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Well-preserved history

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CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中国日报 TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2024

Key meeting sets tone for further deepening reform

By MO JINGXI
mojingxi@chinadaily.com.cn

China reiterated on Monday its determination to persist with the key strategy of reform and opening-up in order to address the risks and challenges faced on its development path, as a key meeting set the tone for the overall deepening of reforms this year.

President Xi Jinping, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remark when presiding over the fourth meeting of the central commission for deepening overall reform of the 20th CPC Central Committee, which he heads. It was stressed at the meeting

that China will continue to work on reform measures to expand domestic demand, boost confidence, ensure the public's well-being and fend off risks, according to a statement released after the meeting.

Efforts should be focused on resolving the most crucial and pressing issues through reforms to remove barriers hindering the smooth advancement of Chinese modernization, it said.

It was agreed at the meeting that this year's primary task is to plan for further steps to advance the overall deepening of reforms.

Efforts must be made to fully mobilize enthusiasm for reform throughout society, further consolidate the consensus on reform and rally the entire Party and the whole nation to carry forward and

complete major reform tasks, the meeting said.

The meeting reviewed and adopted guidelines regarding land administration system reform, promoting the overall green transition of China's socioeconomic development, enhancing the grassroots emergency management capacity, and accelerating the formation of fundamental systems supporting comprehensive innovation.

Xi said at the meeting that a land administration system that can better coordinate macro policies with regional development should be established in order to improve the accuracy and efficiency of the allocation of land resources.

Noting that the comprehensive green transition of socioeconomic

development is the fundamental strategy for addressing issues relating to resources, the environment and the ecology, Xi underscored the importance of making coordinated efforts to reduce carbon emissions, reduce pollution, expand green areas and promote economic growth.

The concept of green development must be considered during the whole process of socioeconomic development, he said.

Xi added that it is necessary to enhance emergency management capabilities at the primary level to prevent and mitigate major safety risks, so that various disasters and accidents could be handled in a prompt and effective way.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

Fair treatment for Chinese citizens urged

High-level Vienna meeting hears call for Washington to lift its visa restrictions

By YANG ZEKUN
yangzekun@chinadaily.com.cn

State Councilor and Minister of Public Security Wang Xiaohong urged the United States to stop harassing and interrogating Chinese students for no reason, during a meeting with US Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas in Vienna on Sunday.

Wang asked the US to ensure that Chinese citizens enjoy fair treatment and full dignity upon entering the country.

The US should take effective measures to ensure the safety of Chinese diplomatic and consular missions and personnel, and lift visa restrictions against Chinese institutions and individuals, he said.

In January, there were reports of multiple Chinese students with valid documents facing unwarranted interrogation, harassment and visa cancellations, leading to deportations by US border enforcement officers upon their arrival at Washington Dulles International Airport.

During their time at the airport, the students were subjected to prolonged questioning, inspection of their electronic devices and, in some cases, detention for over 10 hours with restricted communication with the outside world.

US law enforcement officers repeatedly questioned the individuals about their political background and research activities, demanding access to information about the Chinese government as a condition for entry. After the individuals refused, the officers revoked their visas, barred them from entering the country and deported them.

These acts occurred despite US officials recently stating their support for cultural exchanges with China and welcoming Chinese students.

During a meeting in San Francisco in November, President Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden agreed to enhance dialogue and cooperation in various fields. While addressing a welcome dinner jointly hosted by friendly organizations in San Francisco, President Xi said that China is ready to invite 50,000 young Americans to China on exchange and study programs over the next five years.

On Jan 29, the Chinese embassy in the US issued a reminder to prospective Chinese students intending to enter the US through Washington Dulles International Airport to exercise caution. They were advised to ensure they have a thorough understanding of US entry policies and regulations,

make preparations in advance and bring all required entry documents.

In the event of interrogation by US border enforcement officers, prospective Chinese students were advised to remain calm and cooperate rationally. If treated unfairly, they were instructed to record information about the officers involved, carefully review any documents they were asked to sign, request copies and preserve necessary evidence.

Chen Wenxin, executive director of the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations' Institute of American Studies, said that student exchanges are an integral part of cultural exchanges between China and the US. Cultural exchanges between the two countries have evolved with changes in the overall bilateral relationship.

Chen said that China has made significant efforts in promoting cultural exchanges with the US and proposed during the San Francisco meeting to expand people-to-people exchanges, especially among the younger generation.

"We have shown great goodwill, but the malicious interrogation and harassment of Chinese students by the US side creates obstacles to our cultural exchanges," he said.

Chen noted that Wang's recent request was very pertinent and stems from protests against the continuous hindrances and wrong practices by the US, which are detrimental to normal exchanges between the two sides.

At the Vienna meeting, Wang requested that the US rectify its categorization of China as a "major drug source country".

In September, Biden submitted to Congress a presidential determination memorandum on major drug transit or major illicit drug-producing countries, identifying China and more than 20 other countries as so-called major sources for drugs.

Wang expressed hope that both sides would uphold the principles of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation, respect each other's core interests and major concerns, and remove obstacles to bilateral drug control, law enforcement cooperation and cultural exchanges.

Both sides agreed to implement the consensus reached by the two heads of state at the San Francisco summit, maintain dialogue and cooperation in drug control and law enforcement on the basis of mutual respect, manage their differences, strive to achieve mutually beneficial cooperation, attach importance to each other's concerns and address issues properly.

Captivating show



Volunteers — from China, Malta and Italy — wearing hanfu, a traditional Chinese costume, walk along the main street of Valletta, the capital of Malta, on Saturday as part of an event to celebrate the Chinese Spring Festival. JONATHAN BORG / XINHUA

BEIJING ILLUMINATES NEW WINTER TOURISM

Colorful displays, lantern exhibitions entice visitors to linger longer

By XIN WEN
xinwen@chinadaily.com.cn

In-depth

On a bitterly cold Beijing evening in late November, 27-year-old Li Chuhan was one of thousands of spectators mesmerized by a light show that looked like spectacular scenes from a Harry Potter movie.

A flock of illuminated giant phoenixes — trailing long, fiery tail feathers — circled, soared and swooped over the lake near the Solana shopping mall in Chaoyang district.

Dressed in a thick coat and holding a camera, Li was surrounded by a group of people and jostled to capture images of the phoenixes, which in mythology are reborn through fire and ashes.

The simulated phoenixes that transfixed the crowd during the Beijing Chaoyang International Light Festival were "kites" powered

by drones with a series of lights attached.

The festival, held along the Liangma River and across other landmark locations in Chaoyang, featured more than 100 cultural, commercial and tourism events.

See Lights, page 2

China a leading advocate of global governance reform

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the Group of 77, the largest organization of developing nations, with over 130 members. It is noteworthy that China remains a staunch ally for inclusive and sustainable development.

While independence was the hallmark six decades ago, the inexorable ascent of the Global South nations today draws extensive discussions on collaborative strategies to address inequality and inadequate growth.

The Third South Summit, held in Kampala, Uganda, in late January and organized by the G77

WORLD WATCH

By Imran Khalid

and China with the theme "Leaving No One Behind", witnessed strong voices of leaders from the Global South and the United Nations calling for enhanced collaboration on more equitable global governance systems, in order to achieve shared and sustainable development.

The existing global governance systems have long been criticized

in Africa, Asia and Latin America for favoring developed Western nations and providing no safety net for distressed developing countries. Calls for a reassessment of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank stem from concerns that their structure, location and mandates are ill-suited to address evolving global dynamics. The United States, a key architect of these institutions, wields significant influence due to its substantial shareholdings and their Washington headquarters.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said the international system's global institutions reflect the world of 80 years ago, when many African countries were still colonized, adding that they "are no longer fit for purpose".

See G77, page 3

Community in mourning



People attend a candlelight vigil on Sunday after two police officers and a firefighter were shot and killed by an armed man in Burnsville in the US state of Minnesota. The suspect, who officials said had multiple guns and large amounts of ammunition, also died. ABBIE PARR / AP

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Global South countries support effective rules-based order
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From left: A "kite" phoenix swoops over the lake near the Solana shopping mall in Chaoyang district in Beijing, while lanterns adorn Moshikou Street in the capital's Shijingshan district. PHOTOS BY FU TIAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE AND PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



LIGHTS:

CAPITAL CITY EXPANDS ITS ATTRACTIONS

From page 1

Although she was chilled to the bone as she clutched her camera, Li said she hoped more light shows would be held in Beijing in the winter. "It's only on rare occasions that wintry days like these don't dampen people's enthusiasm to go out," she said, adding the night was a precious moment that lifted her spirits.

When it comes to winter spectacles, Harbin in Heilongjiang province traditionally captures the public imagination with its exhibitions of elaborate ice and snow sculptures. However, Beijing is

catching up fast. Dazzling light displays in bustling commercial areas, augmented by lanterns hung on suburban trees for Chinese New Year, are trending topics on social media.

