8 percent on Wednesday to regain the 2,800-point psychological level. The Shenzhen Component Index rose 1 percent, and the technology-focused ChiNext in Shenzhen closed 0.51 percent higher.

Yang Delong, chief economist at First Seafont Fund, said that powerful policies and large-scale capital inflow are needed for the A-share market at present, as a downward trend has set in. If the indexes go further south, some leverage-using capital will be forced to close position, further aggravating the slump.

"Therefore, real money is crucial now to reverse the trend and rebuild investor confidence," he said.

Yang Haiping, a researcher at the Central University of Finance and Economics' Institute of Securities and Futures, said that it is necessary to introduce a stabilization fund to intervene in the currently over-pessimistic market.

With the United States Federal Reserve keeping interest rates high for a longer-than-expected term, there may be continued capital outflow pressure in China as the country makes more efforts to stabilize economic growth, further lower financing costs and prepare for any possible external financial challenges. The stabilization fund will help to address these issues, said Yang.

Meanwhile, the ongoing process of deepening reforms in the Chinese capital market will include stronger crackdown on violations, prevention of making money through

unfair means in the capital market and protecting the rights of retail investors. The stabilization fund will serve to safeguard the reform, he added.

James Wang, head of China strategy at UBS Investment Bank Research, said the sentiment of A-share investors is downbeat, with some worrying that market liquidity, rather than China's economic fundamentals, will be the main factor affecting market performance. The stabilization fund may provide confidence, which is most needed now.

But it should be noted that the stock price correction may not take place immediately upon the introduction of the fund, he said, citing the government support for the A-share market in 2015.

Analysts from Soochow Securities said that stabilization funds have been used in mature markets such as the US and Japan when their stock markets have stumbled. But certain conditions and appropriate timing are crucial for such funds, including drastic share price decline, irrational capital outflow, less satisfactory results of other stimulative policies and stagnant trading, they said.

The Shanghai Composite Index has shed nearly 5 percent since the beginning of this year.

However, Soochow Securities also stressed that stabilization funds can only serve as transitional means. If used for a longer period, the results will be largely impaired, they said.

Bloomberg reported on Tuesday that China Securities Finance Corp or Central Huijin Investment, an arm of China's sovereign fund, may purchase no less than 300 billion yuan of A shares directly. The regulators did not comment on this either.

Wang Jianjun, vice-chairman of the China Securities Regulatory Commission, said in a media report released on Wednesday that the regulators have noticed the recent high volatility of the A-share market. More efforts will be made to complete the market mechanism, improve the quality of public companies, and balance investment and financing to protect rights and interests of investors.

In a news conference on Wednesday, the Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council said that it will study the inclusion of market value management in the performance appraisal of the executives at listed State-owned enterprises, to get these executives to attach greater importance to the stock market performance of their companies.

Contact the writers at shijing@chinadaily.com.cn

Provincial economies paint bright picture for this year

By OUYANG SHIJIA, ZHOU LANXU and LIU ZHIHUA

China's top provincial economies — Guangdong, Jiangsu, Shandong and Zhejiang — are taking the lead in ensuring stable and high-quality growth, shaping a promising trajectory for China's 2024 economic outlook, said experts.

They said the robust performance of the four provinces in 2023 showcases the strong resilience and vitality of the Chinese economy, while laying a solid foundation for sustained growth in 2024.

Looking ahead, experts and entrepreneurs anticipate the economy to pick up steadily in the current year, with strong policy support, continued recovery in consumer spending and the diminishing downward impact of real estate investment.

The southern coastal province of Guangdong became the first province in China to post a GDP of more than 13 trillion yuan (\$1.81 trillion) last year, finishing as the top provincial economy in the country for the 35th consecutive year. The eco-

nomical output of Shandong and Zhejiang also touched highs, exceeding 9 trillion yuan and 8 trillion yuan, respectively.

Eastern China's Jiangsu became the first Chinese province with five cities recording a GDP of over one trillion yuan each. The province as a whole reported a GDP of over 12 trillion yuan last year.

Feng Jianlin, chief economist at Beijing FOST Economic Consulting Co, attributed the robust performances to solid economic foundations and robust internal dynamics, saying the provinces have made great strides in deepening reforms and opening-up, improving the business environment, fostering a relatively vibrant private sector and enhancing innovation capabilities.

"Economically strong provinces will continue to play a key role in supporting China's steady economic growth this year," he said.

Despite challenges and mounting uncertainties ahead, Feng said the "around 5 percent" GDP growth is achievable this year. "We will see improvements in the services sector and employment,

while household incomes and consumption are anticipated to maintain steady growth. Investment growth is expected to outpace that of 2023, with real estate development investment poised for improvement."

Safdar Parvez, the Asian Development Bank's country director for China, said the ADB forecasts that China's economic growth will remain steady at 4.5 percent in 2024, supported by a continuous recovery of the services sector and efforts to expand domestic demand, particularly consumption.

China's central bank announced on Wednesday that it will cut the reserve requirement ratio by 0.5 percentage points on Feb 5 to provide liquidity of about 1 trillion yuan in the market.

Pan Gongsheng, governor of the People's Bank of China, told a news conference in Beijing that the central bank will also lower the interest rates for relending and rediscount supporting the agriculture sector and small enterprises to 1.75 percent from Thursday, down from 2 percent.

He said the measures will promote

the downward trend of the loan prime rate, a market-based benchmark lending rate.

Ye Yindan, a researcher at the Bank of China Research Institute, said more financial policies are needed to strike a balance between ensuring stable growth, promoting reforms and preventing risks.

Marc Horn, president of Merck China, said the science and technology company is optimistic that the ongoing implementation of measures to further open up the market indicates China's commitment to fostering a more transparent and accessible business environment.

Zhou Haijiang, chairman of garment giant Hodo Group in Wuxi, Jiangsu, said that the province's achievements in 2023 have been inspiring, and private enterprises should make full use of the good environment to embrace new opportunities and to expand to the global market.

Cang Wei contributed to this story.

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Set to celebrate



Cadets take part in a rehearsal for the upcoming Republic Day parade in Chennai, India, on Wednesday. India will celebrate its 75th Republic Day on Friday to remember the day its Constitution came into effect in 1950. R. SATISH BABU / AFP

Corridor: Nation also shares its expertise with Pakistan

From page 1

deep-sea port in the Arabian Sea. Gwadar Port, whose development has been central to the CPEC, is envisaged as a hub for regional trade and connectivity. The port has the potential to transform Pakistan into a major maritime trade center, boosting its economy and its strategic importance in the region.

The first phase of the CPEC also laid the groundwork for more extensive economic cooperation between

Pakistan and China. It established a framework for bilateral trade and investment, setting the stage for the more diversified and comprehensive developments planned for the second phase. The successful completion of these foundational projects in the first phase has not only bolstered Pakistan's confidence in the CPEC initiative, but has also showcased the potential of such large-scale bilateral cooperation in addressing developmental challenges.

Transitioning into the second

phase, the CPEC is set to expand its focus. This phase aims to diversify the economic impact of the project by venturing into new sectors such as industrial development, agricultural modernization and socio-economic projects. The establishment of special economic zones is particularly noteworthy, as these zones are expected to catalyze industrial growth, attract foreign investment and create job opportunities.

The potential benefits for Pakistan in this phase are vast. Economic

growth is expected to surge with the development of industries and the creation of new job opportunities. Technological advancements and skill development initiatives are likely to enhance the workforce's capabilities, fostering a more dynamic and competitive economy. Moreover, strengthening key sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing and services will have a ripple effect across the economy, enhancing overall productivity and efficiency.

China's role in this phase remains

pivotal, especially as Chinese leaders are stressing high-quality Belt and Road development, closer links in interconnections and better cultural exchanges. As a strategic partner, China is not only investing financially but also sharing technological expertise and industrial knowledge.

However, the path forward is not devoid of challenges. Security concerns, political stability and overcoming bureaucratic hurdles are key areas that need attention. Efficient implementation and coordination among various stakeholders are crucial to realize the full potential of these projects.

It is certain that the second phase

of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor will also stand as a transformative chapter in Pakistan's development journey. With a broader scope and deeper impact, it promises to propel Pakistan toward a future of sustainable and inclusive growth. The strategic alliance with China underpins this journey, signaling a shared vision of prosperity and development, not just for both countries but for the region as a whole.

The writer is deputy editor-in-chief at Pakistan Economic Net and Daily IITEHAD Media Group. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA

Falling birthrate puts pressure on resources

Lawmakers call for close management to ensure quality education for students

By **ZOU SHUO** in Changsha
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Lawmakers and political advisers have called for the better allocation of education resources in preparation for a drop in student numbers due to the country's declining birthrate.

They said while urban areas are likely to still have large numbers of students in the short term, they need to prepare for a sharp decline of school-aged children as the number of newborns has dropped significantly in the past several years.

However, they said the declining number of new births can offer schools the chance to reduce the size of each class and provide students with higher quality education.

There was an increase in births after China introduced the second-child policy in 2016, with 17.86 million recorded that year. However, according to the National Bureau of Statistics, the country only had 9.02 million births last year, down from 9.56 million in 2022.

Experts said the increase of newborns in 2016 and the significant drop in the last two years means schools need to prepare for a jump in the number of students, followed by an abrupt decline a few years later.

A notice issued by the Hunan Provincial Education Department in November asked local authorities to better allocate education resources for the next five to 10 years based on the birthrate, urbanization and the change in the number of school-aged children.

The province plans to build new public kindergartens in densely populated urban areas while no new kindergartens should be established in rural areas. It also encourages kindergartens with good conditions to offer daycare services to children 2 to 3 years old.

Qiao Jinzhong, an associate education professor at Beijing Normal University, projected that the number of students at primary and middle schools is likely to fall by 30 million from 2020 to 2035.

If the ratio of students and teachers remains unchanged, it means

there will be a surplus of 1.5 million primary school teachers and 370,000 middle school teachers in 2035, he said.

A guideline issued by the Sichuan provincial education department and human resources and social security departments said the number of education majors at universities should be controlled to cope with the declining need for teachers in the future.

Ke Zhongming, a member of the 14th Guangzhou Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and a principal of a local primary school, said Guangzhou has spent a lot of resources to renovate and build new schools and hired lots of teachers in recent years, as China still has a large population, so the sheer demand for education resources will exist for a long time.

Moreover, the new teachers hired by the city have all received a good education, so they can improve the overall education quality in Guangzhou, he told local media Yangcheng Evening News.

Chen Wu, a deputy to the 16th Guangzhou people's congress and a local primary school principal, said on average there are 45 students per class at primary school and 50 students per class at middle school in the city.

With more investment in education and the declining number of students in the future, Guangzhou has the opportunity to gradually reduce the number of students in each class, so the students can receive more attention from teachers and have a more tailored education, he said.

Tianhe district, where Chen's school is located, has had a shortage in education resources during the past 10 years, and many schools have transformed the music rooms, art rooms and laboratories into classrooms to meet the demand, he said.

If the number of students decreases in the future, those rooms can be put to better use, so students can also receive better education, he added.

Wang Songsong contributed to this story.



Volunteers distribute meals to disaster-affected people at a temporary shelter on Wednesday after a landslide in Zhenxiang, Yunnan province, two days before. LIU RANYANG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Death toll from landslide rises to 34 as hundreds remain relocated

By **LI YINGQING** in Kunming and **YANG ZEKUN** in Beijing

The death toll from the landslide that hit Zhenxiang county in Southwest China's Yunnan province on Monday had risen to 34 as of 5 pm on Wednesday, with rescue efforts ongoing and 10 people still missing, according to local authorities.

The landslide occurred in Liangshui village at around 6 am on Monday, burying 18 houses.

By Wednesday afternoon, rescue teams had recovered 34 bodies from the rubble.

The command center handling the landslide reported that the initial analysis by the expert team during on-site investigations indicated that the steep topography, layered fractured rock structure, continuous precipitation infiltrating and softening the weak surface of the rock, along with rain and snow before the collapse, led to the groundwater reaching its critical point, triggering the collapse.

Transportation links to the disaster area, power and communication have been restored. The search and rescue for missing people are ongoing, with a focus on those bur-

“We have guarantees for food, clothing, shelter and transportation. If we have difficulties, we can find the government staff members stationed here.”

Lei Yin, a 50-year-old villager staying at the resettlement site

ied deep, according to Yunnan Fire and Rescue. The cold and icy weather at the scene has increased the difficulty of rescue, it added.

While putting significant effort into rescuing the missing individuals, relocation and resettlement of survivors are being carried out simultaneously. Dozens of people are staying at a temporary resettlement site at an elementary school.

Local governments have allocated daily necessities to the affected residents, including 222 tents, 1,350 cotton coats, 700 quilts and

200 rollaway beds, the command center said.

Lei Yin, a 50-year-old villager staying at the resettlement site with his daughter, said: “We have guarantees for food, clothing, shelter and transportation. If we have difficulties, we can find the government staff members stationed here.”

Song Han, a staff member from the local township government, said she has been working at the temporary relocation site since Monday.

Each classroom is equipped with heating equipment and 10 beds. Every affected individual has been provided with thick cotton coats and gloves. Food, drinking water and medical services are all available at the scene, she said.

“All cadres from the town are on the front line, each with their responsibilities,” she said.

A total of 918 people have been relocated, with 90 people relocated to the elementary school, 778 people staying with relatives and friends, and two people receiving treatment in the county hospital.

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Villagers cared for in quake aftermath

By **MAO WEIHUA** in Urumqi and **ZHOU HUIYING**

Despite some cracks appearing in the walls of her house and some bricks falling down during the earthquake that struck Xinjiang on Tuesday, Amragul Mamat didn't feel too nervous about the situation.

“After the earthquake, village cadres knocked on doors, asking us to move to the resettlement sites,” she said. “At the resettlement site, they distributed food such as bread, water and eggs, which made us calm down.”

Mamat's house is located in Karasu village of Wushi county, and was built in 2012 with a government subsidy of 50,000 yuan (\$7,000).

“I believe with everyone's help and effort, everything will be fine,” she said.

All 725 villagers of Karasu village have moved into 25 tents with electric heaters, folding beds and cotton quilts after a 7.1-magnitude

earthquake that hit Wushi county in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region on Tuesday, leaving three dead and five injured.

After the earthquake, 30 village cadres were divided into four groups and visited door-to-door to check on the safety of the residents of 415 households, according to Wu Hui, an official from the county's administration for market regulation, who has been appointed as village secretary.

“Thanks to the construction of earthquake-resistant housing, there were no casualties reported in the village,” Wu added.

“We have distributed 364 down coats to women and children,” said Yang Deji, deputy director of the county's women's federation. “And 500 sweaters, 1,000 quilts, 500 coats and other materials will be distributed to villagers to warm affected people.”

Data from the China Earthquake Networks Center show that as of 8 am on Wednesday, over 101 aftershocks above magnitude 3

had been recorded, with the strongest reaching magnitude 5.7.

Aman Mamat, deputy director of the region's emergency management department, told China Central Television that a full search and rescue has been completed.

“Through research and judgment, there is still the possibility of aftershocks around magnitude 6 near the epicenter,” he said. “Therefore, we can't be relaxed about the prevention work.”

The Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Emergency Management have allocated disaster relief funds totaling 30 million yuan, the Ministry of Finance said on its website on Wednesday.

The funds will be used to support disaster relief and emergency rescue work, focusing on search and rescue, the relocation of affected people, secondary disaster detection, the repair of damaged homes, and other areas, it said.

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Male panda revealed as female by keeper

By **HUANG ZHILING** in Chengdu
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Panda lovers were shocked to learn on Wednesday that one of their beloved bears was not what they thought them to be.

Tan Jintao, the keeper of four-year-old giant panda He Ye at the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding in the northern suburbs of Chengdu, Sichuan province, revealed to the panda's fans that he was actually a she.

In a video released by the base, Tan, a keeper well-known as Grandpa Tan among panda lovers, said, “Come here, He Ye and Hua Hua. Did you two sisters eat bamboo well when I was on a business trip for two days?”

Born in July 2020, Hua Hua is the twin sister of He Ye. Hua Hua is an online sensation because of her intelligence. She always obeys when her 52-year-old keeper summons her.

Because of Hua Hua's popularity, He Ye has also aroused public attention. The former sister and brother have instead become twin sisters.

According to an information officer at the base who asked to remain anonymous, the video was released to confirm He Ye is a female.

After He Ye was born, the cub's gender characteristics tended toward male. Because the cub peed in a certain way, appeared very lively and had a large stature, He Ye was identified as a male at that time, Tan says in the video.

“As He Ye is growing older, the male characteristics are not obvious. So we have invited experts to collect He Ye's biological samples and found out that He Ye is indeed a female,” he said in the video.

The biological samples can be used for DNA analysis, said Zhang Guiquan, a senior panda expert with the China Conservation and Research Center for the Giant Panda.

According to experts, the sex of giant pandas is the most difficult to determine among large mammals. Since newborn panda cubs weigh only about 100 grams, their sex organs are not obvious, so keepers sometimes make mistakes in sex judgment. It is widely believed to be very hard to determine the gender of a panda before it turns three.

According to media reports, Mei Lan, the father of He Ye, was once raised as a female panda.

Before his true sex was determined, Mei Lan was even arranged to date several male pandas. Mei Lan's sister Bao Lan was also judged to be male at birth, and only after an examination was it discovered that the sex was actually female.

In 2013, officials at Zoo Atlanta in the United States received surprising news regarding giant pandas Po, Mei Lun and Mei Huan. Po, then three years old, and twins Mei Lun and Mei Huan, then nearly five months old, were the offspring of Lun Lun, a female panda from the Chengdu base. DNA testing confirmed that all three bears who had originally been sexed as male were in fact female.

Prior to the time pandas are at least three years old, there are no obvious external clues as to their sex, the zoo said.

Cold seafront



Tourists enjoy the spectacle of sea ice along the coast of Yantai, Shandong province, on Wednesday. A recent cold wave has brought strong winds and waves, resulting in large areas of sea ice along the coast of the city. TANG KE / FOR CHINA DAILY

Advisers urge Shanghai to take lead on stem cells

By **ZHOU WENTING** in Shanghai
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Political advisers for the Shanghai government have urged relevant parties to work toward making the city a global hub for stem cell research, development and industrialization.

Shanghai has the country's largest public resource bank of stem cells, and related clinical research programs are underway at 15 hospitals in the city.

Stem cells are a promising field for medical treatment, with the ability to replace disease-affected

cells with healthy ones and to increase understanding of how diseases occur, as well as many other applications.

“As of August 2023, 21 stem cell products had been approved for market around the world, and more than 6,200 relevant clinical trials are ongoing, involving 200 indications for diseases afflicting all the eight human body systems,” said Zhang Yi, a political adviser, on the sidelines of the ongoing annual session of the city's political advisory body.

Stem cell-related patent applications from the United States

account for 28 percent of the global total, with China's coming in at second with 16 percent.

“It is estimated that the global stem cell therapy market will reach 226.1 billion yuan (\$31.5 billion) by 2030. If Shanghai maintains its leading position in stem cells, it will play a crucial role in accelerating the city's construction of a biomedical hub with international influence,” said Zhang, who is also vice-president of the Shanghai Federation of Industry and Commerce.

