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# CHINA DAILY

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## New Antarctic station opens

Xi says Qinling base will further bolster Chinese, global polar research efforts

By ZHAO LEI zhaolei@chinadaily.com.cn

China's fifth research station in Antarctica, the Qinling Station, commenced operations on Wednesday morning on Inexpressible Island in the Terra Nova Bay of the world's southernmost continent.

In a letter to polar researchers on Wednesday, President Xi Jinping congratulated them on the completion of the building of the station and its operation, and urged them to continue to work hard and innovate.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, extended his sincere greetings and Chinese Lunar New Year wishes to people working on polar research.

Noting that this year marks the 40th anniversary of China's polar expedition, Xi said the nation's polar research has achieved fruitful results and the completion of the Qinling Station will provide a strong guarantee for scientists in China and around the world to continue to explore the mysteries of nature and bravely ascend the peak of science.

He called for better understanding, protection and utilization of the polar regions to make new and greater contributions to the benefit of humanity and the building of a community with a shared future for humanity.

The Qinling Station can accommodate 80 people in the summer and 30 in the winter, according to the Polar Research Institute of China, which was in charge of the station's construction.

The station, with an area of 5,244 square meters, has an external shape resembling the Southern Cross constellation, a unique design to honor Zheng He, a legendary admiral, mariner and diplomat in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), the institute said.

The ancient Chinese invented astronavigation, and Zheng He was



Above: The Qinling Station, China's fifth Antarctic research station, is shown on Wednesday, when it was inaugurated. The station, which will be staffed year-round, is situated on Inexpressible Island in the Terra Nova Bay, and covers an area of 5,244 square meters. ZHANG TJUN / XINHUA Below: A ceremony is held on Wednesday to mark the launch of China's Qinling research station in Antarctica. ZHOU YUAN / XINHUA

among the first to use it during many of his voyages.

All of the large components of the new Antarctic research station were built in China, with inner hardware already mounted and then transported to Inexpressible Island for assembly.

Engineers used lightweight, high-strength materials at the station, making it able to resist extreme temperatures as low as -60 C and the corrosive environment on the island.

Construction work, which started in December, was conducted by members of the nation's 40th Antarctic expedition, which set off from Shanghai in early November and arrived in Antarctica later that month.

Before Qinling, China had constructed four research stations in Antarctica — Changcheng, Zhongshan, Taishan and Kunlun.

The new station is China's third Antarctic research base to be operational throughout the year, alongside Changcheng and Zhongshan, which were both built in the late 1980s.

Currently, the Kunlun and Taishan stations operate only during the summer.

At a news conference on Wednesday



day afternoon, Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said the Qinling Station will serve to bolster mankind's knowledge about Antarctica, advance the peaceful and sustainable development of the southernmost continent and act as a platform for joint exploration. China places high attention on the scientific research and peaceful development of polar regions. So

far, the nation has conducted 40 expeditions to Antarctica and 13 to the Arctic, obtaining a great deal of scientific data and many samples.

He Jianfeng, a scientist at the Polar Research Institute of China, said the Qinling Station will enable researchers to carry out investigation about the waters, glaciers, ice shelves, weather, environment and animals in Antarctica.

## Return of relic from US to China a sign of friendship

By LIA ZHU and CHANG JUN in Portland, Oregon, and WANG KAIHAO in Beijing

A 2,800-year-old Chinese bronze relic that had gone missing after being stolen overseas 40 years ago was recently returned to its motherland, in a fresh instance of relic protection cooperation between China and the United States, the National Cultural Heritage Administration announced on Wednesday.

The bronze ritual vessel, named Feng Xingshu Gui, was believed to have been crafted during the last century of the Western Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century to 771 BC).

The vessel, which is 18 centimeters high and 21 cm in diameter and weighs about 6 kilograms, is composed of a large bowl that has double handles in the design of a coiled-nose animal face and rests on three feet shaped like those of an animal. It also features abstract animal designs and patterns in the shape of eaves tiles.

The treasure was flown from San Francisco and arrived in Beijing on Jan 28, the heritage administration said. A panel of expert appraisers was organized to take a close look at the artifact the next day.

Based on its comprehensive analysis of the vessel's artistic patterns, materials, decorative arts and inscriptions, as well as old photos and historical files that were used for reference, the panel confirmed that the repatriated item was the original Feng Xingshu Gui, a top-level cultural relic of China.

An inscription cast in the interior of the vessel says it was "crafted by Xingshu (a nobleman) of the Feng (vassal) state, dedicated to his wife, Boji, and is a treasure for all his generations to come".

The Western Zhou Dynasty developed the practice of inscribing ritual vessels. The inscriptions were meant to communicate the owners' political and social achievements, for their ancestors and future generations to admire. Historians generally believe that

inscriptions are the most striking feature of bronze ware of that time.

In 1978, the bronze vessel was excavated from a cellar in Fufeng county of Baoji, Shaanxi province. It was later housed in a local museum, but on Nov 5, 1984, it was stolen by burglars, and its whereabouts remained unknown.

Since the theft 40 years ago, China had never given up looking for it, according to Li Qun, director of the National Cultural Heritage Administration.

Decades later, when Raymond King, an entrepreneur based in Portland in the US state of Oregon, was helping his mother clear out old belongings in her New York apartment, little did they realize that a bronze vessel nestled among other antiques was the long-lost treasure.

However, King discovered its origin last year when he invited a researcher at Sotheby's auction house to look at his mother's collection. The next day he was told the bronze had been stolen from China.

"My grandfather got it from a dealer ... and then gave it to my mother," King told China Daily. "We had no idea (when or for how much it was bought), but once we understood it was stolen, my mom's reaction was just, 'Give it back!'"

"Raymond King and his mother resolutely decided to do the right thing. They agreed to unconditionally return the artifact to the Chinese government, an act that is truly admirable," Li said in a video message played at the repatriation ceremony held at the Portland Art Museum in late January.

Also commendable was the international cooperation and a shared appreciation for the cultural heritage, he added.

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The Feng Xingshu Gui bronze ritual vessel from the Western Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century-771 BC) PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## HOW TIDES OF CHANGE TRANSFORMED YUNDANG LAKE

Good governance, environmental innovations rejuvenate formerly polluted area

By LI HONGYANG and HU MEIDONG in Xiamen, Fujian

Zuo Lihua, 80, recalled the grim conditions of polluted lakefronts in the coastal city of Xiamen, Fujian province, four decades ago, when chickens, ducks and pigs freely roamed crowded streets.



In the early 1980s, Yundang Lake was one of the worst — a body of water spoiled by sewage, garbage and pest infestations. The putrid

conditions were in stark contrast to the vibrant community that now flourishes around the lake's rejuvenated environment.

The lake, once part of bustling Yundang Port, has since been cleaned up to become a thriving urban haven thanks to a succession of measures taken by

researchers and local authorities.

Nowadays, Zuo, a retired nurse, regularly goes for hourlong walks in a park near the lake. She also takes advantage of a newly built fitness trail and enjoys looking at egrets that hover around the body of water.

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## Group of 77 leads pursuit of a fairer global order

The Third South Summit, held in Kampala, Uganda, in January, concluded with Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni urging the Group of 77 to persist in championing the interests of the Global South and working toward transforming the existing international order into a more equitable one.

Aligned with the theme of the Kampala summit, which was "Leaving No One Behind", the emerging new world order should aspire to be inclusive. It should avoid fostering divisions between the South and the North, or the East and the West. Instead, the new world order should strive to establish a more equitable framework, under which prosperity is shared more fairly among nations.

Formally established in 1964, the G77 emerged as a group of developing countries aiming to collectively address economic



By Dato Majid Khan and Peter T.C. Chang

issues and strengthen their position in international forums. Over the years, the G77 has undergone significant growth, both in terms of its membership and the scope of its agenda. Originally focused on economic matters, the group has evolved to address pressing global issues, such as climate change, sustainable development and social justice.

The G77 is a heterogeneous community comprising member states that represent a rich tapestry of cultural traditions, that are in various stages of economic growth, and that have divergent political ideologies. Furthermore, within the group internal contentions add

another layer of challenges.

Nevertheless, the countries of the Global South share a common vision, namely, to bring about change to the existing international order to better advance the interests of the developing world. Indeed, the Kampala summit marked a historic moment, reminiscent of the Bandung Conference, in which the opportunity to actualize the post-colonial aspiration of full economic and political independence has never been more opportune. Therefore, it is crucial for the G77 to unite to press for reform of the existing world order, ensuring that it better reflects the realities of the world today and fosters a global environment conducive to the well-being of all nations.

A noteworthy aspect of the G77's collaborative efforts is its partnership with China. Together, they

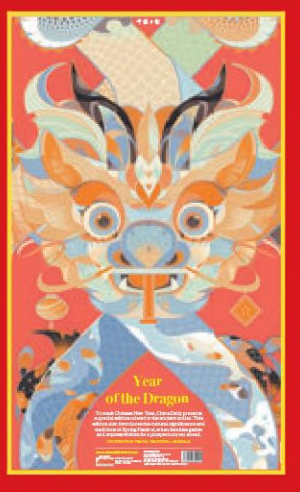
strategically advocate within international forums, presenting a unified front on issues of common concern and contributing to shaping global policies that align with the shared principles of the countries of the Global South.

To that end, China, as an emerging world power, has a crucial role to play. The Belt and Road Initiative, for instance, puts China in a leading position to shape an alternative economic order that advances the well-being of humankind. Through initiatives such as this, China has the opportunity to contribute significantly to the establishment of a global economic framework that prioritizes cooperation and mutual benefit, thereby fostering the prosperity and progress of nations worldwide.

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TO OUR READERS

We wish our readers a prosperous Year of the Dragon. A special Year of the Dragon edition will be published on Friday, Feb 9. We will be back on Monday, Feb 19.



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In the 1970s, a crucial change happened with the construction of a western embankment, transforming Yundang Port into a sprawling lake, according to the Ministry of Natural Resources. The port, which was connected to the sea, covered 10 square kilometers while the area of Yundang Lake was 2.2 square kilometers.

However, in the early 1980s rapid economic development brought industrial pollution and fish and shrimp disappeared from the lake. Back then, more than 100 polluting enterprises, including paper mills, tanneries, breweries, and electroplating factories, discharged wastewater into Yundang.

**Xi leads action**

A meeting chaired by Xi Jinping, then serving as executive vice mayor of Xiamen, in 1988 set in motion a comprehensive strategy to revitalize the lake.

The meeting outlined a plan that detailed legal governance, stopping pollution, dredging work, revitalization of the body of water and improvement of the surrounding environment.

In the same year, the Standing Committee of the People's Congress of Xiamen passed the "Accelerating the Comprehensive Improvement of Yundang Lake" proposal, which outlined the principles for restoration work.

At that time, 45 percent of the city's industrial wastewater and half of Xiamen's domestic sewage was discharged into the lake. Cutting off sources of pollution and treating sewage were crucial steps to improving the water quality, according to the local government. The Xiamen government eventually shut down or relocated major polluting industrial plants.

Supervision of Xiamen's drainage system was also stepped up and a major innovation was introduced.

Wang Yanyan, chief engineer of Xiamen's Municipal Affairs and Gardens Bureau, said they now manage the city's drainage system for both residential and business areas.

The bureau regularly inspects and supervises renovations and new construction in business areas to ensure polluting waste doesn't make its way into the waterways. "We instruct business owners to install the necessary infrastructure, including grease traps, and to also obtain drainage permits before they renovate business premises," she said.

The preventive approach aims to stop grease and waste from blocking drainage systems. There are also two drainage systems that separate rainwater from wastewater. The wastewater is then treated before being discharged into rivers and lakes, she said.

"The drainage management authority tracks and manages the system. It's like a doctor regularly tracking (the system's) health and taking care of it," Wang said.

The Xiamen government has also used tidal differentials to connect the lake to the sea, facilitating water exchanges during low and high tides. This movement of water has transformed the once stagnant lake into a dynamic and thriving ecosystem and promoted a healthier aquatic environment.

**Sea dikes removed**

In the 1920s, Xiamen began expanding its area by reclaiming land from the East Sea through the building of dikes.

Back then, travel from Xiamen Island relied heavily on shipping. Sea dikes not only guarded against waves, but also enabled rail lines and highways to be built to better connect



Left and right: Residents dance while others feed pigeons in a park beside Yundang Lake in Xiamen, Fujian province.



PHOTOS BY WANG DONGMING / CHINA NEWS SERVICE



An aerial view of sprawling Yundang Lake that connects to the sea in Xiamen. ZENG DEMENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Xiamen: From polluted lake to clean, green city oasis

the city to outside areas and boost economic growth.

The sea dikes, including one near Yundang Port, enhanced industries such as salt fields and aquaculture. However, the dikes also created a pollution problem.

Pan Shijian, former vice chairman of the Xiamen Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, said: "Xiamen experiences two influxes of seawater from the Taiwan Strait, bringing clean seawater into the city. If we were to fill in the bay and turn it into land, our tidal inflow would greatly decrease, leading to a dismal future for this city."

"Despite the large cost and efforts, the Xiamen government made a resolute decision to open up the sea walls and clear millions of cubic meters of sediment, introducing seawater into bays."

Xiamen removed all the dikes that it could. Those needed for flood management and tide control were kept, and sluice gates or additional openings were added. Since 1988, Xiamen has opened seven sea dikes, including ones at Yundang Lake and Maluan Bay, the Ministry of Natural Resources said.

With the completion of sea-cross-



Egrets perch around Yundang Lake. CHEN XIAORONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

ing bridges and tunnels such as the Xiamen Bridge, Haicang Bridge and Xiang'an Tunnel, the transportation functions once shouldered by the sea dikes have gradually diminished. The sea dikes had curbed Xiamen's efforts to improve the environment and achieve high-quality urban development, the ministry said.

"Returning much of the land to

the sea is something you may find hard to imagine. It required a significant amount of money and it seemed unbelievable at the time," Pan said.

**Mangroves restored**

So far, the renovation of Yundang Lake has cost about 1.99 billion yuan (\$277 million).

"We are not only engaged in

environmental restoration, but also preserving our city's culture," Pan said.

"For example, our sailing sports lead the way in China. People in Xiamen no longer just observe the sea from the shore. They can now sail and see dolphins in the sea. It has changed our lifestyle."

To restore wetlands, the city's forestry bureau and Xiamen University planted mangroves along lakefronts and seashores.

The mangrove restoration projects were done in "forest-friendly" areas including Yundang Lake and Tong'an Bay. The area of mangrove forests in Xiamen increased from around 33 hectares in 2000 to 174 hectares in 2023, the ministry said.

As mangrove plantations expanded, marine ecosystems flourished, with water birds returning to nest and frolic.

In the past, coastal waters in Xiamen suffered from severe eutrophication — an overabundance of nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus in water caused by excessive aquaculture and haphazard development.

As a result, the native mangrove forests, known for their crucial

role in protecting coastlines and mitigating the impact of waves, disappeared.

Yang Shengchang, an associate professor of environmental studies at Xiamen University, said: "Replanting mangroves by the sea posed challenges. The elevation of the plant above mud flats had to be carefully considered to avoid long submersion that could hinder sapling growth."

"Selecting suitable species required extensive experimentation to ensure adaptability to the local environment. Moreover, the planting density had to be the best to withstand tidal forces without being washed away."

**'Chopstick' technology**

To address these challenges, researchers at Xiamen University developed a patented chopstick seedling technology.

"A seedling without enough height has difficulty surviving. We use a chopstick to raise the height of the seedling so its survival rate has become higher," Yang said.

The research team conducts regular monitoring to ensure the growth of the plant.

These efforts have revived the once-dwindling mangrove areas and increased protection of vital coastal ecosystems, providing a sanctuary for thousands of egrets during the nesting season.

Chinese modernization aims for harmonious coexistence between people and nature. Respecting nature, and conforming to and protecting it are requirements of this belief, the ministry said while commenting on the environmental protection practices in place in Xiamen.

Luo Ming, director of the Ministry of Natural Resources' Key Laboratory of Consolidation and Rehabilitation, said Xiamen adopted nature-based solutions to mitigate environmental damage at every stage of the restoration project, be it planning, design or implementation.

"With more people and less land, Xiamen's water resources are scarce, so sustainable development is extremely critical," she said. "Habitat loss resulting from extensive urban development, such as the filling of lakes in Xiamen, used to be a challenge."

Global ecosystem restoration standards focus on eliminating threats, establishing local ecosystems and reconnecting restored ecosystems with their external environments, she said, adding that's how Xiamen achieved its goals.

The effectiveness of this approach relies on enhancing urban resilience in the face of climate change, promoting "sponge land" for sustainable water management and protecting biodiversity by restoring natural habitats for species like migratory egrets.

Xiamen also managed to achieve its environmental protection targets without sacrificing economic growth. The city only accounts for 1.4 percent of Fujian's land area, but in 2022 it accounted for 14.7 percent of the province's GDP, up from 13.2 percent in 2000. Nearly half of the province's import and export value was from the city, and the per capita disposable annual income in Xiamen was about 68,000 yuan in 2022.

Meanwhile, the water quality compliance rate of major river basins has been maintained at 100 percent for many years, the local government said.

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## Urban nature reserve a lesson in species protection

By LI MENGHAN and HU MEIDONG in Xiamen, Fujian

In downtown Xiamen, Fujian province, a 6-meter-high mound that stretches for 60 to 70 meters stands in stark contrast to the surrounding high-rise buildings.

The mound sits in the center of a 3-hectare reserve in Huli district and is a vital sanctuary for the blue-tailed bee-eaters, which is under second-level State protection.

The blue-tailed bee-eater, or *Merops philippinus*, is renowned for its colorful plumage and on the Chinese mainland is found in coastal provinces such as Fujian, Hainan and Guangdong.

Every spring, they migrate to China to breed and in winter they return to Southeast Asian coun-

tries including Myanmar, Thailand and the Philippines.

The Huli nesting site and a 37-hectare foraging site 2 kilometers away make up the Wuyuanwan Nature Reserve, the first reserve for the blue-tailed bee-eaters on the Chinese mainland.

Established in 2011 as Xiamen's inaugural city-level nature reserve in an urban area, it provides a crucial habitat for the species.

In recent years, with improved environmental conditions in Xiamen and increased attention to biodiversity, the blue-tailed bee-eaters have become regular visitors and their recorded population has seen a slight increase.

"Before 2015, we observed some 70 to 80 birds in the area," said Cai Libo, director of the Nature Reserve

Affairs Center in Xiamen.

In 2023, over 200 of the birds were observed at the nesting site and more than 3,000 at the foraging site, Cai said.

Peng Zhiwei, head of the bird-watching association in Xiamen, said due to the challenges posed by coastal development in China, the birds should have national priority protection.

Peng said that he was impressed by the city government's commitment to nature conservation despite the high cost of putting aside land in the downtown area. The nesting habits of blue-tailed bee-eaters require designated places that need to be maintained, he said.

Every year when the birds arrive at the habitat, they use their beaks

and claws to dig into the porous mound and spend around 10 days building a tunnel 60 to 100 centimeters long to house their nests.

The birds, which are sensitive to smell, build a new nest every year. Therefore, the mound must be cleared and refilled after the blue-tailed bee-eaters fly south.

"Fledgling blue-tailed bee-eaters depend on their parents for food, heat and protection during the 20-day incubation period, so the nest and foraging sites require proximity," said Peng. The diverse plant species in Xiamen provide ample insects for the birds, including dragonflies, butterflies, and bees, he added.

To better safeguard their habitat, the city government issued a notice in 2017, establishing a pro-

protective zone around the nesting site prohibiting noise and pollution-producing industries, such as catering, entertainment and auto repairs.

"Our 13-year experience of preserving blue-tailed bee-eaters has given us a grasp of their habits and made the Wuyuanwan Nature Reserve a stable habitat for them. I can see the potential for international collaboration to monitor migration patterns and enhance the protection of this species. Wildlife preservation transcends boundaries," Peng said.

Established in 2019, the Wuyuan River National Wetland Park in Haikou, Hainan province, learned from the successful experiences of Xiamen. Since last year, the 8.39-hectare nature reserve has imposed a ban on large numbers of tourists and bird watchers who might scare the birds away during the breeding season.