A large number of fish lanterns shining blue light on trees lit purple, nicknamed "Big Fish and Begonia" by netizens, have been praised for creating a cool urban atmosphere in Chaoyang's Sanlitun area. Other attractions that have gained attention include glowing spherical lights floating on the Liangma River in Chaoyang that twinkle in various colors, and clusters of red and yellow lights adorning trees in Moshikou Street in western Shijingshan district to welcome the arrival of Chinese New Year.

Shining examples

Experts are hopeful the city's displays, set against the backdrop of modern and older buildings, will prove to be another popular winter tourism attraction.

Li Li is the director of the Light and Shadow Center at the China Academy of Urban Planning and Design's Beijing Planning and Design Consultants Co, the major design institute responsible for the light show in Chaoyang. She believes the multicolored light displays and accompanying performances have added vibrancy to the city's winter skies.

"We wanted a pyrotechnic atmosphere that contrasts with the traditional cold, reinforced concrete image of a metropolis," she said. "We aimed to bring relaxation and pleasure rather than tension and stress to the business districts in Beijing, further restoring the city's charm during winter nights."

According to Li Li, the light shows complement the city's architecture and culture, and strengthen the image of urban cultural districts.

Li Chuhan, the engineer, said that she had never seen such a large number of people on the streets near Solana in winter. Visitors were crammed together as they crossed bridges over the Liangma River, and security guards used megaphones to ensure that the crowds moved safely.

Li Chuhan studied electrical engineering in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, from 2019 to 2022. She recalled that during Chinese New Year, the annual Qinhuai Lantern Festival held along scenic streets near the Confucius Temple added sparkle to the city's celebrations.

Although a Beijing native, she said in the past she had seldom attended lantern fairs in the city due to them being few in number and usually having lackluster decorations.

However, the light show on the Liangma River helped change her mind.

"Unlike the usual displays, the lighting along the river enthralled me," she said.

"At a pier, light projections were cast on the wall of a building, constantly changing with the music, creating an artistic atmosphere that made me feel relaxed and joyful."

"That night, the river and shopping mall took on a chic appearance under the lights, with the architecture and nearby walking trails looking like the city of my dreams," Li Chuhan added.

Magical Moshikou

The red lanterns adorning Moshikou Street in Shijingshan district have also struck a chord with Beijingers and visiting tourists.

On the lifestyle-sharing platform Xiaohongshu, the hashtag "Moshikou" has generated more than 1.16 million views and the topic "Moshikou Street" has amassed over 780,000 views.

Taking pictures at dusk of the Moshikou Street lanterns has become a major trend on social media.

Zeng Huifan, 33, was among those who shared her posts on Xiaohongshu shortly after she visited the street at night.

Inspired by the approaching Chinese New Year, Zeng, an amateur photographer, decided in early January to capture the allure of the red lanterns.

"It's rare to find a place with such a large number of lanterns in Beijing as those areas have been eclipsed by the proliferation of high-rise buildings," she said.

Trees glittering with lanterns form a spectacular scene along the 1,500-meter stretch of Moshikou Street. Stores and stalls on the sides of the road offer culinary treats such as sesame flatbread, mutton soup, sugarcroated haws, and dumplings, adding to the hustle and bustle of the suburban setting.

"The entire street is very clean and full of a festive vibe for Spring Festival," said Zeng. "I got there around 5 pm on a Saturday last month, waited for the sunset for about half an hour, and took pictures of lanterns with a DSLR (digital single lens reflex) camera for about 20 to 30 minutes."

"I've been living in Beijing for 18 years, and it was the first time that I paid attention to Moshikou Street, which amazed me with its festive air and artistic wall paintings," she said. "To my recollection, a place like Moshikou has seldom been seen in the city."

Ice lanterns

Another popular event — the annual Longqing Gorge Ice Lantern Festival in Beijing's northwestern Yanqing district — had attracted more than 60,000 tourists by the end of last month. Dragon-themed elements were integrated into the ice and snow sculptures to convey blessings and good fortune for the Year of the Dragon.

"A large number of dragon-related festive lanterns were set up for tourists. Folk tales based on the dragon became the main themes of this year's ice lantern design," said Zhang Haijun, head of the Yanqing Office of Ice Lanterns, who is also the designer and coordinator of the 38th Longqing Gorge Ice Lantern Festival, which runs from Jan 15 to Feb 28.

One of the features of the event is a 120-meter-long gold dragon-shaped lantern placed on the top of a mountain to welcome tourists.

Zhang said the festival, sprawling across 250,000 square meters this year, has many spectacular displays for visitors.

"We created numerous photo opportunities for tourists, basically one every 50 meters along the tour route," he said. Some game characters loved by young people were also incorporated into the ice sculptures, he added.

Three ice sculptures of female cartoon

characters caught the attention of children visiting the festival. Li Yitong, a 9-year-old from Haidian district, said she liked the originality and novelty of the sculptures.

"There are different colors on every cartoon sculpture — green, pink and blue — which made the characters look so real," said Li Yitong. "I would touch them if there were no barriers."

Her mother, Zhao Jiana, who drove for about an hour to take her daughter to the event, said the novel elements of this year's festival are likely to have increased the number of visitors.

Zhao said her daughter also joined a group of children who performed a dance in an open space at the Longqing Gorge scenic area. "She was so happy that she even forgot about the freezing cold temperature that day," Zhao said.

Zhang, the head of the ice lantern office, said a glacier waterfall, which is about 26 meters high and has snow monsters and polar bears at the bottom, is another popular attraction at this year's festival.

"Our ice lantern festival is not a knock-off of the Harbin Ice and Snow World but rather another event located near Beijing, which makes the visitors feel they are in the Arctic," he said.

Learning experience

The lights have already dimmed on the Beijing Chaoyang International Light Festival, which ran from Nov 18 to Dec 9.

However, how such modern light shows can be integrated with traditional lantern fairs to create long-term attractions is still being considered by experts and event organizers.

As an off-season tourism event, the Chaoyang light show encouraged tourists to linger longer in Beijing, but greater efforts are needed from local authorities and business owners to build on that success.

"In fact, Beijing's weak point is its cold weather in winter, and the night economy has been affected over the past few years," said Xiong Haifeng, an associate professor with the School of Cultural Industries Management at the Communication University of China.

"This year's light show has spawned new business models and offered immersive experiences for tourists, thus having an integrated and comprehensive impact."

While Beijing has taken initial steps on tourism initiatives this winter, finding effective solutions to further stimulate urban vitality in the cold months and boost the night economy requires more exploration, he said.

However, light shows have a natural advantage in attracting people, Xiong said. Chasing a light source is embedded in the

human psyche, with illumination giving people a sense of warmth and security.

"Fundamentally, a light show fulfills people's inner emotional needs for the pursuit of a better life and greater expectations," Xiong said.

This winter's light displays in Beijing had also gone beyond "illumination and beautification" to express the city's values and aspirations, he added.

"The light show was by no means a mere display of high-tech skills. It integrated design with the urban landscape and cultural roots to resonate with the visitors," he said.



Solana shopping mall during the light festival. FENG JUN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Moshikou Street is lit up. ZENG HUIFAN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Lights adorn buildings along Liangma River during the Beijing Chaoyang International Light Festival this winter. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Red lanterns in Moshikou Street. ZENG HUIFAN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Moshikou Street this winter. ZENG HUIFAN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Visitors enjoy the annual Longqing Gorge Ice Lantern Festival in Beijing's northwestern Yanqing district. ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

TOP NEWS



Artifacts returned from Fowler Museum at the University of California, Los Angeles, in the United States, are carried to Asante King Otumfuo Osei Tutu II at the Manhyia Palace in Kumasi, Ghana, on Feb 8. MISPER APAWU / AP

More African nations calling for return of stolen artifacts

By OTIATO OPALI in Nairobi
otiato@chinadaily.com.cn

Calls are increasing across Africa for the return to the continent of heritage items stolen during colonial times.

As a result, experts said more cultural relics are likely to find their way back home, contributing to a restoration of the very essence of African culture.

In early February, for example, the citizens of Ghana were elated over the return by a museum in the United States of antiquities that had been looted from Ghana by British forces almost 150 years ago. The looted Asante royal regalia and other objects were returned to their original place, the Manhyia Palace in Kumasi, the capital of Ghana's Ashanti Region.

The return of the artifacts signifies a turning point in Ghanaian history and reflects a global dialogue about cultural heritage restitution. Experts said this might inspire others to evaluate the source of cultural items that they possess.

Abigail Arunga, a Kenyan writer and social activist, said that African countries have been demanding the return of stolen artifacts for some time now, but the calls are getting louder.

"In Kenya, Kenyan artists under an umbrella organization called The Nest began the Invisible Inventories Program in 2012, with the objective of writing to a number of museums across the world asking them if they have any Kenyan artifacts in their collections," Arunga said.