The Shanghai government plans for the city to have biomedical R&D

scale of 100 billion yuan by 2025.

By the same year, more than 100 innovative drugs and medical device products are aimed to have been cultivated or introduced, and at least 50 biomedical company headquarters established.

Political adviser Ma Jin suggested the government require that, during the process of acquiring stem cells from umbilical cords and placentas, medical staff explain to parents the role that stem cells play.

Shenzhen, Guangdong province, and Tianjin have already unveiled laws to clarify that medical institu-

tions should support the collection of biological samples to promote the protection, development and utilization of stem cell resources.

Advisers also suggested more support is needed in the development of the city's innovative drug industry to enhance the resilience of Shanghai's biopharmaceutical enterprises against international competition.

Since 2019, a total of 19 innovative drugs produced in Shanghai for either the domestic or international market have been approved, accounting for roughly one-fourth of the country's total.

However, there still exist difficulties throughout the process from R&D to marketing. For example, the time it takes for a new innova-

tive drug to be approved is long. It usually takes an average of two to three years in China, which compares to eight months in the US, they said.

Other difficulties include that innovative drugs are usually not covered by commercial insurance, and they require a relatively long time to be covered by government medical insurance.

The Shanghai committee of the China National Democratic Construction Association made a suggestion that the city should establish a joint working mechanism to promote innovative drugs developed in Shanghai to go global, and create a good policy environment and service support system for enterprises.

CHINA

Poetry 2.0

A robotic arm called Xiaofei writes the Chinese character *fu*, or good fortune, at a community in Wuhan, Hubei province, on Tuesday. Local calligraphers, as well as the robot, came to the community to scribe Spring Festival couplets and festive stickers ahead of the holiday.

GAO YONG / FOR CHINA DAILY



Legal framework has enabled successful terror crackdown

Yearslong focus has seen rapid drop in attacks and put an end to radicalization

By CUI JIA
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The prioritization in China's legal framework for preventing acts of terrorism has thwarted attacks in recent years and helped to safeguard national security and social stability, according to legal experts.

From the late 1990s to the 2010s, terrorist attacks in China were becoming more frequent, and terrorist cells had become smaller and more localized.

With the violent attacks causing irreversible damage to life and property, China began improving its legal framework to put a stop to terrorism, said Yang Haitao, a professor at the Criminal Investigation Police University of China's School of

Investigation and Counterterrorism.

China's Counterterrorism Law, which was passed in December 2015, states that the principle of the country's counterterrorism measures is to prioritize prevention. The crimes of planning terrorist activities, advocating terrorism and extremism and inciting terrorism were added in Amendment IX to the Criminal Law adopted in August 2015, Yang said.

"China has been making consistent law-based efforts in deradicalization. It has succeeded in containing the influence and spread of religious extremism, which is the ideological foundation of terrorism," he said.

Acts of religious extremism have been clarified in the Counterterrorism Law and the Regulations of Xin-

jiang Uygur Autonomous Region on Deradicalization. It has made people aware of those acts, so they won't be manipulated by religious extremists, he added.

China has established standards for the prevention of terrorism in key sectors, including transport, water, electricity, oil, gas, nuclear facilities, nuclear technology, hazardous chemicals, biosecurity and national strategic reserves, said Li Changlin, a professor at Southwest University of Political Science and Law's Human Rights Institute.

According to the white paper titled "China's Legal Framework and Measures for Counterterrorism" released by the State Council Information Office on Tuesday, the Ministry of Public Security has released 37 terrorism prevention standards for the public security sector, and local authorities have issued hundreds more.

It added that by supporting scientific research and technological innovation, developing new technical devices, and applying them to training and real-world scenarios, China continues to increase its scientific and technological capacity to counter terrorism and effectively tackle the challenges posed by new technologies and business forms, including artificial intelligence, encrypted communication and virtual currencies.

"China's legal framework on counterterrorism has specified the responsibility of different forces and sectors in combating terrorism, so counterterrorism measures can be carried out more effectively," Li said.

According to the white paper, since 2014, China has taken tough action against violent terrorism and punished criminals who have plotted terrorist activities. It has foiled most potential terrorist attacks at the planning stage.

Scientists reveal gibbons' gift for choral singing

By CHEN LIANG
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The origin of human music was a mystery highlighted as one of the 125 most challenging scientific questions in a 2005 issue of Science journal. But now, a group of scientists from China, the United States and Canada have delved into the question by focusing their research on the mechanism and evolution of song coordination in animals, especially in three closely related species of wild gibbons.

On Jan 24, they published a paper titled "Small apes adjust rhythms to facilitate song coordination" in Current Biology. The study marks the first time that adult male gibbons in the wild, specifically those in polygynous groups (a male pairing with two females), have been reported to adjust the timing, speed and rhythmic pattern of their vocalizations to better facilitate coordinated singing.

"Our research answered the question of 'How do animals coordinate their vocalization to form elaborate duets or choruses?'" said professor Fan Pengfei from the School of Life Sciences at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, who is the senior author of the paper. Ma Haigang, a postdoctoral researcher with the school, and Wang Zidi, a graduate student with the school, were lead authors.

"It provides insights into the origin and evolution of song coordination in music," Fan said.

The researchers emphasize choral singing is not only an important musical form but also a significant behavior among various non-human animal groups, including duets formed by two individuals or larger choruses.

Choral singing in humans plays a crucial role in promoting prosocial behavior, increasing social cohesion and strengthening social relationships, Fan said. "The coordination of individual voices into an organized chorus has long been a subject of scientific inquiry," he said.

Rhythm, as a fundamental element of music, organizes the temporal patterns of sound. Scientists believe that isochronous rhythms, such as those emitted by a clock or metronome, are easier for recipients to perceive and predict, and they facilitate coordination among individuals, thus promoting choral singing. Until the research, however, the role and mechanisms of rhythm and its variations in promoting choral singing in non-human animals remained poorly understood.

Gibbons are ideal subjects for studying these questions, Fan said.

"Among all the apes, and even among all non-human primates, the vocalizations of gibbons bear the closest resemblance to human music," he said. "They are the only apes capable of producing complex phrases or sequences composed of multiple syllables, which can be combined to form a 'chorus' — a feature not found in any other ape species. It's been observed that they dynamically adjust their vocalizations to align the first resonance peak frequency, akin to the singing pattern of human sopranos."

The loud and enduring songs of gibbons can travel 1 to 2 kilometers and are believed to serve functions such as attracting and defending mates, marking and defending territories, and reinforcing pair bonds.

China is home to three species of gibbons: the Cao-vit gibbon, the Hainan black-crested gibbon and the black-crested gibbon.



Two female Hainan black-crested gibbons rest in a forest canopy in Hainan province. FAN PENGFEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Unlike other gibbons that primarily live in monogamous family groups, these three species typically reside in stable polygynous family groups, consisting of one adult male and two adult females, Fan said.

Within these family groups, adult males and one or two adult females combine their gender-specific calls to form duets or trios, with the males predominantly leading the singing.

The study first demonstrates the presence of isochronous rhythms (with a rhythm ratio of 1:1) and other small integer rhythms (with a rhythm ratio of 2:1) in the male sequences of these gibbons, Fan said. "After the males emit multiple sequences, the females respond with successful or unsuccessful excited calls to coordinate with the males, resulting in singing bouts," he said.

"Based on our long-term field observations, our study discusses for the first time the evolutionary basis of rhythm and its variations — adult males demonstrate bond strength with females through successful choral singing to avoid being replaced by other males," he said.

This study has revealed the function of rhythm and its variations in promoting choral singing, the professor said.

It has advanced the understanding of the function and evolution of rhythm for humans and proposed several avenues for future research, contributing important data and theoretical foundations for further understanding the origins and evolution of music.

However, the team's joy of discovery was tempered by the grim reality of the gibbons' dwindling populations.

"Gibbons once flourished in central, southern and southwestern China. But over the centuries, their numbers have plummeted, and their habitat has steadily receded," Fan said.

After the founding of New China in 1949, the country was still home to seven species of gibbons.

Regrettably, he said, the northern white-cheeked gibbon and the white-handed gibbon have already been declared extinct in the country.

At present, the Hainan gibbon, with only six groups totaling 37 individuals, stands as the world's most critically endangered primate species.

The Cao-vit gibbon, the second-rarest gibbon worldwide, numbers fewer than 80 individuals distributed in China and Vietnam, with 36 in five families within the country.

The Skywalker hoolock gibbon, named by Fan, has a population of fewer than 200, while even the most populous of gibbons in China, the western black-crested gibbon, numbers only 1,300 to 1,500 individuals.

Fan called for urgent action to conduct further research and to protect the gibbons. "If we lose these precious species, we will forever lose the opportunity to explore the mysteries of their behavior," he said.

Soccer star Ronaldo apologizes after games called off

By SUN XIAOCHEN
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After calling China his "second home", soccer star Cristiano Ronaldo and organizers of his club's exhibition tour in China have left fans fuming after abruptly calling off two friendly games on very short notice.

The games between Ronaldo's club — Al-Nassr of the Saudi Pro League — and Chinese Super League's Shanghai Shenhua and Zhejiang FC, scheduled for Wednesday and Sunday, respectively, in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, were "indefinitely postponed" due to a health issue suffered by the Portuguese superstar, organizers of the event announced on Tuesday.

The sudden postponement, only confirmed on the eve of the first game, left Ronaldo's Chinese fans hugely disappointed. The five-time Ballon d'Or winner sparked massive excitement across China over his first visit to the country since 2019, resulting in tickets for the two games selling out within hours.

Before his arrival in China, the media in Saudi Arabia reported that Ronaldo had suffered a calf injury while training, and would need at least two weeks for treatment and rehabilitation. Chinese organizers, though, reiterated that they were only told by Al-Nassr on Monday night that Ronaldo couldn't play, after all preparations were made for the star striker to play both games as articulated in the event contract.

Neither the Saudi club nor the Chinese organizers gave any further details on Ronaldo's condition, only expressing deep regret while apologizing to fans at a brief media conference.

"For me, today is a sad day. I want to say sorry to the Chinese fans, especially in Shenzhen," Ronaldo said at the news conference on Tuesday.

"In football, there is always something you cannot control. ... I am really sad because Al-Nassr and myself have come here to enjoy the tour. I've been coming to China since 2003, or 2004, I feel at home

here. I feel this is my second home.

"We are not canceling the game. We just postpone the game. We will be back."

Ronaldo refused to answer any questions after his opening remarks, insisting that he had "said everything and clarified everything".

Hours after the decision was announced, videos emerged on Chinese social media showing hundreds of fans surrounding Al-Nassr's hotel in Shenzhen, chanting Ronaldo's name while angrily calling out organizers for a more reasonable explanation.

"It's impossible that they only learned about Ronaldo's health problems one night before the match. I feel like we've all been kept in the dark as they didn't want to disrupt all the prematch marketing events and sponsorship activities," said Zhao Jiatong, a member of Ronaldo's fan club in Shanghai, who bought two tickets for the Wednesday match, each for 2,880 yuan (\$400).

In an interview with Shenzhen TV before the Al-Nassr contingent landed on Sunday, Deng Hongfei, vice-president of the tour's co-organizer G.H.Y. Culture & Media, confirmed that Ronaldo would play both games.

Although organizers had promised that all sold tickets could be refunded and expenses incurred by fans on travel and hotels would be covered as well, die-hard Ronaldo fans remain disgruntled, claiming their wasted time and, more importantly, the emotions they had devoted can never be compensated.

"I am totally speechless. I came all the way from Shanghai to Shenzhen only to be told that this whole thing had been called off at the last minute?" China's former national women's team player Li Jiayue, a known Ronaldo fan, complained on social media platform Sina Weibo.

"The money and our time spent on this, they didn't come cheap. They've treated us lightly. I am so pissed off," she said in a video message.

Taiwan youths experience mainland development

By LIU MINGTAI in Changchun and ZHANG YI

About 500 young people from Taiwan are participating in a winter camp that includes Chinese customs experiences and tours of mainland provinces, aiming to boost exchanges and mutual understanding.

The opening ceremony organized by the All-China Federation of Taiwan Compatriots was held at Jilin University on Tuesday, and was attended by about 200 people from both sides.

Zheng Jianmin, the federation's president, said the event will help young people from Taiwan experience Chinese culture and customs, and see the mainland's economic and social development in order to introduce a more authentic mainland to their families and friends in Taiwan.

He said youth from both sides of the Strait can communicate with each other, enhance mutual understanding, become good friends, and work together to promote the peaceful and integrated development of cross-Strait relations.

Kong Lingzhi, president of the Jilin Provincial Federation for Taiwan Compatriots, said that in recent years, an increasing number of young people from Taiwan have been attracted to the diverse ethnic customs, natural scenery and rapidly changing social development of the mainland.

They will experience the unique ice and snow culture, fishing and hunting culture, intangible cultural heritage inheritance, and rural revitalization practices during the week-long trip in Jilin, he said.

Liao Ling-chun, from Taiwan's Tao-

yan, said she wanted to learn more about the mainland through the event, and felt local students she met in Jilin were very kind and helpful.

"It was my first time coming to Jilin, and I felt cold once I got off the plane. I look forward to trying skiing and enjoying the hot springs, which I haven't experienced before," said the 23-year-old university student.

Yang Yi-chen, 25, a teacher from Taiwan's Pingtung, said that five years ago when she last visited Jilin, she had a great experience and really wanted to return.

"I feel that the people here are very friendly, and the snow scenery is also very beautiful. When I came last time, it was this season, very cold, and everywhere was covered in snow," she said.

Yang said she has been paying attention to the popularity of ice and

snow tourism in Northeast China this year, and watched many short videos online of many people from the southern regions visiting the northeast.

Diverse itineraries are designed in 14 provincial regions including Heilongjiang, Gansu and Xinjiang to conduct youth exchange activities.

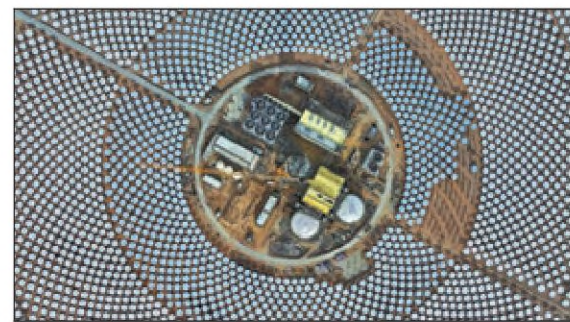
Participants are encouraged to make videos recording their experiences during the camp to help more people learn about the mainland.

The event is the 30th edition of the camp, which was first held in 1989 to promote cross-Strait exchanges. It has attracted more than 7,000 Taiwan youths to take part since then.

Han Junhong contributed to this story.

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Bright idea



A total of 11,960 heliostats — sets of mirrors that reflect and concentrate sunlight to a single spot — are installed at the site of China's largest central tower solar thermal power station under construction in Aksay, Gansu province, on Tuesday. The 750-megawatt project will generate some 1.7 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity and reduce equivalent carbon dioxide emissions by 1.47 million metric tons every year. ZHOU XINGLIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

CHINA

Fujian nursing home draws Taiwan seniors

Center in Fuzhou helping promote care for elderly across the Strait

By HU MEIDONG in Fuzhou and CHEN MEILING

Lin Shen-shen, a 92-year-old retired nurse originally from Taiwan, said that she feels happy and more secure at a newly opened nursing home for the elderly that she recently moved into in Fuzhou, Fujian province.

"Here, there are various activities and many friends. Everyone takes care of each other, which allows children to feel more at ease when they go out to pursue their dreams," Lin said.

At the home, she likes to attend calligraphy and painting classes, and with her background, she said she intends to help watch over other elderly residents who are sick.

"It's great I can still apply my knowledge," she said. "The managers here are willing to take advice from us. I feel a great sense of security."

The Yuefeng Town Home-based Community Elderly Care Service Center opened in December in Yuefeng town, which is part of Fuzhou. It is run by Anxin Nursing Home Chains, a Taiwan company, and is a pioneering project of cross-Strait elderly care.

It combines standards, concepts and service evaluation systems for seniors from both sides of the Strait, hires workers from Taiwan and organizes activities to boost exchanges, its managers said.

With an area of 2,000 square meters, the center offers 50 beds for people over age 50. Currently, eight staff members serve 12 residents there.

Wu Sang, general manager of the center, said it follows models seen in Taiwan.

For example, nursing homes in Taiwan don't put showers inside individual rooms, because sometimes two workers are needed to



Residents attend a painting class at the Yuefeng Town Home-based Community Elderly Care Service Center in Fuzhou, Fujian province. HU MEIDONG / CHINA DAILY

help bathe the residents, so larger showers are required, she said. Furthermore, wet floors are dangerous for the older tenants.

"So here, up to 25 people can share one public shower. They can take turns using it," she said.

The center provides meals inspired by traditional Chinese medicine and China's 24 solar terms, which are periods on traditional Chinese lunar calendars that match specific climate and natural events.

Employees who work the night shift check on the residents every

two hours. They help the residents turn over, pat their backs to assist with expectation, accompany them to the toilet, change diapers and check vital signs, Wu said.

"Elderly people from Taiwan love to come here," she said. "For self-funded care in Taiwan, it costs at least 10,000 yuan (\$1,393) per month, but we only charge from 3,500 to 5,000 yuan. Also, people from southern Fujian and Taiwan have a similar accent, so it's easy for them to adapt to the community. The city is also very close to Taiwan."

To enrich residents' lives, the center offers classes in painting, calligraphy, singing, photography, yoga and folk dance, all of which are popular among the elderly. Each class costs 400 yuan per class per year, and they are each held once a week.

Yan Renmin, the calligraphy teacher at the center, said teaching the elderly is very different from teaching young people.

"They are primarily driven by their interests. We should encourage their desire to learn," he said. "Learning also helps slow brain

cell degradation."

After eating breakfast from 7 am to 8 am, the seniors are separated into groups based on their interests to enjoy some social activities. For example, in the newspaper reading group, they read the news and share opinions on the topics. In another group, the residents gather to talk about their life experiences.

"Sometimes, the conversations become so engaging that everyone forgets about their meal times. Some people became teary-eyed while talking," said Wang Kewei,

“

Here, there are various activities and many friends. Everyone takes care of each other, which allows children to feel more at ease when they go out to pursue their dreams."

Lin Shen-shen, retired nurse from Taiwan who lives in the Yuefeng Town Home-based Community Elderly Care Service Center in Fuzhou, Fujian province

Party secretary of the center.

A retired teacher surnamed Gong, 92, said she felt lonely at home and now enjoys the companionship she has at the center.

"Here we have a good environment, and we can learn and improve ourselves," she said. "The caregivers and leaders here are very caring. It feels like a big family!"

The center also provides door-to-door services for nonresidents, helping them bathe, bringing them meals, accompanying them to the doctor, helping them clean their homes or just visiting to chat with them.

"We will teach them painting, read classic literature and enjoy music with them. We can also help them write their autobiographies," said Wu, the general manager. "This service typically requires people to request them for three months, with two home visits per week to listen to their stories, followed by helping them organize their belongings, such as old photos, visiting places important to them, taking photos, and drafting their autobiographies."