The blue-tailed bee-eater, or *Merops philippinus*. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

# TOP NEWS

## Swimming dragon



Members of the media take pictures as divers perform a dragon dance as part of the Lunar New Year celebrations at the Sea Life Bangkok Ocean World aquarium in Bangkok, Thailand, on Tuesday. ATHIT PERAWONGMETHA / REUTERS

## Belgian zoo owner hopes to help strengthen friendship with China

By MO JINGXI  
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About 60 kilometers south of Brussels, Belgium, a privately-owned wildlife park called Paire Daiza is home to five giant pandas that live in its Chinese garden and are the star attractions for visitors.

Eric Domb, founder and president of Paire Daiza, said the five pandas have thousands of fans. "When we had to cancel the birthday celebrations for the giant pandas due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many visitors felt deeply saddened," he said.

Domb mentions a "crazy" visitor who calls himself Papi Panda, meaning Grandpa Panda in French, who even moved homes in order to be close to the giant pandas, whom he comes to see every day.

In 2014, China and Belgium embarked on a joint panda conservation cooperation and research with the arrival of Hao Hao and Xing Hui at Paire Daiza as part of a 15-year loan agreement. In 2016, they gave birth to male cub Tian Bao, the first giant panda cub born in Belgium. In 2019, the twins — male Bao Di and female Bao Mei — were born.

"I loved China long before we got the pandas," said Domb, who has nurtured a profound affection for China for more than 50 years, ever since he was a child and his

They (pandas) first attract people and then invite them to step into the Chinese garden to know more about the Chinese culture."



Eric Domb, founder and president of Paire Daiza, on how giant pandas are a good introduction to Chinese culture

parents explained to him that the soul of Chinese culture is pursuing a harmonious life.

Domb believes that the giant pandas are actually a good way for people to begin learning about Chinese culture. "They first attract people and then invite them to step into the Chinese garden to know more about Chinese culture," he said.

With waterfalls, rocks, plants, a red-painted tea pavilion and other traditional architecture, the Chinese garden was built in 2005 and is the largest in Europe.

When President Xi Jinping visited the Chinese garden in 2014 for the inauguration of the panda enclosure, Xi and the Belgian monarch, King Philippe, jointly planted a magnolia tree that symbolizes friendship between the two countries.

On an early June day last year, Domb came up with the idea of sending a letter to the Chinese president with a photo of the beautiful tree which was in full blossom when he had lunch with the Chinese Ambassador to Belgium Cao Zhongming and talked about the tree.

"I was totally amazed that just eight or nine days later, I received a reply from President Xi, emphasizing the efforts China has made so far toward wildlife conservation and encouraging me to reinforce the friendship between the Chinese people and the Belgians and the European people," he recalled.

According to Domb, there are two opposite strategies in wildlife conservation.

"I would say that one of these strategies is mainly the American strategy. That is to create a kind of wall between wildlife and humans. And the Chinese strategy, which is also shared in Europe by some countries like France and Belgium, is to find the best compromise," he said.

Domb said the Chinese wisdom of harmony between humanity

and nature can be found in ancient Chinese poems such as the one about people in the house hearing the sound of rain falling on plantain leaves written by the Song Dynasty's famous female poet Li Qingzhao (1084-1155).

Now China is showing the world how humans and wildlife can live in harmony together as the country has a huge population of over 1.4 billion people but is also home to a great variety of wildlife, he said.

This week, Domb was presented the Chinese Government Friendship Award for his contribution to China's exchanges and cooperation with other countries.

The award winner said it is his personal wish and also a pleasure to help people discover the real China.

"When you love people and you observe that these people are not really known by your relatives, you really have the push to say, 'No, open your eyes. They are really wonderful people,'" he said.

Now Domb wants to go much further by expanding the Chinese garden into an authentic ancient Chinese village where people can stay for a few nights.

"I think that if you want to give a good illustration of the philosophy of Confucius, you need to have a garden, which is the symbol of the water of nature. And you also need to have a city, a place where people live together. And this could be the village. So I think it's very interesting to show that cities can live in harmony with the natural environment," he said.

"The core message of Confucius is to live in harmony and I think that is the future," he said.

## Service centers launched at Beijing airports

Foreign visitors can exchange 21 currencies at kiosk, seek guidance on using mobile wallets

By LI MENGHAN and LUO WANGSHU

Beijing Capital International Airport and Beijing Daxing International Airport, the two airports in the Chinese capital, have launched dedicated payment service centers for the convenience of overseas travelers.

The centers, which were inaugurated on Monday, are strategically located near the exit of the international arrival halls at the airports and offer a wide range of services to cater to the diverse payment needs of foreign visitors.

Their primary objective is to offer comprehensive payment consultation and guidance to foreign visitors who arrive in Beijing. Travelers can seek assistance with downloading mobile payment applications and using ATMs for cash withdrawals, among other services.

A key feature of the Capital Airport's payment service center is an automated currency exchange machine. According to the two staff members at the center, the machine can interact with users in eight languages and exchange 21 currencies, effectively meeting the cash needs of a majority of overseas visitors. In addition, the center has an ATM for cash withdrawals.

Currently, the two airports collectively host five bank outlets, seven manned currency exchange counters, 24 ATMs and one automated currency exchange machine, while most businesses at the airports accept foreign bank cards.

According to the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, payment inconvenience experienced by some foreign visitors largely stems from the disparity in payment practices between China and other nations.

To address this issue, the PBOC and the State Administration of Foreign Exchange have prioritized key tasks such as mobile payments, acceptance of overseas bank cards, cash use and account services.

In other words, a comprehensive solution is being developed to facilitate payment services for foreign visitors in China, with the aim of resolving the payment challenges that they encounter.

Last year, the central bank said that China will continue to work on accepting foreign bank cards and facilitating mobile payments, cash use and account services, in order to create a more convenient payment environment for foreign visitors.

In China, mobile wallets such as Alipay and WeChat Pay are the most popular for financial transactions because they offer the convenience of just scanning a QR code using a smartphone to make payments.

However, in many foreign countries and overseas regions, cash and bank cards remain the preferred means of payment, posing challenges for travelers to China.

Karen Cunha, from Brazil, who recently visited China to see the Great Wall, said the country's mobile wallet practice took her by surprise. "It was my first time in China, and no one had told me about the payment system," she said.

Upon arrival in Beijing, Cunha and her friend tried to book a taxi, only to discover that credit card payments were not accepted. "We had to return to the airport, find an ATM and withdraw 300 yuan in cash," she said, adding that they found the ATM cash withdrawal service very convenient.

Martin Vonriedmatten, from Switzerland, who has visited China on 10 occasions, recalled the initial challenges he faced when making payments and highlighted the importance of cash withdrawal and currency exchange machines.

During his most recent trip, a shop at his hotel declined to accept international card payments, so he had to withdraw cash first. "I was staying only for two days," he said, adding that getting a mobile wallet didn't seem like a convenient option for such a short duration.

However, Jayant Uppal, from London, said he finds both Alipay and WeChat Pay wallets very convenient. Having previously worked for a Chinese enterprise in China, he had opened mobile wallet accounts using his passport and foreign bank account.

"It's very convenient to buy things and pay for them in China (if you use the mobile wallets)," Uppal said, adding that in recent years, China has made sincere efforts to improve the overall experience of foreign visitors, and there are fewer obstacles for foreigners traveling to or working and studying in the country.

Yan Zhongqian contributed to this story. Contact the writers at luowangshu@chinadaily.com.cn



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## Catching the train home



Travelers arrive with their luggage at the Beijing West Railway Station to catch their trains on Wednesday. China Railway estimated that a total of 480 million railway trips will be made during this year's Spring Festival travel rush, which will end on March 5. ANDY WONG / AP

## G77: Reform of international institutions imperative

From page 1

A central theme of the summit revolved around the importance of upholding international law and fostering deeper cooperation to tackle collective challenges. A pivotal focus was the imperative to reform existing international institutions, including the United Nations, to more accurately reflect the interests and values of the G77.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who attended the summit, said: "Let us face the reality that those benefiting most from the current global governance system are unlikely to lead its reform. Thus, the impetus for change must come from you."

His message was clear: For the world order to become fairer, the G77 must take the lead in promoting reform of global governance structures.

The G77 should also actively contribute to the resolution of conflicts, such as those in Ukraine and Gaza. The recent case in which South Africa brought allegations of genocide against Israel to the UN International Court of Justice highlights the important role that countries in the Global South can play in advocating for rights and justice on the international stage. The Kampala summit highlighted

the developing world's aspiration for a new international system. The time has come for the G77 and China to usher in a new global order that is inclusive, just and equitable.

Dato Majid Khan is president of the Malaysia-China Friendship Association. Peter T.C. Chang is a research associate at the University of Malaya's Institute of China Studies. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## Relic: Exchange called example of building bridges

From page 1

The London-based Art Loss Register put Feng Xingshu Gui in its own database after Interpol listed it as stolen art in 2017. When the Sotheby's researcher contacted the Art Loss Register about the bronze vessel, the register informed the Chinese embassy in London and was later connected with the office for recovery and restitution of cultural prop-

erty at the National Cultural Heritage Administration in Beijing. "The returning of the relic is a key fruit of implementing the consensus reached by the state leaders of China and the US in San Francisco (in November)," Li said.

He added that the repatriation of Feng Xingshu Gui is an example of different countries taking concerted action to fight the illicit trafficking of cultural property, and it was also an

outcome of 15 years of China-US cooperation in cultural heritage protection, fostered by a memorandum of understanding first signed in 2009.

In January, the agreement, renewed in 2014 and 2019, was extended for another five years. It will act as a guideline for US Customs and Border Protection officers to restrict the importing of "archaeological materials representing China's cultural heritage from the

Paleolithic period through the end of Tang Dynasty (618-907)."

Between 2009 and 2023, a total of 504 Chinese cultural relics were returned from the US to China on 15 occasions, thanks to bilateral judicial cooperation based on the agreement.

The vessel's journey isn't just about the repatriation, but is also a testament to the power of shared heritage in building bridges between cultures, said Brian Ferriso, director

of the Portland Art Museum.

"Culture connects us across time and place. Objects such as this ancient bronze provide a meaningful insight into Chinese culture. And this exchange itself serves as another opportunity to build bridges between China and the United States," he said.

That sentiment resonated with Zhang Jianmin, the Chinese consul-general in San Francisco, who praised the repatriation as an "important achievement of cultural exchanges" between the two nations.

"We will also remember and cherish the friendship of our American

friends who have made this return possible," said Zhang, who presented King and his mother with a certificate of donation for their generosity.

For King, the return wasn't a grand gesture, but a simple act of righting a wrong.

"I don't think it's really ours to donate," he told China Daily. "I feel great that it's going to where it belongs. Maybe one day it'd be nice to visit the museum" where the relic will be housed in China.

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## CHINA



**Left:** Workers remove ice and snow on power lines in Zhanjiapo village, Xiangyang, Hubei province, on Tuesday. YANG TAO / FOR CHINA DAILY  
**Below:** A traffic police officer pushes a stuck car on an expressway in Wuhan, Hubei province, after a heavy snowfall. REN YONG / FOR CHINA DAILY



## No extreme weather expected during holiday

By LI MENGHAN and LI HONGYANG

China is expected to experience fluctuations in temperatures but no large-scale disastrous weather during the upcoming Spring Festival holiday, meteorological experts said at a news conference on Wednesday.

Zhang Hengde, deputy director of the National Meteorological Center, said that temperatures in most areas of the country will rise first and then drop, and average temperatures will be higher than normal. Experts don't expect any widespread rain, snow or freezing weather, nor any persistent fog and haze during the holiday.

"From Chinese New Year's Eve to the fourth day of the lunar year, China will experience sunny and cloudy weather with a significant rise in temperatures in most areas," said

Zhang, adding that temperatures in central and eastern China will increase by 4 to 10 C.

He said that gusts of cold air are expected to affect central and eastern China toward the end of the holiday. From Feb 14 to 17, or from the fifth day to the eighth day of the lunar calendar, some areas in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region and Heilongjiang province will experience temperature drops of 10 to 12 C, while others will see declines of over 14 C. The eastern part of northeast China will experience moderate to heavy snow during the period.

"Though the recent round of snow and freezing rain will end on Feb 8, special attention should be paid to the potential risks of secondary disasters brought about by rising temperatures and melting snow and ice

in provinces such as Hubei, Hunan and Anhui, Zhang said.

Though weather conditions will not have a major impact on road traffic during the holiday, Pei Shunqiang, deputy director at the China Meteorological Administration's public meteorological service center, warned motorists to be mindful of rainy and snowy weather in the northeast.

According to the Ministry of Transport, many people will start returning to work at that time, so more people are expected to be on the roads that day.

Pei said that owners of new energy vehicles should charge their cars in advance, and energy departments should strengthen inspections of electrical facilities and guarantee that power supplies are stable.

Zhang also warned of the poten-

tial risks of intermittent fog or haze to travelers in North China, the Yellow River-Huaihe River region and the coastal areas of South China during the holiday.

Due to global warming and the El Nino phenomenon, China has experienced higher temperatures and more extreme climate conditions in recent years.

The country's average temperature last year was 10.71 C, 0.82 C higher than normal and the highest since 1951. Floods and droughts were prominent, though last year's precipitation level was the second lowest since 2012, according to the annual China Climate Bulletin that was issued by the China Meteorological Administration on Wednesday.

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## Hainan gets to grips with long queues at ports

Emergency measures taken to reduce wait times during Spring Festival rush

By CHEN BOWEN in Haikou  
[chenbowen@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:chenbowen@chinadaily.com.cn)

Since the beginning of this year's Spring Festival travel rush on Jan 26, the Qiongzhou Strait has teemed with ferries transporting vehicles between the provinces of Hainan and Guangdong, despite fog and wind occasionally posing challenges for the busy waterway.

To mitigate the long queues of vehicles leaving the island, Hainan has expanded parking spaces and increased the availability of ferry tickets, according to the Ministry of Transport.

During the first 10 days of the travel rush, 1,169,700 passengers and 273,100 vehicles have traveled the Qiongzhou Strait to and from the island, an annual increase of 31.8 percent and 17 percent, respectively, said Liu Peng, deputy director of the Hainan Provincial Department of Transport, at a news conference held on Monday.

He said travel on both sides of the strait has remained at a high level this year, with a notable increase in the proportion of large trucks compared to previous years.

Even with ships and ports operating at full capacity, as many as 6,000 vehicles at a time have queued up for ferry travel in Haikou during peak times.

Liu highlighted that, through collaborative efforts, emergency transport measures have managed to reduce the queue and wait times at ports.

As of 2 pm on Monday, the number of vehicles waiting to cross from the three ports in Haikou, Hainan's capital, has decreased from 6,000 to 1,513.

Furthermore, the wait time for passenger cars departing from Guangdong to the island has been reduced to less than three hours.

Additional ferry tickets went on sale on Monday for vehicles leaving Hainan from the ports of Xinhai and Xiuying in Haikou.

The tickets can be purchased from 8 am to 10 am and from 8 pm to 10 pm daily, according to the WeChat account Qiongzhou Strait Ferry Manager.

On Monday, Xinhai Port introduced a new ferry service at 4:30 pm daily, especially for new energy vehicles departing the island.

This additional ferry aims to complement the existing two departures at 10:30 am and 8:30 pm. Each ferry can transport up to 18 new energy vehicles.

For the travel rush, 54 passenger and vehicle ferries have been deployed and 25 berths have been allocated at Haikou's three ports — Xinhai, Xiuying and South Railway Port — according

“

This service can make a big difference for my journey. It truly showcases the warmth and kindness of the people of Hainan.”

A passenger surnamed Huang, who received biscuits, mineral water and porridge from a service station for drivers waiting for ferries in Haikou, Hainan province

to Zhu Huomeng, deputy general manager of Hainan Harbor and Shipping Holding Co.

He said the company is committed to improving its shipping capabilities by increasing the number of crew members. It recently hired nearly 300 mariners to help ensure that the company can meet transportation needs, especially during peak traffic periods.

He also noted that all staff members have chosen to not take leave during the Spring Festival holiday, showing their dedication to serve during this critical time.

Feng Fei, Party secretary of Hainan, emphasized the importance of fostering a robust service-oriented mindset, streamlining the cross-strait transportation reservation system, achieving precise loading times and improving ferry transport efficiency during his visit to Xinhai Port to assess cross-strait transportation operations on Sunday.

Xiuying district in Haikou has set up four volunteer service stations to provide round-the-clock assistance for drivers waiting around the three ports, including offering water, food and information cards.

A passenger surnamed Huang received biscuits, mineral water and porridge from the service station on Tuesday.

"This service can make a big difference for my journey. It truly showcases the warmth and kindness of the people of Hainan," she said.

Li Zhongbiao, deputy secretary-general of the Haikou government, said: "We've made efforts to ensure basic necessities such as water, electricity, night lighting and public toilets in the waiting areas."

"We've also ensured sanitation, vehicle guidance and maintenance, and we have set up medical assistance service points at Xinhai Port, contributing to the well-being and convenience of travel for passengers."

## Internet celebrity promotes ice and snow culture

By ZHOU HUIYING in Harbin  
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Over the past month, Jiang Kedong has amassed over 2.7 million followers on Douyin, China's version of TikTok that has become one of the most popular short video platforms in the nation.

The 38-year-old is better known as "Bingcheng Zuoyouge" or "Brother Left and Right in Ice City," and has transitioned from being a local entertainer to a widely recognized internet celebrity, whose fame has coincided with the tourism boom this winter in Harbin, Heilongjiang province.

In 2012, Jiang became host of the Dream Stage at Harbin Ice and Snow World, which is celebrating its 25th year of operation this year.

His claim to fame, the "Rabbit Dance," marked by its playful left and right foot movements, has captured his followers' hearts with its catchy simplicity and has become a symbol of Harbin's vibrant spirit during this tourism surge.

"In the winter, temperatures can get to as low as -30 C in Harbin," he said.

"My original intention was to help tourists feel warmer in a world of ice and snow by following our instruc-



Jiang Kedong interacts with tourists in Harbin, Heilongjiang province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

tions and pace to join the game in an orderly manner."

Yang Qin, one of Jiang's followers on Douyin, was thrilled to hear Jiang's voice at the park during her visit to Harbin.

"Here is the Dream Stage of the Harbin Ice and Snow World, I am Bingcheng Zuoyouge," he announced.

Together with tens of thousands

of people, Yang cheered and danced following Jiang's instructions.

"It was my most important task during my trip to the city to see him in person," said Yang, who hails from Chongqing. "I also got the chance to dance with Jiang on stage, which left me with unforgettable memories in Harbin."

In 2017, Jiang began posting some short dance videos on the internet and livestreaming his performances at the park. His humorous style made the videos popular, and by the beginning of 2019, he had amassed 600,000 followers on Douyin.

Despite the outbreak of COVID-19, which forced the 21st Harbin Ice and Snow World to close only 19 days after its opening in 2020, Jiang continued to visit the park and livestream to introduce it to his followers.

"The popularity of Harbin is no accident. Since the beginning of 2023, we have been promoting Heilongjiang in a multidimensional way on new media platforms, establishing numerous destinations dubbed by netizens as must-visit attractions," He Jing, director of Heilongjiang's culture and tourism department, told China Central Television. "Moreover, we are also paying more attention to com-

ments made on online videos.

"We will do our best to meet tourists' needs," she said. "Some visitors said it would be better if the moon was shining when they took photos at Saint Sophia Cathedral, so we sent a drone to lift an artificial moon over the landmark. Others said it was too cold in Harbin, so we immediately built a number of small prefabricated houses to warm them up."

"All these details can make tourists feel comfortable and respected, and they post news of them on the internet, receiving a warm response," she said.

The local tourism department is also focusing on new media platforms, which play an important role in the development of the tourist industry.

As a Harbin native, ice and snow sports have accompanied Jiang from his childhood.