Three of the royal artifacts looted 150 years ago by British forces from Ghana's ancient Asante Kingdom, which were later transferred to Fowler Museum. FOWLER MUSEUM / HANDOUT VIA REUTERS

"Last time I checked, of the 40 museums that were written to, 33 have responded. So far, there is a record of 32,000 Kenyan artifacts in 33 foreign museums," she said.

According to experts, the efforts are much more than the recovery of objects stolen during colonial times. The pursuit of such items is also about reclaiming the lost identity of people or nations, healing historical wounds, and redressing the imbalances perpetuated by centuries of colonial oppression, they said.

Arunga noted that in the past five years, Benin has officially asked France for the return of statues that were looted during the European ransacking of the Royal Palaces of Abomey in 1892, while in Ethiopia, the Association for the Return of the Magdala Ethiopian Treasures has also been fighting for the return of cultural items seized by British forces at Magdala in 1868.

"We demand the return of these African artifacts because they are not just items of antiquity, but represent a stolen culture, and their continued stay in European museums is a refusal to acknowledge the injustice that was perpetrated by colonial powers," Arunga said.

She added that in some cases, the removal of items resulted in communities losing knowledge about cultural concepts or no longer knowing how to make such items, including combs, clothing, war armor and other emblems of a lifestyle that was rich and vibrant.

Charles Kojo, who is from Ghana, said that the theft of Africa's cultural treasures has had far-reaching consequences that extend beyond

"We demand the return of these African artifacts because they are not just items of antiquity, but represent a stolen culture."

Abigail Arunga,
Kenyan writer
and social activist

the material realm. From ceremonial artifacts and archives to intangible cultural expressions, Africa's rich and diverse heritage has been scattered across foreign lands, out of reach for millions on the continent, Kojo said.

The impact of this loss is profound, as it robs present and future generations of the opportunity to connect with their history, culture and identity, he said.

"This is not just about returning pieces of art, but about restoring the very essence of these cultures. In this pursuit of restitution, we acknowledge the importance of redressing historical wrongs and dismantling the structural inequalities that persist today," Kojo said.

He added that a crucial aspect of calls on the continent for restitution should involve investing in the development of skills and infrastructure in African nations.

Such investment would ensure that repatriated artifacts are appropriately cared for, displayed and preserved, Kojo said. This would help Africans cultivate a sense of ownership and responsibility and empower their nations with the means to safeguard their own heritage.

Veronica Waweru, an archaeologist doing fieldwork in Kenya, said that museums around the world still hold and exhibit stolen items, despite a UNESCO treaty in 1970 halting the illicit trade of cultural artifacts.

"Even after some museums decide to repatriate artifacts, they must cut a great deal of red tape to do so," Waweru said. "However, in recent years, there has been increased pressure on Western powers to return stolen African property. These demands have caught the attention of the intended targets, as Western leaders all over the world have vouched to begin returning African treasures."

For example, in 2022, Ireland promised to return mummified remains to Egypt. In addition, the Natural History Museum in London and Cambridge University said they are ready to return stolen human remains back to Zimbabwe, and France has showed a willingness to return artifacts to African countries.

Waweru said these developments are a result of sustained pressure by African countries and organizations calling for the return of the items. However, it is important that African countries continue fostering widespread public awareness, she said.

Asian regional cooperation highlighted at security meeting

Nations should engage in negotiations or seek consultation amid conflict, former diplomat says

By CHEN WEIHUA in Munich
chenweihua@chinadaily.com.cn

Veteran Chinese diplomat Fu Ying hopes that people will learn to appreciate the long-standing peace in Asia.

A former vice-foreign minister, Fu was speaking at the 60th Munich Security Conference on Saturday in a panel discussion themed "Shoring up Defense: Security in the Indo-Pacific". The other panelists were Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Ali Sabry, United States Senator Ben Cardin and German Social Democratic Party Co-Chair Lars Klingbeil.

Fu said there has been stability and great economic progress over the past decades in Asia, where the GDP put together accounts for 40 percent of the world's total, compared with just 15 percent in the 1990s.

She credited the Association of Southeast Asian Nations for playing a key role in leading regional cooperation.

The process started with a lot of mistrust, she said, but honest discussions over the years have helped boost trust and economic cooperation.

"We grew into the habit of discussing the differences in the corridor. We even created retreats," Fu said, while describing the Asian way of resolving differences. She added that she got to witness the whole process as it started in the years when she was still a young diplomat.

"So the result now is that in the region, there is a basic consensus about common security," she told the audience at the Munich conference, where the conflicts between Russia and Ukraine and between Israel and Palestine topped the three-day agenda.

Fu emphasized that there is a strong sense of common security in Asia.

Every country is entitled to defend its security and to protect its interests, she said. But when their interests clash, countries should engage in negotiations or seek consultations to avoid conflict.

On differences that are hard to resolve, such as territorial disputes, Fu said countries have been able to keep the differences aside while continuing to discuss their cooperation on other fronts.

Regarding South China Sea maritime territorial disputes, Fu said China and ASEAN members have managed to reach the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea.

"We are discussing the COC," she said, referring to the South China Sea Code of Conduct.

Fu dismissed concerns about freedom of navigation in the South China Sea.

While shipping safety in the Red

Sea is about civilian ships, the freedom of navigation people talked about is not about commercial ships, but US military vessels that want to go anywhere they choose, she said.

"If you want to know the safety of civilian navigation in the South China Sea, you could very well check with the shipping industry. The (insurance) premium doesn't go up, never goes up because of the tension in the South China Sea.

"Freedom of navigation of civilian ships has never been a problem. So it's just an excuse."

China opposes the small, exclusive security groups because they not only target China but also undermine regional common security, she said.

"I don't think it's helpful for regional stability," she said.

It is "very dangerous" for some people to try to link Taiwan with Ukraine, she said, describing them as "two entirely different" situations.

The Taiwan question is China's internal affair, she said, and the Anti-Secession Law states China's position that it will try the utmost to achieve peaceful reunification, which is the best for the people on the two sides.

However, the government reserves the right to resort to non-peaceful means and other necessary measures to protect China's sovereignty and territorial integrity in the event of "Taiwan independence", or if major incidents entailing Taiwan's secession from China should occur, or if possibilities for a peaceful reunification should be exhausted.

"So there is a law there," she said.

Fu added that many in Asia want to understand what attracted the US back to Asia after it spent 20 years on transforming post-Cold War Eastern Europe and then about another 20 years on war on terror.

"I think the attraction is success of the region, including China's success," she said.

"Instead of joining the regional peaceful development, the concern is that the US may reverse the trend of peaceful cooperation and progress—that's the concern for the region."

Many countries in the region have said that they prefer not to choose sides, she added.

She highlighted Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's talk at the security conference on Saturday, when Wang talked about how China is going to play a stabilizing role in the world.

"You could see the intention on the part of China to share the regional experience," Fu said, adding that the China-proposed Global Security Initiative very well sums up the Asian experience and Asian sense of common security.

G77: It is crucial to recognize China's substantial role

From page 1

Dennis Francis, president of the UN General Assembly, also addressed the urgency of reform, asserting that multilateral organizations must swiftly adapt to recognize and leverage the significance of the Global South for a more equitable global order.

The engagement of China, which has extended political backing and financial contributions since the early 1990s, underscores its commitment to the G77's objectives. This collaboration highlights a nuanced global landscape in which nations, beyond formal affiliations, foster mutual support for shared development aspirations.

As the G77 commemorates its diamond milestone, it is crucial to recognize China's substantial role in bolstering the G77's endeavors. This collaboration showcases China's commitment to fostering cooperation and solidarity among developing countries, emphasizing a shared vision for equitable global development. China's ongoing engagement reflects a nuanced approach to international relations, blending political advocacy and tangible financial support to amplify the collective voice of developing

Over the past decade, China has invested over \$1 trillion in more than 3,000 Belt and Road projects worldwide, signaling its dedication to fostering global prosperity.

nations on the global stage.

As the Kampala summit advocated transformative measures within international organizations including the UN, the World Trade Organization, the IMF and the World Bank, Chinese Vice-Premier Liu Guozhong emphasized the idea of collaboration among Global South nations for high-quality cooperation, expressing optimism about the significant potential in this endeavor.

China has underscored the necessity of enhancing international development agencies, especially in supporting the Global South, which comprises Latin America, Asia, Africa and Oceania.

Beijing's pivotal role in founding the New Development Bank, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Silk Road Fund exemplifies China's commitment to reshaping the global financial landscape. These institutions offer vital alternatives for nations excluded from global financial markets, channeling funds into substantial projects across Asia and beyond.

The transformative impact of such ventures underscores China's dedication to fostering a more inclusive, equitable international economic framework, marking a departure from historical imbalances and cultivating a collaborative future for nations beyond the traditional power centers.