The center also welcomes older people from nearby communities to have dinners and attend classes.

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Xizang trade unions get better protection

By PALDEN NYIMA and DAQJONG in Lhasa

Trade unions and their members in the Xizang autonomous region will receive better legal protection, with the regional legislative body recently announcing a revision of the Xizang Autonomous Region's Implementation Measures of the Trade Union Law of the People's Republic of China, which will take effect on Feb 1.

The revised measures were adopted at the Sixth Session of the 12th People's Congress of Xizang on Nov 29.

The Standing Committee of the People's Congress of Xizang and the region's Federation of Trade Unions have urged regional institutions to ensure implementation and raise awareness of the measures.

Tang Mingying, deputy secretary of the standing committee of the regional people's congress, said the new measures are collectively seen as a high-quality regulation that embodies the leadership of the Communist Party of China, reflects the will of the people and is in line with current development trends, providing robust legal support for trade unions in the region.

"Trade unions at all levels are called upon to diligently study, publicize and implement the measures, utilizing the rule of law to fulfill their responsibilities in safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of workers and serving the workers wholeheartedly," Tang said.

Tang, who also serves as the chairman of the region's trade

union federation, said the announcement marks the first comprehensive revision of the trade union law since its promulgation and implementation in 2004.

The revision is seen as a significant achievement in promoting comprehensive and law-based governance in Xizang, reflecting the attention and support of various sectors for the work of trade unions in the region.

Consisting of five chapters and 39 articles, the revision calls for advancing the reform of the industrial workforce, strengthening the protection of the rights and interests of workers in new forms of employment, making efforts to improve the quality of workers' lives, establishing a mechanism to boost the welfare standards of workers, upgrading the system

that facilitates meetings between the government and trade unions, and improving the treatment of trade union workers.

The provisions are meant to provide comprehensive and effective legal guarantees for trade union work.

The revised implementation measures aim to encourage trade unions at all levels in the region to fulfill their duties according to law, and they will provide strong legal guarantees for the high-quality development of trade union work and the industrial workers' cause in Xizang in the new era, Tang said.

"The implementation of the revised measures is considered an essential requirement for implementing the strategy of governing the country according to law and promoting the construction of the rule of law in Xizang," Tang said.

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Sichuan water-sharing deal aids thirsty Ningxia

By HU DONGMEI in Yinchuan and HUANG ZHILING

The parched Ningxia Hui autonomous region in Northwest China will soon find some relief after winning the right to use 15 million cubic meters of water from the Yellow River over the next three years.

The water will be transferred by the Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture Water Affairs Bureau in Southwest China's Sichuan province to the Management Committee of the Ningdong Energy Chemical Industry Base in Ningxia.

In November, the bureau and the committee signed an agreement in Chengdu, capital of Sichuan, to give Ningxia permission to use the river water.

Minister of Water Resources Li Guoying praised the deal. He said Ningxia completed China's first cross-provincial water rights transaction to resolve its water shortage woes as it strives to boost its socioeconomic development.

Ningxia's arrangement with Aba started with a trip to the autonomous prefecture by an investigative team from Sichuan's water resources department in March. Ningxia's water resources department discussed the region's water shortage with the team, which was tasked with researching ways to mitigate water costs.

The autonomous region mainly relies on 4 billion cubic meters of water from the Yellow River allocated by the central government.

The Yellow River experienced a dry year last year, and weather experts said there may be consecutive or extremely dry years to come. Ningxia's total water shortage is forecast to reach 1.42 billion cubic meters in 2025.

Sichuan, which has access to more water resources, saw a surplus from its Yellow River water allocation last year, said Song

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I proposed that both sides engage in a cross-provincial trading of water resources."

Song Yuangsong, member of an investigative team from the water resources department in Sichuan province

Yuangsong, a member of the investigative team.

"I proposed that both sides engage in a cross-provincial trading of water resources," Song said.

The central government allocates 42 million cubic meters of water from the river to Sichuan, and 41 million cubic meters are given to Aba.

As the prefecture has adopted water-saving measures, it has only needed to use an average of 33 million cubic meters of its water allocation from the Yellow River each year since 2015.

With the approval of the Ministry of Water Resources and its Yellow River Conservancy Commission, Ningxia and Sichuan signed the agreement in November, which allowed Ningxia to pay 18 million yuan (\$2.5 million) to Aba for the right to use a total of 15 million cubic meters per year from the river starting this year through 2026.

The deal signaled to areas with relatively abundant water resources that they can also sell their water surpluses to others, said Deng Shunjie, deputy director of the office for water rights and price reform of Sichuan's department of water resources.

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Winter sports enthusiasts receive welcome at ski resort

CHANGSHA — Ski coach Guo Dandan is welcoming winter sports enthusiasts to Zhangjiajie, in Central China's Hunan province.

"Not only can you enjoy skiing here, but also immerse yourself in the breathtaking natural beauty," Guo said.

Guo said winter sports are booming in popularity across China, with an increasing number of people from warmer, southern parts of the country, particularly children, taking part.

The second edition of the Zhangjiajie Winter Sports Tourism Festival, launched at Qixing Mountain Ski Resort on Dec 26, attracted over a thousand people to revel in the joy of winter sports.

Since its season opening on Dec 22, the resort, nestled over 1,000 meters above sea level, has become a hub for skiers.

"Enthusiasm for winter sports has soared in China since the Beijing Winter Olympics, attracting more people in the southern



Visitors enjoy winter scenery at Qixing Mountain Ski Resort in Zhangjiajie, Hunan province. XINHUA

regions to the slopes," said Han Wei, the marketing director at Qixing Mountain Tourism Resort.

Han said the resort has sold over 50,000 ski tickets online,

with travel agencies integrating skiing into their travel packages.

Covering almost 60,000 square meters, Qixing Mountain Ski Resort, the only Alpine outdoor

ski area in northwestern Hunan, can handle 150,000 visitors a day.

To meet the growing demand for winter sports, the resort has upgraded its safety features and ski slopes, and installed new equipment. It also offers winter-time fun activities for all ages and groups, including snow sledding, snow tubing and snow go-karting.

"Our goal is to offer ski enthusiasts a unique experience, enhanced by our commitment to professional and personalized ski training," Han said.

Wang Tao, Zhangjiajie's deputy mayor, highlighted the impact of the Beijing Winter Olympics and Paralympics, both held in 2022, in spurring the growth of winter sports and related leisure tourism.

"Zhangjiajie aims to leverage skiing to enliven its winter tourism, build a distinctive brand and translate the appeal of winter sports into economic vitality," Wang said.

XINHUA

SPORTS

BASKETBALL

NBA stars shoot for Paris Olympics berth

James, Embiid, Curry and Durant named in 41-man player pool for Team USA, as turbulent season costs 2016 winner Green



From left: Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James, Philadelphia 76ers center Joel Embiid, Golden State Warriors point guard Stephen Curry and Phoenix Suns forward Kevin Durant. USA TODAY SPORTS VIA REUTERS

There are few surprises in USA Basketball's men's player pool for the Paris Olympics, which was announced Tuesday, with most of the big names like LeBron James, Joel Embiid, Stephen Curry and Kevin Durant on the list.

The bigger surprise may have been who was missing.

Draymond Green, who helped the US win gold at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games, and then another title at the rescheduled Tokyo Olympics in 2021, was not among the list of 41 candidates released by USA Basketball for the team that will head to Paris this summer in search of a fifth consecutive gold medal.

The naming of the pool is the first official phase in the process of assembling a 12-player Olympic roster that will be coached by Golden State's Steve Kerr and assisted by Miami's Erik Spoelstra, the Los Angeles Clippers' Tyrone Lue and Gonzaga Bulldogs' Mark Few. Team selection will be finalized this spring, with many of those decisions likely hinging upon player health and how deep their respective teams go in the NBA playoffs.

"The United States boasts unbelievable basketball talent and I am thrilled that many of the game's superstars have expressed interest in representing our country at the 2024 Olympic Summer Games," men's national team managing director Grant Hill said. "It is a privi-

Jokic finishes with triple-double, as Nuggets make it three in a row on the road

Nikola Jokic had 31 points, 13 rebounds and 10 assists, Jamal Murray also scored 31 points and the Denver Nuggets spoiled Pascal Siakam's home debut with the Indiana Pacers with a 114-109 win on Tuesday night in Indianapolis.

Jokic's triple-double was his first ever against Indiana and his 13th of the season. Kentavious Caldwell-Pope had 14 points and Reggie Jackson scored 13 off the bench for Denver, which has won three straight on its five-game road trip.

Siakam, acquired from the Toronto Raptors last Wednesday, finished with

16 points and 10 rebounds for Indiana. Myles Turner led the Pacers with 22 points, TJ McConnell scored 17, Andrew Nembhard contributed 15, Aaron Nesmith had 13 and Benedict Mathurin finished with 11.

The Pacers played without star guard Tyrese Haliburton, who will also miss the next two games with a hamstring injury, coach Rick Carlisle said Tuesday. Indiana also played most of the second half without Carlisle, who was ejected early in the third quarter.

The Nuggets led by 12 after three quarters, and Jackson's layup early in the fourth made it 95-82.

McConnell scored Indiana's next 11 points, sparking a 21-7 run that gave the Pacers a 103-102 edge with 3:42 left. Jokic was whistled for an offensive foul, his fourth personal of the night, but a successful challenge overturned the call, and Jokic drained a 3-pointer to put Denver ahead by two points.

It was tied at 107 when Jokic scored with 1:38 left. Turner then missed a 3-pointer and Murray scored to make it 111-107.

Siakam's putback made it 111-109 with 27.9 seconds left, and Jokic sealed the victory, dropping a 3-pointer with

6.3 seconds to go.

Indiana led by as many as 13 points in the second quarter, but the Nuggets followed with seven straight points and got within eight of the Pacers, with the score 62-54 at the break.

Denver opened the third quarter strong and capped a 17-6 run at the free-throw line, as Carlisle picked up two technicals and Caldwell-Pope hit both foul shots.

The Nuggets continued to dominate the period and took a 93-81 lead into the fourth quarter.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

lege to select the team that will help us toward the goal of once again standing atop the Olympic podium. This challenging process will unfold over the next several months as we eagerly anticipate the start of national team activity."

The pool, which is subject to change, includes 13 players who already have Olympic gold medals — Durant has three, James and Chris Paul each has two, while Anthony Davis, Bam Adebayo, Damian Lillard, Devin Booker, James Harden, Jayson Tatum, Jimmy Butler, Jrue Holiday, Kyrie Irving and Paul George each has one.

If he plays and the US wins, Durant would be the first men's player with four basketball golds.

"I will play in the Olympics," Durant adamantly said last fall at Phoenix's media day.

The other 28 players on the list are headlined by a pair who may make their Olympic debuts — Embiid and Curry.

Both said last year that they would like to be on the plane to Paris but, again, nothing will be finalized until their NBA seasons end.

"I definitely want to be there," Curry said last fall. "I definitely want to be on the team."

Embiid — the reigning NBA MVP, two-time scoring champion and Philadelphia star who scored 70 points Monday night — could have decided to play for France (he has dual citizenship) or even Cameroon, his birthplace, if it qualifies. However, he chose to play for the US last fall.

"When he gets motivated ... anything can happen," 76ers coach Nick Nurse said.

Also picked for the pool are Jarrett Allen, Paolo Banchero, Desmond Bane, Scottie Barnes, Mikal Bridges, Jaylen Brown, Jalen Brunson, Alex Caruso, Anthony

Edwards, De'Aaron Fox, Aaron Gordon, Tyrese Haliburton, Josh Hart, Tyler Herro, Chet Holmgren, Brandon Ingram, Jaren Jackson Jr, Cam Johnson, Walker Kessler, Kawhi Leonard, Donovan Mitchell, Bobby Portis, Austin Reaves, Duncan Robinson, Derrick White and Trae Young.

"We get to go to Paris. We get to go do something special," said Adebayo, who got his first gold in 2021 and is expected to be part of the 2024 team. "I reflect on it and I get excited because I get an opportunity to do something special — twice."

Green had expressed some inter-

est last year in being part of the Paris-bound team.

But the Golden State forward missed 16 games spanning mid-December to mid-January while serving what was originally called an indefinite suspension for striking Phoenix center Jusuf Nurkic in the face. Green said he considered retiring, and sought counseling before he was reinstated.

Players not in the pool aren't exactly ineligible to make the Olympic team; while it is a long shot, it has happened before. San Antonio's Keldon Johnson was not one of the 57 players USA Basketball announced in March 2021, but he was eventually selected for the Tokyo Games team and won a gold medal under Spurs coach Gregg Popovich.

That said, it took an extraordinary set of circumstances for Johnson to be in that position.

He was on the US Select Team that practiced against the Olympic team to help it prepare for the Tokyo Games, got promoted to the national team in part because some players were still taking part in the NBA Finals, then got added to the Olympic roster (along with JaVale McGee) when Bradley Beal and Kevin Love — both of whom had been picked for the team — had to drop out late in the process.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

RUGBY

Gatland says door is open for Welsh speedster if NFL dream sours



Gloucester and Wales wing Louis Rees-Zammit made the shock decision to leave rugby union with immediate effect last week, to pursue his dream of a career in American Football. Rees-Zammit's bombshell announcement came on the day Wales head coach Warren Gatland unveiled his squad for the forthcoming Six Nations tournament. AFP

DUBLIN — Wales coach Warren Gatland said Monday he was ready to keep the door open for Louis Rees-Zammit's return to rugby should his American football stint prove short-lived.

Rees-Zammit was all set to be named in Wales' training squad for the Six Nations last week.

But, hours before Gatland's announcement, he sensationally declared he was quitting rugby union to pursue the "once-in-a-lifetime" opportunity of an American football career.

The 22-year-old wing has an impressive record of 14 tries in 32 Tests for Wales.

Yet, he stunned the rugby world by announcing he was heading to

Florida to join the NFL's International Player Pathway program — which allows athletes based outside the United States to forge a gridiron career — signing up as a running back.

Gatland was taken aback by Rees-Zammit's move but, having had time to reflect on the decision, said Monday: "When I thought about it and reflected on it, he's been a fan of the NFL for a long time, he's 22, he wants to take this opportunity and follow a dream, I say good on him."

The New Zealander, speaking at the Six Nations launch in Dublin, added: "As a youngster, it doesn't matter whether it's in sport or in life, you've got to follow your dreams, and if it doesn't work out, then may-



As a youngster, it doesn't matter whether it's in sport or in life, you've got to follow your dreams, and if it doesn't work out, then maybe something else comes along, or you find a different pathway."

Warren Gatland, Wales coach

be something else comes along, or you find a different pathway?"

Rees-Zammit, who scored five tries for Wales at last year's World Cup, became the youngest player to be selected for the British and Irish Lions since 1959 when he was

named in the squad for the 2021 tour of South Africa aged 20 years and 93 days.

Wade warning

It would still be a huge surprise were he to make it in the NFL.

Christian Wade, a former England wing, tried to make the same switch, before returning to rugby following a stint with the Buffalo Bills that ended without him playing a competitive game.

Wade, now at Paris-based Racing 92, warned Rees-Zammit to expect a "lonely" time in the United States.

"Getting the phone call from the Bills was one of the best days of my life, but once I was in there, reality struck," Wade said.

He added: "I was in my hotel room, training every day, not knowing anybody. I couldn't really call anybody, because of the different time zones. No one is going to put a hand out to help you."

"Everybody is fighting for their

own survival. America is a very big place and very lonely. It is definitely going to be lonely."

But veteran coach Gatland, whose Wales side begins its Six Nations campaign at home to Scotland on Feb 3, said a return to rugby was still possible for Rees-Zammit if his NFL dream turns sour.

"If it doesn't work out for him, the door will potentially be open for him to come back in the future," he added.

"If it works out for him and he's a superstar in the NFL, then congratulations to him ... I support him 100 percent, and I really hope things do work out for him."

AFP

WORLD

Trump beats Haley in New Hampshire

Second win in GOP race brings former president closer to rematch with Biden

MANCHESTER, New Hampshire — Former US president Donald Trump won the key New Hampshire primary on Tuesday, moving him ever closer to locking in the Republican presidential nomination and securing a White House rematch with President Joe Biden.

Trump, 77, attacked his sole remaining challenger Nikki Haley in a rambling victory speech and said that when the primary contest reaches her home state of South Carolina, "we're going to win easily". In her speech, Haley insisted the race was "far from over" and told supporters that Democrats actually want to run against her former boss, due to his record of sowing "chaos".

"They know Trump is the only Republican in the country who Joe Biden can defeat," Haley, 52, said.

Haley had hoped for a major upset in the northeastern state, but Trump — her former boss when she was UN ambassador during his administration — won by around 54 percent to 43 percent, with more than 90 percent of votes counted.

At one point swearing on prime-time TV, Trump said the United States was a "failing country" and claimed that undocumented migrants were coming from psychiatric hospitals and prisons and "killing our country".

"It is now clear that Donald Trump will be the Republican nominee," Biden responded by saying in a statement.

"I think it's a two-person race now between Trump and Biden," Keith Nahigian, a veteran of six presidential campaigns and former member of Trump's transition team, told Agence France-Presse.

New Hampshire was markedly more Haley-friendly than the states she will subsequently face, should she stay in the race, South Carolina will be a tough sell, the agency reported.

Trump won a crushing victory in the first Republican contest in Iowa last week, with Haley a distant third.

What was once a crowded field of 14 candidates then narrowed to a one-on-one matchup on Sunday after Florida Governor Ron DeSantis dropped out.

No Republican who won both Iowa and New Hampshire has ever lost the nomination battle, according to The Associated Press.

The race now turns to Nevada, where Trump is already claiming an all-but-certain victory, and next month to Haley's home state of South Carolina, where he leads the former governor by some 30 percentage points.

Legal challenges

Trump was already the leader in national Republican polling, despite piles of legal challenges as he faces 91 criminal charges related to everything from seeking to overturn the 2020 presidential election to mishandling classified documents and arranging payoffs to an adult movie actress, AP reported.

Trump's trial in the defamation case brought by the writer E. Jean Carroll is scheduled to resume on Thursday, and will not be held on Wednesday as initially scheduled, Manhattan federal court records showed on Tuesday.

On the Democratic side, Biden won the unofficial Democratic primary in New Hampshire, giving him a symbolic boost, AFP reported.

The Democratic National Committee voted to start its primary next month in South Carolina, but New Hampshire pushed ahead with its own contest.

Biden didn't campaign or appear on the ballot but topped a series of little-known challengers.

The president marked the day by campaigning alongside Vice-President Kamala Harris in Virginia at a rally for abortion rights.

With Trump touting his role in the ending of the constitutional right to abortion, Biden told an enthusiastic crowd that the Republican was "hellbent" on further restrictions.

Biden faces his own challenges. There are widespread concerns about his age at 81 years old. Dissent is also building within his party over Biden's alliance with the ongoing conflict in Gaza, putting the president's standing at risk in swing states like Michigan.