"My biggest wish is to participate in the 9th Asian Winter Games scheduled for February 2025 in Harbin, becoming a competition DJ to stand on the field of the highest level of competitive winter sports event in Asia," he said.

"Living in the ice city, I'm just like a snowflake flying in the world of ice and snow, and I hope to make more contributions to my hometown."

## Travel between mainland, Kinmen and Matsu increases

By HU MEIDONG in Fuzhou and ZHANG YI in Beijing

With the approach of this year's Spring Festival and cross-strait exchanges resuming, more Taiwan residents have been traveling to and from the Chinese mainland, leading to a substantial increase in cross-strait passenger flow compared to the same period last year.

During the period from the eve of Chinese New Year on Friday to Feb 17, the estimated number of passenger trips to be made on ferry routes between Fujian province and Taiwan is expected to exceed 30,000, with a daily average increase in passenger flow of about 7 percent compared to January, according to the border inspection authority in Fujian.

There are four cross-strait ferry routes — one between Xiamen in

Fujian and Kinmen, another between Quanzhou and Kinmen, and two between Fuzhou and Matsu — making it greatly convenient for people traveling between the two sides.

During the 40-day Spring Festival travel rush period, the Xiamen-Kinmen route is expected to see 640 ferry trips, with an estimated 100,000 passenger trips being made, a 22-fold increase compared to the same period last year, said Chen Jinlai, an officer from the Gaoqi Immigration Inspection Station in Xiamen.

The ferry terminal in Xiamen has put up traditional Chinese New Year decorations, and presented passengers with the Chinese character *fu*, meaning good fortune, to add a festive atmosphere, he said.

The passenger ferry route between Fujian's Lianjiang and Mat-

su is only 4.8 nautical miles, with a one-way journey taking only 25 minutes, making it the most time-saving route between the two sides. Since its resumption last year, passenger volume has exceeded 200,000, promoting exchanges between the two places.

Cao Guangtong, an officer from Fuzhou's maritime authority, said: "There are more passengers this year than last year. Every morning, a ferry comes from Matsu to Fuzhou, and in the afternoon, it returns. Occasionally, additional services are added."

"Many Taiwan passengers take this ferry to visit relatives on the mainland during Spring Festival because the distance between the two places is short, and many families have blood ties. When they return home, they like to buy a lot of

goods in Fuzhou, including various daily necessities and household appliances," he said.

A group of 50 Taiwan teachers and students took the ferry to Quanzhou last week to participate in exchange activities.

"The service was attentive, and the environment was clean. In the future, cross-strait exchanges will definitely become more convenient," said student Yang Zonghuan, who took the ferry for the first time.

"The beautiful scenery of Quanzhou is fascinating, and I felt at home while communicating with people there. The trip has been very rewarding, and I hope to have the opportunity to visit the mainland again," he said.

Another young passenger, Guo Ya-han, said: "I have never been to



Workers at the Gaoqi border inspection station offer Lunar New Year gifts to a passenger at Wutong Port in Xiamen, Fujian province, earlier this month. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Fujian before, and I am very interested in the local culture, so I took the opportunity to sign up.

"I thought I would feel dizzy on the ferry, but after one trip, I didn't feel uncomfortable at all, and I could

even enjoy the sea view. In the future, I will travel to the mainland again when I have the chance," she said.

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# CHINA

## Tibetans take field for 'New Year Cup'

Villagers gather for annual high-altitude soccer tournament in Xizang autonomous region

**Clockwise from top left:** Players stage a soccer game in Mali village in Lhorong county in Chamdo city, Xizang autonomous region, on Jan 21 during the annual "New Year Cup" tournament. SUN FEI / XINHUA Villagers watch the game on Jan 21. A villager fixes the net for a goal before a game on Jan 20. Villagers move a rock to level the makeshift pitch before a game on Jan 20. PHOTOS BY TENZIN NYIDA / XINHUA



Players participate in a soccer game while other villagers watch on Jan 21. SUN FEI / XINHUA

By CHINA DAILY

In the small village of Mali in Lhorong county in Chamdo city, Xizang autonomous region, the 7th annual "New Year Cup" soccer tournament was staged last month on a makeshift pitch about 3,700 meters above sea level.

"Though it's still dusty, it's a lot better than before," said Karma Chopel, a Mali villager.

A decade ago, the soccer field was nothing but a desolate field strewn with rocks. Back then, Karma Chopel, who was a high school student, took it upon himself to organize local children who loved playing soccer to level the ground and set up makeshift goalposts with wooden sticks, laying the foundation for what would become the village's soccer field.

Karma Chopel, who graduated from Xizang Minzu University with a sports degree, is now a physical education teacher at the local primary school. With an increasing number of children showing interest in soccer and parents hoping for a proper playing field, Karma Chopel, now a father himself, led the effort to renovate the field and organize soccer matches.

Fundraising, purchasing building materials, leveling the field, repairing facilities — under the leadership of Karma Chopel and other fathers in the village, nearly every member of the community joined hands to develop the pitch.

This year's tournament took place on the renovated field, attracting 12 teams from the surrounding areas and turning a rural soccer event into the "World Cup" of this eastern Tibetan village. Residents enjoyed butter tea and dried meat as they sat on the ground and watched the games to celebrate the coming of the Tibetan New Year, which will begin on Saturday and end on Monday.

At present, all 74 counties in Xizang have their own soccer pitches, and the construction of standard soccer fields is expanding to grassroots towns and villages. Lhorong county alone boasts six soccer fields, with plans to build three more.



**Above:** A child plays soccer on the pitch while several villagers fix a goal on Jan 20. SUN FEI / XINHUA **Right:** An aerial photo shows the makeshift pitch in Mali village. TENZIN NYIDA / XINHUA



## WORLD

# Mediators push for Gaza truce amid conflict

'Final formula' sought as humanitarian situation worsens during fierce fighting

DOHA/GAZA — The US, Qatar and Egyptian mediators prepared a diplomatic push to bridge differences between Israel and Hamas on a "final formula" for a cease-fire after the Palestinian group responded to a proposal for an extended pause in fighting and hostage releases.

Hamas on Tuesday replied to a framework drawn up more than a week ago by the US and Israeli spy chiefs at a meeting in Paris with the Egyptians and Qataris.

According to a draft document, the Hamas counterproposal envisages three phases of a truce, lasting 45 days each, Reuters reported on Wednesday.

Militants would exchange the remaining Israeli hostages they captured on Oct 7 for Palestinian prisoners. The reconstruction of Gaza would begin, Israeli forces would withdraw completely, and bodies and remains would be exchanged.

There was no immediate public response from Israel, which has said it will not pull its troops out of Gaza until Hamas is wiped out.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, on a lightning tour of the Middle East, said he would discuss the Hamas response with Israeli officials when he visits the country on Wednesday.

Qatar described the Hamas response as "positive" overall while Egyptian security sources told Reuters that Hamas showed flexibility.

"We will discuss all the details of the proposed framework with the concerned parties to reach an agreement on the final formula as soon as possible," Diaa Rashwan, head of Egypt's State Information Service, was quoted as saying.

A source close to the negotiations said the Hamas counterproposal did not require a guarantee of a permanent cease-fire at the outset, but that an end to the conflict would have to be agreed during the truce before the final hostages were freed.

"People are optimistic, at the same time they pray that this hope turns into a real agreement that will end the war," Yamen Hamad, who lives in a UN school in Deir Al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip, told Reuters.

Saudi Arabia has told the US its position stands that there will be no diplomatic relations with Israel unless an independent Palestinian state is recognized on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem, and Israeli "aggression" in Gaza stops, the

Saudi foreign ministry said in a statement on Wednesday.

Argentina's President Javier Milei on Tuesday arrived at Ben Gurion Airport near Tel Aviv when he told Israel's awaiting Foreign Minister Israel Katz: "My plan is to move the embassy to west Jerusalem."

Palestinian militant group Hamas on Tuesday said it "strongly condemns" the announcement.

Israel began its military offensive in Gaza after militants from Hamas-ruled Gaza killed 1,200 people and took 253 hostages in southern Israel on Oct 7.

Gaza's Health Ministry said at least 27,585 Palestinians have been confirmed killed in Israel's military campaign, with thousands more feared buried under rubble.

## Shortage of necessities

The conflict has sparked a humanitarian catastrophe that has brought shortages of the most basic necessities. Some of the hardest-hit are babies, young children and their parents, with diapers and formula either hard to find or spiking to unaffordable prices, leading parents to resort to inadequate or even unsafe alternatives.

Resident Zainab al-Zein was forced to make a desperate decision: Feed her infant daughter solid foods that her tiny body may not be able to digest or watch her starve because of a lack of baby formula in the besieged Gaza Strip.

Al-Zein chose to give 21/2-month-old Linda solids, knowing the choice could lead to health issues.

"I know we are doing something harmful to her, but there is nothing," said al-Zein, feeding her wailing daughter crushed biscuits in the cold tent they now call home.

For Palestinians enduring increasingly dire conditions, the most basic of acts — such as changing a child's diaper — have become a luxury that can require sacrifice.

"I sold my children's food so I can buy diapers," said Raafat Abu Wardah, who has two children in diapers.

Meanwhile, UNICEF said aid deliveries into Gaza are not meeting the vast needs.

The agency estimates 20,000 infants up to 6 months old need formula, which UNICEF has been delivering along with necessities that have also included diapers and cash.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



Children sit on wooden pallets as they take shelter in a tent camp in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Tuesday. SALEH SALEM / REUTERS

# Xi extends condolences over passing of Chile's ex-leader

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Wednesday sent a message of condolence to Chilean President Gabriel Boric over the passing of former Chilean president Sebastian Pinera.

On behalf of the Chinese government and people, Xi extended deep condolences and expressed sincere sympathies to the Chilean people and Pinera's family.

In his message, Xi pointed out that Pinera was an outstanding politician of Chile and had devoted himself to the development of China-Chile relations and the mutually beneficial and friendly cooperation, actively contributing to the friendship of the two countries.

The Chinese people have lost an old friend, a good friend after Pinera's passing, Xi said.

"I highly regard the development of China-Chile relations, and stand ready to work with President Boric to continue to promote the ongoing consolidation and development of the China-Chile comprehensive strategic partnership," Xi said.

Pinera, who was Chile's president in 2010-14 and 2018-22, died on Tuesday when his private helicopter crashed on the shores of Lake Ranco, in southern Chile, according to his office.

"It is with deep regret that we announce the death of the former



People gather at the headquarters of the National Renewal party in Santiago on Tuesday, mourning Chile's former president Sebastian Pinera who died in a helicopter crash. DIEGO REYES VIELMA / REUTERS

president of the Republic of Chile, Sebastian Pinera Echenique," his office said in a statement.

Minister of the Interior and Public Security Carolina Toha confirmed the news, and announced that the former president, 74, "will have all the republican honors and recognitions he deserves".

In the commune of Futrono, "a helicopter crashed with four crew

members. Three of them were able to reach the shore through their own means, they are out of danger, but that was not the case with the fourth crew member, who was the former president", the minister said.

Toha said President Boric "has instructed that a state funeral be held, that national mourning be declared".

The crash occurred around 3 pm

XINHUA

# Philippine EVs eye Chinese investment

By PRIME SARMIENTO in Hong Kong  
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The Philippines' electric vehicle industry is seeking more Chinese investments, with industry executives noting that Chinese automakers have the technology and financing that can help boost the local EV and battery manufacturing sector.

"Chinese investments are critical for the development of the EV industry in the Philippines," Rommel Juan, chairman of the Electric Vehicle Association of the Philippines, or EVAP, told China Daily.

He said that as one of the world's biggest EV markets, China is a global trendsetter for EVs. The EVAP, which was set up in 2009, includes Chinese car companies' branches in the Philippines, and "they're really the ones who are making the (local EV) industry grow".

Juan said the EVAP had also linked up with local battery manufacturers and nickel miners to boost the country's battery manufacturing industry. The Philippines is one of the world's biggest producers of nickel, a key material for making batteries.

"Since we have the raw materi-

als, (battery manufacturing is) an investment that the Chinese companies can look into," he said.

But while some of China's biggest EV makers such as Dongfeng Motor and Chery Group have branched out in the Philippines, these companies are only focused on distributorship, said Jose Bienvenido Biona, associate professor and director of the Center for Engineering and Sustainable Development Research at the Manila-based De La Salle University.

## Decarbonization move

The move toward decarbonization has spurred the growth of the global EV industry.

The Philippine government has laid out a road map that aims to increase EV adoption in the domestic market and encourage more investments in EV manufacturing.

But while the Philippines has been producing and assembling electric tricycles for more than a decade, most locally manufactured four-wheelers are electric jeeps as they are used for public transport. There are fewer than 9,000 EVs out of the nearly 13 million cars registered in the Philippines in 2021, according to the latest data.

"The ease of doing business in the Philippines is a lot harder," Ferdinand Raquelsantos, the EVAP's honorary chairman, told China Daily.

EVAP president Edmund Araga said while the Philippines has a lot of skilled workers to offer potential investors in EV manufacturing, it cannot compete with other Southeast Asian countries when it comes to lower material costs, logistics and infrastructure.

Compared with its peers in Southeast Asia, the Philippines has fallen behind Thailand and Indonesia in attracting investors in EV manufacturing. For example, the Shenzhen-based BYD, the world's top EV manufacturer, has set up a factory in Thailand. In the second half of this year, the company will start production with a focus on the Thai market for sales, according to Liu Xueliang, general manager of BYD Asia-Pacific Auto Sales Division.

BYD also plans to invest \$1.3 billion to build a manufacturing plant in Indonesia, Indonesia's Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs, Airlangga Hartarto, told local media in January.

Jiang Xueqing in Tokyo contributed to this story.

# 5.5 tons of nuke water leaked from Fukushima

TOKYO — Approximately 5.5 metric tons of water containing radioactive materials have leaked from an equipment in Japan's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, local media reported on Wednesday.

At about 8:53 am local time on Wednesday, workers discovered water leaking from the outlet of a device used to purify nuclear-contaminated water during the inspection of the equipment, Fukushima Central Television reported, citing the plant's operator Tokyo Electric Power Company.

TEPCO estimates that the amount of water that leaked was approximately 5.5 tons, which may contain 22 billion becquerels of radioactive materials such as cesium and strontium, the report said.

Most of the leaked water appeared to have seeped into the soil, but monitoring of a nearby drainage channel did not show any significant radiation level changes.

TEPCO has made the area where the water was leaked a no-go area.

Hit by a 9.0-magnitude earthquake and an ensuing tsunami on March 11, 2011, the Fukushima nuclear plant suffered core meltdowns that released radiation, resulting in a level-7 nuclear accident, the highest on the International Nuclear and Radiological Event Scale.

The plant has been generating a massive amount of water tainted with radioactive substances from cooling down nuclear fuel in the reactor buildings, which are now being stored in tanks at the nuclear plant.

In August, Japan started to discharge the Fukushima nuclear water into the Pacific Ocean despite numerous and repeated objections by governments and communities of neighboring countries and the Pacific region, environmental groups, NGOs and anti-nuclear movements in Japan.

AGENCIES—CHINA DAILY

XINHUA

## Briefly

### ARGENTINA Milei's reform plan stalled in Congress

Argentine President Javier Milei was dealt a major setback in parliament on Tuesday when his controversial deregulatory reform package was prevented from advancing and sent back for a rewrite, legislators said. Just as the Chamber of Deputies was preparing for a vote on the bill, the president's La Libertad Avanza party suddenly requested and obtained the adjournment of the session. The matter is being sent "back to committee" for further dialogue, Oscar Zago, leader of the ruling party faction, said.

### UNITED STATES Boeing jet bolts missing before takeoff: Report

The bolts that helped secure a panel to the frame of the Boeing 737 MAX 9 jet were missing before the plane took off last month from Portland, Oregon, investigators said on Tuesday. In a preliminary report on the Jan 5 incident, the National Transportation Safety Board included a photo from Boeing, in which three of the four bolts that prevent the panel from moving are missing. Investigators said the lack of certain damage around the panel indicates that all four bolts were missing before the plane took off.

### PAKISTAN Twin blasts at election offices kill at least 26

A pair of bombings at the election offices of a political party and an independent candidate in southwestern Pakistan killed at least 26 people and wounded more than two dozen others, The Associated Press quoted officials as saying on Wednesday. The first attack hit the election office of Asfandyar Khan in Pashin. Officials said at least 15 people were killed in the attack. Later, another bombing in Qilla Saifullah town killed at least 11 people, authorities said.

# Sweden ends Nord Stream probe over lack of jurisdiction

STOCKHOLM — Sweden on Wednesday dropped its investigation into the explosions in 2022 on Nord Stream pipelines carrying Russian gas to Germany, saying it lacked jurisdiction in the case but had handed evidence it had uncovered over to German investigators.

The Nord Stream pipelines, which carried Russian natural gas into Germany and the wider European Union via underwater routes across the Baltic Sea, were ruptured in what appears to have been a series of deliberately set explosions in the waters of Sweden's and Denmark's economic zones.

During investigations, officials

from both Sweden and Denmark said they found traces of explosives, which suggested deliberate sabotage. The pipelines have been crippled ever since.

With the blasts happening soon after the start of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and with Russia's exports of natural gas to the EU in the spotlight at the time, Russia has contended the blasts were instigated by the United Kingdom and the United States, and called for a "transparent international investigation" to get to the truth.

Swedish prosecutors concluded that nothing had emerged to indicate that Sweden or Swedish citi-

zens were involved in the attack which took place "in international waters".

"Against the background of the situation we now have, we can state that Swedish jurisdiction does not apply," Public Prosecutor Mats Ljungqvist said in a statement.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Wednesday that Russia will watch what Germany does to investigate explosions.

In July, Germany told the UN Security Council it had found traces of subsea explosives on a sailing yacht that "may have been used to transport the explosives" and that trained divers may have attached

the explosives to the pipelines.

"Of course, now we need to see how Germany itself reacts to this, as a country that has lost a lot in relation to this terrorist attack," Peskov said.

"It will be interesting to see how thorough the German authorities will be when it comes to this investigation," he added.

Danish police said on Wednesday it expected to provide more information on its investigation "within a short time".

Earle Gale in London contributed to this story.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

# Rescue mission



Soldiers carry a landslide victim as they arrive in Tagum City, Davao del Norte Province, in southern Philippines on Wednesday. A search was underway for the 27 miners. At least six people were killed and dozens missing. VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

# WORLD US

## Ambassador welcomes overseas Chinese 'home'

Envoy highlights positive developments in Sino-US ties at New Year celebrations

By YIFAN XU in Washington  
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The Chinese embassy in the United States welcomed home overseas Chinese in a celebration of the upcoming Spring Festival, with optimism about the future.

With the theme of "Warmly Welcoming Spring — Celebrating the Chinese New Year", the reception on Monday, the first for overseas Chinese after the COVID-19 pandemic, opened with a performance that included children playing the *guzheng* in *Battling the Typhoon*, a musical rendition.

Students also sang *Reed Flower*, and there was a lion dance by the Chinatown Lion Dance troupe.

A short video highlighting the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the US was played before Ambassador Xie Feng's speech for the Lunar New Year.

"The embassy is always the home of overseas Chinese around. Welcome home for celebrating the Chinese New Year," said Xie.

Xie said 2023 was a year of solid advancement in Chinese-style modernization. He said the notion that China's economy would collapse has repeatedly been proven wrong, and the contention that China's economy has peaked has no basis in fact.

"No matter whether it is a tariff war, science and technology war, or cognitive war, it can't stop China's high-quality development," he said.

Xie said 2023 was a year when China-US relations stopped fall-

ing and stabilized, and people should cherish that hard-won achievement.

"Both sides should follow the road map drawn by the two leaders, build a breakwater to eliminate interference, gather positive energy for exchanges and cooperation, adhere to mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and win-win cooperation," he said. "And we should promote the stable, healthy and sustainable development of China-US relations."

Xie also said 2023 was a year for overseas Chinese to unite their hearts and minds, and now they are faced with a broad opportunity to do more.

"Only when the nation is good, will the Chinese people be good. And when China-US relations are good, our compatriots in the US will be better off," he said.