Simultaneously, China calls on developed nations to fulfill their development and climate financing pledges and accelerate the implementation of the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals agenda. Emphasizing China's commitment to shared development, the Belt and Road Initiative and the Global Development Initiative, among others, underscore its active role. Over the past decade, China has invested over \$1 trillion in more than 3,000 Belt and Road projects

worldwide, signaling its dedication to fostering global prosperity.

These efforts align with China's vision of collaborative, sustainable development, which has gained the endorsement of many leaders and resonated with still others. Yoweri Museveni, the president of Uganda, which took over the G77 chairmanship from Cuba, stressed the urgency of reforms in the international financial architecture. He called for multilateral development banks to "support developing countries without imposing any conditionalities that infringe on their sovereignty."

The Summit of the Future, to be held at UN headquarters in New York in September, is expected to explore profound reforms in the international architecture, in financing in particular. And the collective push of the G77 and China for a fairer global governance system is gaining momentum, with nearly all developing countries lending their support to the initiative.

The author is an international affairs commentator and freelance based in Karachi, Pakistan. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Showstoppers



Samba dancers dressed in flashy costumes steal the show on Carnival Sunday at the Sambadrome in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Six of Rio's top samba schools performed during the spectacular Champion's Parade, which marked the conclusion of this year's festivities. "The Greatest Show on Earth", as organizers of the Rio Carnival call it, attracts millions of visitors from all over the world. WANG TIANCONG / XINHUA

CHINA

Hidar Yousef initially aspired to be a tour guide. However, he now finds himself acting as a guardian of Syria's cultural heritage, working at the Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums in the capital Damascus.

The country's civil war dramatically changed the course of his life. After the conflict erupted in 2011, tourists vanished, the tourism industry collapsed, and cultural relics became targets for bombing, theft, illegal excavations and smuggling.

"It's kind of an ironic story," Yousef said. "I wanted to introduce (artifacts). Now I am rescuing (them)."

The conflict altered almost everything in the 31-year-old's life. Born into a Syrian middle-class family, Yousef once enjoyed the trappings of affluence, with his family having four apartments and three cars. However, after the war his entire family is now forced to live in a single dwelling.

His wedding plans have been repeatedly delayed as he cannot afford the \$200 engagement ring. As an archaeologist with a doctorate, he scrapes by on a meager \$15 a month, and like nearly all Syrians he juggles at least two jobs just to make ends meet.

Day-to-day survival is a challenge for most Syrians, with the preservation of the country's cultural heritage low on most people's list of priorities, he said.

Yousef shared his story during a study tour of the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang, Gansu province, in early November. He was part of a delegation of 24 Syrian cultural scholars and officials, seeking to learn from China's expertise in cultural heritage preservation.

"All the time we viewed European experience as the best," he said. "But one or two years ago, we started to look to the East," he said, adding that they chose China to find out what was going on in the area of cultural heritage preservation.

"We were actually surprised, China is way better," he said.

Caves inspire visitors

When it came to China's antiquities and cultural heritage, Ibrahim Kherbek, director of the DGAM's Lattakia Antiquities Department on Syria's Mediterranean coast, only knew about the Great Wall before he visited the country. He said he had never heard of Dunhuang.

However, after visiting the Mogao Caves and attending lectures by experts from the Dunhuang Academy, he expressed his astonishment at China's high level of cultural heritage preservation.

Kherbek has worked in the field of cultural heritage for over 30 years and interacts with artifacts daily. "Cultural relics have become a part of my life," he said.

The destruction and obliteration of Syrian cultural heritage by war and terrorism is heartbreaking, Kherbek said. All six UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Syria have been put on the endangered list, including the Ancient City of Damascus, which dates back to the third millennium BC and is considered one of the oldest continually inhabited cities in the world.

In 2018, seven years after the outbreak of war, Syria reopened the National Museum of Damascus and showcased artifacts that had been carefully hidden away during the conflict. "Only by eliminating war can the foundation of peace and stability be laid for cultural heritage to continue to exist," Kherbek said.

China has faced similar hardships in recent centuries when it comes to cultural preservation, enduring the ravages of imperial-



Left: Syrian archaeologist Jihad Abu Kahla captures the intricate patterns of an unearthed brick in Dunhuang, Gansu province. Right: Syrian archaeologists meticulously examine and discuss a fragment of silk fabric excavated from Dunhuang. PHOTOS BY YAO YUXIN / CHINA DAILY



Mogao Caves' preservation inspires Syrian experts

Visitors from war-torn country witness how cultural protection work can succeed. Yao Yuxin reports in Dunhuang, Gansu.



Tourists appreciate the grotto art at the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang, Gansu province, on June 21, 2022. ZHANG XIAOLIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

ism and war. Countless Chinese cultural artifacts were destroyed, plundered and taken overseas, with many still unrecovered.

Yu Zongren, director of the Institute of Conservation at Dunhuang Academy, said it's hard to imagine that the well-preserved Mogao Caves were abandoned for over four centuries.

Some murals were darkened by oil lamps used for worship and cooking smoke, some Buddha statues were looted, and the lower caves were blocked by sand drifts. In the 1950s, with no electricity or cars, sand clearance relied on ox- and horse-drawn carts.

Today, the protection of the Mogao Caves involves meticulous efforts. Temperature, humidity, and carbon dioxide levels are monitored in real-time, and kiln-fired tiles have replaced cement bricks on the floor to allow for better ventilation.

To preserve the environment and microclimate, a temporary parking lot was removed by the National Cultural Heritage Administration to restore the area to its original state.



An archaeologist organizes data collected for the protection of the murals in a cave of the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang. LI HE / XINHUA

The UNESCO World Heritage Site is also embracing technology, and digitizing images of Buddha statues and murals to be shown in places outside Dunhuang.

"The prosperity or decline of civilization is closely intertwined with

the stability and strength of a nation," Yu said.

Impact of war

Beyond ruining numerous cultural artifacts, the war also altered the development priorities of Syria, said

Jihad Abu Kahla, director of the Damascus Countryside Antiquities Department at the DGAM.

Reviving the economy, securing people's livelihoods, and maintaining stability have taken precedence, making cultural heritage preservation less of a priority, Abu Kahla said.

Sanctions imposed by the United States in June 2020 have also added formidable obstacles to cultural restoration efforts in Syria after the war, according to Ahmad Dali, director of the digitalization department at the DGAM.

Dali said the US' restrictions on exporting materials and equipment necessary for artifact restoration to Syria, coupled with a shortage of skilled professionals and the economic burden of cultural preservation, have forced many restoration projects to be shelved.

Nevertheless, Dali's department is working on digitizing documentation on Syrian cultural artifacts and carrying out emergency repairs to the best of their abilities.

"Construction of a national identity

is achieved through the inheritance and transmission of cultural heritage from one generation to the next," Abu Kahla said.

"Preserving cultural artifacts is tantamount to safeguarding the future of a nation."

Exchange and cooperation

In 1999, the Mogao Caves unearthed four pages of biblical psalms written in Syriac — an Aramaic dialect used as the literary and liturgical language of the ancient Syrian Christian churches — believed to be from the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368).

During the Yuan Dynasty, Gansu was a center for Nestorianism, a branch of Eastern Christianity that was prevalent in Central Asia. Dunhuang, in particular, witnessed multiple interactions with Western Christians, including notable figures like the Venetian explorer Marco Polo.

The discovery of the psalms underscored the long-standing cultural exchanges between the two countries.

Hala Emad, a senior official of Syria's Planning and International Cooperation Commission, said due to the prolonged conflict, cooperation between China and Syria was limited and primarily confined to humanitarian aid.

However, there has been a shift in recent years, especially after Syria became part of the Belt and Road Initiative last year, she said.

In ancient times, both nations were closely connected through the Silk Road. "Today, we have the opportunity to further extend our friendship through the new Silk Road of the BRI," Abu Kahla said.

China and Syria face common challenges in cultural heritage preservation, such as intentional damage, and mitigating the impact of damaging natural conditions.

Yu Jianman, Party secretary of the Central Academy of Culture and Tourism Administration, said fostering exchanges and collaboration among cultural heritage professionals from both countries is essential.

"The potential for cooperation in the field of cultural heritage preservation between China and Syria is vast and promising," Yu said.

Expertise shared

After approximately 80 years of research, the Dunhuang Academy has amassed significant expertise in mural and sculpture protection. Before the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted cooperation, more than 200 Chinese teams visited Central Asia and conducted on-site inspections of cultural sites and devised cultural heritage assistance projects.

"If any country requires assistance, we are more than willing to undertake such tasks," said Su Bomin, head of the Dunhuang Academy.

During the cultural exchange, Dali, director of the digitalization department at the DGAM, detailed the current state of cultural heritage preservation in Syria to experts and officials from both countries.