Meanwhile, AP reported that Canada's government is preparing for the possibility that Trump could reach the White House again and the "uncertainty" that would bring, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Tuesday.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



People follow New Hampshire presidential primary election news at a bar in the state on Tuesday. REBA SALDANHA / REUTERS

Holy bath



Students pour water on each other as they take a holy bath during a ceremony organized to resemble the annual monthlong Hindu religious festival of Magh Mela, held during the Hindu month of Magh, in Ahmedabad, India, on Wednesday. AMIT DAVE / REUTERS

Five top US universities settle 'price-fixing' lawsuit

By MINGMEI LI in New York
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Five prestigious US universities have agreed to a pay a combined fine of \$104.5 million to settle an antitrust case accusing them of engaging in a "price-fixing cartel" over financial aid to students, according to court filings.

In the 2-year-old class-action lawsuit filed by former students in an Illinois federal court in January 2022, Brown, Columbia, Duke, Emory and Yale universities, while denying any wrongdoing, have agreed to the settlement to "avoid costly and distracting legal proceedings", according to the filings on Tuesday.

The five schools' agreement raises to eight the number of universities and colleges that previously agreed to settle, out of 17 institutions involved in the lawsuit.

The lawsuit originates from a 1994 federal antitrust exemption that allowed colleges to collaborate on financial aid guidelines. The exemption was applicable only if the schools practiced "need-blind" admissions, admitting students without considering their financial circumstances.

Such policies aim to enhance economic and racial diversity at prestigious institutions. Several colleges have enhanced their financial aid programs, including commitments to remove the requirement for loans, to attract more students from low-income backgrounds.

According to the suit, the schools were sued for alleged antitrust violations because they worked together to determine financial aid awards for students, as the universities were accused of using a shared methodology to calculate applicants' financial need.

The lawsuit alleges that the schools considered candidates' ability to pay in their admission decisions, for example, by favoring children of wealthy donors when

“It is past time for the presidents and governing bodies ... to stand up and do the right thing ... and resolve the overcharges to middle-class and working-class students.”

Robert Gilbert, managing partner at Gilbert Litigators & Counselors

admitting applicants off their waiting lists, which violates the antitrust exemption.

The colleges in the lawsuit worked together under what was called the 568 Presidents Group, a reference to the section of the 1994 legislation that provided the exemption. The antitrust exemption expired in the fall of 2022, and the group has disbanded.

Currently, the website of the 568 Presidents Group states that its member institutions work together to uphold a financial aid system designed to bring "greater clarity, simplicity, and equity to the process of assessing each family's ability to pay for college".

Plaintiffs' attorneys stated that the settlement funds would be allocated to all students in the proposed class, not limited to those who attended the now-settling schools. The proposed class includes approximately 200,000 individuals who have attended the 17 schools over the past 20 years and were harmed by the alleged actions.

Columbia and Duke each agreed

to pay \$24 million, while Yale and Emory will pay \$18.5 million each. Brown will pay \$19.5 million to settle the case, according to court documents.

"We are pleased the litigation is behind us," Emory spokeswoman Laura Diamond said in an email to The Washington Post. "Our focus has been and always will be to make an Emory education accessible to all talented students, regardless of their financial resources, and we look forward to continuing that mission."

Nine other schools, including the California Institute of Technology, Cornell University, Dartmouth College, Georgetown University, Johns Hopkins University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Northwestern University, the University of Notre Dame, and the University of Pennsylvania, continue to contest the allegations, with no trial date yet set.

In August, the University of Chicago agreed to settle the case for \$13.5 million, being the first to disclose a deal, although it said that the suit was "without merit".

Rice University, in its fiscal 2023 financial report, revealed that it settled the class-action suit in October for nearly \$34 million, although that has not been disclosed in court filings.

Vanderbilt University stated in a November court filing that it had reached "an agreement in principle" but didn't disclose any financial details.

"It is past time for the presidents and governing bodies of the remaining defendants to stand up and do the right thing for their students and alumni, and resolve the overcharges to middle-class and working-class students," Robert Gilbert, managing partner at Gilbert Litigators & Counselors, which is representing the former students along with the law firms Freedman Normand Friedland and Berger Montague, told the Post.

Russia says no survivors in Ukraine prisoners plane crash

MOSCOW — Russia said on Wednesday that an IL-76 military transport plane carrying 65 Ukrainian prisoners had crashed in the western Belgorod region, bordering Ukraine, killing everyone on board.

"At about 11:00 Moscow time, an IL-76 plane crashed in the Belgorod region during a scheduled flight. There were 65 captured servicemen of the Ukraine armed forces on board and transported to the Belgorod region," Russia's Sputnik news agency reported, citing the Russian defense ministry.

The plane was carrying 74 people, including six crew and three guards, when it crashed, Reuters reported.

"Everyone on board died," the Belgorod regional governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said on social media.

Shortly before the crash, Gladkov said on his Telegram channel that a "missile alert" had been triggered in the region and warned residents to take shelter.

According to Sputnik, a Russian investigation team flew to the crash site to establish the cause of the disaster.

Chairman of the Russian State Duma Vyacheslav Volodin said he believes the Ukrainian military shot down the plane, according to the report.

He instructed lawmakers to prepare an appeal to the US Congress and Germany's Bundestag in connection with the plane crash to show foreign governments how Kyiv is using their military assistance.

"There is a proposal to investigate what missiles and launchers were used. Let's prepare an appeal to the US Congress and the German Bundestag so that the deputies can finally see who they are funding and helping," Volodin said.

Looking into situation

The Kremlin said in response to a reporter's question that it was looking into the situation.

Ukraine's Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War said it was looking into the crash but did not immediately provide any information.

Footage of the crash posted on social media showed a plane falling from the sky in a snowy, rural area, and a massive ball of fire erupting where it apparently hit the ground.

"It was absolutely deliberate. They knew very well that the plane was en route, where it was going and the operators of (Ukrainian) surface-to-air missile systems cannot mistake transport planes for military planes or helicopters as targets," Andrey Kartapolov, a lawmaker in Russia's parliament, said in a TV interview.

"It was done deliberately to sabotage the prisoner exchange," Mykhailo Podolyak, a Ukrainian presidential adviser, told Reuters: "Comments will come a little later. Time is needed to clarify all the data."

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Right-wingers on course for success in EU elections

By JULIAN SHEA in London
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Newly published research has suggested that far-right parties are on course for major success at the European elections in June, which could result in significant changes in policy on Europe-wide issues such as climate change.

A combination of opinion polls carried out in all 27 European Union member states and analysis of past electoral behavior has been collated into a report for the European Council on Foreign Relations, or ECFR.

Its authors said the findings should be a wake-up call to mainstream politicians to ensure that it

should be them who set the policy agenda, rather than fringe groups.

"Campaigns should give citizens reason for optimism," said Simon Hix, one of the report's authors from the European University Institute in Florence. "They should speak to the benefits of multilateralism."

In nine countries, parties of the radical right look set to come out on top. Those countries include Poland, Austria and France, where Marine Le Pen of the National Rally has lost the last two presidential elections to Emmanuel Macron.

The right is also expected to finish second or third in countries including Spain, Sweden and Germany, where support for the Alternative

for Deutschland party has been spreading westward from its eastern heartland.

The research suggested the Brothers of Italy party could see its representation in the 705-seat parliament rise to 27, while the National Rally could win a record 25 members, as centrist parties lose seats.

If the predictions are accurate, the European Parliament could end up with a majority right-wing coalition for the first time.

Shift in power

ECFR senior fellow Susi Denison told the Euractiv news website that a shift in the balance of power could pose a major challenge

to long-established and agreed-upon pan-European projects.

"In key areas such as migration, climate, support for Ukraine, some of the consensuses, which have held in European politics over the past five years under the current parliament, will become more difficult to push through," she explained.

Although the parliament has only a limited ability to direct EU foreign policy, the election result could have an impact on individual national policy debates that could have wider consequences.

The report also forecast that Bulgaria's Revival party, which is anti-NATO and the EU, would gain its first three seats at the European Parliament.

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BUSINESS

Guangdong's manufacturers stand out from pack

By **QIU QUANLIN** in Guangzhou
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The manufacturing sector, which has been prioritized across Guangdong province — an economic powerhouse in South China — played a significant role in driving local economic development in 2023, said a senior government official.

"We adhere to the principle of the real economy as the foundation and prioritize the manufacturing industry, thus making significant progress in the construction of a modern industrial system," said Wang Weizhong, governor of Guangdong.

Wang made the remarks while delivering a government work report to the annual session of the Guangdong Provincial People's Congress, which opened on Tuesday in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong.

The added value of the manufacturing sector in Guangdong accounted for 32.7 percent of the province's gross domestic product, which grew 4.8 percent year-on-year to 13.57 trillion yuan (\$1.89 trillion) in 2023, according to the report.

The performance indicates that Guangdong has become the first province nationwide to surpass 13 trillion yuan in GDP growth, also ranking tops in the country for 35 consecutive years.

"We have launched an action to promote the development of major industries, especially eight industrial clusters worth 1 trillion yuan each, and to accelerate the development of new industrial clusters," said Wang.

The province has developed over 71,000 industrial enterprises above a designated size of 20 million yuan in business sales each and over 75,000 high-tech enterprises, with both metrics ranking tops nationwide, according to the report.



Workers are busy on a smart assembly line of GAC Aion in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, in June.
GONG BIN / XINHUA

The eight industrial clusters include new-generation electronic information, green petrochemicals, intelligent home appliances, advanced materials, modern light industry and textiles, software and information services, modern agriculture, foodstuffs and autos.

Citing the robust development of the automobile industry, Wang said one out of four new energy vehicles nationwide is currently made in Guangdong.

An intelligent ecological factory of GAC Aion, a major NEV arm of Guangdong-based automaker GAC Group, has been selected as the world's only "lighthouse factory" for the production of NEVs. Also, an industrial park of BYD and a factory of Xpeng, both now successful

homegrown NEV manufacturers, have commenced full-scale production in the province.

Guangdong has also become the province with the most comprehensive support for the energy storage battery industry nationwide, with 100 new energy storage projects under construction and a total investment of 229 billion yuan.

In the development of integrated circuits, two 12-inch chip manufacturing lines and high-end lithography lines were put into operation last year, helping greatly improve production efficiency of the local automobile industry, Wang added.

Following the rapid development of the modern agriculture and food industry, nearly 100,000 fishermen in Zhanjiang, a coastal city in west-

ern Guangdong, became involved in the aquaculture of golden pompano, said Liang Siqiao, vice-president of the Zhanjiang General Chamber of Commerce.

The total output value of catching and harvesting the fish has reached over 20 billion yuan, Liang said.

"It has greatly inspired our confidence in vigorously developing deep-sea aquaculture and solidifying our determination to develop marine ranches," said Liang, who is also a deputy to the Guangdong Provincial People's Congress.

Zhanjiang, the largest aquaculture base in Guangdong, has 3,500 deep-sea fish containment facilities, accounting for one-seventh of the national total and 70 percent of the provincial total, Liang added.

German firms buoyant about China's growth

Over half of survey respondents plan to increase investments in 5 years

By **ZHONG NAN**
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(\$195.5 million) in Taicang, according to information released by the local government.

About 78 percent of German companies expect growth to be consistent in China in the next five years, while 54 percent plan to increase investments in the country, a survey published by the German Chamber of Commerce in China showed on Wednesday.

According to the Business Confidence Survey for 2023 and 2024, 79 percent of German companies said it is necessary to remain competitive in China.

The survey was conducted between Sept 5 and Oct 6 last year. A total of 566 member companies of the chamber responded to the survey.

About 42 percent of German companies expect positive industry development in 2024, compared to only 21 percent in 2023, as per the survey.

Ulf Reinhardt, chairperson of the board of the German Chamber of Commerce in China (South and Southwest China), said about 5 percent of the survey respondents currently regard Chinese companies as innovation leaders in their industry, but 46 percent foresee them becoming leaders within the next five years.

German business leaders said China's significance to the German economy remains unique.

As Germany's most important trading partner for seven consecutive years, the Sino-German economic relationship sustains millions of jobs in both countries, said Jens Hildebrandt, executive director of the German Chamber of Commerce in China (North China). The enormous size of the Chinese consumer market, advanced supply chain infrastructure, and status as an increasingly strong innovator make China one of the most important markets for many German companies, Hildebrandt said.

The German Chamber of Commerce in China has more than 2,100 members, including Siemens AG, Mercedes-Benz Group, Covestro AG and Bayer Group.

Upbeat about the Chinese market, logistics conveying equipment manufacturer Beumer Group became the 500th German company to settle in Taicang, in East China's Jiangsu province, early this month.

The company plans to invest a total of 100 million euros (\$108.74 million), with an annual output value of up to 1.4 billion yuan

Since the arrival of the first German company in 1993, Taicang has attracted 500 German enterprises.

The first 100 German enterprises came to Taicang in a span of 14 years, but it only took two years for the last 100 German businesses to settle in the city.

To become a manufacturing powerhouse, China needs to not only increase efforts aimed at independent research and development but also collaborate with countries like Germany to identify gaps and learn from each other's strengths, said Bai Ming, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation in Beijing.

Both China and Germany have achieved significant success in cooperation in high-end manufacturing industries, not only in areas like household appliances, construction machinery and communication equipment, but also in fast-growing sectors such as chemicals, new energy and autonomous driving systems, he said.

Eager to enhance the country's strength in attracting foreign capital, China will roll out a package of measures this year to boost efforts in soliciting foreign investment. The government will work to solve existing problems that foreign businesses face in investing in its market, said Zheng Chiping, head of the National Development and Reform Commission's Department of Foreign Capital and Overseas Investment.

China has shifted its utilization of foreign investment from being solely focused on scale and speed to a more quality-driven approach. The high-tech manufacturing sector has experienced rapid growth in attracting foreign investment, in line with industrial restructuring.

This reflects a continuous upgrade in China's utilization of foreign investment structures, said Sang Baichuan, dean of the University of International Business and Economics' Institute of International Economy in Beijing.

That sentiment is in line with the latest data. China's high-tech industries attracted 423.34 billion yuan of foreign direct investment in 2023, accounting for 37.3 percent of the country's total utilized FDI, data from the Ministry of Commerce showed.

Alibaba founders' share buybacks enthruse investors

By **FAN FEIFEI**
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Alibaba Group Holding Ltd co-founders Jack Ma and Joe Tsai's recent move to buy back shares of the Chinese technology heavyweight is expected to shore up investor sentiment and market confidence toward China's tech sector, and drive up the stock prices of major Chinese internet companies, industry experts said.

Shares of Alibaba surged 7.32 percent to close at HK\$72.6 (\$9.28) on the Hong Kong stock exchange on Wednesday, while Baidu Inc and JD saw their share prices soar 6.7 percent and 4.69 percent, respectively.

Alibaba said late on Tuesday that Ma and Tsai have been aggressively buying the company's shares of late, signaling their confidence in its development prospects.

Tsai bought around \$151 million worth of Alibaba's US-traded shares via his Blue Pool family fund in the fourth quarter of last year, according to a regulatory filing from the US

Securities and Exchange Commission. In 2023, the company said, Alibaba repurchased a total of 897.9 million ordinary shares, adding that the shares were bought on both the US and Hong Kong stock markets under its share repurchase program.

The e-commerce company emphasized that it has continued to repurchase shares for five consecutive years, demonstrating its firm confidence in its future development.

Hong Yong, an associate research fellow at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation's e-commerce research institute, said the latest share buyback will not only consolidate investor trust and support for Alibaba, but also help boost market confidence toward China's internet and tech industry.

As of Dec 31, the remaining amount the company's board had authorized for its share buyback plan, which is effective through March 2025, was \$11.7 billion, according to Alibaba.

The company also said that it had 20 billion ordinary shares outstanding as of Dec 31, 2023, compared to 20.7 billion ordinary shares as of Dec 31, 2022. This indicates a net reduction of 3.3 percent in its outstanding shares in the last 12 months.

The share repurchase move came after Jiang Fang, a partner and chief talent officer of Alibaba, said on the company's internal network in November that Ma had not sold a single share of the company, and will continue to hold Alibaba shares, adding that the current stock price of Alibaba is far below its real value. Pan Helin, co-director of the digital economy and financial innovation research center at Zhejiang University's International Business School, said the increased shareholdings of Ma and Tsai, who serve as key shareholders of Alibaba, show their confidence in the company's prospects, which is conducive to stabilizing the capital market and improving investor confidence.

Pan said in order to reverse the downward trend of stock prices, it is

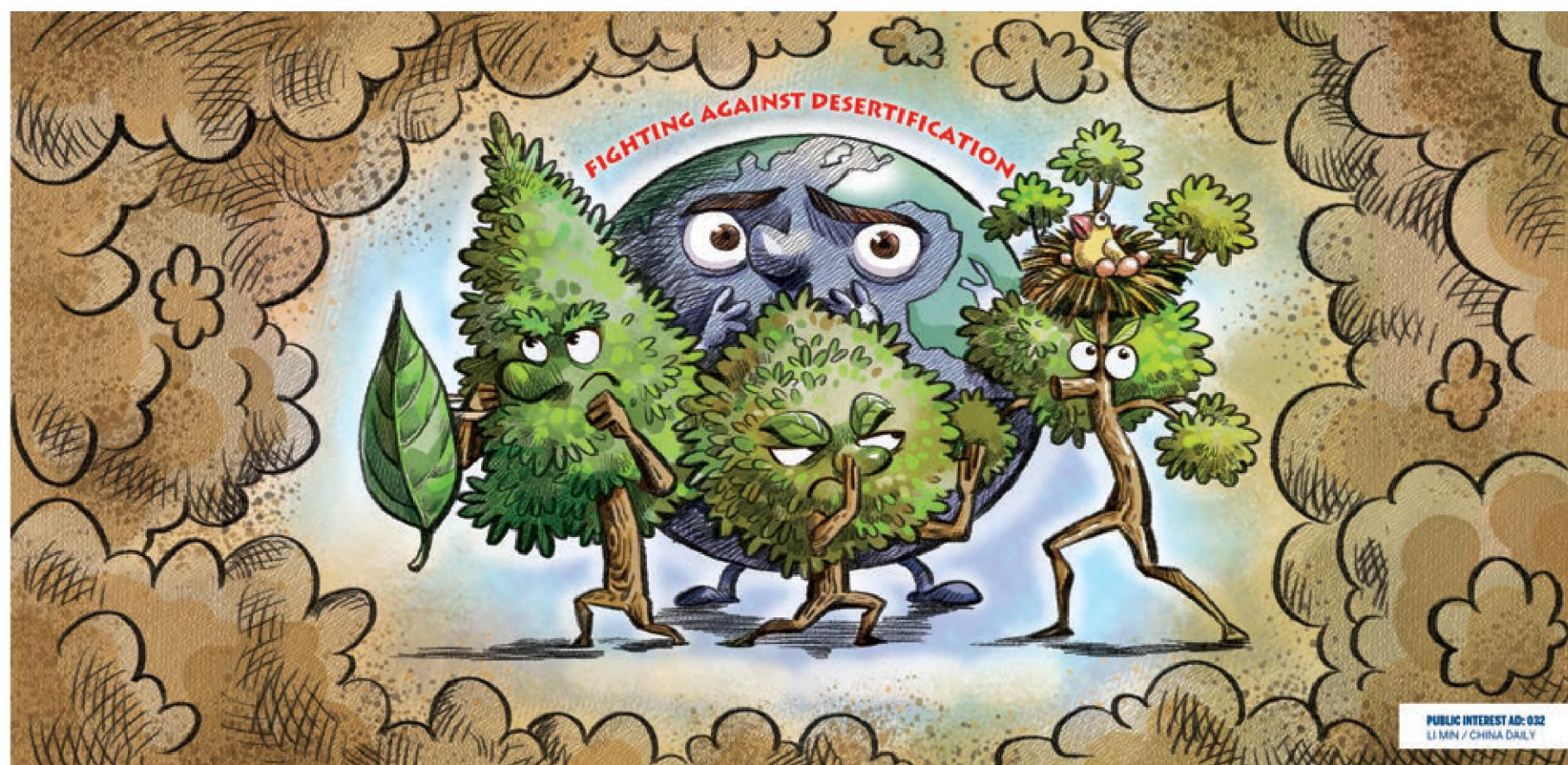
important to improve corporate profitability and optimize the business structure.