### High-quality services

The ambassador mentioned a series of new measures, saying that the embassy is making every effort to provide high-quality services to Chinese living in the US, whom he also encouraged to contribute more wisdom and strength to the exploration of the right way to improve bilateral relations in a new era.

The Chengdu Sichuan Opera Research Institute presented a special show, part of the 2024 "Happy Chinese New Year" event, an annual brand activity held to celebrate the Spring Festival, organized by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China.

In the hourlong performance, the artists displayed the charm of Sichuan Opera, such as voice, posture, performance and stunts, which

drawn applause. The show came to a climax with face-changing, a unique feature of the Sichuan Opera that shows different emotions and feelings of the characters in the play.

One of the guests, Xie Zongqi, the founder and managing director of the International Center for Tai Chi Health, USA, said that he was thrilled to attend the reception.

"This kind of event and the spread of traditional Chinese culture will be of great benefit to deepening the US people's understanding of China," he said.

Xie, the tai chi master, said he has had more than 300 students since moving to the US less than two years ago, and they are hoping to enhance their physical and mental health through traditional Chinese martial arts.

Chen Nanping, the founding president of the Rose Group for Cross-Cultural Understanding, said she hoped that more Chinese cultural and artistic groups would come to the US.

"So that more Chinese here, as well as the US people, would have the opportunity to learn about the excellent traditional Chinese culture," she said.

James Xuefeng Zhang, the president of the South Florida Chinese Business Association, said that 2024 marks the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the US, and it is also an election year in the US.

"We hope to improve the US-China relations through people-to-people exchanges," he added.

Xue Chuan and Li Linglin, both Sichuan Opera artists, had visited Chile, Argentina and the US. They were warmly welcomed.

"This is the confidence that traditional Chinese culture brings to us," said Li.



Robert Mintz, chief curator at the Asian Art Museum, introduces filmmaker Zhang Weimin at the Feb 3 premiere of her documentary featuring renowned Chinese artist Chang Daichien. CHANG JUN / CHINA DAILY

## Revisiting Chang Daichien, misunderstood Chinese artist

By CHANG JUN in San Francisco  
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Weimin Zhang, a professor and filmmaker at San Francisco State University, shares one trait with the internationally renowned and controversial artist Chang Daichien (better known as Zhang Daqian in China).

That is an unquenched thirst for self-fulfillment, evolution and the revelation of identities.

The strong motivation might explain why Chang, after decades of nomadic migration among different continents since 1949, kept awing the world and his followers with artistic breakthroughs, and why Zhang, dedicating 12 years of her life arduously tracing Chang's footsteps, unveiling a nostalgic soul that eternally aspires to his utopia.

Recently, the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco hosted the premiere for *Of Color and Ink: Chang Daichien After 1949*, a documentary produced by Zhang.

Family members and students of Chang's, art critics and enthusiasts packed the auditorium to hear stories about one of the most influential Chinese artists (1899-1983) of the 20th century.

Adept in a broad range of classical Chinese painting styles and skills such as brush and ink, Chang in his later years developed innovative approaches to drawing — pouring ink and colors on paper or silk for a random and creative form of production.

It is a method many art scholars believe Chang had borrowed from Western counterparts such as the impressionists or abstractionists.

However, "Chang's work is misunderstood in both China and the West," said Mark Johnson, an American art critic who is deeply involved in the documentary.

Chang left Sichuan in 1949. Along with some of his family members, he first flew to Argentina, then, due to visa problems, had to transfer to Brazil. Chang finally relocated to the United States and spent the rest of his life in the coastal city of Carmel, California.

"Chang's 30 years of overseas expedition remains a mystery to many, and for the most part misunderstood in both China and the West," said Zhang, detailing her intention to document Chang's

“The more details I collected, the more complicated and sophisticated Chang becomes.”

**Weimin Zhang**, producer of the documentary *Of Color and Ink: Chang Daichien After 1949*

depth of life and art creations. "This used to be an area nobody has ever touched."

*Of Color and Ink* was inspired by 1967 film footage, produced by California art historian Michael Sullivan, said Zhang, who said that Sullivan later donated the 21-minute-long raw material to San Francisco State University, where she teaches and conducts research.

In 1999, when the university decided to screen the footage as part of Chang Daichien's centennial exhibition, with a focus on the artist's California years, Zhang helped transfer the original celluloid to a digital format.

Seen through the lens of a local cinematographer, *Chang Daichien in California* featured vivid episodes — the artist's random walks with his wife along the seashore on the Monterey Peninsula, his seemingly effortless painting of twisted cypress trees, his Chinese traditional uniform, and his distinctively iconic, long beard.

"Then comes the moment that I realize I have to do something," said Zhang. "What was Chang's life like? What has he been through during these 30 years?"

Bearing those questions in mind, Zhang started her own journey of inquiry about and discovery of Chang as an individual and artistic master. Setbacks and bewilderment were by no means rare, said Zhang. "The more details I collected, the more complicated and sophisticated Chang becomes," she said.

Zhang traveled extensively to gather material about Chang by interviewing his neighbors and journalists who covered Chang's exhibitions. She annotated primary sources in French, English, Spanish, Italian, Japanese and Chinese that documented Chang's trips

and works, and made field trips to Chang's former residences and apartments.

She then stitched the pieces together.

In Brazil, Zhang made a painstaking effort to locate Chang's abandoned home, which now was under a lake. According to recollections by his family members, the house was nestled in a serene small town called Mogi das Cruzes.

In 1954, Chang had replicated a traditional Chinese residential compound on a 30-acre lot, constructing what he called the *Bade Yuan*, or Eight Virtues Garden, featuring pavilions, a giant lotus pond, spacious grassland with a lush meadow, and bamboos.

"This is his remake of the spiritual paradise, his version of utopia," said Zhang. There he dressed himself in traditional Chinese robes, running his family following Chinese rituals and rules, and always being homesick.

In one of his long strolls, Chang started from the chain bridge in his hometown of Neijiang, near Chengdu along the Yangtze River, which stretches thousands of miles.

Barry Lam, an art collector, believes that when Chang left Qingcheng Mountain in Sichuan, "he must have been looking down from airplane at his beloved hometown".

Xiao Daiwen, granddaughter of Chang, was in the audience at the premiere. "This film is so touching and drew a true picture of my grandfather. Over the years, there are many misconceptions, rumors and misinterpretation of his work," Xiao said. "My grandfather loves China, deeply."

The film, using archival interviews with the artist, showcased Chang's perspective on integrating artistic expressions between East and West. In his opinion, brush, ink, color and medium are nothing but tools.

Chang's deep roots in Chinese thought and culture never hindered him from artistic pursuit across geopolitical borders.

Ba Dong, an art scholar, said Chang has reinterpreted Chinese traditional painting style and has invented his own artistic way to present Chinese paintings.

"Some thought Chang had abandoned China. No, he never abandoned China. He holds China close to his heart," Johnson said.

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# BUSINESS

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## Auto shipments from Nansha port set to boom

By QIU QUANLIN in Guangzhou  
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Following the docking of two car-carrier ships recently at the automobile terminal berth of the Nansha automobile port in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong province, exports of automobiles through the port are expected to increase significantly, the port company said.

After their successful docking in early February, both ships will be fully loaded with cars bound for Central America, South America and the Middle East, imparting strong momentum to China's automobile exports, according to the port company.

The Bahamian ships — *Gravity Highway* and *Progress Ace* — became the largest car carriers to dock at the Nansha automobile port since its opening, as they are widely regarded as "super behemoths" and "super cargo kings".

*Gravity Highway*, with a total length of 199.96 meters and total tonnage of nearly 59,000 tons, can carry nearly 6,000 fully loaded vehicles.

*Progress Ace* has a similar carrying capacity to that of *Gravity Highway*, according to data provided by the shipping company.

According to statistics from local commerce authorities, the import and export volume of automobiles in Nansha increased by about 3.9 times in 2023, with a 68 percent year-on-year growth in the number of cars exported through the automobile port.

The annual capacity of passenger vehicles passing through the

Nansha automobile logistics hub is close to 2 million units, making it the largest automobile export hub in the country in terms of throughput.

Over the years, Nansha's international shipping and logistics capabilities have risen, establishing it as a core area for building an international shipping hub in Guangzhou and an important gateway for external trade, the port company said.

The Nansha automobile port serves as a vital link connecting cities on both sides of the Pearl River estuary, as well as a key hub radiating across Guangdong and neighboring Hainan province and the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, making it the largest cluster of roll-on/roll-off terminals in the country and the largest RoRo automobile hub port in South China.

The port's capacity to handle automobile imports and exports increased significantly following cooperation agreements signed on Sunday between the local commerce authorities and two subsidiaries of COSCO Shipping Specialized Carriers Co Ltd.

Guangzhou Ocean Shipping Co, one of the subsidiaries and a key player in car shipping, currently operates six professional car carriers in Nansha, with an annual export capacity of 110,000 vehicles.

Additionally, the company plans to build several new car carriers in Nansha, aiming to establish a professional car carrier fleet with more than 30 ships capable of handling an annual export capacity of over 700,000 vehicles.



An employee works on the assembly line of an NEV manufacturer in Zhaoqing, Guangdong province. DENG HUA / XINHUA

## Better trade ties in NEV sector boosting exports

Sustainable growth of cooperation positive for novel, green paradigm

By ZHONG NAN  
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China's recent efforts to bolster domestic automakers' global expansion and improve their risk management capabilities will reinforce the country's exports of new energy vehicles, contributing to the world's sustainable growth, said market watchers and business leaders on Wednesday.

The comment came after the Ministry of Commerce and eight other government branches, including the National Development and Reform Commission and the General Administration of Customs, jointly issued a guideline to support NEV trade cooperation in early December, further sustaining the growth of this fast-growing industry.

In addition to promoting standard internationalization and mutual recognition of qualifications, as well as fully leveraging the effectiveness of various free trade agreements, the Chinese government will encourage domestic automakers to conduct research and development cooperation activities in foreign countries, and strengthen cooperation with global companies to reach win-win results.

In an online statement released on Wednesday, the head of the department of foreign trade at the Ministry of Commerce, said the government will enhance collaboration with diverse countries in the realm of low-carbon advancement for NEVs.

These efforts aim to foster the robust and sustainable growth of trade cooperation in the NEV sector, contributing to the establish-

ment of a novel growth paradigm and cutting carbon footprint in many parts of the world, said the Commerce Ministry official.

To reinforce the risk prevention abilities of its automakers, the Chinese government aims to optimize the use of both multilateral and bilateral frameworks. It will actively address issues that restrict foreign trade in the area of NEVs, according to the guideline.

China's auto exports surged 57.9 percent year-on-year to a record high of 4.91 million vehicles in 2023 as the country's automakers expanded their presence overseas, data from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology showed.

The massive growth was propelled by a surge in the exports of NEVs, which soared 77.6 percent to more than 1.2 million units last year.

Chen Shihua, deputy secretary-general of the Beijing-based China Association of Automobile Manufacturers, said the government's favorable industrial and consumption-stimulating policies will further accelerate the upswing in China's auto sales in the domestic market as well as exports, especially in the field of NEV this year.

However, in recent years, China's NEVs have increasingly become the focus of international trade disputes. The European Union has commenced a countervailing duty investigation into China's NEVs.

"As China's NEV sector has evolved into a strong pillar supporting economic growth, it is imperative for the government to undertake a series of initiatives to foster international industrial

cooperation and mitigate potential trade remedy risks," said Sun Fuquan, former vice-president of the Beijing-based Chinese Academy of Science and Technology for Development.

Many countries have promoted the electrification of vehicles in both private and public transportation. Some of them, such as Norway, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States, have already established robust charging infrastructure systems and fostered scientific and technological innovation within the NEV sector, he said.

After seeing its sales grow by 8.8 percent year-on-year to 3.37 million vehicles in both home and global markets in 2023, China FAW Group Corp Ltd, a Changchun, Jilin province-headquartered automaker, said it now plans to export 158,000 vehicles this year.

The State-owned automaker plans to launch 13 types of electric vehicles under the Hongqi brand by 2025, both for domestic consumption as well as exports.

"Chinese electric vehicle manufacturers, skilled at maintaining cost efficiency through stable supply chains, are advancing rapidly," said Liu Yigong, vice-president of China FAW Group.

Many companies are currently focused on swiftly broadening their international presence, targeting Southeast Asia and Europe as their primary destinations for expanding the market of NEVs, he said.

Among the many NEV producers that have seen booming sales, Shenzhen, Guangdong province-based BYD became the world's leading seller of pure EVs in the fourth quarter of 2023. The company sold 526,409 electric cars, outpacing the sales figures of US EV giant Tesla Inc during the quarter.

## Ningde takes steps for smooth vehicle dispatches

By LI JIAYING in Beijing and  
HUMEIDONG in Fuzhou

A containership loaded with 1,000 Chinese-made vehicles left Ningde in East China's Fujian province for Mexico recently.

Manufactured at the Ningde production base of the country's major automaker SAIC Motor, the batch includes 258 electric vehicles, 100 hybrid and 642 gasoline cars.

The export-bound vehicles started their journey on Jan 30, the fifth day of the Spring Festival travel rush and is expected to arrive in Mexico around mid-February, during the Chinese New Year holiday period.

Faced with particularly heavy cargo traffic during Spring Festival, the maritime bureau of Ningde has taken targeted measures to ensure smooth transport.

"We have optimized inspection procedures and tailored inspection plans based on the features of different vessels to improve efficiency," said Li Zongming, an official with the Sanduao maritime affairs office under Ningde's maritime bureau.

The inspections are mainly focused on navigation facilities, fire safety and lifesaving equipment, crew capabilities as well as loading requirements, Li added.

Eyeing improved efficiency, Ningde has leveraged its maritime coordination platform to provide 24/7 services for vessel arrivals and departures, facilitating online processing and approval, and significantly shortening the time taken for multiple procedures.

In addition, through the comprehensive use of command systems, automatic tracking and drone patrols, Ningde's maritime bureau has maintained follow-up controls for navigation and operation of vessels.

"This way, we get to keep a close eye on weather changes and give timely warnings on cold waves and strong winds to terminals and ships, ensuring safe and efficient transport," Li said.

Since the beginning of this year, Ningde has facilitated the export of 2,172 vehicles, with ship routes covering regions such as the Americas and West Asia, said its maritime bureau.

The port city will continue to strengthen its maritime services, promote trade facilitation and enhance Customs clearance services, in order to achieve a higher internationalization level at its ports and facilitate the export of "Ningde-made" products, it added.

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### Briefly

#### Renminbi strengthens against greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, strengthened 33 pips to 7.1049 against the US dollar on Wednesday, according to the China Foreign Exchange Trade System. In China's spot foreign exchange market, the yuan is allowed to rise or fall by 2 percent from the central parity rate each trading day. The central parity rate of the yuan against the US dollar is based on a weighted average of prices offered by market makers before the opening of the inter-bank market each business day.

#### Vehicle sales log double-digit growth

China's vehicle sales surged 47.9 percent year-on-year in January to nearly 2.44 million units, said the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers on Wednesday. The country's vehicle output last month increased 51.2 percent year-on-year to 2.41 million units, according to the association.

#### PBOC adds liquidity via reverse repos

China's central bank conducted 396 billion yuan (\$55.74 billion) in 14-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 1.95 percent on Wednesday. The move aims to keep liquidity stable ahead of Spring Festival that falls on Saturday this year, the People's Bank of China said in a statement. A reverse repo is a process by which the central bank purchases securities from commercial banks through bidding, with an agreement to sell them back in the future.

#### Forex reserves fall to \$3.2193 trillion

China's forex reserves totaled \$3.2193 trillion at the end of January, down by \$18.7 billion, or 0.58 percent compared to the end of December 2023, according to data released on Wednesday by the State Administration of Foreign Exchange.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

## Beijing, Tianjin, Hebei come closer for development

By ZHENG JINRAN and  
ZHANG YU in Shijiazhuang

Cooperation on technology and innovation in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region is expected to be accelerated with the launch of more projects for the development of cutting-edge technologies and new plans for smoother exchange channels.

The three local governments of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei also said they will promote the growth of regional centers to fuel coordinated development in the region.

The national capital will advance the construction of the Jingjinji National Center of Technology Innovation, and guide and support innovative entities across the region, to jointly build startup incubation centers and pilot bases for shared outcomes, said Yin Yong, mayor of Beijing, while delivering the municipal government work report during the city's "two sessions" or the annual meetings of the local legislature held in late January.

The Jingjinji National Center of Technology Innovation, China's first

comprehensive national technology innovation center set up in December 2020, has three branches: the Tianjin Center, the Hebei Center and the Xiong'an Center.

The coordinated development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region has been implemented for 10 years to 2024, with tremendous achievements made in multiple areas like industrial cooperation, healthcare, education and technology innovation.

The region is home to a number of top-class colleges and universities as well as high-end research talent. Hence it boasts a solid foundation for innovation. And the Jingjinji National Center of Technology Innovation has been one of the major moves in promoting regional cooperation in the field of technology.

Tianjin plans to accelerate work on its local center and expand comprehensive cooperation in technology and education fields with Beijing for its Tiankai Higher Education Innovation Park. The park was initiated by two esteemed universities in Tianjin: Nankai University and Tianjin University, Mayor Zhang Gong said while

delivering the Tianjin government work report.

For its part, Hebei's local government said it will promote the Hebei and Xiong'an centers, but highlighted a different direction. It will strengthen the mechanism for achievements in technology and technological transformation, and smoothen communication on research and development activities between Beijing and Tianjin, as well as the digital transformation channel in Hebei, according to the provincial government work report.

"We have attracted multiple projects from Beijing and Tianjin to relocate and invest in the province with the help of the Hebei Center," said Liu Chuncheng, Party secretary of the Hebei Academy of Sciences, which led the launch of the Hebei Center.

The Hebei Center will conduct a thorough analysis of the industries in the province and local industrial centers to better attract targeted resources from Beijing and Tianjin this year, said Liu, who is also a local deputy of the provincial people's congress.

Many measures have been effected to restrain operations and businesses in Beijing that are not commensurate with the role of the city as the national capital. Relocation of certain entities in the fields of technology and education has thus become quite an attractive proposition for areas neighboring Beijing.

Beijing had witnessed a large increase in regional technology cooperation last year. Its technology contracts with Tianjin and Hebei were worth 74.87 billion yuan (\$10.4 billion), up 110 percent year-on-year, data from the city government showed.

Xiong'an has set larger targets, including improving its Xiong'an Center. The Xiong'an New Area is to primarily serve as an alternative location for operations relocating from Beijing, said Tian Jinchang, deputy director-general of the Administrative Committee of the Xiong'an New Area and a deputy of the provincial people's congress.

The focus of work in Xiong'an has shifted to high-quality development, management and relocation, he said, adding they will promote the



A view of a container terminal at Tianjin port. ZHAO ZISHUO / XINHUA

better utilization of the first batch of projects relocated from Beijing.

The Zhongguancun Science Park in the Xiong'an New Area has been one of the major projects to receive high-tech companies from Beijing. Since its unveiling on Aug 30, 35 companies have set up their headquarters here, the science park said.

Beijing will implement a new strategic cooperation agreement with Xiong'an, and will jointly build the rest of the Zhongguancun Science Park in Xiong'an, according to the Beijing government work report.

Zhang Junqi, head of one of the first batch of companies in the park, said the company's team decided to relocate to the science park from Beijing within two weeks because the park's preferential policies, like those for rent and environment, would facilitate their startup's growth.

Yang Cheng in Tianjin and Du Juan in Beijing contributed to this story.

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# BUSINESS

## Private firm mecca Fujian punching above weight

By CHENG YU in Beijing  
and HU MEIDONG in Fuzhou

The private economy has become a key driver of economic growth and technological innovation in East China's Fujian province, as local private firms have contributed 70 percent of GDP and tech breakthroughs in the province, said a local government official at a recent news conference.

Industry experts said this reflects broader efforts from one of the earliest birthplaces of private enterprise activity in the country, and successful support of the innovative development of such firms with encouragement to play a larger role in economic recovery and future development.