The contrasting images of heritage sites before and after the war brought many of the Syrian representatives to tears. Once majestic buildings and traditional markets had been reduced to ruins. During the five-day trip to Dunhuang, it was the rawest glimpse of the pain wrought by the war in Syria.

Yara Shartouh, director of tourism in Hama, said Syrians dislike war, yearn for peace and always approach life with hope and optimism. No matter what happens, they manage to maintain a positive outlook.

"This is the essence of our culture," she said.

Contact the writer at yaoyuxin@chinadaily.com.cn

Innovations help maintain balance between tourism and safeguarding relics

By YAO YUXIN

Administrators of the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang, Gansu province, are striving to harmonize tourists' exploration of the site with the need to safeguard murals and artifacts, through innovative measures such as digital presentations.

Sandstorms, rainfall and tourist visits constitute the most severe threats to the UNESCO World Heritage Site, said Wang Xiaowei, director of the Dunhuang Grottoes Monitoring Center at the Dunhuang Academy.

Since the Mogao Caves opened to the public in 1979, the number of visitors has been growing at an average annual rate of around 20 percent, reaching 2.15 million in 2019 before the outbreak of the

COVID-19 pandemic. This year, the site is expected to receive a record 3 million visitors.

"If you enter the caves during the peak tourism months of July, August and September you'll find it hard to breathe," Wang said. The carbon dioxide and moisture exhaled by visitors accumulate inside the caves and cause damage to the murals, Wang said.

To preserve the caves, the duration of visits is limited and sometimes stopped during rain or dust storms. To try and ensure visitors aren't disappointed when restrictions are in place, the center provides a digital exhibition, he said.

Currently, the center is being expanded to cater for an additional 3,000 visitors on top of the existing capacity of 6,000.

The Dunhuang Academy began digitally recording and storing images of murals and painted sculptures over 30 years ago. The digitization project has successfully covered over 200 caves, with a dedicated team of 110 experts currently undertaking the work.

"Digital technology not only serves cultural tourism but also leaves behind a historical record for future generations," said Ding Xiaosheng, deputy director of the Institute of Cultural Heritage Digitization at the academy.

Digitization also brings the wonders of the Mogao Caves to a global audience, according to Su Bomin, head of the Dunhuang Academy.

"The Mogao Caves are immovable, and transporting them is impossible," Su said. "However, with

digitization, we can perfectly replicate Dunhuang art and showcase it worldwide, introducing Eastern culture to the world."

In 2016, the Digital Dunhuang repository went live, sharing high-definition images and panoramic tours of the most exquisite 30 caves globally. Currently, visitors from 78 countries have accessed the repository, totaling over 16.8 million visits.

Su said Dunhuang can provide diverse cultural exchanges through its cultural relics.

"By digitizing these relics, we enable people worldwide to understand Dunhuang's culture, thereby gaining a deeper appreciation for China's historical commitment to diverse cultural exchanges — that is, an ethos of inclusivity, mutual learning and a shared future," he said.



Visitors watch a full-dome film at Mogao Grottoes Visitor Center in Dunhuang, Gansu province, on March 18. CHEN BIN / XINHUA

CHINA



Village Night is staged at a stadium in Rongjiang county, Guizhou province, during the halftime break of a soccer game on Feb 2. LIU XU / XINHUA

Soccer match helps new year celebrations kick off

GUIYANG — A soccer match kicked off in Rongjiang county, in Southwest China's Guizhou province, around 5:20 pm on Feb 3 as part of this year's Village Super League and to mark the ongoing Spring Festival.

When the final whistle was blown, the Guizhou Village Super League Football Team, in blue, had beaten the Macao Workers' Union Football Team, in red, 3-2.

This match was also an important part of this year's Village Night demonstration and exhibition activities and helped promote exchanges between Guizhou and Macao.

"The Village Super League is so charming and attractive. It is an unforgettable experience for me to bring our team here and socialize with local players," said Lin Jinxiong, from the Macao team.

Lin added that it was also a rare opportunity to get a close look at the colorful ethnic cultures and beautiful natural scenery of the motherland, and he hopes there will be more exchanges between Guizhou and Macao.

During the halftime break, Macao's cheerleading team performed a traditional "drunken dragon dance" to the rhythmic beats of gongs and drums.

Artistic and cultural performances at the stadium are one of the highlights of the rural cultural and sports carnival, filling the stadium with the sounds and colors of diverse ethnic cultures.

At about 7:30 pm, Village Night, the Spring Festival gala in Rongjiang, began with local members of the Miao ethnic group singing ancient songs.

The gala also featured the Kam

Grand Choir of the Dong people, the Jinji Dance of the Miao and the drumming of the Yao.

Just like the grassroots and village-centered Village Super League, Village Night also has a "down-to-earth flavor" and calls on everyone to participate.

Besides students, farmers, vendors and village cadres from Rongjiang, the county also invited villagers from nearby counties to join in the festival, which attracted more than 2,300 participants.

In addition to the ethnic cultural displays, there were many modern performances, including a show called Football Dream that combined football skills, folk dances, gymnastics and other elements that showcased the energetic spirit of Rongjiang teenagers.

Young foreigners were also invited to participate in this year's Village Night, and Anita Miavazandry, from Madagascar, sang the song *Shake Hands with the World* with other foreign students.

"It is an unforgettable experience to participate in Village Night," she said. "It has always been my dream to perform at the Village Super League stadium, and today my dream came true."

"Besides appreciating the unique local ethnic culture, I also hope to share the happiness of Village Night with more people."

At the end of the gala, people from different ethnic groups formed a gigantic circle, playing musical instruments, dancing and singing together, as well as blessing one another for the Chinese New Year.

XINHUA

Guangdong man's toy show puts him into record books

Wu Wuqiang is recognized for his use of a slinky to trap glass bottles

By ZHENG CAIXIONG in Guangzhou
zhengcaixiong@chinadaily.com.cn

Wu Wuqiang has become a well-known figure at home and abroad because of a small toy — the rainbow spring.

Wu, from Maoming, a coastal city in the western part of Guangdong province, set a mark recognized by Guinness World Records with a rainbow spring performance in Milan, Italy, last year.

He was given a certificate by Guinness World Records for trapping the most glass bottles with a slinky in one minute.

Wu, 36, was invited to perform in Milan in March. Wearing a blindfold, he amazed his audience by using rainbow springs to trap more than 50 wine bottles in a minute.

He is now in talks with the organizers of an Italian talent show about participating in a world talent show.

Wu was also invited to Japan to perform on television programs four times between 2015 and 2017.

He has also performed at Chinatowns in the United States, and said he hopes to present his rainbow spring performances to more people around the world.

Wu has established training courses and has entered into a rainbow spring production partnership with a toy factory in Chenghai district of Shantou city in Guangdong that offers him dividends.

"I had never even left Guangdong province before," he said. "It's the rainbow spring that has made me famous at home and abroad and allowed me to have a more colorful life."

Wu had earlier had a difficult time after resigning from an air conditioning factory and returning to his hometown to start a business.

With around 100,000 yuan (\$14,285) in savings from two years of work at the factory, he set up a barbecue shop, a wholesale clothing store and a fruit shop.

But Wu lost all his savings and ended up heavily in debt as his entrepreneurial efforts failed. He then set up a stall on a street in the



Wu Wuqiang displays his certificate from Guinness World Records for trapping the most glass bottles with a slinky in one minute in Milan, Italy, last year. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

city of Dongguan in Guangdong to make a living.

His fortunes turned around during Spring Festival in 2010, when he and a nephew visited a temple fair in his hometown and found a bustling rainbow spring stall.

Wu said he was immediately attracted when he saw his first rainbow spring performance, adding that it was like a living laser.

He asked the stall owner to teach him how to emulate the performance, thinking it could become a lucrative business.

Wu returned to Dongguan and started selling rainbow springs at his stall after Spring Festival.

To his surprise, he sold more than 800 yuan worth of rainbow

springs in two hours, making a net profit of more than 500 yuan.

And his performances attracted many passersby.

Throughout 2010, Wu set up his stall at the entrances of shopping malls and schools in Dongguan to sell the toy and perform. From the money he earned, he quickly paid off debts totaling 30,000 yuan and bought his first car for 90,000 yuan.

Then, in 2011, Wu moved his stall to Liaoyuan, Jilin province, where he set a daily sales record of more than 40,000 yuan.

Wu became a household name in 2015 after he appeared on a talent show on China Central Television, and many companies and

brands sought to sign him as an image representative.

He signed the cooperation agreement with a toy factory in Chenghai in 2019, and is now both a shareholder and a sales representative.

He has also extended his business to video platforms.

Wu said he has made many foreign friends by participating in international programs, and that will help him and the factory expand into international markets. He also met his wife during one of his rainbow spring performances, and they now have two children.

Chen Ziyuan contributed to this story.