The challenge for Alibaba, he said, is how to maintain rapid growth amid an increasingly complex environment and intensified competition from domestic rivals such as PDD Holdings.

Alibaba said in 2023 that it will split its business into six main units, with each separate business having the flexibility to raise outside capital and seek its own initial public offering, the most significant organizational change to the company in its 24-year history.

However, it announced in November it will not proceed with the full spinoff of its cloud unit due to uncertainties caused by the recent expansion of US export controls on advanced computing chips.

Alibaba said its total revenue stood at 224.79 billion yuan (\$31.4 billion) during the July-September period, up 9 percent year-on-year, driven chiefly by improved consumer sentiment.



BUSINESSFOCUS

Shipbuilders chart new course on clean transition

Fresh regulations to entail upgrades in operational fleets globally, lifting demand

By WANG YING in Shanghai
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China's shipbuilding industry is actively seizing new opportunities as the sector globally transitions into a phase of low-carbon and green development, industry experts said.

The International Maritime Organization unveiled a revised greenhouse gas emissions strategy, or IMO 2050 net-zero target, in July 2023, wherein all members agreed to reduce emissions from 2008 levels to net zero by or around 2050.

"The global environmental regulations cover both vessels built in the future as well as retrofitted ships in service, to better align with the new requirements," said Zhou Dequan, director of the Shanghai International Shipping Institute's domestic shipping research office.

"A huge number of ship fleets in operation will have to upgrade and renovate in accordance with the new rules, which will generate demand in the coming years," said Zhu Jianzhang, vice-president of the Marine Design and Research Institute of China.

According to Zhu, the implementation timeline will cover almost all vessel types, requiring improvements in terms of performance, carbon emission and artificial intelligence.

Marintec China 2023, the world's largest and most influential event of its kind in 2023 held in Shanghai in December, was widely regarded as a stage to showcase shipbuilders' latest products, cutting-edge technologies and trends.

More than 2,000 enterprises from over 30 countries and regions attended the biennial event, with 42 percent coming from overseas, making it the largest in its history.

"Low-carbon or even zero-carbon has become the future development trend of the shipbuilding industry, and a large number of low-carbon or zero-carbon emission technologies and products from Chinese shipbuilders were displayed at the exhibition, drawing a picture of future development of the maritime industry," said Xing Wenhua, chairman of the Shanghai Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers and chairman of the Chinese organizing committee of Marintec China.

Shanghai-based Jiangnan Shipyard (Group) Co Ltd, a unit of China State Shipbuilding Corp, officially released its design for the world's largest nuclear-powered container ship with a capacity of 24,000 TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units) and received in-principle approval from certification agency Det Norske Veritas at the Marintec China on Dec 5.

Tapping into the zero-carbon emission trend, the vessel — equipped with the latest nuclear solution — is the latest attempt by Jiangnan Shipyard to deploy clean energy to realize truly zero emissions throughout the complete



Visitors check out shipping vessel models during the Marintec China 2023 expo in Shanghai in December. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

operational cycle of the ship, according to the Shanghai-based shipbuilder.

"Driven by low-carbon requirements, Chinese shipbuilders have in the past few years spearheaded a series of design, research and development initiatives for powering ships with various clean energy sources," said Zhu of the Marine Design and Research Institute of China.

"Four years ago, vessels built by us were powered by liquefied natural gas, but now we have developed a variety of low-carbon emission energy sources to serve as fuel for ships made in China," Zhu said.

Zhu was referring to the world's first 23,000 TEU liquefied natural gas-powered container ship delivered to French shipping and logistics group CMA CGM Group by Hudong-Zhonghua in Shanghai in September 2020, which marked a milestone by Chinese shipbuilders in research and development, design and building world-class vessels.

Hudong-Zhonghua has continued to innovate, and improve R&D in powering container ships with low-carbon energy sources, including LNG, liquid ammonia and methanol, by tapping into the specific requirements of ship owners.

The Shanghai-based shipbuilder launched a design for a 16,000-TEU container ship powered by ammonia at Marintec China.

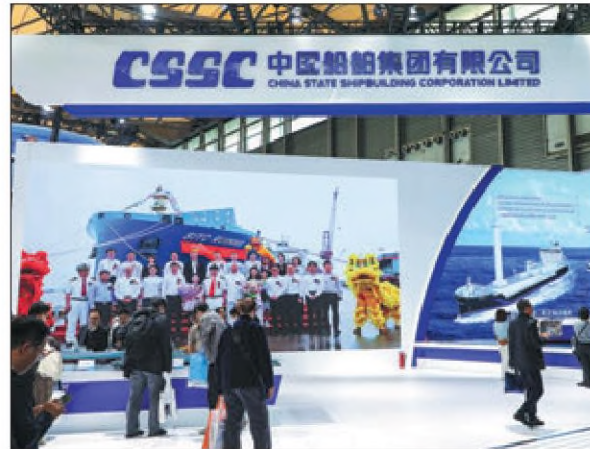
The ship, characterized by light structural weight, large cargo-carrying capacity and high comprehensive performance, is expected to offer the industry a new choice of green, environmentally friendly, safe and reliable vessels.

In addition to the ammonia-powered container ship, Hudong-Zhonghua also showcased an indigenously designed liquefied hydrogen carrier that is capable of carrying 40,000 cubic meters of gas on one trip; the world's currently largest liquefied liquid ammonia carrier with a capacity of 88,000 cu m, as well as a 174,000 cu m LNG carrier equipped with a carbon capture system.

Also at the Marintec China 2023, Shanghai Waigaoqiao Shipbuilding said it had received new orders for six PCTCs (pure car and truck carrier), each with 10,800 parking spaces. It is the world's first very large PCTC order with a capacity of over 10,000 parking spaces, according to the Shanghai-based shipbuilder.

Including the above-mentioned order placed by Canada-based Seaspacer Corp, Waigaoqiao Shipbuilding's total PCTC orders on hand amount to 16 vessels.

Designed by the Shanghai Merchant Ship Design and Research Institute, the super large PCTCs will each have 14 car decks, and the multilayer car decks can load various



People gather at the booth of China State Shipbuilding Corp during the recent Marintec China expo in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

new energy vehicles powered by energy sources such as hydrogen, compressed liquefied natural gas and liquefied petroleum gas.

The construction of six dual-fuel powered PCTCs will help further enhance Waigaoqiao Shipbuilding's market share and international influence, experts said.

Zhou of the Shanghai International Shipping Institute's domestic shipping research office, said China's robust automotive exports over the past few years have driven

demand for shipping and manufacturing capacities of PCTCs.

Despite a 17 percent year-on-year growth in automotive transportation capacities to 23.7 million units in 2023, the shortage of car shipping capacity can hardly ease off in the near future, Securities Daily reported, citing an estimate by shipping industry data provider Clarksons.

In the first 11 months of 2023, 4.4 million vehicles were exported, surging 58.4 percent year-on-year, said the China Association of

Automobile Manufacturers.

China Merchants Industry Holdings Co Ltd has also tapped into the green trend by releasing an ultra-large intelligent PCTC vessel model with a capacity of 11,000 parking spaces at Marintec China 2023.

The new generation green PCTC ship received design certification from DNV along with a 180,000 cu m LNG carrier model and a 200,000 cu m LNG ship at the event.

Zhu said the net-zero regulations will profoundly affect the development pattern of the world's shipbuilding industry in the next few decades, offering opportunities that the Chinese shipbuilding industry cannot afford to miss.

According to Zhu, the Marine Design and Research Institute of China also exhibited a batch of green, energy-saving and low-carbon ships, including a 20,000 cu m liquefied hydrogen carrier, an ultra-large 102,000 cu m ethane carrier, a 40,000 cu m liquefied carbon dioxide carrier, and an 88,000 cu m liquefied gas carrier.

"There is still room for China's shipbuilding industry to grow, particularly in high-end vessels. The research, development, and construction of these innovative ships will help upgrade talent and techniques, and further raise the standard and quality of Chinese shipbuilding as a whole," Zhou said.

Notice

Wang Baozhen (deceased), the farmers' residence land user of House No 26 and No 32, Yangjiazhai, Yongxin village, Gaodong town, Pudong New Area, Shanghai, with Shanghai Rural Residential Land Usage Certificate of Hu Ji Zhai (Chuansha) Zi No 079022 and the land No 41 Qiu (22), Yongxin village, Yangyuan township, Pudong New Area, Shanghai:

The collective-owned land where your residential house site is located was approved on Aug 29, 2023 for expropriation with the document numbered as Hu Pu Yu Zheng Di Gao [2023] No 246 and No 254. The project has, at present, entered the expropriation compensation stage. To safeguard the legitimate inheritance rights and interests of all property owners, the children or direct relatives of Wang Baozhen should contact the expropriation implementing unit within seven days from the date of the publication of this notice and provide a valid identity certificate, contact address and contact number to ensure your legal rights and interests. If you fail to contact us within the time limit, it will be dealt with in accordance with related regulations.

Address: Dongli Road 80, Villagers' Committee of Yongxin Village, Gaodong town, Pudong New Area, Shanghai, China
Liaison person: Xu Yonghui; Cell phone: 86-131 6716 9956
Office hour: 09:00-17:00, Monday through Friday
Property expropriation implementing unit: Shanghai Pudong No 3 Property Expropriation Service Firm Co Ltd

Shanghai Pudong No 3 Property Expropriation Service Firm Co Ltd
Jan 25, 2024

Shanghai moving full steam ahead with green, advanced charging facilities

By WANG YING in Shanghai

Shanghai has put in place 1,526 green charging pile units since the beginning of this year for recharging new energy vehicles, State Grid Shanghai Municipal Electric Power Co said.

These charging facilities are among the city's latest efforts to boost green power consumption through the creation of a new energy system that is clean, low-carbon, safe and efficient.

According to a deal signed between operators of charging facilities in Shanghai and new energy electric power plants in Shanxi province in December, a total of 180 million kilowatt-hours of green electricity will be delivered through the charging facilities to power Shanghai's NEVs, according to the power utility.

"There is a common query during the recharging of NEVs — how to

ensure that the electricity in the recharging facilities is also from renewables. With this batch of facilities, we can say that the electricity powering these recharging units is certified new energy electricity," said Tang Xiaodong, head of the municipal platform for public data collection and monitoring of charging and swapping facilities in Shanghai.

The green charging units are currently available at charging stations for the exclusive use of public buses and NEVs, as well as at venues including commercial buildings and airports.

In accordance with the city's green electricity procurement schedule, Shanghai will work on making more qualified charging piles into green ones this year, so as to let as many NEVs as possible become truly green by using green electricity.

This will assist Shanghai's high-quality development through green and low-carbon transition, said Yang

Jing, chairman of Shanghai Power Exchange Center.

A survey was carried out in December of the city's 134,000 public recharging facilities and more than 500,000 private ones by State Grid Shanghai Municipal Electric Power, to check the feasibility of using green electricity in various recharging facilities.

The research finally led to the nation's first provincial-level green electricity procurement program that is powering these charging piles.

"In the first 11 months of 2023, China's public and private charging piles saw a year-on-year growth of 50 percent and 71 percent, respectively, taking an absolute lead worldwide," Cui Dongshu, secretary-general of the China Passenger Car Association wrote on his official WeChat account.

"The thriving growth of NEVs calls for a high-quality system of charging infrastructure facilities," Cui added. China has unveiled an implementation guideline to strengthen the

integration of NEVs with the power grid, said the National Development and Reform Commission.

The guideline, jointly released by four authorities, including the NDRC and the National Energy Administration, aims to give full play to NEVs' important role in the electrochemical energy storage system, consolidate and expand NEVs' development advantages, and support the construction of a new energy and power system.

By 2025, China's preliminary technical standards on the integration of NEVs with the power grid will be established, and the time-of-use electricity pricing mechanism for charging NEVs will be fully implemented and further optimized, according to the development targets put forward by the guideline.

By 2030, NEVs will become an important part of the electrochemical energy storage system, the guideline stated.

COMMENT

Editorials

US should ask not what Africa can do for it, but what it can do for Africa

United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit to four African countries this week is being viewed by many as part of the Joe Biden administration's geopolitical strategy to contend with Beijing for influence in Africa.

As Blinken started his visit to Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria and Angola on Monday, US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield is touring three other west African nations — Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

The visits by the senior US officials at almost the same time speak volumes about the importance the Biden administration attaches to the US' relations with African countries. It also suggests how concerned Washington is about the increasingly important presence of China in Africa, although Molly Phee, assistant secretary of state for African affairs, dismissed the idea that the US is trying to compete with Beijing in Africa, claiming it is the media "who frame this as a US-China soccer match".

The irony is that Blinken watched a soccer match between Cote d'Ivoire and Equatorial Guinea in the African Cup of Nations at the 60,000-seat Olympic Stadium built with support from China. Yet, this very fact points to a phenomenon that wherever one goes in any African country, one can hardly ignore what China has done for African people, be it helping construct a hospital, a stadium, a government building or a school, let alone important infrastructure facilities such as railway

lines, airports, highways, bridges and ports.

Phee said, "If China didn't exist, we would be fully engaged in Africa. Africa is important for its own sake and it's important for American interests." What she didn't say is that China's increasing presence in Africa has made Washington increasingly uneasy and it is because of this that the US is increasing its engagement with African countries as a matter of urgency.

But the question the Biden administration should be answering is not how can it reduce the influence of China in Africa, but what can the US do to assist the development of African countries.

China has been providing aid of various kinds within its means to African countries, not in pursuit of global hegemony or even a geopolitical sphere of influence. It has been doing all it can because of its long friendships with African countries and as part of its efforts to promote common prosperity.

China is not keeping a tally of how much the US is doing for African countries so it can engage in one-upmanship. Instead, China welcomes the US' engagement with African countries as the continent's development will benefit the world. China hopes that the US and other developed countries do whatever they can to help developing countries in need.

China is not interested in geopolitical rivalry. It only hopes that major countries give up their superpower mentality, their sense of superiority and ambition for dominance of the world. It is willing to work with the US, and the other developed countries, to support the development of the developing countries.

'De-risking' stems from zero-sum mindset

In a sign of Germany's growing interest in Vietnam, a business delegation comprising representatives of top German companies such as tunnel boring machine maker Herrenknecht and wind farm developer PNE AG is joining German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier on a state visit to the Southeast Asian manufacturing hub, which started on Tuesday.

German companies have already invested more than \$3 billion in Vietnam, as cooperative engagements flourish at all levels and in numerous policy fields, especially after the two countries established a "strategic partnership" in 2011. Germany is now Vietnam's most important trading partner in the European Union, while Vietnam is Germany's top trading partner among the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

The mutually beneficial cooperation has not been achieved at the expense of any third party. Yet unfortunately, some have tried to depict the closer German-Vietnam economic ties as part of a "de-risking" from China strategy of Germany. The ongoing visit "underlines Germany's interest in looking beyond China and diversifying its economic relations", said Florian Feyerabend, the representative in Vietnam for Germany's Konrad Adenauer Foundation, a think tank.

The remarks reflect a zero-sum mindset as harbored by some people, who tend to oversimplify normal trade relations between countries, for example, by seeing Vietnam's gain from a closer partnership with Germany as China's loss. Yet they are glassy-eyed about the fact that trade between

China and Germany reached a record level of \$320 billion in 2022, as China remained Germany's most important trading partner for the seventh year in a row. The volume was about 18 times that between Germany and Vietnam.

Indeed, there have been calls in Europe in recent years to follow the US' efforts to reduce economic dependence on China, or to "de-risk" from China, amid rising geopolitical tensions.

Some European companies, under pressure from Washington, have even cut business links with China to the detriment of their own interests. The Dutch government, for example, has revoked ASML's export license to supply some advanced chipmaking machines to China after the US applied great pressure, costing the company a lot of business opportunities.

Yet the Washington-initiated strategy of "de-risking" from China has nothing to do with ensuring Europe's economic or technology security. "If you look at what the United States is doing, it's all about curtailing the ability of China to make industrial progress", as ASML's EU Government Affairs Lead Wouter Baljon observed. He thus advised the EU to not join "the American exercise", but instead make its own assessment of what it considers a meaningful way forward.

European leaders should understand that it is impossible to isolate China economically. Europe needs to hold on to its strategic autonomy and expand its practical cooperation with China for its economy to thrive and grow.

History and the law decree one China inviolable

The representative of the "Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States" has recently peddled via some US media outlets the "democracy versus authoritarianism" narrative, and said that Taiwan will continue to strengthen its security and economic ties with the United States.

As the spokesperson for the Chinese embassy in the US pointed out in a statement on that, what the TECRO representative propagates is misleading and has distorted the truth. The Taiwan question has nothing to do with "democracy", which is a pretext for the US interfering in other countries' internal affairs, but bears on China's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The "democracy versus authoritarianism" rhetoric is nothing but a Cold War cliché Washington has been hyping up again.

By using that rhetoric, the "Taiwan independence" forces are trying to solicit support for their cause from the international community by stoking confrontation and antagonism across the Taiwan Strait to make Beijing appear aggressive and coercive.

But the bifurcated framework they are trying to impress on the world only exposes their readiness to pursue their separatist agenda at the cost of the people of Taiwan, and in the face of the strong opposition of the vast majority of their compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Strait against their secessionist attempts.

It must be pointed that while the TECRO repre-

sentative said the Democratic Progressive Party authorities on Taiwan seek to maintain the "status quo", the fundamental "status quo" of the Taiwan Strait is that both sides of it belong to one China, there is but one China in the world, Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory, and the Government of the People's Republic of China is the sole legal government representing the whole of China.

This is not only a consensus of the majority of the international community but also strictly stipulated by relevant resolutions of the United Nations and such key postwar binding international documents as the Cairo Declaration and the Potsdam Proclamation, as well as the Sino-US joint communiqués that are the political foundation for Sino-US relations.

Taiwan's return to its motherland is a component of the post-World War II international order, and the results of the elections on the island cannot change the dynamics and direction of cross-strait relations which are toward reunification.