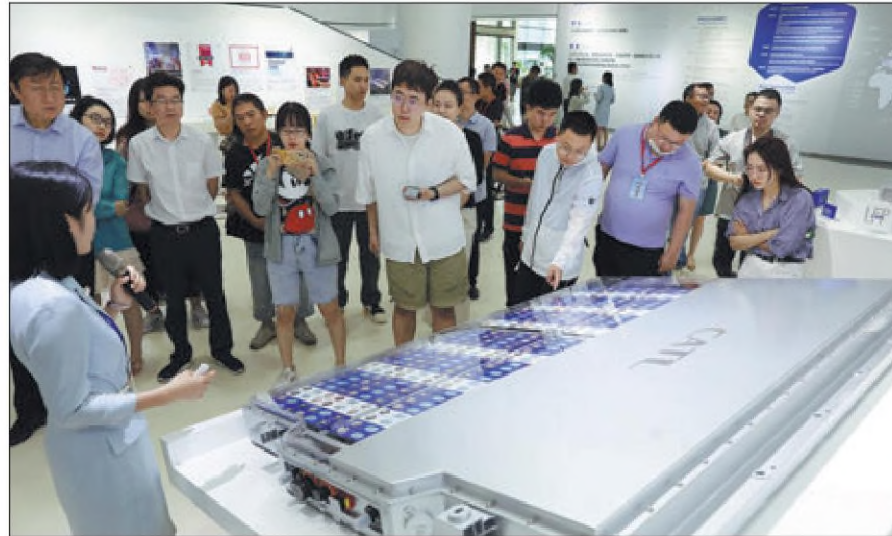
Zhang Wenyang, deputy director of the Fujian Development and Reform Commission, said that private companies, which account for 94 percent of Fujian's total enterprises, have also contributed to 70.6 percent of tax revenue and 80 percent of urban jobs.

"In particular, the technological innovation capability of local private companies has continued to improve, and investment into research and development has also been boosted," Zhang said.

The proportion of R&D investment by major private enterprises has increased from 22.1 percent in 2017 to 56.6 percent in 2022. Private enterprises now account for over 90 percent of over 12,000 national high-tech enterprises, 7,200 technology-based small and medium-sized enterprises, and over 3,100 "little giant" companies in the province, he said.

Little giant firms are basically innovative SMEs that own proprietary core technologies in niche sectors and exhibit great market potential.

Zhou Qiren, a professor at Peking University's National School of Development, said in a note that for many Chinese private companies to gain an advantage on the global



Visitors check out a battery at a Contemporary Ampere Technology facility in Ningde, Fujian province. ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY

stage, they should invite the best minds in the world to "make better products and innovate."

Fujian, which is home to several well-known private firms like Contemporary Ampere Technology Ltd — the world's largest battery maker — has launched a series of policies to support the innovative development of private companies over the past few years.

CATL, for instance, last year developed a groundbreaking battery that supports ultra-fast charging, and is reportedly the world's first 4C super-fast charging lithium iron phosphate (LFP) battery. "C" basically refers to the charging multiplier of the battery, with 4C meaning the battery can theoretically be fully charged in 15 minutes.

The breakthrough battery, dubbed Shenxing, is able to deliver a driving range of 400 kilometers with a 10-minute charge.

Wu Kai, chief scientist at CATL, said that the future of EV battery

technology must remain steadfastly anchored to global tech frontiers as well as produce economic benefits.

"As EV consumers shift from pioneering users to ordinary users, we should make advanced tech accessible for all and enable everyone to savor the fruits of innovation," Wu said.

Fujian-based Anta Sports Products Ltd also highlighted technological innovation during its development, which has helped its sales revenue remain tops among Chinese sportswear brands for 11 straight years.

Ding Shizhong, Anta's founder and chairman of the board of directors, said the company has leveraged technology to build additional smart factories and develop more new material and tech-driven sports products.

"Traditional industries are not necessarily low-end industries, and industrial upgrading should be achieved through technological

innovation. Private companies are expected to play a leading role and take the initiative in the new round of tech revolution," Ding said.

The Central Economic Work Conference in December said that China will implement a number of measures to strengthen private enterprises, including facilitating better market access, access to factors of production, fair law enforcement and protection of rights and interests.

Wang Peng, a researcher at the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences, said: "With better expectations, private companies, which have been drivers of the nation's economic growth and innovative development, will make bold moves for business vitality. This, in turn, will drive economic recovery as well as the steady development of many sectors over the long term."

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## Fine-tuned moves to shore up realty sector

Policy revisions in top cities to inspire similar actions in next-level markets

By WANG YING in Shanghai  
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Optimized homebuying measures introduced recently in cities including Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, and white lists of property projects to better meet the reasonable financing requirements of developers, will promote the stable and healthy development of the real estate market, industry experts said.

The fine-tuned home purchasing policies are expected to boost market activity after the Chinese Lunar New Year, with some cities possibly seeing a mild sales pickup in spring, said Guo Xinyu, an analyst with the China Index Academy.

The policy revisions in top-tier cities Guangzhou, Shanghai and Beijing may inspire similar actions in first- and key second-tier cities, Guo said.

Regardless of specific adjustments to home purchases, a number of Chinese cities are responding positively to the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development's call for active measures, granting more macro-level rights to local governments in their home markets, analysts said.

For example, Guangzhou's eased residential property purchase measures announced on Jan 27 led to the scrapping of buying restrictions on residential flats of more than 120 square meters.

Li Yujia, chief researcher at the Guangdong Planning Institute's residential policy research center, said the downtrend in home prices and weak homebuying expectations prompted Guangzhou to take the initiative among the four top-tier cities in loosening home purchase restrictions even in downtown areas.

Guangzhou experienced the largest decline among the four first-tier cities in both new and pre-owned home prices in December, with home prices falling since the end of 2021, Li said.

Following in Guangzhou's footsteps, Suzhou in Jiangsu province abandoned its previous curbs on residential property purchases from Jan 30 regardless of the size, units, and the condition of the property, whether new or pre-owned.

The new home supply volume of Suzhou's downtown area saw a 1.36 percent year-on-year dip to 5.15 million sq m, while transaction volume shrank by 20.57 percent year-on-year during the same period, said Jin Ke, a senior analyst at the Suzhou branch of the China Index Academy.

"With the lifting of purchase limits in the city, it is hoped that it will effectively shore up demand and attract more nonlocal talent to settle down in the city," Jin said.

On Jan 30, Shanghai revised its homebuying requirements by allowing eligible nonlocal individuals who have paid taxes for five years or more, to buy one residential apartment each outside the city's downtown area.

The move, which took effect from Jan 31, also revoked the ban on unmarried nonlocal people from buying properties in Shanghai, boosting the prospects of its comparatively large single population, said Guan Rongxue, a senior analyst with Zhuge Real Estate Data Research Center.

The policy will not only unleash homebuying demand among qualified people, but also boost market sentiment. In addition, it will also raise Shanghai's appeal among employees, strike a balance between working and living in suburban areas, and promote the integration of industries with local development, Guan said.

Beijing on Tuesday issued its version of optimized measures by loosening homebuying requirements in Tongzhou district.

This is in accordance with the current property market condition of the district, said Li.

On the one hand, it allows local people and families with no property to buy one in Tongzhou district, and on the other, the new measure strictly adheres to the principle of letting people working in the district buy a home there, Li said.

Compared to previous measures, the latest policies have been more inclusive in easing home purchase restrictions, creating an extremely viable environment for the property market, said Yan Yuejin, director of Shanghai-based E-house China Research and Development Institution.

While home demand has got a fillip from eliminating purchase restrictions, financing for property projects has received more support after the first batch of white lists was unveiled, said analysts.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development and the National Financial Regulatory Administration said on Sunday that a coordinated mechanism of urban property financing was established in 170 cities nationwide by the end of January, and the first batch of white lists comprising 3,218 real estate projects had been sent to commercial banks.

## Luxury shopping over extended holiday heating up

By WANG ZHUOQIONG  
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Several interesting trends and phenomena are emerging related to some of this year's luxury and consumer brand designs amid the highly lucrative Chinese New Year shopping season.

Luxury and consumer brands are gearing up to enhance revenues with designs for the Year of Dragon, which begins on Feb 10 this year.

The symbolism of the mythical beast, deeply rooted in Chinese culture, embodies power, prosperity and a promising future.

A designer working for a world-renowned consumer brand, who asked to be identified only as Zhang, emphasized the importance of respecting the dragon's symbolism in design rather than excessive innovations.

"The dragon's symbolism is deeply rooted in Chinese culture and folklore. It is probably the most significant zodiac sign and has a majestic presence," Zhang said.

As Chinese customers will account for 35-40 percent of the per-

sonal luxury goods market globally by 2030, it is vital to drive growth in the Chinese market, according to the latest Bain & Company report with Altgamma, an Italian luxury goods industry association.

The global luxury market is projected to reach 1.5 trillion euros (\$1.62 trillion) in 2023, an 8-10 percent growth over 2022, setting a new record for the industry and proving its unparalleled resilience.

The report found that in 2023, the Chinese mainland posted a strong performance after its first quarter, but slowed progressively as the year moved forward. Looking ahead, the tropical island province of Hainan is expected to grow as a shining luxury goods shopping hub, and is set to become an entirely duty-free island by 2025.

Brands are seeking inspiration from dragon-related themes by integrating traditional Chinese culture with modern aesthetics.

However, some brands have faced less than glowing reviews online.

For example, the Burberry Chinese New Year series, including turtle-neck

sweaters sporting houndstooth patterns, is considered by many netizens to resemble braided polypropylene bags — often used to carry bulk items during holiday journeys.

A short-sleeved shirt graced with rosy floral patterns is likened to a large plate of pork. One online observer wrote: "The shirt reminds me of fresh pork ready for the hotpot."

Summer Liu, a financial analyst in Beijing, however, said she likes Burberry's seasonal rosy floral prints accentuated by vibrant reds.

"I like how subtly they combine the iconic Burberry elements with symbolic colors of the Chinese Lunar New Year," Liu said.

Dior's collaboration with Otani collections sparked debate on whether dinosaurs equate to dragons. Japanese cosmetic brand Shu Uemura's lipsticks incorporate dragon scales into their designs.

Some designs from luxury houses have led to more complimentary reviews.

Louis Vuitton's gilded dragon installations, crafted by artisans in China and inspired by Pharrell Williams' col-

lection, display a successful strategy in connecting cultural narratives with product offerings to attract Chinese New Year shoppers.

Cristina Wang, a marketing executive who visited Louis Vuitton installations in Beijing, said she was impressed by the giant dragons.

"It shows LV is confident about the market and they have a respect for local culture," said Wang.

Designer Zhang said it is all about knowing your audience and offering real value.

"Modern Chinese consumers seek value not only in the brand itself but also in packaging and design," he said.

"For international brands to thrive locally, it goes beyond brand power. Productivity is essential. Understanding the needs of Chinese consumers requires trust in designing teams that are well-versed in the nuances of the local market. Striking a balance between breakthrough innovations and maintaining the loyalty of existing consumers while gaining new ones is crucial for sustained success in the Chinese market," Zhang added.

## Xizang estimates express delivery of 24m items in 2024

By PALDEN NYIMA  
and DAQJIONG in Lhasa

The postal and express delivery segment in the Xizang autonomous region is poised for significant growth in 2024.

The sector is expected to achieve a mail and express delivery volume of 202 million items and a business revenue of 1.07 billion yuan (\$150 million) this year, according to the region's postal administration.

Xizang's postal and express delivery industry saw robust growth in 2023, with express courier firms handling 191 million parcels and achieving 1.01 billion yuan in revenue, marking a rise of 7.9 percent and 36.33 percent year-on-year, respectively, data recently released by the administration showed.

In 2023, the express delivery volume was 22 million items and business revenue was 609 million yuan, with an increase of 79.78 percent and 35.85 percent year-on-year, respectively.

In 2024, the region's express deliv-

ery volume is forecast to reach 24 million items, with a business revenue of 657 million yuan, an about 8 percent increase.

This growth demonstrates the industry's resilience and recovery capability, setting a positive tone for the year ahead.

As an integral part of the modern logistics industry, transportation and logistics have played a pivotal role in enhancing efficiency, optimizing resources, and reducing costs, while making substantial contributions to the region's economic and social development.

Wang Huiwen, head of the administration, said it is committed to leveraging the comprehensive three-dimensional transportation network of the autonomous region to enhance postal express hub capacity during the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) period.

The administration aims to accelerate the implementation of major postal projects during the period and promote the construction of a robust postal network to improve quality and efficiency.

"In line with these objectives, our administration is focused on deepening cooperation with commercial transportation, advanced manufacturing, modern agriculture, and financial communication, integrating itself into the industrial and innovation chains at a higher level," Wang was quoted as saying by Xizang Commerce Daily.

Efforts are underway to strengthen the industry infrastructure, coordinate rural infrastructure and public services, promote balanced urban-rural development, optimize the trunk transportation structure, enhance airfreight and road transportation capabilities and actively develop multimodal transportation, Wang said.

To improve the postal service network, the administration is committed to promoting effective connections between village-level postal logistics stations and express services, deepening "postal-express cooperation" and supporting rural revitalization.

The administration is also

working to advance the coordinated development of rural e-commerce and express delivery, as well as the construction of township transportation service stations and postal-road intermodal transport routes.

Recognizing the significance of informatization, the administration is prioritizing the automation, intelligence and digitization of the industry.

Efforts are being made to strengthen the application of the "Green Shield" project information system, promote the use of self-service sorting systems and advance the application of intelligent lockers, drones and unmanned vehicles.

Looking ahead, the administration is focused on consolidating and enhancing the industry's positive trend, promoting qualitative and effective improvement, and contributing to the high-quality development of the postal and express delivery industry in Xizang.

"These efforts are aimed at con-



A China Post courier arranges packages at a community in Lhasa, Xizang autonomous region. PALDEN NYIMA / CHINA DAILY

tributing to the construction of a strong postal network in the region and supporting the region's role in the country's overall efforts to build a robust transportation country," Wang added.

Manlha Tsering, a courier worker at a China Post outlet in Lhasa, capital of Xizang, for the past six years, said he has witnessed the rapid development of the region's postal and express delivery industry.

"Back in 2018, I handled only an average of around 50 parcels per

day, now the number has grown steadily to an average of 100 per day, thanks to the fast-growing logistics industry in recent years," he said.

"Thanks to the region's overall socioeconomic development and improvement in transportation, the region's express delivery industry has been steadily growing in recent years," he said.

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# BUSINESSFOCUS



Customs officials inspect durian quality at a port in Pingxiang, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, in September. CAO YIMING / XINHUA

## China-ASEAN industrial cooperation deepens on RCEP

Member states of Southeast Asian group remain nation's largest trading partner in 2023

NANNING — During the 2024 New Year holiday, a bustling scene unfolded at Youyi Pass, also known as Friendship Pass, as trucks from both China and Vietnam formed lines for Customs clearance.

Shipments of agricultural products like durians and mangoes from member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations were streaming into China through the port situated in the border city of Pingxiang in South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region.

In the opposite direction, trucks laden with electronic components, machinery and equipment were en route to ASEAN countries.

Boosted by the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement that entered into force on Jan 1, 2022, industrial cooperation between China and ASEAN has continued to deepen over the past two years, contributing to regional economic development.

As the world's largest free trade agreement, the RCEP includes 10 ASEAN members, along with China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. The 15 states' total population, gross domestic product and trade all account for about 30 percent of the world's total.

According to China's General Administration of Customs, ASEAN remained China's largest trading partner in 2023, with the total trade between the two sides reaching 6.41 trillion yuan (\$891.6 billion).

In July 2022, fresh Vietnamese durian was officially allowed to enter the Chinese market, following which the Youyi Pass, the largest fruit import and export port between China and ASEAN, witnessed a massive influx of the tropical fruit.

According to Wang Zhengbo, president of a Guangxi-based supply chain management company, business opportunities for collaboration between China and ASEAN have continued to grow in recent years, boosting the demand, quantity and variety of goods in cross-border trade as well as marking a continuous increase in freight volume.

The company has carried out strategic cooperation with orchards and packaging plants in Vietnam, and has signed cooperation agreements involving nearly 3,000 hectares of durian orchards to meet demand in China.

After the RCEP agreement took effect, eight new fruit varieties from ASEAN countries have been approved to enter China, including bananas from Myanmar, longans from Cambodia and durians from Vietnam.

In the first three quarters of 2023, the Youyi Pass saw a continuous increase in the import of agricultural products, with a value of 19.66 billion yuan, up 43.8 percent year-on-year.

Leveraging its advantages in location, transportation policies and resources, Guangxi has integrated

“As China-ASEAN regional economic integration progresses, we are fully confident that Chinese enterprises can gain a foothold in the ASEAN market.”

Huang Kanghua, chairman of Guangxi Mesda Group Co Ltd

**\$891.6 billion**

total value of trade between China and ASEAN in 2023

the construction of the China-ASEAN industrial cooperation zone based on the existing development zones, free trade zones and industrial parks in seven cities, including the regional capital Nanning and Chongzuo.

Relying on raw materials from Southeast Asia, a processing industrial park is under construction in Pingxiang, the border city under the administration of Chongzuo.

According to Wang Shujuan, a local company that has invested in the industrial park, the first phase of the project, with a total investment of about 150 million yuan,

commenced operations in November 2023, mainly producing lime jam. The annual output value is expected to surpass 300 million yuan once the project is fully operational.

With the industrial chains of China and ASEAN becoming increasingly complementary, enterprises in regions like Guangxi are ushering in huge market opportunities.

In recent years, construction machinery made by Guangxi Mesda Group Co Ltd has entered the markets of Thailand, Indonesia, Cambodia and other ASEAN countries, and has been well received by local customers.

“Many ASEAN countries are undergoing rapid industrialization and have a great demand for China's advanced technology, products and capital. As China-ASEAN regional economic integration progresses, we are fully confident that Chinese enterprises can gain a foothold in the ASEAN market,” said Huang Kanghua, chairman of the company.

With the advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative and the thorough implementation of RCEP, the industrial chain between China and ASEAN will be further integrated, and exchanges and cooperation between the two sides will take a new step forward, said Zhai Kun, a professor at the School of International Studies, Peking University.

XINHUA

## Pact catalyzes foreign trade in Chongqing

CHONGQING — SAIC Hongyan Automotive Co Ltd, based in Chongqing, has been manufacturing heavy trucks for over half a century. It has embraced new business opportunities overseas since the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership came into effect on Jan 1, 2022.

“In 2023, we exported 450 heavy trucks to Indonesia, up about 160 percent from 2022,” said Li Dong, head of the Indonesian branch of the company.

“As the RCEP agreement took effect for Indonesia, the tariffs on dump trucks have been reduced to zero from 10 percent, which means local consumers are able to purchase our trucks at lower prices,” Li said, adding that this has increased the products' competitiveness.

Likewise, many other enterprises in the municipality in Southwest China have also made the best of the agreement to boost overseas businesses.

Chongqing Huaifon Chemical Co Ltd, one of the largest adipic acid producers globally, has facilitated its export businesses, especially to Japan. In 2022, the company exported 4,706 metric tons of adipic acid to Japan, a record high.

“In 2023, the tariff on adipic acid was 3.2 percent, compared to 4.6 percent prior to the RCEP agreement,” said Xu Shuyuan, deputy manager of the company.

Thanks to relevant policies, the company was able to score a price advantage in foreign markets, which also enhances its international competitiveness, Xu added.

At Lvling, a local pickle-making company based in Fuling district, a batch of uniformly sized, emerald-green pickled mustard tubers roll off the production line. Soon, they will be packaged and shipped to Yokohama in Japan.

Thanks to the free trade agreement, the Customs clearance time has been further shortened, and it only takes a week to ship the mustard tubers to Japan.

The import costs imposed on Japanese clients have also been reduced through tariff concession policies, according to Zhou Linxiang, general manager of Lvling.

Lvling exported 50 million yuan (\$6.9 million) worth of pickled or fresh mustard tubers to RCEP member countries in the first three quarters of 2023, up 5 per-

cent year-on-year. Mustard tubers worth about 20 million yuan were exported to Japan during the same period, up 6 percent year-on-year.