Traffic lights alleviate camel congestion at popular desert scenic spot



Clockwise from top: Tourists ride camels at the Mingsha Mountain and Yueya Spring scenic area in Dunhuang, Gansu province, on Feb 15. ZHANG XIAOLIANG / XINHUA Zhao Wenlong tends his camels in his house in the Yueya Spring village on Jan 21. JIA ZHAO / XINHUA Tourists, riding on camels, pass a camel traffic light at the Mingsha Mountain and Yueya Spring scenic area on Feb 14. ZHANG XIAOLIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

LANZHOU — A line of camels appeared as silhouettes as the sun set on snow-covered dunes, their bells evoking the grandeur of the ancient Silk Road as they rang through the desert.

But the reason they were stationary had a distinctly modern twist — a camel traffic light.

A red camel signifies "stop," while green indicates "go" following the installation of a dozen camel traffic lights at Mingsha Mountain and Yueya Spring, a scenic spot surrounded by sand dunes in Northwest China's Gansu province.

The unique traffic lights, originally designed to alleviate traffic congestion in the desert, garnered widespread media attention last year and have become a popular tourist attraction.

Wang Youxia, deputy general manager of the company responsible for the scenic spot's operations, said more than 3.7 million tourists visited last year, with 42 percent opting for camel rides. Since December, visitor numbers have surged 22.6 percent compared with the same period in 2019, before COVID-19 became a pandemic.

The substantial increase in tourist arrivals has resulted in significant revenue for local camel herders, with Zhao Wenlong among the beneficiaries.

Zhao, 42, is an experienced camel breeder from the Yueya Spring village who owns 21 camels.

In the 1990s, before the establishment of the scenic area, only a few farmers in the village were

"The safety of camels ensures the safety of tourists. They are like family to me."

Zhao Wenlong, camel breeder from the Yueya Spring village in Dunhuang, Gansu province

engaged in camel husbandry. Locals used to rely on apricot cultivation as their main source of income. However, due to the village's proximity to the desert, farmland would often be engulfed by sandstorms, resulting in bad harvests and low returns.

"Our village was so poor that there was barely any girl willing to marry young men from here," village head Qin Zuotao recalled.

The rapid development of tourism has sparked hope for prosperity, and villagers are venturing into the camel walking business at the scenic spot.

Recreational activities for tourists initially revolved around posing for photos on the back of a camel but gradually included short camel rides. They now offer hourlong camel treks in the desert.

A regular camel trek costs 100 yuan (\$14), with the camel owner earning 70 yuan. In summer, the peak season, the scenic area is home to roughly 2,000 camels dedicated to tourism, with each camel undertaking three treks a day.

Qin said that 80 percent of the vil-

lage's 274 households are now involved in camel-related tourism.

That also means competition has intensified, and to ensure fair working and resting times for each camel, the village has decided to issue camel licenses.

The scenic area has offered camel herders training on visitor reception protocols and emergency procedures.

They also learn to speak basic English for better communication with foreign tourists.

Over the years, Zhao has accumulated valuable experience in sustaining and growing his business.

He bought two rare camels, one white and one with a mixed coat, after discovering that some visitors preferred to pose for camel-back selfies on animals with unusual fur.

And because he is concerned that the vivid colors of tourists' clothing might startle the camels, Zhao often hangs bright banners in the camel enclosures to acclimatize the animals to such hues.

"The safety of camels ensures the safety of tourists," he said.

His family earns 500,000 yuan a year from camel rides, but he spends more than 100,000 yuan a year caring for the animals.

In the summer months, he gives his camels nutritious feed and fresh fruit to help them cool down.

He also takes them to the vet for annual checkups.

"They are like family to me," Zhao said.

XINHUA

WORLD

India offers support price to pacify protesting farmers

MUMBAI — The Indian government has offered guaranteed support prices for pulses, corn and cotton in a bid to break the deadlock with protesting farmers, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said after weeklong clashes between security forces and protesters.

Tear gas and barricades were used to deter the farmers, who form an influential voting bloc, months ahead of a general election due by May, in which Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeks a record third term.

It followed marathon talks with farmers' unions after the protesters, who are demanding higher prices backed by law for nearly two dozen crops, were halted at a distance of about 200 kilometers from New Delhi.

Goyal said the government had proposed five-year contracts for a minimum support price to farmers who diversify their crops to grow pigeon peas, red lentils and corn, paid by cooperative groups it promotes.

"These organizations will buy the produce and there will be no limit on quantity," Goyal told reporters in the northern city of Chandigarh, adding that a similar price guarantee would also be offered to farmers who diversify and produce cotton.

The farmers' unions said they would decide on the proposal within a day or two, after reaching a consensus among themselves.

Switching more crops to pulses from those such as rice and wheat that require more water will not only benefit a depleting water table but also help cut back on imports of pulses.

The world's biggest importer of pulses, India has struggled to hold back increases in the prices of pigeon peas and crops, Reuters reported.

The demand for domestic corn has also been rising as the poultry and ethanol industries boost consumption.

Police have used tear gas and barricades to stop thousands of farmers, who mainly grow wheat and rice, from marching to New Delhi, to press their demand that the government ensure a minimum price for all their produce.

Pressing for demands

Scores of farmers with large convoys of tractors embarked on the Delhi march on Tuesday to press for their demands, including a minimum support price for crops. The farmers were stopped near the Haryana border and tear-gassed.

Last week, protesting farmers held talks with three federal government ministers over the issue.

In September 2020, the Indian government passed three contentious laws aimed at "modernizing" the country's agriculture sector.

However, farmers feared the new laws would weaken their position and make them dependent on corporates. Seeking revocation of the laws, thousands of farmers sat on strike at the borders of the national capital.

The strike went on for over a year after which Modi, in a surprise address to the nation, announced his government was repealing the laws.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Treading lightly



A man walks along an ice-covered pier on Lake Michigan in St. Joseph, Michigan, on Sunday. The Great Lakes shorelines have historically been covered in ice during this time of year, but this winter's warm weather has led to the lowest ice cover over the lakes since record keeping began in 1973. SCOTT OLSON VIA AFP



Palestinians struggle to buy bread from a bakery in Rafah, Gaza Strip, on Sunday. International aid agencies say Gaza is suffering from shortages of food and other basic supplies. FATIMA SHBAIR / AP

Israel sets Ramadan deadline for Rafah

Despite pressure, Netanyahu vows attack as humanitarian situation deteriorates

GAZA/JERUSALEM — Israel has threatened to launch an offensive in Gaza's Rafah by the start of Ramadan if Hamas does not return the remaining hostages by then, despite international pressure to protect Palestinian civilians sheltering in the city.

With prospects for truce talks dimming, the United Nations and other governments, including Israel's key ally, the United States, have issued urgent appeals to Israel to call off its planned offensive on Rafah.

The Israeli government says the city on the Egypt border is the last remaining stronghold in Gaza of the Palestinian militant group Hamas.

It is also where three-quarters of the displaced Palestinian population has fled, taking shelter in sprawling tent encampments without access to adequate food, water or medicine.

International pressure has grown on Israel to halt the offensive in the besieged coastal territory, but Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu again on Sunday vowed "total victory" over Hamas.

War cabinet member Benny Gantz warned on Sunday that the Israeli army is ready to push deeper into Rafah during Ramadan.

"The world must know, and Hamas leaders must know: if by Ramadan the hostages are not home, the fighting will continue everywhere, including the Rafah area," said

Gantz, a former military chief of staff. Ramadan, the Muslim holy month, is expected to begin around March 10.

But where Palestinians can go after months of conflict have flattened vast swathes of the strip remains unclear.

"There's no safe place. Even the hospital is not safe," Ahmad Mohammed Aburizq told Agence France-Presse from a Rafah hospital.

For weeks, international mediators have sought to broker a truce-for-hostages deal that would pause fighting for six weeks.

The international community overwhelmingly supports an independent Palestinian state as part of a future peace agreement, but Israel's government on Sunday adopted a declaration rejecting such recognition.

Hamas has said it will suspend its involvement in any cease-fire negotiations unless relief supplies reach Gaza's north, where aid agencies have warned of looming famine.

The UN's top court is expected to open a week of hearings from Monday examining the legal consequences of Israel's 57-year occupation of Palestinian territories.

Aid trucks blocked

On Sunday morning, dozens of Israeli blocked Gaza-bound aid trucks from entering through the Nitzana border crossing with Egypt, AFP reporters and the Palestinian Red Crescent Society said.

Overnight strikes and battles in Gaza killed more than 100 Palestinians, pushing the death toll past 29,000, said the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory, with fighting heaviest in Khan Younis, north of Rafah.

The conflict began after Hamas launched a surprise attack in Israel on Oct 7, killing about 1,200 people and taking about 250 hostages.