As the fuss the TECRO representative has tried to make indicates, the collusion between the "Taiwan independence" forces and external forces is the root cause of cross-strait tensions in recent years and the fundamental threat to peace and stability across the Strait. The DPP authorities and their patrons should not underestimate the determination, resolve and capability of the Chinese people to safeguard the nation's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Song Chen



Opinion Line

Big economy express-delivered in over 100 billion packages

China's express delivery industry saw a robust growth in 2023, with express courier firms nationwide handling 132.07 billion parcels, an increase of 19.4 percent year-on-year, and ranking first in the world for the 10th consecutive year, as shown by data recently released by the State Post Bureau.

It has taken just 10 years for the number of China's express delivery orders to realize a huge leap from 10 billion to more than 100 billion. China's express delivery business already accounts for more than 60 percent of the world's total.

Express delivery volume is an important indicator to observe China's economy. The consumer market in China creates on average 350

million deliveries each day. China's final consumption expenditure contributed 82.5 percent to its economic growth in 2023, raising economic growth by 4.2 percentage points. The number of internet users in China now exceeds 1 billion, and the online retail sales of goods account for 27.6 percent of the country's total retail sales of consumer goods.

Meanwhile China's industrial supporting capabilities and supply chain advantages provide a strong guarantee for the fast production and the quick response of Chinese enterprises to overseas demand. China's cross-border e-commerce exports increased by 19.6 percent in 2023 compared with 2022 against the backdrop of the downturn in global trade.

China has built the world's largest high-speed rail and expressway networks and world-class port clusters. It has an efficient express delivery service network that can handle more than 700 million orders a day on average. Such a well-connected transportation infrastructure and highly efficient logistics system are like "blood vessels" that ensure the smooth flow of goods and reduce costs for enterprises.

China's express delivery sector has become a shining symbol of China, and its booming business reflects the recovering of the country's production and consumption, which in turn promotes the further release of demand.

— CHINA MEDIA GROUP

'Dexit' talk reflects EU's loss of stature

According to foreign media reports, Alice Weidel, leader of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, stated in an interview that if her party comes to power, it will push for a "Dexit" — Germany's withdrawal from the European Union — referendum. Weidel acknowledged that the AfD could not possibly come to power before 2029, but she also believes that her party gaining a position in government is inevitable.

In 2019, the AfD issued a public declaration stating that if the EU does not reform within a reasonable time, Germany must leave the EU. This despite Brexit being highly damaging to the United Kingdom's economy.

But on this issue, the AfD is not much different from other right-wing and far-right parties in Europe. Right-wing parties across Europe generally argue that the EU, being an unelected institution, lacks legitimacy but still wields

political and economic power over sovereign nations, constituting a form of neo-imperialism.

The UK has a historical tradition of "splendid isolation" and regards itself as "exceptional" in Europe. This is among the reasons that led to the Brexit referendum during David Cameron's term as prime minister in 2016.

Germany, to the contrary, has been a linchpin of European integration and led the bloc in overcoming the eurozone crisis in the years following 2009, but it paid high economic costs for that, which has become a particularly sensitive issue with the economic downturn today. This sensitivity has emboldened the AfD to challenge the political taboo of not "leaving the EU", and the calls for "Dexit" are growing louder as Germany's political landscape is tending toward fragmentation.

The Christian Democratic Union is now the largest party, but its voice

is scarcely heard on the political stage. The Red-Green ruling coalition holds administrative resources, but its support is diminishing. The AfD has a high tone, but apart from a rapid rise in various parliamentary levels, it has yet to secure a position within the government system.

Similar situations exist in countries with a significant rise in right-wing forces, such as France, Italy, Austria and Sweden. Although some parties in the countries advocate leaving the EU or the eurozone, they struggle to find middle-ground forces as allies, and lack operational advantages. The political, economic and social turmoil in the UK after Brexit is also a reminder to other countries advocating a similar "exit" about the high price that will likely need to be paid. Therefore, at least in the foreseeable future, "Dexit" seems set to be a soundbite rather than a political agenda.

— BEIJING NEWS

What They Say

Financial reform imperative for risk control

It is undeniable that China's financial system has shown some problems due to its addiction to the dividends of infrastructure and real estate. Some speculators have even taken advantage of regulatory loopholes to conduct risk-free arbitrage. Undisciplined financial activities naturally tend to create financial risks.

That's why the central authorities have recently highlighted the urgency of effectively managing and controlling the risks to avoid a systemic crisis, and better boost the development of the real economy. Governments at various levels are urged to strive to realize the goal of turning China into a country with a strong financial sector.

Notably, the transformation process of China's financial system coincides with the major cycle of economic structural adjustment. Therefore, the process may be

accompanied by a series of uncertainties, such as asset value revaluation, amendments to financial regulations, monetary policy adjustments, etc. This will undoubtedly be a process of systemic restructuring related to changes in the overall development patterns and growth models of the country.

The excessive debt of the US federal government and its weaponization of the US dollar have led to an increase in the vulnerability of the global financial system. In addition, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic over the past few years, many countries have increased their debts significantly.

These moves have resulted in continued high inflation and high interest rate shocks in the world, an overture to a global economic slowdown this year, and consequent increase in global financial risks.

That being said, China should accelerate the forming of an effective financial regulatory system, a well-structured financial market system, and a developed system of financial institutions with a reasonable division of responsibility. A complete and effective financial supervision system, a diversified and professional financial products and services system, a team of capable financial talents and an independent, controllable, safe and efficient financial infrastructure system are all indispensable for a strong financial sector.

In particular, the country needs to continuously strengthen its support to promote the renminbi's internationalization and further expand foreign investment and trade settled in the renminbi, so as to consolidate the foundation of its financial sector.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

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COMMENT

Zhang Wanhong

Human rights an inspiring and simple goal

Since 2024 marks the 20th anniversary of the inclusion of "The state shall respect and protect human rights" in the Constitution of China, this is an appropriate time to review the development of human rights in the country.

Human rights are rooted in human dignity, and the cause of human rights is rooted in people's lives. In his New Year's message, President Xi Jinping said: "Our goal is both inspiring and simple. Ultimately, it is about delivering a better life for the people. Our children should be well taken care of and receive a good education. Our young people should have the opportunities to pursue their careers and succeed. And our elderly people should have adequate access to medical services and elderly care. These issues matter to every family, and they are also a top priority of the government. We must work together to deliver on these issues."

Ensuring a life of dignity for people

We protect and promote human rights because they are an "inspiring yet simple goal". Human rights are protected and promoted in China to ensure the Chinese people lead a life of dignity, while governance is improved to achieve that goal. Over the past few years China has made tremendous achievements in human rights thanks to the intensifying modernization drive.

China eradicated absolute poverty and built a moderately prosperous society in all respects by the end of 2020. It improved "whole-process people's democracy", and promoted the rule of law in order to better protect and promote human rights. China follows a people-first development philosophy, which was especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when it made the safety of the people its top priority.

The report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in October 2022 vowed to "follow a Chinese path of human rights development, actively participate in global human rights governance, and promote all-around advancement of human rights". In line with that, China's development is the development of a huge population, including its material, cultural and ethical development, as well as the harmonious development of human beings and nature. As China's modernization advances, the cause of human rights also advances.

In the course of its long-term promotion of human rights, China has developed a unique human rights philosophy, which aligns with the contemporary Chinese concept of human rights. The contemporary concept combines the Marxist concept of human rights with China's concrete reality. The "free and comprehensive development of human beings" as per Marxism is the conceptual basis of China's human rights endeavors.

The contemporary concept of human rights also combines the Marxist concept of human rights with the traditional Chinese culture. Mencius said: "The one who wins people for the sake of the world is called benevolence", with benevolence (*Ren*) being the love for others, for society, for the country, and for the world, which reflects the broad-mindedness of China's human rights cause.

China's development relies on the people, and it shares the fruits of development with the people while protecting and promoting

human rights. On the global front, China carries forward the common values of humankind, such as peace, development, fairness, justice, democracy and freedom, while upholding multilateralism and helping build a community with a shared future.

Over the past four years, China has enacted 51 new laws and amended 113 old ones to promote human rights through legislation. It has signed a number of international human rights instruments, engaged in international human rights cooperation, and implemented the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights to fulfill its international human rights obligations. It has also been protecting and promoting human rights in its political and judicial systems, implemented the National Human Rights Action Plan (2021-25), and invited civil society to participate in human rights governance, thus building a strong human rights protection system.

People's happiness is greatest human rights

"The happiness of the people is the greatest human right." In terms of protecting human rights, China does not limit itself to just repeating abstract concepts, but makes efforts to understand the aspirations of the people.

First, in terms of economic, social and cultural rights, China has achieved fruitful results in food production, poverty alleviation and economic development, which means it is protecting people's rights to subsistence, development, equal employment opportunities, fair wages and healthy working conditions, and preventing the violation of labor laws and workers' rights.

China guarantees, in accordance with the law, equal rights to all ethnic groups, and the increase in the populations of ethnic minority groups and the preservation of ethnic cultures mean the rights of ethnic minorities are protected.

China has built the world's largest social security system, meaning it protects individuals' right to social security, and ensures "houses are for living in, not speculation" while improving the housing system — both home purchase and rental housing, meaning China protects individuals' right to housing. Also, China's education system

ranks first in the world in terms of scale, with the government subsidizing student loans and thus effectively protecting people's right to education.

The government continues to upgrade the cultural service system and attaches great importance to the protection of minority cultures, and improve the healthcare system by, among other things, strengthening the grassroots healthcare institutions and widening the coverage of basic medical insurance. China also has been promoting the concept of "clear waters and green mountains are as valuable as mountains of gold and silver", and has made remarkable achievements on the environmental protection front, while reducing air and water pollution and soil contamination, thus protecting individuals' right to a healthy environment.

Second, in the field of civil and political rights, China has taken measures to combat and prevent terrorism, punish those involved in extremist activities in accord-

ance with the law, while making those who engage in minor criminal acts aware that their actions are detrimental to the country's development and it is the duty of every individual to work for the betterment of society. The country has also taken measures to combat drug and human trafficking. As such, the government is safeguarding people's safety and security.

Also, the government is developing whole-process people's democracy, making sure the people are in charge of their own affairs, and launching a hotline which people can call to avail of government services, and seek redress for their grievances.

The government guarantees citizens' rights to freedom of religion in accordance with the law. The government also protects freedom of speech.

And third, with regard to the rights of specific groups, China's adherence to the basic policy of equality between men and women, which penalizes domestic violence and encourages women to participate in economic and social fields as equals. China has also taken measures to eradicate crimes against minors and guarantee children get good education and medical care.

Measures have also been taken to ensure the elderly people share the fruits of economic development and lead a happy life in their twilight years. To that end, it has improved the eldercare system. China believes that people with disabilities, too, can lead a fulfilling life, and thus provided them with living subsidies and nursing care subsidies, and built public facilities that are easily accessible for people with disabilities.

China guarantees, in accordance with the law, equal rights to all ethnic groups, and the increase in the populations of ethnic minority groups and the preservation of ethnic cultures mean the rights of ethnic minorities are protected.

To quote Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of former US president Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home — so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm, or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world".

It is true that beyond the broader dimensions of human rights, people lead a simple life. Looking back, China has not only promoted the development of human rights but also introduced human rights in every aspect of social life. Looking ahead, we should keep in mind that human rights are both an inspiring and a simple goal, and we should not only pursue the ultimate realization of universal human rights, but also adopt a down-to-earth attitude when it comes to improving the daily life of individuals.

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JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

Benoit Vermander

More Chinese works worthy of French versions

The year 2024, which marks the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and France, has been designated the "Franco-Chinese Year of Cultural Tourism". During the months to come, many events will be held both in China and in France, with some of them already taking place.

For instance, the Harbin Ice and Snow Sculpture Festival harbors sculptures of Notre-Dame de Paris and of the Temple of Heaven. Also, Charles Gounod's opera, *Roméo et Juliette*, will be performed in Beijing, a Château de Versailles exhibition will be held at the Palace Museum (Forbidden City), and *Les Misérables* and *Les Fourberies de Scapin* are also on the program. Several major art exhibits, such as the one of Annette Messager at Shanghai's Power Station of Art, too are on the list.

Both sides have been making efforts to organize gala programs. Most importantly, and going beyond holding one-time events, China will continue to promote the translation and publication of the works of Chinese academics and writers in the French language, an effort that it has sustained for a number of years now.

These translated works have introduced the French-speaking public to such major works as *Eastern and Western Cultures* and

their Philosophies, by Liang Shuming, *A Sociological Study of the Chinese Family System* by Lin Yaohua and *From the Soil*, an epoch-making study by celebrated anthropologist Fei Xiaotong (a biography of whom has also been translated and published).

Interestingly, reputable French academic publishing houses such as Presses de l'Inalco, L'Harmattan and Honoré Champion have participated in this endeavor of cross-cultural communication.

China is to be commended for continuously improving the quality and number of these translations, making considerable effort to introduce modern and contemporary Chinese works to a larger international public. This state-led effort slightly corrects the large imbalance in the number of acquisitions: Chinese publishing companies translate many more books from the French language than their French counterparts do from the Chinese.

For sure, translated works of French social scientists or even philosophers may not be as numerous as was the case in the past (the French influence in these fields is not as dominant as was the case a few decades ago), but some sectors have shown a remarkable resilience. Among them, poetry probably comes first: the works of René Char, Yves Bonnefoy, Jean-Pierre Siméon, Yvon Le Men and Serge Pey have met with

As the history of French-Chinese exchanges show, artistic and literary creativity is triggered and nurtured by continuous interactions among partners who have learned from one another and are committed to continuing to do so.

remarkable success in China.

This is largely due to the untiring efforts of some remarkable Chinese translators, such as Shu Cai, a leading actor in the exchange. Regular manifestations, notably the one called *The Spring of the Poets (Le Printemps des Poètes)*, also contribute to making Sino-French poetic exchanges a field of lively interactions and cross-cultural fertilization.

These achievements are rooted in a reciprocal cultural fascination that goes back to the time of Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) and Louis XIV, whose reigns witnessed the first organized intellectual and scientific exchanges

between the two countries (five "King's Mathematicians" sent by Louis XIV reached Beijing in 1688). But these achievements should not lead to complacency. New challenges need to be tackled.

The French people's appreciation of Chinese cultural vitality has reached a plateau, with a certain weariness appearing when it comes to traditional arts and crafts as there is little knowledge among today's French people of the most contemporary artistic and literary expressions. New forums need to be developed, and efforts made for encouraging translations and adaptations of Chinese contemporary literary works in the French language and exhibition of contemporary artists' creation in France.

As a matter of fact, the French Embassy in Beijing organizes the "Fu Lei Translation and Publication Prize" every year to reward Chinese translations from French on the Chinese mainland, an initiative started in 2009. But there is no similar award for encouraging the French translators and other bridge-builders who strive to popularize Chinese productions on foreign soils.

Second, even if national cultural entities play a crucial role, cultural exchanges need to be fostered by companies and individuals. In fact, accrued efforts are already perceptible. For instance, the Fosun

conglomerate supports the large Lantern Festival held in Paris, and the Shanghai-based fashion brand ICICLE organizes eight exhibitions of contemporary art between the two countries.

On their part, French companies, with a long presence in China such as Michelin, Cartier and L'Oréal, are involved in a number of events. But there is a need for others to join the endeavor, and encourage smaller, more local entities to foster grassroots initiatives.

And third, direct and sustained exchanges between the artists, writers and thinkers of the two countries are essential to building long-term friendship. Exchanges among creators influence the way the citizens of the two countries appreciate each other's culture. As the history of French-Chinese exchanges show, artistic and literary creativity is triggered and nurtured by continuous interactions among partners who have learned from one another and are committed to continuing to do so.

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GLOBAL VIEWS

ZHANG HUIYONG AND DAI MINHAN

Tapping the potential of blue carbon

The critical role of oceans and ocean ecosystems in providing climate solutions has been vastly overlooked

In December 2023, the 28th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28) concluded in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, with a landmark agreement, named The UAE Consensus, covering a wide range of topics such as the Global Stocktake, mitigation, adaptation, finance, loss and damage and international cooperation. According to The UAE Consensus, to limit global warming to 1.5 C by the end of this century requires deep, rapid and sustained reductions in global greenhouse gas emissions of 43 percent by 2030 and 60 percent by 2035 relative to the 2019 level.

During COP28 climate talks, 130 countries signed the Global Renewables and Energy Efficiency Pledge, and 50 large oil and gas companies signed the Oil and Gas Decarbonization Charter to accelerate climate action.

However, even if everyone delivered on their commitments, it would lower global energy related greenhouse gas emissions by only 4 billion metric tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent in 2030, which is about one-third of the emissions gap that needs to be closed in the next six years to limit warming to 1.5 C above pre-industrial levels, as agreed to in the 2015 Paris Agreement, according to the International Energy Agency.

In sharp contrast, the global average temperature has been climbing. The global average temperature for 2022 was 1.16 C above the pre-industrial baseline. According to reports, the year 2023 has been confirmed as the hottest year on record. Meanwhile, the average atmospheric carbon dioxide levels climbed to over 410 parts per million in 2022. In fact, the last time atmospheric carbon dioxide amounts were this high was more than 3 million years ago, when the global surface temperature was about 5 C warmer than it is now and the sea level was 10 to 20 meters higher than it is now.

Given that global warming of over 1.1 C poses serious threats to humanity's sustainable development, it is imperative that we take strong action to cut carbon emissions in the face of 1.5 C or even higher temperature rise. However, emissions reduction alone can hardly address the

current climate crisis.

We should attach greater importance to ocean-based climate solutions and tap the huge potential of oceans and ocean ecosystems as carbon sinks.

The critical role of the oceans has been under-appreciated. Covering more than two-thirds of the Earth's surface, the oceans are a major component of the climate system, storing water, heat, carbon dioxide, and moving them around the Earth, and exchanging these and other elements with the atmosphere. Storing around 84 percent of the Earth's carbon, the oceans are the planet's largest carbon reservoir. Since the Industrial Revolution, the world's oceans have absorbed 93 percent of the excess heat from human-induced warming and over 25 percent of carbon dioxide emitted into the atmosphere by human activities. As the largest carbon sink, the ocean plays a critical role in achieving the carbon neutrality goal.

The ocean provides a slew of solutions to mitigate the impacts of climate change, and help human beings achieve the carbon neutrality goal. The solutions include conserving, restoring and managing coastal wetland blue carbon ecosystems (blue forests); shrinking the carbon footprint of marine industries such as the shipping

industry to the utmost extent; enhancing offshore carbon storage capacity and strengthening the ocean's productivity to increase its carbon absorptive capacity; and steering fishery production and aquatic product consumption toward low-carbon development.

According to a report from the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy in 2019, ocean-based climate action could deliver one-fifth of the emissions cuts needed to limit the global temperature rise to 1.5 C, equivalent to emissions from all the current coal-fired power plants world-wide. According to a new report commissioned by the panel in September 2023, the oceans can deliver up to 35 percent of the emissions reductions needed by 2050 to keep warming to 1.5 C.

In addition to advancing carbon peaking and carbon neutrality goals, ocean-based climate solutions will also create job opportunities and foster a number of new marine industries, providing long-lasting impetus for sustainable economic growth.

Goods and services from coastal and marine environments amount to about \$2.5 trillion each year — that would put the ocean as the sev-

enth largest economy in the world in terms of GDP.