Data showed that during the first three quarters of 2023, Chongqing Customs issued 693 certificates of origin under the RCEP agreement for exports to Japan, up 8.45 percent year-on-year. The total value of the goods was \$62.6 million, up 37.74 percent from 2022.

“

As the RCEP agreement took effect for Indonesia, the tariffs on dump trucks have been reduced to zero from 10 percent, which means local consumers are able to purchase our trucks at lower prices.”

Li Dong, head of the Indonesian branch of SAIC Hongyan Automotive Co Ltd

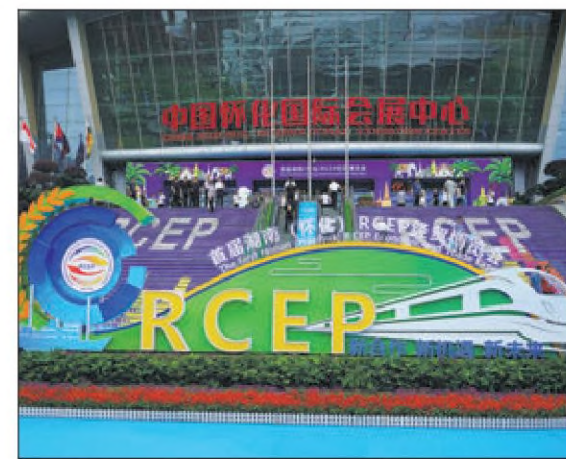
Through RCEP, these made-in-China products have also won recognition overseas for their good quality and specialized services.

“In a bid to meet the needs of Indonesian clients, we utilize late-model hydrodynamic retarders and larger-diameter wheels on our heavy dump trucks, which largely increase the maneuverability and stability of the products,” Li said.

He added that many clients in Indonesia gave positive feedback that China-made heavy-duty trucks feature higher power, carrying capacity and security compared with products from Japan and South Korea at the same price.

“These mustard tubers are selected precisely in terms of size, quality and color. At a food exhibition in Japan, many clients sought to cooperate with us,” said Zhou, adding that the company plans to build overseas warehouses and increase product varieties to provide more high-quality pickles.

XINHUA



A view of the venue for the First Hunan (Huaihua) RCEP Economic and Trade Expo in Huaihua, Central China's Hunan province, in May. YU CHUNSHENG / XINHUA

## Agreement strengthens business relations with Indonesia

NANNING — A batch of coated ivory boards worth about 430,000 yuan (\$59,800) was packed up at Guangxi Sun Paper Board Co Ltd in Beihai, a coastal city in South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, before the New Year holiday.

The products were expected to arrive in Indonesia in about 15 days.

“With the certificates of origin under the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, our goods will enjoy a tariff reduction of nearly 20,000 yuan when clearing Customs in Indonesia,” said Liu Ning, director of the company's export Customs affairs.

In 2023, the company applied for nearly 200 certificates of origin under RCEP, which significantly

helped it explore new advantages in foreign trade and expand its market in Indonesia, Liu added.

The RCEP, which entered into force on Jan 1, 2022, comprises 15 Asia-Pacific countries, including 10 ASEAN member states and five trading partners, namely China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

The RCEP took effect for Indonesia on Jan 2, 2023 and has enabled the country to implement new trade regulations.

In accordance with the commitment of the RCEP agreement, Indonesia will implement immediate zero tariffs on 65.1 percent of products originating from China, and China will also implement immediate zero tariffs on 67.9



People visit the RCEP pavilions during the 19th China-ASEAN Expo in Nanning, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, in September 2022. LU BOAN / XINHUA

percent of products originating from Indonesia since the effective date.

Based on the China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement, Indonesia will add zero-tariff treatment to more than 700 Chinese products, including auto parts, motorcycles, televisions, clothing, shoes and plastic products.

China will also cut taxes on more products from Indonesia, such as pineapple juice, canned goods, paper products and auto parts, further opening up its market to Indonesia.

Over the past decade, there has been increasingly close economic and trade cooperation between China and Indonesia. The trade volume between China and Indonesia increased from \$50 billion in 2013 to

\$150 billion in 2022. China has maintained its status as Indonesia's largest trading partner for 10 consecutive years.

The RCEP has become an important driving force for the growth of foreign trade among members of the agreement. Notably, it has injected new vitality into China's economic and trade cooperation with Indonesia.

Data from the Chinese Embassy in Indonesia showed that in the first 10 months of 2023, bilateral trade between China and Indonesia reached \$114.5 billion, and in the first three quarters, China invested \$5.6 billion in Indonesia, up nearly 8 percent year-on-year.

XINHUA

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Change-or-ruin mindset main obstacle to economic talks making any real progress

Although the exchanges between the two sides at the Third China-US Economic Working Group Meeting that concluded on Tuesday in Beijing were described as "in-depth, candid, pragmatic and constructive", it is almost impossible that any breakthroughs will be forthcoming on any major issues it covered.

In fact, the only major reported outcome of the meeting is that the two sides have agreed to continue to maintain communication. It indicates that the development of bilateral ties is restrained by the Joe Biden administration's insistence on an approach which it claims is "competitive when it should be, collaborative when it can be, and adversarial when it must be", when in fact it seeks to squeeze the space for collaboration by prioritizing the other two facets of the prism through which it views bilateral relations.

Indeed, it seems that the only reason the US side is still cooperating with China at all is because it is not yet ready to try and decouple in certain areas as it has not yet found an alternative to China.

The turning point came after the US realized that its efforts, "implied or explicit, to shape or change the PRC over several decades" had not succeeded, as US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said in a speech on the future of US-China relations on Jan 30. For the US, the sole point of Sino-US engagement has been to "change" China to the US' liking.

The other important realization the US side has come to regarding China, which determines

the exchanges between them even on the economic and trade fronts but are unlikely to make a difference in the overall situation, is that China's development achievements are the result of either the US' condescending gifts or of China exploiting the global market system led and designed by the US.

Given China's indispensable and tremendous contributions to the prosperity, stability and growth of the world economy and market, the actual situation could be deemed to be the opposite — it is the US, as well as some other developed countries, that have benefited unfairly from the opening-up of China first as a source of rich mineral resources, raw materials and cheap labor, and then as a large market and efficient manufacturing base, and a reliable source of investment and talents.

After the US realized China was not going to "change", it started approaching bilateral ties from the perspective of a zero-sum game mentality. An important reason why the US still finds it imperative to come back to the table on economic and trade issues, climate change and even security concerns with China is that it keeps butting up against the fallacy of that mentality — the US' losses are not necessarily China's gains, and vice versa. In most cases, it is the US side that bears the brunt of its China containment strategy which is a lose-lose scenario.

Unless Washington discards its zero-sum mentality and its change-it-or-ruin-it mindset, bilateral dialogue such as the economic and trade meeting will be nothing more than a talk shop.

## Protective measures will dent EU's green goals

With the European solar power industry increasingly finding itself in difficulties, it is no surprise that some in Europe are seeking to adopt protective measures to deal with what they view as "unfair Chinese competition", including antidumping probes and emergency curbs on access to the European Union market for Chinese imports.

Europe's local solar panel manufacturers are said to have hit crisis point mainly due to cheaper imports and oversupply, with the sector warning half of its capacity could shut down within weeks unless emergency actions are taken.

China, which is playing an irreplaceable role in the global renewable energy sector, accounts for more than 90 percent of Europe's solar panel supply. The country is also the EU's leading source of wind turbine imports.

Yet, while it is easy to make Chinese enterprises the scapegoat for Europe's industrial woes, the EU must carefully consider the substantial impact any restrictive actions will likely have on its ambitious green goals.

"Any potential measure needs to be weighed against the objectives we have set ourselves when it comes to the energy transition," the EU's financial services commissioner, Mairead McGuinness, told the European Parliament on Monday.

The EU has set a target of 750 gigawatts of solar power generation capacity by 2030, up from 260

GW in 2023, yet European companies produced only 3 percent of the solar panels they installed last year. It is largely thanks to Chinese imports — which have helped drive solar prices down by around 40 percent — that EU countries installed record levels of solar capacity last year, 40 percent more than in 2022. Any trade restrictions on Chinese solar imports could stall the continent's rapid expansion of green energy and make 90 percent of the photovoltaic panel market more expensive, as German Economy Minister Robert Habeck wrote in a letter he sent to the European Commission in November. The move also risks causing bankruptcies among EU companies that assemble and install solar panels using imported parts, he added.

The leading position that China currently holds in the global renewable energy sector can be attributed to factors ranging from a huge domestic market and massive investment in research and development to economies of scale. Trade defense measures targeting Chinese companies will only lead to a lose-lose result, and will by no means save Europe's solar panel manufacturing. Rather, it could cause deep decline in its solar panel deployment.

Clean energy cooperation is a major part of the China-EU strategic partnership, as the two sides are committed to tackling climate change. They should work together to reinforce engagement in that regard, rather than making any move to weaken it.

## Legitimacy of US military actions questionable

The recent series of air strikes by the United States on Iran-backed military targets in Syria and Iraq have sparked international concern, as they are a clear violation of the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of these nations.

Robert Wood, the US alternate representative for special political affairs at the United Nations, defended these actions as being "necessary and proportionate", citing a country's "inherent right of self-defense" under Article 51 of the UN Charter. However, attempting to use this right to justify unauthorized military operations in the territories of other sovereign nations that a country is not at war with distorts the concept of self-defense.

The lack of approval from the nations concerned and the absence of pre-notification prior to the air strikes — which the US initially claimed it had done but which it later admitted it hadn't — further underscores the US' disregard for the principle of respecting other nations' sovereignty, as stipulated in the UN Charter. While State Department spokesman Vedant Patel claimed that Iraq and other regional countries "understood" the US' actions, which were in response to the deaths of three US soldiers, the criticism of the strikes expressed by Syria, Iraq and Iran contradicts this assertion and high-

lights the unilateral nature of the US' actions.

Rather than being acts of self-defense, the air strikes can be seen as retaliatory measures for the deaths of the US military personnel, as indicated by President Joe Biden's statement: "If you harm an American, we will respond." This reflects a retaliatory and vengeful stance rather than a defensive posture. Moreover, the distance of the initial attacks from the US military personnel and the broader historical context of US military involvement in the region suggest a pattern of escalating tensions rather than genuine self-defense.

Rosemary DiCarlo, under-secretary-general for political and peace-building affairs of the UN, has emphasized the volatile nature of the Middle East and called for active engagement to prevent further escalation and the deterioration of regional peace and security. Any more long-arm US military actions are not conducive to this and will only exacerbate tensions rather than alleviate them.

It is imperative for all parties involved to exercise restraint, adhere to the UN Charter and international laws, and, most importantly, refrain from illegal military actions that violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other nations. The US needs to demonstrate some restraint and abide by the established rules of the international community.

Cai Meng



## Opinion Line

## Boost for investor confidence market's most valuable asset

The securities regulator said it has worked together with the Ministry of Public Security to investigate a number of suspected cases of market manipulation and malicious short selling and will intensify the supervision of trading behaviors. For investors concerned about securities lending, the China Securities Regulatory Commission said it has suspended new securities lending and strengthened supervision of the business.

All measures are to strengthen market entry expectations and crack down on malicious short selling. In response to these moves, China's stock market has reacted positively, with three major indexes of the A-share market skyrocketing on the close of trading on Tuesday.

In the face of the continued shocks in the country's capital market in recent days, what the authorities should do first is calm market sentiment and inject more liquidity

to restore market confidence. After solving short-term urgent problems, the key to increase investor confidence is repairing long-term market expectations.

The capital market is the barometer of the economy. The business environment in which listed companies as representatives of the key assets in China operate is the key to determining the extent of market confidence and expectations. Therefore, all financial work must focus on how to solidify the real economy, and improve the quality of listed companies and their investment value.

To fully protect the fair order of the securities market, regulators should face up to the serious problems such as listed companies putting greater emphasis on financing but less emphasis on investment and the protection of the rights and interests of small and medium-sized investors. Given that China's

A-share market has 220 million investors, and its volatility is closely related to the interests of ordinary people, the country must build an "investor-based" capital market. It should further improve the quality evaluation standards of listed companies and highlight the return requirements, support listed companies to inject quality assets, and put in place an exit mechanism for companies with major violations of the law or no investment value. Companies involved in window-dressing of financial reports, fraudulent listing, insider trading, market manipulation or other illegal issues, must be severely dealt with.

The authorities should make every effort to create an open, fair and just market order and a legal environment in which investors can truly feel the fairness and justice of the market and have their legitimate interests strictly protected.

— THE PAPER.CN

## What a mess, without Messi

A friendly match between Inter Miami and a star-studded local team in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region on Sunday left fans distraught, as there was no sign of their idol Lionel Messi, who was supposed to play in the match.

It looks like the fans in Hong Kong were duped. The organizers had been using Messi to promote the sale of tickets, but they never said that Messi's presence was not guaranteed. However, if one sees Messi's

posters plastered across town it is natural for fans to assume they are going to see their idol play. If the organizers had said "Messi's appearance is subject to conditions", there is no doubt fewer tickets would have been sold. Therefore, the fans are justified in expressing their dissatisfaction.

Even from a purely commercial perspective, ignoring the sentiment of fans is not a good idea. This kind of business model may not be sus-

tainable. Expectedly, the organizers, the team, and even the stars in question suffered damage to their reputation.

On Tuesday, at a news conference in Japan, Messi talked about the incident in Hong Kong, saying he hoped there will be another opportunity for him to play in Hong Kong. For now, one can only hope that relevant parties will take remedial action.

— BEIJING NEWS

## What They Say

## One-China principle is nonnegotiable

Shortly after Guatemalan officials made public on Monday the desire of the Bernardo Arevalo government of developing trade ties with the Chinese mainland, while maintaining its "diplomatic relations" with Taipei, the secessionist-minded Tsai Ing-wen authorities of the Taiwan island said in a statement that it did not come as a surprise and the trade ties the Central American country seeks to build with the mainland will not conflict with its "diplomatic ties" with Taiwan.

The Arevalo government took office in mid-January amid people's call to fight corruption and spur economic growth. While the first part of the Arevalo government's desire is fully understandable, the second part is totally unacceptable. It must realize that it cannot butter both sides of the bread at the same time.

Taipei has tried to smear Guatemala's openness to trade with the mainland as a testimony to Beijing's "checkbook diplomacy". But it is actually Taipei's failure to provide

a broad market and enough opportunities to its "diplomatic partners" that has directly prompted the latter to take the initiative to switch their focus to the mainland.

Central America was once Taipei's staunchest base of "diplomatic support", with seven countries still recognizing the island "diplomatically" as of 2006. Yet, Costa Rica severed its ties with Taipei in 2007, followed by Panama, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras in 2017, 2018, 2021, and 2023. It is Taipei that cannot counter the mainland's economic and trade influence with its "checkbook diplomacy" rather than the opposite.

The Arevalo government should realize that what it is proposing is by no means extending an olive branch in the eyes of Beijing, but presenting a grave provocation to a basic norm of the post-war order in the Asia-Pacific and a consensus of the majority of the international community. The Guatemalan politicians should discard the illusion

that they can have their cake and eat it when it comes to the Taiwan question, which is China's internal affair and concerns China's sovereignty and territorial integrity and core interest.

The one-China principle is the fundamental premise and political basis for China's cooperation with all countries, including Guatemala. Beijing will by no means allow any country to share the mainland's development dividend while maintaining "diplomatic relations" with the island, which is an inalienable part of the country. Taiwan's reunification with its motherland is a historical trend that no power can reverse.

It is to be hoped that the new government of Guatemala can effectively respond to the historical and contemporary trend and make a correct decision as soon as possible that is in the fundamental and long-term interests of the Guatemalan nation and people.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

## CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

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## COMMENT

Pan Helin

## New Year goods economy drives market

Chinese Lunar New Year goods markets across China are bustling with excitement thanks to the festive atmosphere. From North to South-west China and from East to West China, the rural markets selling Lunar New Year goods online are "crowded", indicating business is thriving. From local specialties to imported goods, from high-quality daily necessities to diverse cultural products, the online "Lunar New Year Goods Festival" is in full swing, pointing to the progress China has made in achieving social harmony.

Generally, Lunar New Year goods come flavored with fruits such as melons, and candies and different types of tea. These goods find their rightful place in supermarkets and local markets. However, today's "Lunar New Year goods economy" has several new highlights and trends; it has created new demands too.

The Lunar New Year goods market is undergoing a digital transformation. Participation in the Lunar New Year goods economy is no longer limited to bricks-and-mortar outlets, as online platforms have become another thriving market. Online marketplaces and livestreaming rooms have literally broken the physical barriers of traditional goods, offering craftsmanship and creativity that till now were confined to rural areas, as well as time-honored agricultural products to consumers. This has created a new demand space in the market.

Besides, the Lunar New Year goods economy is no longer just a simple commodity economy. The modern service industry has become a crucial part of the Lunar New Year goods economy. The diversification of market demands has raised the requirements for services such as product delivery and after-sales services. Personalized modern services such as door-to-door delivery, and delivery and installation, have enhanced the shopping experience of consumers.

Amid all this, traditional culture, once relegated to the sidelines, is entering ordinary households through digital technology and the modern service industry, facilitating the transformation from a commodity-oriented to a service-driven Lunar New Year economy.

A village in Mianzhu city of Sichuan province has formed a painting industry chain involving 2,400 people because of the market for traditional Lunar New Year paintings. Some regions have even introduced digital collectibles as complementary products, enriching consumers' purchasing experience.

Hence, enterprises should capitalize on the new trends and demands and promote brand innovation. The digitalization of shopping and the diversification of product demands have significantly increased the variety and quantity of goods consumers can choose from, intensifying competition among producers and suppliers. To secure a share of the Lunar New Year goods economy, businesses need to explore their products' comparative advantages, create brands and improve their products' quality. First, the enterprises need to leverage



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

regional culture and characteristics by creating reliable brands, strengthening consumer identification. China has a complete manufacturing industry chain, which has helped consumers to recognize regionally-clustered products. Examples include silk stockings from Zhuji, Zhejiang province, and river snail rice noodles from Liuzhou, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region.

These regional specialties provide a solid market foundation for building a brand.

The enterprises should therefore realize the advantages of their region's distinctive industries, turn recognizable products and services into brands, and reinforce those brands' reliability and strength. This is crucial for maintaining a competitive edge in the increasingly fierce competition in the Lunar New Year goods economy.

Second, the enterprises should realize the empowering role of digital technology in product enhancement, change in the traditional concepts of supply and sales, product and service promotion, and help strengthen the product and service value chains.

They should use digital technology to convey their respective brand's strengths and advantages to consumers, and employ technologies such as augmented reality (AR) to provide both physical and virtual products, enriching consumers' experience. The enterprises should also offer a range of online intelligent services apart from paper manuals, allowing consumers to indulge in "visual reality-based" consumption, in order to establish a stable customer base for their brands.

In fact, while participating in the "Metaverse Traditional New Year Goods Festival", some brands have set up online exclusive stores and "service experience outlets" that offer virtual and augmented reality scenarios, which have boosted the sales of their physical products.

And third, there is a need for them to leverage the Lunar New Year goods economy to combine brand building with the promotion of traditional culture, enriching the historical and cultural aspects of their products. Consumers tend to favor products with specific attributes during certain times. The Lunar New Year is a period when consumers look forward to a festive and traditional cultural atmosphere.

The enterprises should also explore the alignment between their products and traditional tangible and intangible cultural items. For instance, Moutai has cleverly integrated the Chinese zodiac with its products, achieving positive market results.

In conclusion, the growth of the Lunar New Year goods economy plays a crucial role in stimulating new consumption dynamics and boosting demand, thus creating space for developing brands. By combining their products with identifiable local items and features, or traditional culture through digital means, businesses can enrich their products' functionality and reinforce their brands and thrive in the Lunar New Year goods markets.