Gazans say they are going so hungry they are grinding animal feed into flour. "My children are starving, they wake up crying from hunger. Where do I get food for them?" a Gazan woman told AFP.

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees said nearly 3 in 4 people are drinking contaminated water.

"The speed of deterioration in Gaza is unprecedented," it said. After a weeklong siege, the largest hospital still functional in Gaza is no longer operational, according to the World Health Organization.

At least 20 of the 200 patients still at the Nasser Hospital require relocation to other facilities, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said, adding that his organization "was not permitted to enter" the site.

Seven patients, including a child, have died there since Friday due to power cuts, according to the Hamas-run health ministry.

Israeli military spokesman Richard Hecht said diesel and oxygen supplies had been delivered on Saturday and a temporary generator was running.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Palestinian unity urged to resolve Gaza crisis

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong
jan@chinadaily.com

The latest call for Palestinian unity by Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayeh is expected to generate renewed efforts to realize the two-state solution and end the conflict in Gaza, experts say.

Speaking at the Munich Security Conference on Sunday, Shtayeh urged all Palestinian factions to engage in dialogue, as he stressed Palestinian unity "under any circumstances".

Tass reported that Russia has invited up to 14 organizations, including representatives of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, to an intra-Palestinian meeting in Moscow next week.

Shtayeh was among many senior government officials and heads of state who attended the three-day security conference in the German city of Munich.

He told the forum that the Palestinian Authority was focused on the suffering of the Palestinians. He also called for an immediate cease-fire and for more international aid to be allowed into Gaza.

Hamas and Fatah are the two most dominant parties in Palestine's political landscape. The factions sparked renewed hope in the contentious path to achieving full Palestinian statehood when they met at an Egypt-hosted meeting in New Alamein City in July.

"We will see if Hamas is ready to come to ground with us. We are ready to engage. If Hamas is not going to ground with us, that's a different story. But we need Palestinian unity under any circumstances," Shtayeh said.

Arhama Siddiqi, a Middle East analyst and research fellow at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad in Pakistan, told China Daily "time has come for collective action, transcending individual interests, and steering toward the holistic development of the Palestinian people" with the reverberations of economic devastation echoing exponentially.

Jawaid Iqbal, chairman of the Department of West Asian and North African Studies at Aligarh Muslim University in India, said the possible integration of Hamas into the Palestine Liberation Organization framework is dependent upon the character of the national unity program that the Fatah-led PA is willing to undertake.

Dozens dead in Papua New Guinea tribal violence

MELBOURNE, Australia — At least 26 people were killed in tribal fighting in the northern highlands of Papua New Guinea, Australian Broadcasting Corporation reported on Monday, citing local police.

The men were killed in an ambush in Enga Province, Reuters reported, quoting Australia's state broadcaster.

A report by local newspaper Post-Courier said the violence took place on Sunday and was connected to a battle between two tribes.

Police initially reported that at least 53 people had died, before revising their number down to 26, the ABC said.

"These tribesmen have been killed all over the countryside, all over the bush," George Kakas, a senior officer in the country's police force, told the ABC.

"Police and defense forces have had to go in to do their best to quell the situation at their own risk." The Pacific nation is home to hundreds of tribes, many of which still live in inhospitable and remote terrain.

The ABC said the latest violence involved the same tribes that were responsible for clashes that killed 60 in Enga last year.

Papua New Guinea Prime Minister James Marape said he had

"great concern" about the violence in Enga and urged the warring tribes to lay down their weapons.

"If there are community disputes, there are ways to deal with the community disputes," Marape said.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said his government was ready to assist Papua New Guinea, its nearest neighbor.

"That is very disturbing the news that has come out of Papua New Guinea," Albanese said before the death toll was revised down.

Enga Governor Peter Ipatas said there were warnings that tribal fighting was about to erupt.

"From a provincial perspective,

we knew this fight was going to be on and we (alerted) the security forces last week to make sure they took appropriate action to ensure this didn't occur," Ipatas said.

He described the violence as a "very, very sad occasion for us in the province and it's a bad thing for the country".

Post-Courier reported that high-powered firearms used in the recent fighting made it risky for the police to enter the battlefield.

Facing escalating tribal fighting, Enga Province was put into lockdown for several months in 2023.

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CHINA DAILY USA

NEW YORK HEADQUARTERS

1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036

Telephone: 212-537-8888

Fax: 212-537-8898

editor@chinadailyusa.com

readers@chinadailyusa.com

Subscription: 212-537-8899

Advertising: 212-537-8916

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These materials are distributed by China Daily Distribution Corp. on behalf of China Daily Beijing, China. Additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.

WASHINGTON

National Press Bldg, Suite 1108

529 14th Street NW

Washington, DC 20045

Tel: 202-662-7249

Fax: 202-662-7247

SAN FRANCISCO

235 Montgomery Street, Suite 900

San Francisco, CA 94104

Tel: 415-348-8288

Fax: 415-348-8388

SEATTLE

800 Fifth Ave, Suite 4100

Seattle, WA 98104

Tel: 206-922-3868

HOUSTON

1001 South Dairy Ashford Suite 100

Houston, TX 77077

Tel: 713-595-7660

CANADA | TORONTO

4711 Yonge Street, 10th Floor

Toronto, Ontario, M2N 6K8

Tel: 416-481-5706

CHINA DAILY (ISSN 0748-6154) is published

daily except weekends by China Daily USA, 1500

Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036.

Periodical postage paid at New York, NY and

additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send

address changes to CHINA DAILY USA, 1500

Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036.

Vol. 38 - No. 1276

Dominican Republic starts pilot program on four-day workweek

By GERMAN SANCHEZ in Bogota
For China Daily

Just four days of work every week? Yes, said many companies in the Dominican Republic.

Starting this month, these businesses are taking part in a six-month pilot of a four-day workweek, where employees work 36 hours over four days but receive the same pay as a standard 44-hour, five-day workweek.

"The theme of reducing weekly working hours emerged as we discussed potential labor reforms in the Dominican Republic," Rafael Abreu, president of the National Confederation of Trade Union Unity,

said. "The trial period will allow us to implement the changes and ensure the results do not compromise the goals of either party."

The voluntary trial aims to evaluate the impacts of shorter hours on workers' health, work-life balance and productivity. The initiative is the first of its kind in the Caribbean country.

Private and public companies participating in the trial include telecoms firm Claro, power company EGE Haina, heavy equipment dealer IMCA and the government's national health insurance agency, with around 300 to 400 workers taking part.

A local university will track results from surveys and interviews with employees, including any changes in

physical and mental health, work satisfaction, and correlation between work and personal lives.

In the Dominican Republic, the typical workweek currently stands at 44 hours — eight hours daily from Monday to Friday, and four more hours on Saturdays. But employers have leeway in distributing those hours. A proposed four-day model would reduce the total weekly hours and concentrate them from Monday to Thursday.

The labor ministry said in a news release that the program aims to "prioritize people, improving health and well-being, and promote a sustainable and environmentally friendly productivity". It may also

boost employment if companies need additional recruits to cover vacated hours.

Abreu believes the program could reduce fatigue and stress while improving work engagement as employees gain better work-life balance and arrive at their jobs in a more rested state. "With the extra downtime, workers may be able to perform at a higher level without jeopardizing their health or family life," Abreu said.

Costs in focus

With one less workday, companies may see benefits such as "lower office costs, decreased energy usage, reduced traffic congestion, and

improved logistics if employers implement the changes successfully," said Luis Gonzalez, general secretary of the Latin American and Caribbean Friendship Federation with the People's Republic of China.

However, naysayers question the potential impacts.

"This is a pilot program voluntarily. It will not be feasible to roll it out across all industries, as those with round-the-clock production cycles would not be able to accommodate the adjusted working-hour structure," Abreu said.

Gonzalez noted that "some business sectors remain skeptical because much of the work in their industry is informal".

"Within this informal sector, we cannot talk about reductions but rather, people working whenever they prefer," Gonzalez said.

There is already evidence elsewhere that a four-day schedule boosts benefits in multiple areas. The United Kingdom's pilot last year — the world's largest trial of a four-day week to date — tracked about 2,900 employees across 62 companies and found enhanced work-life balance with no drop in output. Productivity even increased in some firms as burnout fell.

Chile has passed legislation to gradually cut the standard workweek from 45 to 40 hours by 2028, following Colombia's lead in limiting hours to 42 starting in 2023.

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.

WORLDUS

Visit to China gives students new insights

Trip inspires young guests from Iowa to learn more about country's culture

By MAYZHOU in Houston
mayzhou@chinadailyusa.com

Apollo Hayes, a junior at Muscatine High School in Iowa, said she liked her 10-day trip to China so much that she is considering applying to a university in China.

"I'm very thankful to Chinese President Xi Jinping for what he's done to get us there. Without him, I probably wouldn't have learned a lot about China that I know now. And I wouldn't have probably started looking at colleges in China where I could train," Hayes said in a phone interview.