China is an important participant in the production, consumption and trade of marine products. The output of China's marine industry totaled 9.46 trillion yuan (\$1.32 trillion) in 2022, accounting for 7.8 percent of the country's GDP, which remained the same as last year. China has been a world leader in aquaculture and ship manufacturing, accounting for around 58 percent of the world's total aquaculture products in 2020 and 45 percent of gross tonnage of ships in 2022 respectively. In 2021, China added 16.9 million kilowatts of offshore wind turbines, 5.5 times that of the previous year, topping the world in accumulative wind turbine installed capacity.

Looking ahead, countries should elevate the development of a sustainable blue economy to be a national strategic goal and make it an important pathway to their carbon peaking and carbon neutrality goals.

To start with, a comprehensive assessment should be made of all marine technologies around the world, particularly the application of digital technologies, so as to support the sustainable growth and advance the carbon neutrality of the blue economy.

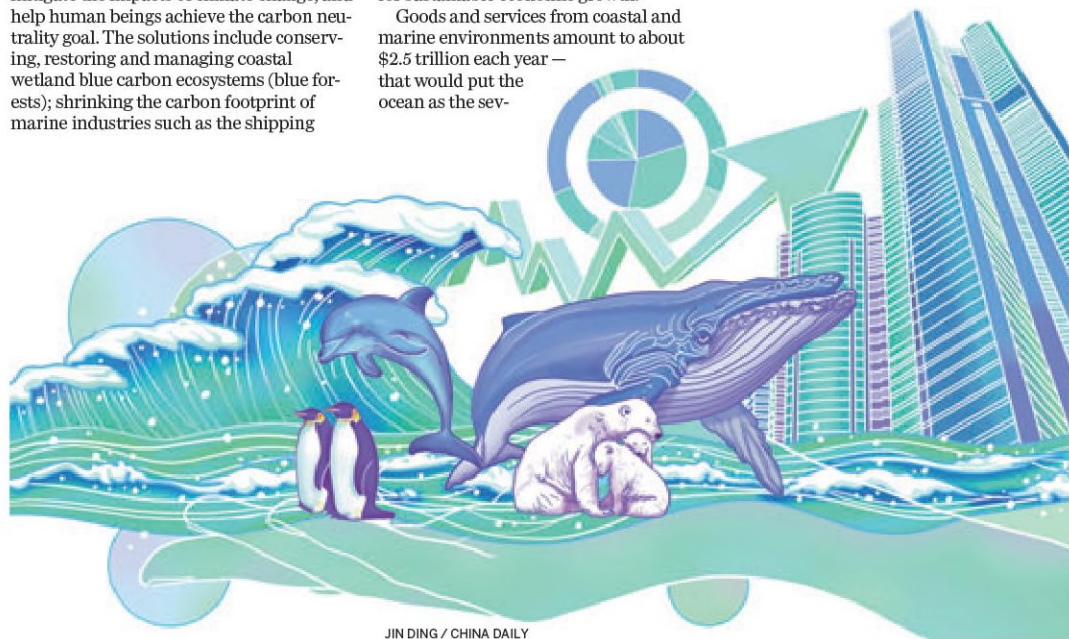
Policies and measures — such as preferential tax regimes, supporting industries, support for business startups, and talent introduction and cultivation policies — should be adopted to encourage and support the development of marine technologies, in particular digital technologies for the blue economy and carbon neutrality, in an attempt to advance large-scale industrial application of these emerging new technologies.

Second, management of the oceans should be improved by coordinating ecological, social and economic targets. A multilayer, comprehensive ocean management system that covers central and local authorities should be established from a complex ecosystem perspective that factors in social, economic and natural targets.

Third, a framework and indexes should be established to conduct a comprehensive accounting of sustainability outcomes and social and economic outcomes, and to beef up financial support for a sustainable global blue economy.

China should update its Green Industry Guidance Directory and the green financial system to assess the necessity of building a new framework for "blue finance". Financial institutions should be encouraged to roll out more diversified financial products to support the low carbon transition of the ocean economy. Government guidance funds should also play a bigger role in advancing the green transition of the blue economy.

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JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

LUO TIANYI AND EMANUELE BIANCO

Enabler of transition

Green hydrogen can help pave the way for a sustainable energy future

The year 2023 was the warmest on record, overtaking the previous record year by a large margin, with the 2023 average approaching the key Paris agreement threshold of 1.5 C above pre-industrial levels, the World Meteorological Organization officially confirmed at the beginning of 2024. The WMO has consolidated six international datasets to arrive at a global temperature of 1.45 C above the 1850-1900 baseline, plus or minus 0.12 C.

In the World Energy Transitions Outlook 2023, the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) calls for raised global ambition in renewables deployment, enabled by renewable energy, clean hydrogen, and sustainable biomass solutions, and for countries to seize all opportunities to stay on a 1.5 C pathway as the window for doing so is rapidly closing.

At COP28, more than 130 countries took the unprecedented step of signing a pledge to triple their renewable power capacity and double energy efficiency by 2030. This is an ambitious, unprecedented and important step on the way to achieving 1.5 C.

But to achieve the 1.5 C target, in addition to infrastructure, laws and regulations, technological breakthroughs, market mechanisms and capacity building, we should factor in and prioritize the adverse impacts of increasingly frequent extreme weather events caused by climate change on the global energy transition.

Energy facility shutdowns caused by water shortages have made frequent headlines in the wake of intensifying climate change, the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, and the growing uncertainties in precipitation. Meanwhile, as the post-pandemic recovery continues, the global energy demand has been climbing. That, combined with other challenges from the food crisis and the urbanization process, has intensified the conflict between water resources and energy needs.

Take clean hydrogen as an example. With clean hydrogen emerging as a key component in reducing emissions in "hard-to-

abate" sectors such as steel-making and the chemical industry, clean hydrogen interest has been growing exponentially around the world in recent years.

Despite this, decision-makers, investors, technicians, and other people involved in the industry should be deeply aware of the fact that water availability is a critical factor for any hydrogen energy production facility. Currently, many hydrogen production projects are located in water-stressed regions of the world. For example, 99 percent of India's existing and planned green and blue hydrogen capacity is likely to be under extremely water-stressed conditions by 2040.

Green hydrogen, which is renewables-based, is the most water-efficient clean hydrogen production technology, according to a report titled Water for Hydrogen Production co-authored by IRENA and Bluerisk. Developing green hydrogen by leaps and bounds and taking water conditions as a critical production factor in the early, mid, and later stages of project planning in a more timely and accurate manner will help ensure a balance between meeting energy needs and conserving water resources.

IRENA forecasts that in the 1.5 C scenario, global hydrogen production could increase six-fold by 2050, compared with today, among which 94 percent of hydrogen could be green hydrogen.

As a world leader in accelerating the global energy transition, China is critical in the development of green hydrogen to the transition process.

Currently, around 63 percent of hydrogen produced in China is brown hydrogen that's both carbon-intensive and water-intensive and a large part of that is located in the Yellow River Basin, a region where the water-energy relationship is intense in the long run. By switching from brown hydrogen to green hydrogen, hydrogen production in the Yellow River Basin could grow by 11 percent by 2030, and at the same time involve 28 percent less water withdrawal and 20 percent less water consumption. The Yellow River Protection Law, which

came into effect in 2023, says water resources are a decisive factor for population planning, city development, land development and industrial growth. It provides guidelines for the green and low-carbon transition of regional energy industries.

Although China is taking the lead in some green hydrogen production technologies and improving relevant policies, the nation, faced with many challenges in this regard, is in dire need of a multi-pronged approach.



YAN XINGYI / FOR CHINA DAILY

To start with, China could advance technological innovation and leverage economies of scale to lower the production cost. Second, relevant policies and mechanisms must play a bigger role in the process, particularly in emissions-intensive industries (such as the iron and steel industry and fertilizer production industry) to create stable and long-term demand for green hydrogen. Furthermore, there needs to be a strategic allocation of resources. Against the backdrop of limited resources and time, we need to prioritize sectors with larger car-

bon footprints to deliver more immediate results, such as decarbonizing the heating and cooling systems through electrification and direct use of more renewable energy.

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LIFE

Last year was the hottest year in recorded history, the World Meteorological Organization declared at the United Nations Climate Change Conference, or COP28, in Dubai in November, generating heated discussions on climate change across the world. But climate change has been an issue for not only contemporary humans but also for ancient civilizations. And the scholars who attended the fifth Shanghai Archaeology Forum suggest that we may be able to take inspiration and insight from their experiences.

The forum, organized by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Shanghai municipal government, under the theme "Archaeology of Climate Change and Social Sustainability", brought together about 200 professionals from 40 countries and regions.

The forum was inaugurated in 2013 as an international platform highlighting cultural heritage's contemporary significance through lectures, group discussions and field trips to museums and archaeological sites.

"Understanding our past, particularly through the lens of archaeology, can yield invaluable insights into social adaptation to long-term climate change. Ancient societies also faced substantial challenges brought by climate change and adopted diverse strategies to cope with and adapt to these changes. Natural climate archives and archaeological records help us model and predict how climate change can shape and transform our lives, helping us search for sustainable trajectories toward the future," the executive committee explains in an official statement.

Rainy days

For example, the Yangshao people dating back 5,000 to 7,000 years in Zhengzhou, Henan province, were challenged by, and responded to, climate change in the Holocene epoch.

According to Liu Qingbin, a researcher at the Zhengzhou Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, there was a period of continuously high temperatures and abundant rainfall worldwide during the Holocene from 8,000 to 3,500 years ago. The heat and precipitation peaked from 7,000 to 5,000 years ago, when the Yangshao people lived in what is now China's Central Plains, including Zhengzhou.

"Archaeological studies show the Yangshao people adopted multiple strategies to adapt to the climate," says Liu.

The Yangshao settlements in Zhengzhou were mostly in mountainous areas in the west of the city, occupying higher terrain instead of the plains in the east. The handful that were on the plains were on hillsides.

Liu says this was probably to avoid flooding, given the copious rain.

Also, most of the settlements were surrounded by large moats that facilitated water drainage. Some had two or three layers of moats, says Liu.

For example, the Shuanghuaishu site in Gongyi, Zhengzhou, hosts the ruins of a huge city dating back 5,300 years, with three layers of moats. Studies of their sediment

As old as the weather

A recent archaeological forum seeks to connect past, present and future solutions to climate change, **Wang Ru** reports in Shanghai.



reveal distinctive water-flow characteristics.

"This means that although the moats served the function of military defense, in daily life, they were used to store and drain water," says Liu.

During the Yangshao period, buildings were often made of mud and suspended atop wooden beams. This construction format offered protection from moisture and pests, and was suited to hot and rainy places, he says.

He also mentions that people fired the exteriors of the earthen houses at the Dahecu site in Zhengzhou, dating back 6,800 to 3,500 years, to make them water-resistant.

Also, rice has been found in many Yangshao settlements in Zhengzhou, although Zhengzhou is located

in a relatively dry area, where millet would otherwise be the main crop. Scholars infer the Yangshao people adjusted their crop composition to include rice, which typically grows in warm and wet places, besides millet.

Such adaptations enabled the Yangshao people to thrive and their culture to contribute to the origin of Chinese civilization, Liu says.

Dry spells

Conversely, people in other places and times had to deal with drought.

Northern Arizona University professor Jaime Awe compares people's responses to droughts in ancient Maya territories with other societies in different times, including Brazil in the 19th century, Spain in the 18th century and the southwestern United States in the 1930s.



Clockwise from top: Major archaeological projects and studies were given awards at the fifth Shanghai Archaeology Forum held recently in Shanghai. LI HE / XINHUA A foreign scholar visits the Changzhou Museum in Changzhou, Jiangsu province during the forum; Attendees of the forum visit the Sanxingcun site in Changzhou and listen to introductions to the newly unearthed artifacts. PHOTOS BY WANG RU / CHINA DAILY

Recent and ongoing research shows that the Maya adopted a range of agricultural approaches like raised and terraced fields and kitchen gardens to respond to droughts in the regions they inhabited in Central America's central lowlands from the eighth to the 10th centuries.

Moreover, they appealed for divine intervention.

"Use-intensity study indicates that there was a dramatic increase in cave ritual activities during the period," Awe says, adding that the Maya even offered human sacrifices in caves to pray for rain.

Measures adopted by people from other regions included increased grain storage, construction of dams and reservoirs, religious activities and reliance on "hard-time" foods — plants and ani-

mals they typically wouldn't eat, including certain reptiles, bats and vultures.

However, ancient Mayan efforts were in vain and the central lowlands were eventually abandoned. Awe says severe, multiyear droughts led to decreased food, increased competition for resources, and higher rates of conflict, violence and mortality, until they finally migrated.

"With almost all efforts failed, you have to put on your walking boots and move out. And it seems it's consistent. It did not just happen to the Maya. It happened all over the world. So, in some respects, the ancient Maya were some of the early climate refugees," says Awe.



It did not just happen to the Maya. It happened all over the world. So, in some respects, the ancient Maya were some of the early climate refugees."

Jaime Awe, Northern Arizona University professor

Today's ancient problem

Yet it's not just people of the past but also their tangible legacies that are at risk today, as contemporary weather threatens ancient cultural heritage sites' surviving remains, prompting archaeologists to explore solutions.

China's overall precipitation is increasing, and its extreme weather risks are intensifying, National Centre for Archaeology researcher Zhang Zhiguo says, citing reports by the Climate Change Center of the China Meteorological Administration and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

In 2021, for example, rainstorms lasting several days straight soaked parts of Shanxi, damaging 1,783 immovable cultural heritage relics in the province, says Zhang.

He says rainfall can cause erosion of surfaces, but sudden and excessive downpours can exceed drainage capacity, threatening or even destroying foundations.

"It's common that trees with expansive root systems spread all over a site, especially on the remains of city walls. When heavy rain causes these trees to fall, they often do so while clinging to chunks of the walls with their roots," Zhang says.

"So, we should clear out trees with extensive roots on earthen structures like city walls. Protective covers like tarps or rammed earth can also reduce damage. Also, drainage should be improved."

Altogether, 19 archaeological projects and studies were given awards at the forum, including the early monumental constructions at the Aguada Fenix site in Mexico; excavations of the early-stage Harappan cemetery dating from 3200 to 2600 BC in Gujarat, India; and discoveries at the Sanxingcun site in Guanghan, Sichuan province.

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By **WANG RU** in Changzhou

A Neolithic site in Jiangsu tells new stories

The latest discoveries at the Neolithic settlement of Sanxingcun in the Yangtze River's lower reaches were recently highlighted at the fifth Shanghai Archaeology Forum.

The site, dating from 6,500 to 5,500 years ago, in what is today Jintan district in Changzhou, Jiangsu province, was found during the second national census of cultural relics in 1985. The six-year excavation carried out there in the 1990s, involved the unearthing of more than 1,000 Neolithic tombs, 4,000 artifacts and 1,200 well-preserved human bones. It was officially listed as one of China's Top 10 Archaeological Discoveries in 1998.

The latest excavations there started in 2022, and are continuing what was started 30 years ago. It is being carried out by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Archaeology, the Nanjing Museum, the Changzhou Institute of Archaeology and the Jintan Museum.

The new excavations have uncovered more than 570 finds from the Neolithic period to the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). The highlight is a settlement dating back to the middle and late periods of the Majiabang Culture and the early period of the



From left: Carved bone boards with patterns of concentric circles and dotted lines found at the Sanxingcun site in Changzhou, Jiangsu province; Scholars check a human skeleton unearthed at the site; A ritual object with a stone yue axe and two decorated parts found at the site. PHOTOS BY WANG RU / CHINA DAILY

Songze Culture. These Neolithic cultures in the lower reaches of the Yangtze River date back roughly 6,000 and 5,500 years, respectively.

The site covers about 350,000 square meters. A roughly 10,000-square-meter loess platform stands in the middle.

Altogether 345 tombs, 210 ash pits, 12 houses and other structures, as well as about 1,000 artifacts have



been unearthed during the latest excavations, Institute of Archaeology researcher Li Moran says.

Based on the distribution patterns of Neolithic remains and artifacts, the entire site can seemingly be divided into functional zones, including residential, burial, and bone-tool and pottery production areas.

"This time, we're planning to

excavate the central loess platform, the tombs in the south, and the residential and handicraft workshop areas in the north, and expect to develop a panoramic view of how people lived there about 6,000 years ago," says Li.

A highlight of the artifacts is a ritual object made of three parts — a stone yue axe, a bone ornament on its top and an ivory decoration



at its base. It's believed there was likely a handle connecting the three that hasn't been found.

Similar artifacts have been found in the Archaeological Ruins of Liangzhu City, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, but the one from Sanxingcun is even older, says Institute of Archaeology researcher Li Xinwei.

"It seems the regard for the yue axe as a symbol of power and the custom of decorating it persisted, and the oldest specimen to date comes from this site," says Li Xinwei.

Consequently, this excavation may enhance understanding of the lineage of ancient cultures in the Yangtze River's lower reaches, says Li Moran.

Four carved bone boards, which

had never been found in China before, were discovered in a tomb on the site. The grave belonged to a young female, who's thought to have been the leader, since her tomb seemed to convey the most status among those on the site from that time. Another 15 funerary objects, including bone hair clasps and spoons, and jade artifacts, were discovered inside. The find suggests a matriarchal society with a female leader.

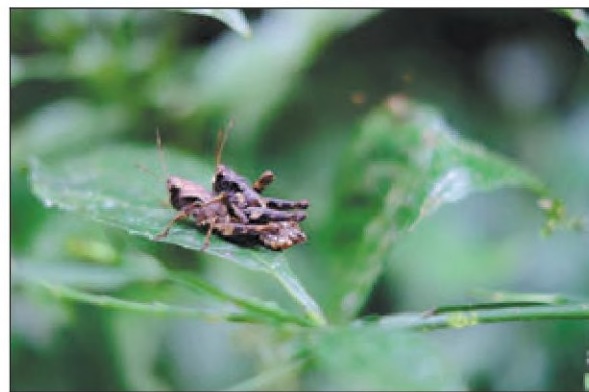
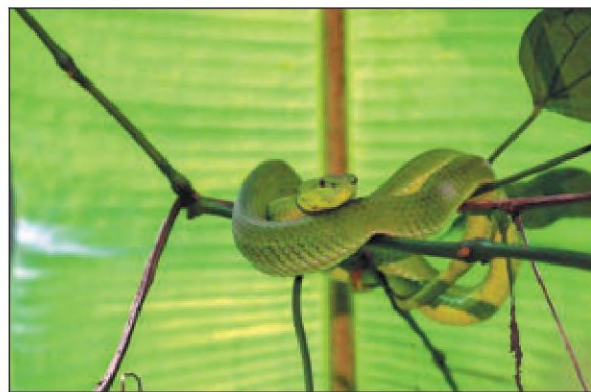
The boards adorned with concentric circles and dotted lines were found on the left side of her chest. These two patterns are typical of the Neolithic, Hebei Normal University archaeology professor Tang Huisheng says.

There are different theories as to their functions. Some scholars believe they were used to make records, while others believe they may have served religious or magical purposes.