The author is co-director of the Digital Economy and Financial Innovation Research Center at Zhejiang University's International Business School. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Jiang Yichu

## Hong Kong needs local law to boost national security

Safeguarding sovereignty, national security and development interests is the fundamental purpose and bottom line of the "one country, two systems" principle. Without national security, the long-term prosperity and stability of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region cannot be guaranteed. Article 23 of the Basic Law empowers the SAR government to enact laws on its own so as to safeguard national security. However, even 26 years after the return of Hong Kong to the motherland, no legislation on Article 23 of the Basic Law (BL23) has been enacted.

The sixth-term SAR government led by Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu has taken concrete measures to promote legislation on BL23. On Jan 25, during his question and answer session, Lee said the government's preparations were in the final stage and the "path to the finishing line" is straight. On Jan 30, the government officially launched public consultations on a piece of BL23 legislation.

The senior officials of the SAR government, Executive Council and Legislative Council members, as well as people and organizations from all walks of life in HK have supported such legislation.

**Why do we need to enact a piece of BL23 legislation?**

The SAR has the constitutional responsibility of enacting legislation based on Article 23 of the Basic Law of Hong Kong. Article 3 of the "Decision on Establishing and Improving the Legal System and Enforcement Mechanisms for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region to Safeguard National Security by the National People's Congress" and Article 7 of the "Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region" state

that Hong Kong should enact legislation on safeguarding national security. Hence, the SAR's Secretary for Justice Paul T.K. Lam claimed that a BL23 law is an "overdue assignment" and the enactment of the legislation is "paying off old debts".

Moreover, BL23 legislation will make up for HK's shortcomings in safeguarding national security. Although the National Security Law is a milestone when it comes to safeguarding national security, it contains only four categories of offenses and penalties: secession, subversion, terrorist activities and collusion with a foreign country or with external elements to endanger national security. The four categories do not cover all activities and crimes that threaten national security.

And since Hong Kong's existing laws such as the Crimes Ordinance and the Official Secrets Ordinance are yet to be fully enforced, it is necessary to enact a BL23 law to ensure the implementation of all the security and security-related laws in the SAR to safeguard national security.

Besides, BL23 legislation conforms to international conventions. Safeguarding national security by implementing security laws is the top priority of every country, and the foundation of their stability and development. For example, the United States has at least 21 national security laws, the United Kingdom at least 14, Canada at least nine, Australia at least four, New Zealand at least two, and Singapore at least six.

**What does BL23 legislation contain?**

First, it prohibits activities that endanger state security. During the public consultations on a piece of BL23 legislation, many suggested how to better safeguard national security which covers five categories: treason and related acts; insurrection, incitement to mutiny and disaffection, and acts with seditious intention; theft of state

secrets and espionage; sabotage endangering national security and related activities; and external interference and organizations engaging in activities endangering national security. A BL23 law will target precisely those acts that endanger national security, and specify what constitutes such crimes and the penalties for committing such crimes.

Second, it will help build a legal framework for better safeguarding national security while underscoring the importance of the National Security Law, which will deal with national security risks that may occur now or in the future and achieve long-term stability. In the lawmaking process, the government will refer to similar laws in other common law jurisdictions and draw on their experiences and practices to ensure the safety and security of the people.

Third, a BL23 law will protect the extensive rights and freedoms enjoyed by Hong Kong residents in accordance with the law. It will protect, in accordance with law, people's rights and freedoms, including the freedoms of speech and the press, publication, association, assembly, procession and demonstration, which the SAR residents enjoy under the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and

the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as applied to Hong Kong.

**What will BL23 legislation bring about?**

To begin with, a piece of BL23 legislation will build a firewall to safeguard national security. The international security situation is changing daily, and there is a danger of the geopolitical risks spilling over into other fields.

Some countries have been interfering in Hong Kong affairs for years, by passing laws detrimental to the SAR, imposing sanctions on it, shielding and supporting those who are opposed to Beijing and are attempting to destabilize the SAR. As such, the SAR cannot turn a blind eye to these moves. It has to take pragmatic measures to plug the security loopholes, establish a firewall and safeguard security of the SAR and the motherland.

In this context, a BL23 law will serve as the "patron saint" of Hong Kong. During the violent demonstrations and riots in 2019-20, separatists who advocated "Hong Kong independence" went on the rampage in the city. And even though Hong Kong, of late, is enjoying peace, the uncertainties have increased the risks of instability.

National security risks are indeed real for Hong Kong residents. It is necessary therefore to improve the legal system in order to better safeguard national security by preventing the crimes which could be committed by separatists in the SAR in collusion with foreign forces. Only in this way can Hong Kong attain social stability and ensure the well-being of all its residents.

And last, a BL23 law will pave the SAR's path from chaos to prosperity while pro-

moting good governance. Despite the implementation of the National Security Law, individuals who are opposed to China have continued to try and destabilize the SAR. But the truth is that the rule of law in the SAR remains robust, its economy is still strong, and its business environment has continued to improve.

For example, according to SAR government data, the number of start-ups in Hong Kong increased by a record 272 in 2023 — from 4,257 in 2022. And in the first 11 months of 2023, the government received more than 200,000 applications for a variety of programs to recruit talents, of which over 120,000 were approved, far higher than the target of bringing in at least 35,000 talents each year.

More important, a survey by the American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong on Jan 30 showed that 79 percent of its members have confidence in the rule of law in the SAR, while the president of the German Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong said that law-abiding German nationals would not be affected by a BL23 law.

It is widely believed that BL23 legislation will help promote Hong Kong's long-term prosperity and stability and ensure the SAR remains a favored destination for foreign investors.

As Lee Ka-chiu said, the BL23 legislation is urgently needed. As long as Hong Kong society works together to draft a BL23 law, Hong Kong can achieve high-quality development and opening-up, leverage its unique position and advantages, cope with potential risks and challenges, and thus better safeguard national security in order to help build a better tomorrow.

The author is a Beijing-based commentator. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

## GLOBAL VIEWS



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

ZHANG MING

## Risk management

China needs to be proactive in responding to both internal and external challenges

Now, China is facing four key challenges in its international and domestic situations.

First, geopolitical conflicts are on the rise globally. After the outbreak of the 2008 financial crisis, the world economy fell into long-term stagnation. Weak domestic growth has led some countries to intentionally internationalize domestic conflicts, claiming that their problems



are caused by "unfair" economic and financial globalization. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the ebb of globalization.

The China-US game is destined to be ongoing and long-term, while the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the Palestine-Israel conflict, and the Red Sea crisis have added uncertainties to international turbulence.

Second, the global industry and supply chains face restructuring. After the COVID-19 outbreak, many developed countries have begun to emphasize that the supply and industry chains should be closer to their domestic market and more diversified. The global chains have become more fragmented, localized and peripheral. The nearshore and friendly-shore outsourcing proposed by the US, as well as the so-called "China+1" strategy proposed by major developed economies, are clear examples. The restructuring of the global chains is harming the efficiency of resource allocation globally, thereby increasing the medium- and long-term production costs of many products, and consequently pushing up global inflation. The emphasis on security is weakening Chinese enterprises' central status in the global chains, and posing challenges to foreign trade and investment.

Third, the domestic real estate market is undergoing transformation and adjustment. Domestically, the Chinese real estate market experienced rapid expansion between 2003 and 2018. Its development brought in a large amount of local government financial and tax revenues, promoted the growth

of commercial bank loans, and propelled China's economic growth, which has enhanced the wealth and well-being of residents. However, it has gradually brought about the problems such as imbalanced wealth distribution in the residential sector; local governments' excessive dependence on real estate, and large-scale risk exposure by commercial banks. The principle of "housing is for living in, not for speculation", which has been applied since 2017, has achieved phased success. Currently, not only developers and homebuyers, but also local governments have fundamentally changed their market expectations. The new round of real estate regulation policies implemented around 2020 has decreased transaction volumes and housing prices. But if the real estate market continues to be deeply regulated, great pressure or too fast adjustment may trigger systemic financial risks.

Fourth, the fiscal and debt relations between central and local governments need to be reshaped urgently. With the implementation of the "housing is for living in, not for speculation" policy, the real estate market has gradually cooled down, making it difficult for local governments to sustain their land financing model. The three-year impact of the pandemic has reduced local fiscal revenue and increased fiscal expenditure, forcing local governments to balance their budgets through various means of borrowing. As the central government is exerting increasingly strict control on local government debt, the sustainability and potential risks of local government debt have become more prominent.



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

To better respond to the above-mentioned challenges, China's macroeconomic policies can be adjusted and optimized in the following aspects.

First, China should continue to prioritize economic growth and social development, and avoid falling into a "pan-security" trap. It is believed that just as the United States' Star Wars program (Strategic Defense Initiative) in the 1980s dragged the Soviet Union into an arms race that ultimately led to the collapse of the Soviet economy, the

US-led developed countries may be attempting to drag China into a "pan-security" trap, that is, creating international tensions and escalating Sino-US confrontation to lure the Chinese government into focusing excessive energy and resources on security at the expense of economic and social development. Chinese policymakers need to fully recognize the importance of sustainable growth, and focus on high-quality development while defending the core national interests.

Second, China should spare no effort to maintain its central position in the industry and supply chains in Asia and along the Belt and Road routes. This means that in the future, China should better manage the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and the Belt and Road Initiative, and be more active in its bid to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership. China still needs to be the flagship for globalization. It needs to strengthen its high-quality opening-up to attract foreign direct investment, and maintain industry and supply chain connections with developed economies such as the US and the European Union through various efforts.

Third, the development of China's commodity housing market is relatively sufficient. In first- and second-tier cities, the future addition of real estate will mainly focus on the construction of affordable housing due to a roughly balanced supply and demand. In third- and fourth-tier cities, considering that a number of commercial houses are not selling well and there is still a high demand for affordable housing, a fund should be set up by the local government to purchase excess commercial housing from developers at a lower price and transform it into affordable housing to meet the needs of new residents. The funds for such housing projects can be provided by the central government through the issuing of special treasury bonds. On the one hand, the construction of affordable housing, urban village renovation, and emergency public infrastructure is expected to significantly speed up; on the other hand, there is still a large demand for the renovation of old commercial hous-

ing. Once the goal shifts from developing increments to operating stock, financial products such as real estate investment trusts (REITs) and mortgage-backed securities (MBS) will also develop rapidly.

Fourth, it is essential to reshape the relations between central and local fiscal debt if the risks of local government debt are to be fundamentally prevented and resolved. It is necessary to readjust and balance the financial and administrative powers of the central and local governments. This is the key to avoiding the debt of local governments increasing. It is essential that the central government coordinate expenses related to education, healthcare, social security and elderly care. Besides, important infrastructure investment in various regions should be financed by bonds issued by central and provincial governments, so as to realize the dual matching of term and cost benefit.

Furthermore, the government also needs to implement more expansionary fiscal and monetary policies: first, the central fiscal deficit ratio to GDP should be raised to over 4 percent, and the fiscal funds should give more support to residents and small- and medium-sized enterprises; second, the central bank should lower interest rates to avoid the negative impact on enterprise production and investment; third, efforts should be made to expand the issuance of treasury bonds, explore more sources of funds for the implementation of fiscal policies, and provide high-quality assets for the financial market. In the future, treasury bond issuance should be expanded to better coordinate fiscal policy with monetary policy.

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DJOOMART OTORBAEV

## De-weaponizing the dollar

BRICS is spearheading a new cross-border payment system using digital currencies to break away from Western dominance

The United Arab Emirates and China completed the first cross-border payment using the digital dirham on Jan 30. The deal involved a transfer of 50 million dirhams (\$13.6 million) from the UAE to China. A new digital platform, developed jointly by the two countries, was used to carry out the transaction. The use of this platform marks the beginning of a new



phase in the conversion of central bank digital currencies (CBDC). The main objective of this platform is to eliminate inefficiencies in cross-border transactions that arise due to high costs, lack of transparency, excessive dependence on the US dollar and the increasing politicization of exchange transactions.

Cross-border payments using digital currencies represent an essential milestone in the development of CBDC. Global financial systems will become more efficient and inclusive as more countries use digital currencies. The fact that the most advanced technology for using digital currencies has been created in developing countries illustrates that countries in the Global South have an excellent opportunity to use the new digital platform, for instance, in mutual settlements.

What has been the primary issue with cross-border payments and international settlements that has become more accentuated lately? Currently, the US dollar is the world's reserve currency, and those who wish to conduct business and

**A crucial step in this pursuit will be establishing an innovative, state-of-the-art digital payment system to improve economic cooperation and strengthen mutual trade worldwide.**

trade with other jurisdictions need US dollars. This process would not be problematic if the dollar had not been extensively utilized as an economic weapon or political tool of late.

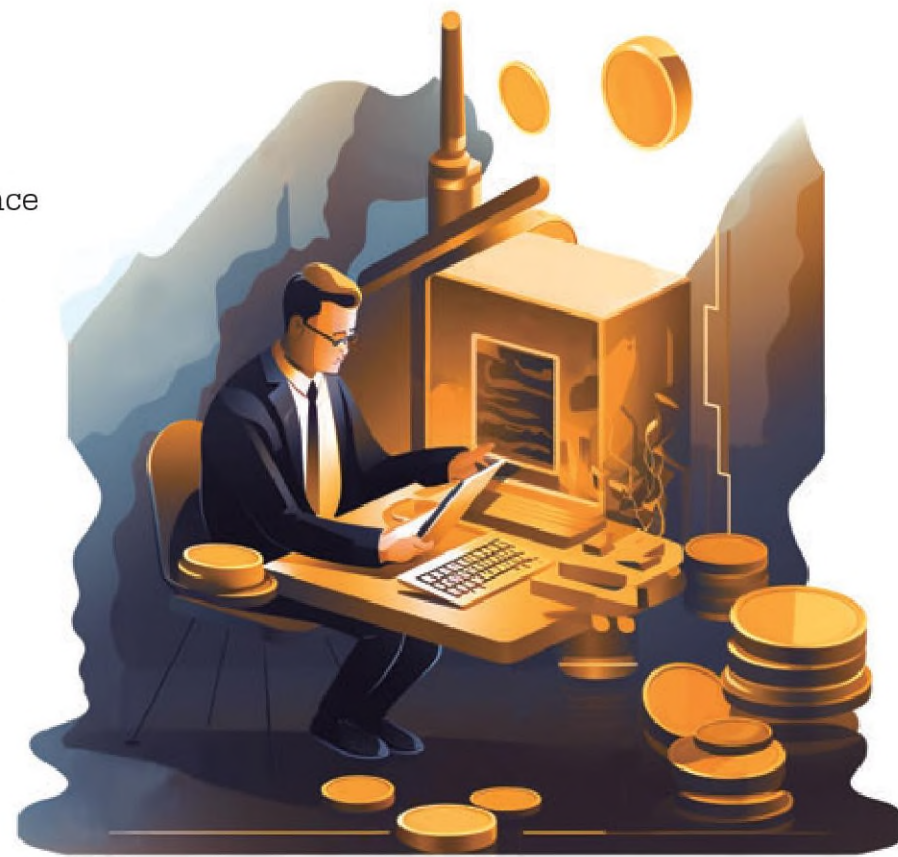
Unfortunately, the United States has increasingly used its dominant position as the issuer of the world reserve currency for political gain. It includes punishing its adversaries or competitors by unilaterally excluding them from the global financial system. Moreover, if the US government dislikes anyone's behavior, it threatens to confiscate its hard currency reserves. As a result, many countries, particularly those in the Global South, are looking for ways to avoid such risks and prevent the politicization of economic and financial realities. Many are exploring the possibility of trading among themselves, avoiding US dollars, and using their national currencies. They believe there is no need for a financial policeman to govern the world's financial system.

Lately, there has been a lot of discussion about the possibility of

replacing the US dollar with alternative currencies. However, this is a challenging political issue, as every country would want its national currency to be the primary one. It is essential to stay realistic and understand that the immediate problem with different currencies is their limited liquidity. Despite becoming the most used alternative currency for international transactions by the end of 2023, the renminbi's share of global reserves remained less than 3 percent, behind the US dollar (60 percent) and the euro (20 percent), which will remain the dominant currencies for a long time due to their higher liquidity. Using alternative currencies for payments will inevitably involve higher transaction costs, as none are fully convertible or have established international status.

The expert community has been actively debating the creation of a new universal settlement instrument. One idea is to develop a digital financial asset backed by a basket of currencies from BRICS countries. This type of unit of account, supported by the economic power of all the countries involved, could potentially be more competitive for conducting alternative cross-border transactions.

This possibility became even more real after Jan 31, when South African Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor announced that Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE had confirmed their decision to join the BRICS bloc. BRICS therefore unites 10 influential developing countries, accounting for one-fourth of world exports and more than 40 percent of global



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

oil production, and their share in the world economy at purchasing power parity has reached 35 percent.

Direct policy statements to strengthen the use of national currencies and payment instruments in cross-border transactions were made at the first BRICS Sherpa meeting on Jan 30. It was stated explicitly by Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, China's Vice-Foreign Minister Ma Zhaoxu and Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Mehdi Safari. BRICS member countries have initiated the promotion of

the digital transformation of advanced technologies in the financial and banking sectors. This will significantly benefit the organization's members and the whole world.

There is a common belief that countries in the Global South cannot achieve the same technological progress as the West. However, these countries appear to be striving to challenge this notion by pursuing rapid modernization and high-quality development within the framework of the new principles of international order and global

governance. A crucial step in this pursuit will be establishing an innovative, state-of-the-art digital payment system to improve economic cooperation and strengthen mutual trade worldwide.

The author is former prime minister of the Kyrgyz Republic and a distinguished professor at the Belt and Road School at Beijing Normal University. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## LIFE



# Ancient Shu shines in Shanghai

New museum's first exhibition is part of an ongoing series that is dedicated to tracing origins of Chinese civilization, **Zhang Kun** reports in Shanghai.

Shanghai Museum East had its soft opening on Friday with the exhibition, *Stars Over China: The Ancient Shu Civilization of Sanxingdui and Jinsha*.

Construction of the new museum opposite the Shanghai Science and Technology Museum in the Pudong New Area started in 2017, and it is expected to open to the public this year in three phases.

Shanghai Museum East has six stories, with a gross floor area of 113,200 square meters.

Its exhibition space will be divided into 20 halls covering a total area of 33,600 sq m. It is expected to receive more than 5 million visitors every year.

The first to open alongside the Sanxingdui exhibition will be the hall of Chinese bronze art, which houses around 500 objects that present the development of bronze art in China from the 18th century BC to the mid-

1800s in seven sections.

The Shu region was an ancient state in southwestern China that lasted for more than a millennium before its fall in the fourth century BC. Excavations of the Shu civilization,

most notably at the Sanxingdui and Jinsha sites, started in 1929 and since the 1980s important discoveries have been regularly made.

*Stars Over China: The Ancient Shu Civilization of Sanxingdui and Jinsha* is hosted by the Shanghai Museum, the Sichuan Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, the Sanxingdui Museum in Guanghan

and the Jinsha Site Museum of Sichuan province.

Featuring 363 objects, including the latest archaeological finds fresh from preliminary cleaning, the exhibition is the largest display of ancient Shu civilization outside its home province of Sichuan.

Over 200 of the objects have come

“We have reserved space for 8,000 visitors every day, and in five minutes we were fully booked.”

Chu Xiaobo, director of the Shanghai Museum



**Top:** An exhibition, *Stars Over China: The Ancient Shu Civilization of Sanxingdui and Jinsha*, is being held at Shanghai Museum East. It kicked off on Friday. **Above:** A multimedia exhibition, *Sanxingdui Encounter*, on the museum's third floor provides visitors a different perspective to experience the art of the ancient Shu state in Southwest China. PHOTOS BY GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY

from Sichuan, but the Shanghai Museum has also managed to borrow objects from 25 other museums and institutions all over the country that reflect the connections between the Shu civilization and other parts of China.

“We believe the exhibition will be phenomenal,” says Chu Xiaobo,

director of the Shanghai Museum.

The institution began accepting online bookings on its WeChat social platform a few days ahead of the opening.

“We have reserved space for 8,000 visitors every day, and in five minutes we were fully booked,” he says.

“We are confident we'll be able to turn the new Shanghai Museum East into a cultural landmark recognized by the whole world.”

On Jan 29, the Shanghai Museum invited members of the media to witness the unpacking of two signature exhibits for the upcoming exhibition.

The first was *Bronze Figure With Towering Strands of Hair*, which dates to between the 13th century and 11th century BC. Standing 104 centimeters tall, the statue's knees are bent and its buttocks are prominent in a posture resembling that of a person doing a dead lift.

The figure has changed people's impressions of traditional Chinese art, says Hu Jialin, a bronze researcher at the Shanghai Museum, because it is commonly believed that traditional Chinese art tended to emphasize the abstract and avoided realistic depictions of the human form.

“This figure shows that realistic representations of human figures were found in China as early as 3,000 years ago.”

Hu points out that contrary to the public perception that Sanxingdui and Jinsha art was “exotic” and different, it was an integral part of ancient Chinese art, and

was closely connected to cultural relics found in many other parts of the country.

“We noticed the similarly realistic depictions of animal forms on bronze art in the Yangtze River watershed,” Hu says.

“And we believe the terracotta soldiers were somewhat influenced by the bronze figures of Sanxingdui.”

The second artifact unveiled to the media was a gold mask excavated at the Sanxingdui site in 2021.

“We have found similar masks at the Jinsha site, and this shows that Sanxingdui and Jinsha share a similar cultural root,” Hu says.

Archaeologists have speculated that the mask was originally placed on a bronze head sculpture and was important to the worship of gods during Shu sacrificial ceremonies, he says.

The latest exhibition is the third in the Shanghai Museum's ongoing series, *The Essence of China*, which aims to present the origins of Chinese civilization through a series of exhibitions over the course of a decade, according to Chu.

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## New York Philharmonic committed to cultural ambassadorship

NEW YORK — The New York Philharmonic is committed to cultural ambassadorship and to linking the United States and China through music, the head of the New York Philharmonic has said.

From giving performances and building cooperation with the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra and the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, the orchestra's relationship with China dates back decades, Gary Ginstling, president and CEO of the philharmonic, says.

“We are sort of connecting the United States and China through our music. Regardless of what's happening in the world around us, or the challenges between our countries, this connection between music is so important to us and will remain so,” he says.

The New York Philharmonic is one of the US' leading orchestras, and one of the oldest musical institutions in the country.

Encouragingly, the New York Philharmonic resumed in-person exchanges with its Chinese partners and audience in 2023, following a yearslong hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Last summer, we were very for-



Musicians from the New York Philharmonic perform at the Happy Chinese New Year launching ceremony at the Consulate General of the People's Republic of China in New York. PHOTOS BY LI RUI / XINHUA

tunate to be able to send a group of about nine or 10 musicians to China. I was able to accompany them to Shanghai to begin reawakening our relationship with Chinese musical institutions,” Ginstling says, adding that these include the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra and the Shanghai Orchestra Academy.

“It was so exciting for me to see for

the first time in person the young musicians being trained by our musicians, and the sort of the coming together of cultures to learn, to make music together. So it's very special for me.”

During their stay in Shanghai, musicians from the New York Philharmonic performed at the Summer Air Festival, sharing their expertise via teaching and side-by-

side performances. They also attended the commencement ceremonies for musicians receiving advanced degrees.

Ginstling voices his hopes for more visits to China with the orchestra. “It's really important to us, and we're hoping to work out all the details to make that happen as soon as possible.”

“It's so exciting to see how classical

music continues to grow in China,” he adds, saying that training the next generation of young musicians is something that's also important to the New York Philharmonic and that despite online exchanges with Chinese musicians during the hiatus, the orchestra had all been looking forward to returning to China in person.

The New York Philharmonic has

been celebrating the Lunar New Year since 2012, which was the last Year of the Dragon, and is scheduled to continue doing so with a concert on Feb 20, for this Year of the Dragon.

The annual celebration is important for the orchestra and one of the high points on its schedule as it welcomes people from all over the world, Ginstling says, adding that 12 years of celebrating China's Lunar New Year no doubt signifies to the community in New York that it is an important part of the tradition.

Yu Long, the Chinese conductor who launched the annual Lunar New Year concert with the New York Philharmonic in 2012, will again conduct the orchestra for the upcoming performance.

Ginstling adds that Yu has put together a wonderful program that will include new music, commissions, as well as great Western classical music.

The New York Philharmonic has many Chinese musicians, Chinese Americans and musicians from European countries, making it a global orchestra, he says.

XINHUA

LIFE



**Above left:** Kunqu Opera actor Shao Zheng plays the role of Liu Mengmei in the classic opera, *The Peony Pavilion*, by Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) playwright Tang Xianzu. **Above middle:** The production arranged for the ancient Zhengyici Theater presents audiences with an immersive experience. **Above right:** Yu Xuejiao (left) and Wang Linlin perform in the show. PHOTOS BY ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

# Staging a classic, with a twist

A time-honored Beijing theater presents a new take on *The Peony Pavilion*, which has long stood as one of the most celebrated Kunqu Opera, **Chen Nan** reports.

Half an hour before the Kunqu Opera show started, Shi Shuyue, who specializes in *huatian* (which translates as "painted face" and refers to actors playing male roles with striking appearances and high social positions), put on his shoulder pads, which make him look like a strong and powerful god.

With his face painted red, black and green, Shi looked in the mirror and decided he was ready to perform as the judge of the underworld courtroom, who investigates the nature of people's deaths and determines their punishments or rewards in the afterlife.

The role is from *The Peony Pavilion*, which is one of the most-performed Kunqu Opera works by Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) playwright Tang Xianzu.

"Usually, I appear onstage during the second half. But for this adaptation, I am the first character the audience will see," says Shi, who has been performing with the Northern Kunqu Opera Theatre, a Beijing-based theater company and the only professional platform in northern China dedicated to the roughly 600-year-old genre that originated in the country's south. The art form is inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The stage adaptation of *The Peony Pavilion* has been tailored specially for the Zhengyici Theater, also known as Temple Theater Beijing Opera House, which is believed to be the only wooden theater of its kind preserved in the country, and is over 300 years old.

As Shi stands on the second floor, he strikes a gong three times and narrates the opening line of the show. As the lights dim, he steps down from the stage. When the lights turn on again, the protagonist, a beautiful young woman named Du Liniang, appears.

In *The Peony Pavilion* Du falls in love with Liu Mengmei, a handsome scholar she meets in a dream. She wakes up and finds that her longing for the man is so strong that it gradually causes her to fall ill and die. After her death, she persuades the judge of the underworld to grant her permission to return as a ghost to find him. She eventually finds Liu, who is staying at the family temple where she is buried. The two stay together lovingly for a while. When he opens Du's coffin, his love for her is so powerful that it brings her back to life, and they live happily ever after.

According to Zhang Peng, director of the stage adaptation and general manager of Zhengyici Theater, this version of *The Peony Pavilion* was premiered about 10 years ago by the Northern Kunqu Opera Theatre. After the company took over management of Zhengyici in 2019 and reopened the venue in 2022 following repairs and renovation, it has become a regular show, and attracts many viewers.

"The story of *The Peony Pavilion* is well-known to the audience, and there

are many different versions. Those who want to come here to watch *The Peony Pavilion* not only wish to enjoy the classic story again, but also to get a glimpse of the old theater, which presents a different experience of watching *The Peony Pavilion*," says Zhang.

During the upcoming Spring Festival, which falls on Saturday, *The Peony Pavilion* will be staged at the Zhengyici Theater as part of the venue's programs celebrating Lunar New Year.

Yu Xuejiao plays the role of Du, and Shao Zheng plays Liu.

"During one of the acts, *Walking in the Garden*, I walk down the stage and perform close to the audience. I'm so close that the audience can see my pimples," says Yu. "I have to control my movements, such as throwing my long sleeves and turning my body. It's a very interesting experience to perform at the Zhengyici Theater. Everything about it makes the show very special."

Located in the *hutong* (traditional alleyway) area of Qianmen, a popular destination in downtown Beijing, the theater was built in 1688 on the ruins of a Buddhist temple, which was initially a guild hall, or a gathering place for business people from Zhejiang province and later became a place for them to pay tribute to their ancestors with performances. It has a long history that includes performances by Peking Opera masters, such as Mei Lanfang (1894-1961) and Tan Xinpei (1847-1917).

According to Zhang, the theater has a capacity of about 150 seats, with two stories of chairs on three sides of the stage. A variety of performances have been staged since the reopening in April 2022. In addition to Kunqu Opera shows, the theater has also hosted violin recitals, dances and performances of traditional Chinese musical instruments.

On the reopening day in April 2022, the classic Kunqu Opera, *Tianguan Cifu*, or Heavenly God Blesses the People, was performed alongside *The Peony Pavilion*.

From Feb 10 to 15, *Tianguan Cifu* will be presented again at the Zhengyici.

The theater has also served as a place for worshipping Zhao Gongming — the God of Wealth. A painting of the god riding a tiger can be seen at the theater. In the image, Zhao holds a gold ingot, a symbol of wealth, in his left hand and a gnarled cudgel, his signature weapon, in his right.

"*Tianguan Cifu* is all about good luck, auspiciousness and good fortune since it involves many Chinese gods, including Zhao Gongming, expressing good wishes. It will be the first time for us to stage it at the theater during Spring Festival," says Zhang.

He adds that special arrangements have been made, including special choreography and plots involving audience interaction.

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**Top:** Actress Yu Xuejiao plays Du Liniang, a beautiful young woman, who falls in love with Liu Mengmei, a handsome scholar, played by actor Shao Zheng (right), whom she meets in a dream. **Above left:** Actor Shi Shuyue kicks off the show, *The Peony Pavilion*, by playing the role of the narrator. **Above right:** Yu in the play.



I walk down the stage and perform close to the audience. I'm so close that the audience can see my pimples. I have to control my movements..."

Yu Xiaojie, Kunqu Opera actress

## Chinese lanterns illuminate Italian theme park

ROME — A large collection of handmade Chinese lanterns lit up one of Italy's major theme parks in the city of Cassino this holiday season.

The International Lantern Festival "Lanternia" opened on Dec 8 at the Il Bosco delle Favole (Fairy Tale Forest) in central Italy.

Divided into six areas and featuring Christmas, fairy tales, animal and animation themes, this large-scale display covers some 110,000 square meters and 2.5 kilometers of pathways, all illuminated with giant Chinese lanterns.

The exhibition, which will run until March 10, received more than 2,000 visitors on Jan 28. This was also the opening day of Carnival, a traditional Italian holiday.

"The lanterns are popular with Italians," says Domenico Durante, director of the exhibition.

As of Jan 28, the lantern had attracted about 80,000 visitors, he adds, with 1,000 to 5,000 people



Italians enjoy Chinese lanterns at a theme park in Cassino in late January. Spanning 110,000 square meters, the Lantern Festival "Lanternia" features 300 giant lanterns, illuminated by more than 2.5 kilometers of LED lights. PHOTOS BY LI JING / XINHUA



entering the park each day.

The success of the exhibition is due to the exquisite handiwork of artisans in Zigong, Sichuan province, a city known for its lantern cul-

ture. A team of 15 people came to Cassino at the end of last year to work for a month, handicrafting hundreds of lanterns.

The lanterns are made of silk, an

eco-friendly material that is lightweight, nonpolluting and resilient. They are illuminated with the latest low-power LEDs, reminiscent of candles or traditional light sources.

According to Durante, the distinctly Chinese lanterns are new and very attractive to Italians. Visitors came from the north and south of the country to see them.

Damiano Vincenzo drove over 50 minutes from Benevento to the park with his family.

"I really like these typical lanterns," he says.

His son Matias especially loves dragon lanterns, not only because of their wonderful colors but also because that "the dragon's head moves".

Another visitor, Matteo, went after reading about Chinese lanterns on the official website and says that the lanterns are "as beautiful as imagined".

The exhibition originated in a trip that Durante took to Zigong, where he was impressed by this traditional art and decided to bring it to his hometown.

"Next year, we might do more lanterns with Chinese characteristics and bring the exhibition to other Italian cities like Florence, or even all over the world," he says.

XINHUA

## LIFE

## Office work is funny business

An unexpected hit movie looks at the humorous side of the misery that reigns over cubicle kingdoms, **Xu Fan** reports.

Within the past several weeks since the comedy hit *Johnny Keep Walking!* topped the country's single-day box-office charts for more than a month, Ying Luoja, the movie's producer and co-writer, has found herself reconnecting with many friends she hasn't been in touch with for a long time. "They jokingly said the characters in the movie are like their alter egos because they express their confusion and frustration while enduring immense workplace stress," Ying tells China Daily in an online interview.

This widespread resonance is the key factor behind the movie's soaring success as the biggest dark horse in the last month of the Year of the Rabbit. Since its release across theaters on the Chinese mainland on Dec 29, the 117-minute film has brought in around 1.24 billion yuan (\$172.3 million) as of Tuesday, a remarkable achievement in the recently comparatively sluggish market.

The film tells the story of an honest and hardworking factory fitter who, by a twist of fate, is mistakenly transferred to the corporate headquarters located in the provincial city. When the human resources department's staffer who handles the transfer discovers the mistake, he resorts to every means possible to cover it up.

Ironically, due to the fitter's straightforward and simple way of thinking, as well as being incorrectly presumed to have a special relationship with the chairman, he receives consecutive promotions, resulting in his annual pay rising from 400,000 yuan to 1.5 million yuan. However, as the plot unfolds, the truth behind the unusual transfer is gradually exposed, revealing a scheme involving corruption and conflicts among high-ranking executives.

The protagonist is played by Da Peng, and the human resources staffer is portrayed by Bai Ke. Both actually experienced the daily hustle of commuting on congested subways and clocking in at the office before transitioning to become actors. This real-life experience made their performances authentic, in turn, helping the movie receive a lot of word-of-mouth praise from online users and hence accumulate a rating of 8.2 out of 10 on the popular review aggregator, Douban.

Director Dong Runnian, who is also Ying's husband and co-wrote the script with her, drew the initial inspiration for the movie from a reunion dinner with former university classmates in 2017.

Some of them were then working at internet companies and complained about workplace problems, ranging from nasty bosses to office bureaucracy and excessive yet ineffective overtime.

Dong, a native of Tianjin, a city that's known for its prolific production of cross-talk — a traditional genre featuring comedic dialogues between two performers — graduated from the Communication University of China after earning his bachelor's degree in the directing department and pursuing a master's in cinema. With a natural sense of humor, and already an established scriptwriter famous for blockbusters like *Breakup Buddies* and *Mr. Six*, Dong quickly seized



**Clockwise from top:** *Johnny Keep Walking!*, a comedy hit, features Da Peng (on the ladder) as a factory technician who mistakenly receives a series of promotions; a still of Li Naiwen, who portrays a vice-president; the movie's poster; director Dong Runnian (left) and producer-scriptwriter Ying Luoja (right) appear alongside the cast during the 2023 Golden Rooster and Hundred Flowers Film Festival in Xiamen, Fujian province, in early November; Sun Yizhou (front) plays a human resources department's head. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

the humorous and satirical elements in the anecdotes.

Ying recalls that she was not quite hooked when she first heard the idea for the film, as she couldn't relate to the original outline, which reflects upon office issues by telling

a tale about a group of underdog staffers who successfully organize an annual company gala.

But as time went on, Dong delved deeper into his idea, interviewing almost 100 employees — ranging from ordinary staffers to middle

management — in several giant internet companies over more than four years, leading Ying to develop a greater interest in the project.

A bottleneck occurred in late 2021. Although the creative duo had already written several ver-

sions of the script, their instincts about the market and audiences meant they were not satisfied with the story.

"Dong wanted to give up. But I, on the contrary, became the person who couldn't let it go," Ying says.

"Then, I said: 'Fine. Let's put aside all other work. We will dedicate a certain number of days, for instance, about 10, to solving the problem.'

"However, it turned out that we had imagined more difficulties than we actually encountered. We solved the key challenges in just five days."

The method sounds simple but was demanding — they treated the movie not as a comedy but as a story that should unfold according to its own logic.

"At first, we tried hard to write funny lines for the characters. But when you intentionally add jokes into dialogues, it may not quite work with the plotline. Dong was the first to realize this problem. He persuaded me to not consider the comedic elements but to imagine what would happen to the characters," she says.

After all, the story itself, about a blue-collar worker who obtains an absurd promotion to ultimately become the deputy head of the human resources department, is already satirical.

"No matter what the characters do or what they say, as long as they do it following the natural logic of the plot, it will be funny," Ying explains.

Dong, who joined his wife during the online interview, recalls that he also read news stories for inspiration. One that impressed him was a report about a homeless man who sneaked into a high-rise office building in Beijing's Wangjing area in 2020.

During the day, the man would hide in an abandoned storage room, waiting for the workers to leave. At night, he would come out and enjoy the free snacks and drinks in the office. Over time, he even learned which departments tended to work late, so he could find a quiet place to sleep by arranging a few chairs.

"The story deeply inspired me. It turns out that some stories in real life are even more absurd, unbelievable and ironic than movie scripts," says Dong.

The director also shared several behind-the-scenes stories, including how Bai improvised two famous lines from Tang Dynasty (618-907) poet Li Bai to depict his character's frustration, emphasizing that despite his talent, he couldn't get the recognition he deserved.

As Dong's second directorial effort after *Gone With the Light*, the 2019 sci-fi comedy, *Johnny Keep Walking!* has also earned acclaim overseas. Aside from its release in eight countries so far, including the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom and Germany between Jan 18 and Feb 1, it will also show in theaters in Cambodia from Feb 15.

"Most of the feedback is from overseas Chinese," Ying says. "They say they have been yearning to watch stories about their roots, especially after living or working in other countries for many years."

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## Breaking through a lifelong cynicism toward tradition

Cultural traditions are the building blocks of identity. From the time we take our first breath, we wear the shoes of our ancestors to climb ladders they built in the hopes of navigating life's trials. Or so I've been told.

My family eschewed faith and organized religion and opted to form its own secular path. I remember my mother dismissing traditions as thoughtless

exercises in nostalgia.

By the time I became an adult, I considered Christmas decorations gaudy. New Year's Eve was an arbitrary moment in Earth's orbit, and if people truly loved each other, they wouldn't need to waste money on cheap corporate gifts on Valentine's Day because they would declare it every day.

My cynicism held firm when I moved to China. If anything, I became less trusting of tradition initially. Experiencing Lunar New Year for the first time proved that one could pick any random day to celebrate a completed circle

around the sun. I'll admit I remember confusing one or two strangers by cheering for the new year in the middle of summer. It's not the most charming thing I've ever done.

One year, my girlfriend declared that it was time for me to begin accompanying her to visit her family during Spring Festival. Being Cantonese, she taught me how to hold my hands together and say *gong hei fat choi*. When I realized I would be saying that to childishly beg her mother for a red packet, my heart sank into my stomach. I was a teenager the last time I

received money as a holiday gift. My grandparents would send me a card with cash inside every birthday and Christmas growing up. Eventually, it became embarrassing, as in my culture, receiving a gift of money as an adult is shameful. Wedding gifts are typically home appliances or decorations. Around the age of 20, folks begin discussing whether it's immature to ask for birthday presents.

My girlfriend told me that it was customary to receive red packets filled with money until marriage, at which point I would be expected to

begin giving red packets to all the unmarried children in the family.

Her family noticed my bizarre reaction to receiving money from them. I'm grateful she explained that I was not used to this custom. I didn't want them to know that their generosity emasculated me, filled me with shame and made me desperate to never show my face again.

Now, I am married. This year, my wife and I will distribute our own red packets to nieces and nephews — some are little, and some are young adults. I will see the gratitude in their eyes and feel the

warmth of their hugs.

It won't be a financial transaction. It will be an expression of a familial bond. I will step into the shoes of Chinese ancestry and add to their ladder.

This summer, I will serve as a groomsman for my older brother's wedding. I will fulfill my traditional duties therein as an implicit approval of his union with my future sister-in-law. Perhaps I will give them a red packet gift. Perhaps traditions aren't so bad after all.

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