Most of the human bones found at Sanxingcun were well-preserved. "They're hard and solid, whereas most human bones found in the Yangtze's lower reaches from this time aren't," Li Moran says.

"This fills in some gaps in the samples between China's north and south during the Neolithic."

LIFE



From left: A spider works slowly on its web after rain in a tropical rainforest in Xishuangbanna Dai autonomous prefecture, Yunnan province; a green snake takes a nap on a branch; a couple of mating locusts.
PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Going wild in the wilderness

Yunnan's Xishuangbanna offers a natural appeal, especially with rainforest hikes that explore its biodiversity, **Deng Zhangyu** reports.

As winter switches much of the country into a fridge, if not a freezer, tropical Xishuangbanna Dai autonomous prefecture in Southwest China's Yunnan province offers a goldilocks climate. That is, not too hot, not too cold — but just right.

It's these mild temperatures that make it a hotspot for travelers during this otherwise-cold season. They flock to the region to explore its biodiversity for both education and entertainment.

Chen Sinan, a local who runs a company that offers tailored rainforest hikes, has been busy recently, especially since many parents are traveling with their children during the school winter vacation.

Xishuangbanna is located in Yunnan's far south. It's widely known as a "wonderland of plants and animals" and as a home to wild Asian elephants. It is where several ethnic groups inhabit for generations.

"Visitors also want to know about tropical forests," says Chen, whose tours are fully booked until the beginning of March.

"Many parents also hope their children will learn about nature while having fun."

The prefecture's governor, Dao Wen, says study tours and jungle treks for families are becoming star offerings this year.

Xishuangbanna received over 54 million visitors from January to September in 2023 and another 670,000 during the three-day New Year holiday.

On a recent visit to the area, I joined a group of photographers, birdwatchers and hikers, as we were guided by Chen through pristine tropical rainforest one sunny afternoon in December.

We hiked for 3 kilometers, picnicked in the rainforest and climbed trees in a jungle hidden behind a mountain range about a half-hour drive from the prefecture's main city, Jinghong.

The initially unremarkable trek became increasingly incredible as the tall palms gave way to trees as high as skyscrapers that created a canopy that blocked out most of the light.

"Welcome to the rainforest. We just walked through a little grassland to start," Chen joked in reference to these towering trees.

As we continued on, he often stopped, pointed at a plant and talked about its function in the ecosystem. He also alerted us to the presence of various insects that camouflaged themselves so well that we wouldn't have noticed them if they hadn't been pointed out.



We encountered a beautiful black widow that had just finished weaving its web, a couple of mating locusts, a large lizard busily scouting for food and a green bamboo snake snoozing in a tree. At one point, a river crab tried to scuttle onto a hiker's shoe.

Even though I'd wrapped myself in clothing to seal out any bugs, especially mosquitoes, I was still bitten by a golden ant that was larger than my fingernail.

It hurt. A lot!

In another palm forest, we found a murder victim — a tall tree we thought had been cut down by humans until Chen explained it'd recently been killed by competing trees.

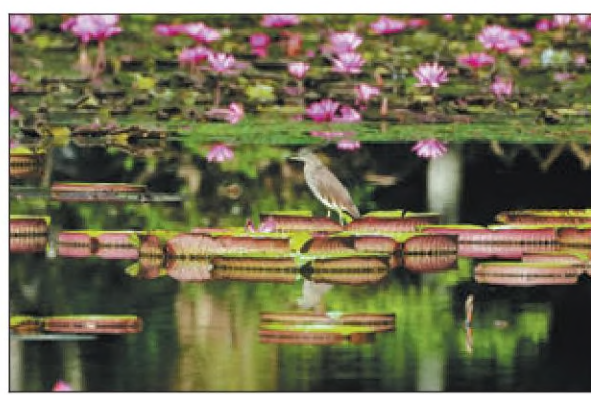
It's a reminder of the law of the jungle, in which everything fights — in every sense — to survive.

We'd come to enjoy the beauty of a place that's ultimately the result of a battle, often to the death.

Trees fight to grow as high as possible to catch sufficient sunlight. This sometimes requires them to sacrifice root depth to extend their presences above ground as much as possible. But the downside of this upward push is that it can make them easier to push over, as was the case with the tree we saw, which had a weak and shallow root system.

Among the countless killers with leaves are "stranglers" like banyan figs. Birds drop their seeds onto tree branches, where they grow roots downward along the trunks and gradually choke their hosts, stealing their nutrients and light until they die of deprivation.

"It's harsh," Chen said. "Many trees have their own ways to fight back, just like we humans struggle



greatly to make a living."

One tree we saw resembled a giant hedgehog covered with spines to fend off vines. Another sheds its bark to slough off lianas and was totally nude when we encountered it.

Still, we stumbled upon more victims of the strangler figs as we con-

tinued deeper in. The brutality and ingenuity of these plants is something I wouldn't have imagined unless I'd witnessed it.

We arrived at the picnic spot where we enjoyed fruit and tea, and coffee made using quality beans grown in Pu'er, a city that's a roughly two-hour train ride away. Here, we



Clockwise from above left: Xiao Yan, a young inheritor of elephant-foot drum dance, a typical dance performed by the Dai ethnic group, teaches tourists how to make a piece of bamboo ware at a camp in a tropical rainforest, which is attracting lots of hikers these days. A 60-meter high banyan tree is where the tree climbing is practiced deep in the tropical rainforest. Chen Sinan (left) guides a group of tourists in a tropical rainforest in Xishuangbanna, where jungle treks have attracted lots of parents with children and hiking lovers since last year. The group is on a 3-km hiking in the rainforest. A bird standing on a giant lotus is ready to catch fish at the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden.

were also able to climb a 60-meter-high banyan by rope, under the supervision of two professionals.

Unfortunately, I ran out of energy after ascending only a few meters. I sat in a chair in front of the tree, sipping tea, watching the others climb. It was quiet, there was no mobile phone signal, so the only stimulation came from nature.

Hikers are also able to enjoy cultural programs, such as performances by elephant-foot drum dancers like 24-year-old Xiao Yan, who belongs to the Dai ethnic group. He has spent the past decade studying the folk art, which takes its name from the fact that its lead percussion instrument looks like the eponymous pachyderm's leg. The influx of tourists has created enough demand, so that Xiao has been able to set up a studio to stage more performances and train several apprentices.

"Thanks to the increase in families visiting, I can make a good living as a dancer," he said.

Dancing in the rainforest is new to him. But the popularity of jungle hikes bodes well for his prospects, he believed.

As the sky darkened, we made our way out of the rainforest. Men drove past, carrying the picnic materials on their motorbikes. Then, the only sounds were of unseen insects.

And so I left the jungle, where so many plants fight fiercely, now once again a dark and mysterious place.

The next day, I visited the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden to learn more about the region's flora and fauna. It's the largest of its kind in the country and is home to the most plant species.

It is also a research center with lots of experts, able to serve as informed guides.

It even provides tailored services for families with specialized interests. For instance, it offers a leaf-tasting tour so that visitors can experience different degrees of sour, sweet, bitter and spicy. The garden also puts on night tours to enable encounters with nocturnal bugs like fireflies.

My guide told me the increase of study tours by families this year has made it harder to get night tickets, which must be booked at least a week in advance during peak season.

"Visitors want to not only have fun but also to learn about nature," she said.

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Busy book fair shows draw of children's books, traditional culture

The Beijing Book Fair, held from Jan 11 to 13, reported a record high of over 100,000 visits as China's book market continues to thrive.

According to the annual report on the book market issued under the guidance of the Publishers Association of China and the Book and Periodicals Distribution Association of China, retail sales of books totaled 91.2 billion yuan (about \$12.8 billion) in 2023, up 4.72 percent year-on-year.

Regarded as a trendsetter in the publishing industry, the fair featured 400,000 books from 720 exhibitors, drawing publishers, authors, and read-

ers nationwide to the literary feast.

Cultural charm

In the almost 400 activities held during the book fair, numerous events spotlighting traditional culture and historical themes captivated readers.

Among them was the unveiling of a six-volume book series on Chinese culture, illuminating the cultural system through comprehensive coverage of literature, painting, calligraphy, music, drama, architecture, and aesthetics.

"Traditional Chinese culture is increasingly attracting the interest of young readers," says Nie Zhen-



From left: Readers browse books at the Beijing Book Fair on Jan 11. A livestream host introduces new releases during the fair.
JU HUANZONG AND PAN XU / XINHUA

ning of the Guangdong Education Publishing House, publisher of the series. Nie expresses the hope that



through its publication, more youthful vigor will be infused into traditional culture.

With a focus on introducing traditional culture to the youth, the Beijing Xiron Culture Group selected over 100 books tailored to young readers.

The line of traditional cultural products will be expanded to kindle even more interest from the younger generation, according to the company's Wei Ling.

Publications for kids

A diverse range of children's publications has revitalized the book market and become a feature of the book fair.

The annual report on the 2023 book retail market shows that

China's book market has resumed growth, and that children's books account for the largest share at 27.21 percent.

Bringing a number of outstanding children's books to the fair, Lin Yun, head of the China Peace Publishing House, recognizes the intense competition in the children's publishing sector.

Lin says that children's publications should continue to provide proper guidance and contribute to the development of future generations.

"At the beginning of the new year, the book market has ushered in a good start, about which we are very excited," says Wu Shulin, chairman of the Publishers Association of China.

XINHUA

LIFE



Documentary film *This Is Life* juxtaposes multiple vertical short videos on the big screen. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The sweet story behind India's first Chinatown

The word for sugar in Bengali, as in some other Indian languages, is *chini*. Ask anyone back in my hometown of Kolkata in India why that is so and chances are they will tell you it is because the Chinese introduced sugar to India. While history says otherwise, it is true that the story of India's first Chinatown does have a sugary connection to it.

The story starts with the arrival of tea trader Tong Ah Chew from Guangdong province in the late 18th century. Atchew, as he is referred to in East India Company records, set up a sugar mill on the outskirts of Kolkata in Achipur, a village that is today named after him, with the help of 100-odd workers he brought from his homeland. When Atchew died in the 1780s and the sugar mill went bust, the Chinese mill workers moved to Kolkata

proper in search of a living. What they left behind was a temple and Atchew's tomb, which members of the Chinese community visit by the hundreds during Spring Festival each year.

The Chinese workers settled around central Kolkata's Tiretta Bazaar area, making a living running leather tanneries and carpentry shops. This was an area that was already inhabited by other non-Bengali trading communities, and the multicultural setup helped the new arrivals integrate easily. However, in the early 1900s, they were forced to shift the polluting tanneries to the marshy eastern fringes of the city and Tangra, the second Chinatown in Kolkata, took shape.

Given their expertise in the leather trade, it is not surprising that before the mega brands made their appearance, Chinese shoe shops were the go-to places for footwear in Kolkata. The row of shops on Bentinck Street in the heart of town was where office workers picked up their formal shoes. My father and uncles all had their personal favorites among those shops and remained devoted customers all their lives. While the men found their custom-fitted shoes on Bentinck Street, for women, Henry and Kowloon in New Market were where the fancy pairs were.

Not to be outdone, Chinese women ran hugely successful beauty salons. Even today, some of the biggest names in the beauty trade in Kolkata are Chinese. Dentistry was the other profession members of the community excelled in.

But it was to the food that the Chinese community introduced to Kolkata that the city owes the biggest debt of gratitude. Nanking, Chung Wah, Eau Chew and Kim Wah, Pieping, Mandarin, Jimmy's Kitchen and the not-so-Chinese sounding Waldorf are among the scores of eateries that have been around for decades, serving Indianized versions of Chinese fare to a clientele that never seems to tire of the rarely changing menus.

So popular is this "Chinese" food that fried rice and chilli chicken regularly make an appearance on Bengali dinner tables. Never mind that the only thing remotely Chinese about them is the liberal use of soy sauce. Humble roadside eateries make a killing every day, dishing up platefuls of Hakka chow mein and Veg Manchurian, which bear very little resemblance to anything available on the Chinese mainland. For the lovers of more authentic fare, the pork dumplings and noodles served early in the morning in Tiretta Bazaar is a breakfast pilgrimage made regularly.

Kolkataans are proud of their Chinese food. Take them to any other city in India, and they will turn up their noses at what is on offer there. In Delhi, some of us would haunt this tiny place called China Fare, only because it served Kolkata-style Chinese food and that was the taste of home.

After moving to China, I have discovered that what is known as the "chicken soup" back home, is just a modified version of the hotpot. The food in the office canteen seems strangely familiar but very different at the same time. Conversations nowadays with friends and family in Kolkata inevitably veer around how much of Chinese food I am getting to sample here — and the envy and wistfulness in their voices are real.

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Clipping together life

An innovative documentary compiles short videos that ordinary people have posted online to offer insights rarely seen on the silver screen, **Cheng Yuezhu** reports.

Chinese short-video platforms reveal snippets of life and work that include those rarely represented by mainstream legacy media. They provide glimpses of young women who work as crane operators, a cargo ship crew who spend the year without tap water, and excavator drivers so adept they can perform feats such as using their scoops to turn on a phone by gingerly tapping the power button with the rim of their buckets.

Tsinging Film studio believes these videos provide contemporary and authentic approaches to documentation.

The team selected 887 short videos from 509 uploaders on the platform Kuaishou to create the unconventional documentary, *This Is Life*, which graced the nation's big screens on Jan 13. It's distributed by the platform, Elemeat.

The idea for the film first came about in 2018, when the film's director Sun Hong was pursuing a doctorate at the School of Journalism and Communication at Tsinghua University.

Inspired by her supervisor Lei Jianjun's view that short videos have changed the creation of documentaries, she and the production crew started to conceptualize a film centered on short-video platform users.

"We chose to highlight Kuaishou users because we have always believed that the essence of China lies not in the mainstream, ornate and exquisite urban scenes that are commonly portrayed, but in small towns and rural areas across the vast expanse of China's landscapes," Sun says.

"Those marginalized groups, who are given less attention and have little influence, make up the majority of the authentic China."

A team of 10 engaged in the research and compilation of short videos. They shared any videos they thought might fit with the group for discussion. It took more than a year to sift through 50,000 clips.

The production crew call the 509 Kuaishou users "co-creators" of the film. They come from all walks of life, especially manual laborers and farmers.

In compiling these clips, *This Is Life* engages ordinary people in its making and presents their authentic experiences, allowing people who are often inadequately represented in mainstream cinema to take center stage.

The team decided to select spontaneously uploaded videos rather than call for entries, furthering the goal of showing how people present their own lives in ways that are even more authentic than traditional documentaries.

"It's our creative endeavor, as documentarians, to present authentic facets of China, highlighting how each individual establishes themselves in a rapidly developing society," Sun says.

She says the clips initially enabled her to experience the occupations and lifestyles of grassroots individuals she hadn't learned about before.

"We often had to scroll through all the videos uploaded by a particular user. In this process, we became involved in a small fraction of their lives, experienced their joys and sorrows, and got to know their humorous and courageous personalities," Sun says.

She further realized that although these groups may lead lives unlike hers and those of other urbanites, their lives are actually in many ways interdependent. Farmers and manual laborers are the producers of food, clothing and

buildings — the necessities of life.

The film compiles clips according to chapters based on these categories, including transportation, accommodation and, as the last theme, home.

"Home is where we set off from and where we return to," Sun says. "Perhaps the most important thing for Chinese people is to go home for Spring Festival. Our attachment to our hometowns is a deep-rooted part of traditional culture."

The film shows women working in traditionally male-dominated blue-collar settings, such as on cargo ships, on construction sites and aboard rafts, using comorants to fish.

"We consciously highlighted sectors dominated by women, such as textiles," producer Wang Jing says.

She says they also sought to present the fact that a lot of women are working in male-dominated industries, and are making even more effort than men to get these jobs.

"We hope that the women in these industries will be seen through the medium of film. If the documentary can raise awareness among viewers of both genders, and inspire discussions on these topics, then our efforts will have proved worthwhile."

This Is Life is the first-ever "vertical film" — the silver screen is able to simultaneously show five vertical mobile phone screens, which allows for the comparison and contrast of five videos.

"In the early days of cinema, when Auguste and Louis Lumiere produced *The Arrival of a Train*, it was a straightforward and crude shot. I feel that in modern times, when everyone can capture footage with their smartphones, it is a valuable opportunity to reflect on the definition of what is a film," Wang says.

"We often have certain expectations based on the majority of movies shown in cinemas. But my understanding is that they're able to bring us emotional experiences and visual expressions without being restricted by norms."

She says compiling these short videos into an 80-minute documentary also serves as an enduring historical record that will allow future generations to look back in time and reflect on these moments recorded by ordinary people.

"We hope that even as time flows, our efforts could help carve out a place in history for these select short videos, so that people in the future can more easily rediscover them and reconnect with these moments that have touched us deeply," Wang adds.

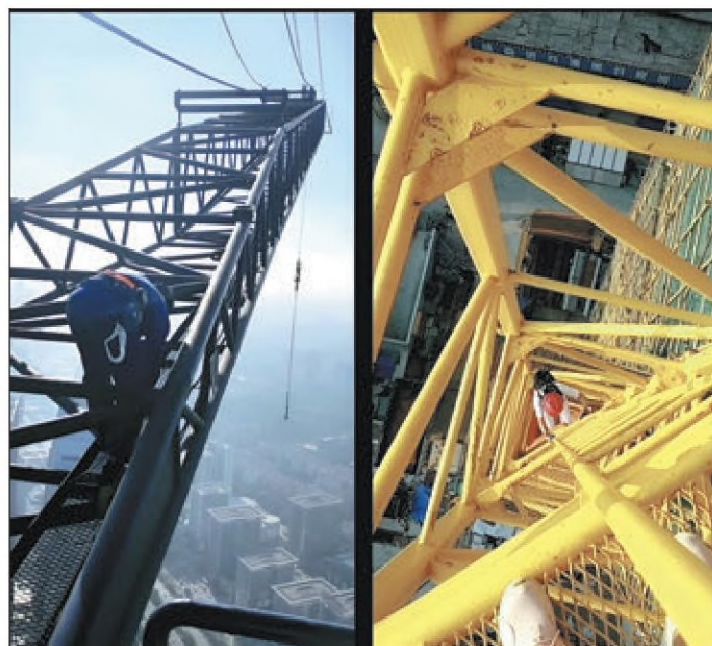
Since Jan 6, the film has embarked on its roadshow theatrical release in cities across China. A series of special screenings are also being organized, including screenings inviting those whose footage has been selected, as well as for children, parents and urbanites.

Merchandise has also been produced, including lenticular tickets (tickets with two images that can only be seen from different angles), woven bags, hoodies, and Chinese couplets and red envelopes to ring in the Lunar New Year.

"The first time I watched *This Is Life*, I was immediately drawn to its contemporaneity," says renowned film director Jia Zhangke.

"This film carries significant experimental value in a contemporary context, representing new modes of expression and ways of life."

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Top: The film *This Is Life* aims to highlight the lives of underrepresented groups with videos they have taken themselves. **Above:** A scene from the film that shows tower crane operators climbing up the towers. **Left:** A poster of *This Is Life*. **Right:** A construction worker practices Chinese calligraphy in his spare time.