Late last month, 24 students from the small Iowa city of Muscatine took a trip to China as President Xi's invited guests. Their journey was initiated by local resident Sarah Lande, who, as Xi's personal friend, wrote him a letter requesting that Muscatine students be included in his initiative of inviting 50,000 US students to experience China in the next five years.

Xi replied to Lande in early January with a firm yes, and Hayes found herself and other schoolmates flying to China soon after.

Heidi Guo, who teaches Chinese at Muscatine High School and accompanied the students to China, said they went to Beijing, Shijiazhuang and Shanghai and visited schools, museums and universities. They also saw sights such as the Great Wall and the Forbidden City.

Hayes said she was excited upon learning of the opportunity to visit China. "But I was also a bit scared because a lot of older people's words of China are negative. ... Once I got there, it was so nice. Everyone was really welcoming and warm."

She ended up having a wonderful time, Hayes said, and she especially was impressed by some of the museums.

She was particularly struck by what she saw in an urban design museum in Shanghai. "It was really cool to see how these places have them already planned out for the future and how they're already trying to implement the new and the old together."

The good memories from meeting a lot of people were among her favorite parts of the trip, said Hayes. "I met a lot of people from different schools, and they were really cool. We got to learn a lot about each other's cultures and the differences about our schools."

Yamileth Monte, a sophomore, shared Hayes' sentiments. "I really liked getting to go there because it helped me connect with everybody from that culture. I was able to practice my Mandarin while they were able to practice their English, and I really liked how we could find a connection with both of our languages," said Monte.

Hayes and Monte said they have downloaded WeChat to keep in touch with new friends they made in China. "We've been exchanging photos and having conversations about the differences between America and China," said Monte.

"We're still in high school and we won't be grown adults for a few years, but it's nice to see how even as

kids we can talk and understand each other despite not being raised in the same culture and not being raised with the same manners," said Hayes.

Monte was especially impressed with meeting the vice-mayor of Shanghai and chancellors of different universities. "It's great how they took the time out of their days to connect with the younger generation to help form that connection between China and America. It showed me that they cared, and it makes me want to go back there."

Seeing China in person brought the students new perspectives.

Sienna Stoneking said she didn't realize how big China is until she got there.

"It's a whole different thing to really be able to see Chinese culture firsthand. I really enjoyed getting to see the Chinese New Year traditions," Stoneking said, referring to learning how to make dumplings, spring rolls and Chinese knots.

"To go and see a different country was really amazing," she said.

Struck by openness

Monte was struck by China's openness. "Wherever you go, it's in Chinese, but it's also in English, and I was really surprised to see that."

She also enjoyed sightseeing. "They said Yu Garden was one of the oldest gardens in China. It was so nice of them to share such a special thing with us."

Leo Regennitter was impressed by the skyscrapers and the city traffic. "It was awesome going to the places. And you don't see stuff like that in Iowa," he said. He was also delighted to find out that the Chinese students he talked to also like Taylor Swift and enjoy TV shows such as *The Office* and *Friends*, as he does.

Hayes was surprised at how delicious Chinese food tasted there. "I tried a lot of things that I didn't realize I would like, and now I really can't wait to make a lot of it at home," she said.

The trip piqued some students' interest in learning more about China. Hayes has already started talking to her principal about applying to a school in China to study the language and learn more about Chinese history and culture.

Stoneking, a freshman and three years away from college, is also considering the possibility of studying in China. "I talked to the president of some university there; I would absolutely love to go to college there someday," she said.

Guo said about 150 students in her school have chosen Chinese as a foreign language, and a lot of the students who made the trip to China have taken Chinese lessons.

"The trip opened their eyes to China, and they got to learn something about their counterparts in China. I could tell the trip definitely made some impact on a lot of them," Guo said.

A few students from the trip will join others from the Muscatine area to visit China in the summer again for about a month to learn more about its language and culture, she said.



Saluting Washington

Members of Alpha Company, 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard), give a firing demonstration on the Bowling Green of George Washington's Mount Vernon estate on Monday in Mount Vernon, Virginia. The ceremonies were held to honor the Feb 22 birthday of George Washington, the first US president, and Presidents Day.

KEVIN WOLF / AP

US politicians' China rhetoric called empty

By YIFAN XU in Washington
yifanxu@chinadailyusa.com

On the growing accusations and tougher rhetoric against China by US politicians heading into the 2024 elections, an observer said they are idle threats in a "silly season".

"People can say whatever they want during campaigns, but what they are able to accomplish when they are actually in a position to implement their claims is subject to a reality factor," William Jones, the Washington Bureau chief of Executive Intelligence Review, said in an interview with China Daily.

The US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director William Burns described China as "the bigger long-term threat" in his article published Jan 30 in Foreign Affairs, the official publication of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). He revealed that the CIA has "committed substantially more resources toward China-related intelligence collection, operations, and analysis around the world — more than doubling the percentage of our overall budget focused on China over just the last two years."

"Thank him for reminding us," Wang Wenbin, spokesman for China's Foreign Ministry, replied to Burns' opinion article, adding that

the CIA chief had revealed that its "spies are everywhere" and that, "China will take precautions as usual and will not allow the US to get its way through illegal moves."

Jones said that the intelligence community and the American political elite generally adhere to the policy that the US is the world's policeman and that the "intelligence branch" has to provide the military arm with competent information.

He pointed out that "the fundamental fallacy underlying this policy" is that the US government sees China as a primary rival and must counter it. "This has sent clear signals to China that the US does have 'double standards', one for the hegemon, and one for everybody else," said Jones. "At the same time, the US has a terrible time keeping up with their so-called 'special status' given that China, a most populous nation, is rapidly developing a growing middle class and a sizable science and technology capability, a capability that may eventually rival or exceed that of the United States in the near future."

FBI Director Christopher Wray last week warned that "Chinese hackers" are preparing to "wreak havoc and cause real-world harm to the US" at a US congressional hearing.

Jones said that Wray's statement "falls into the phony narrative about how China wants to bring down the US economy" as well as "plays into some of the prejudices of many of our badly misinformed members of Congress, who are happy to hear their worst fears confirmed by the 'proper authorities'", and "this also allows the FBI chief to get the money".

"I think the statements by Bill Burns and Christopher Wray have more to do with the fact that things are simply not going their way," said Jones. "Immigration will probably be the number one issue in the upcoming presidential debates if it continues to be a Trump-Biden contest."

The issue of China, however, has already surfaced, as Trump is now calling for 60 percent tariffs on Chinese goods," Jones said. "There is also the war in Ukraine and the situation in the Middle East, which will without a doubt play a major role, particularly the Ukraine war. These issues will probably become the hot topics of debate, but China will be a close second."

Former US president Donald Trump, the leading contender for the Republican nomination, noted in an interview earlier this month that he would impose tariffs of more than 60 percent on Chinese exports

to the US if elected.

Jones said that the former president's claim was "questionable", although Trump may believe what he says.

In Jones' analysis, with the present inflationary prices on basic commodities like food and other essentials, 60 percent tariffs on Chinese goods, many of which are sold at Walmart and Costco, would lead to "skyrocketing prices", and poor people are the worst affected. "Trump has had a good record in reducing goods on the market, but a very poor one in being able to produce them," he added.

These tough talks about China, Jones said, may not affect policy in the short term, as "everybody knows that the presidential campaign in the US is always 'silly season', where candidates can say whatever they please without having to back it up with action". However, "as they are very public affairs, they inevitably resonate in the overall political milieu and can cause occasional tremor".

Jones said that he was hoping for a relatively "soft landing" afterward. "If the US began to view China more as a friend than a rival, perhaps we could get back to work fixing the real problems here at home rather than wasting time and effort on punishing 'rivals'," he said.

Net gains in friendship achieved through games

By RENA LI in Los Angeles
renali@chinadailyusa.com

A high school basketball team from China recently traveled to Los Angeles to play with local teams — both sides came away impressed with the competition and appreciated the cultural exchange.

Players from the Tsinghua University High School, or TUHS, basketball team visited Southern California earlier this month to engage in several friendly matches with their counterparts in the United States.

Following two-hour-long competitions between the TUHS and Duarte High School, or DHS, Shakhani Lewis, coach of the DHS girls' basketball team, said she was deeply impressed by the basketball skills demonstrated by the Chinese students.

"They played amazing; they are an excellent team. Thanks for playing with us," she said.

Kevin Morris, administrative director of the Duarte Unified School District, who oversees the international student exchange program, said that the exchange was a "great opportunity" for students from both sides to collaborate and share their cultures.

Morris has visited Chinese cities and schools over the last 10 years. In 2018, he led the girls' basketball team on an exchange tour to China, spanning 12 days and visited Wenzhou, Hangzhou, Shanghai and Beijing.

"It was a good experience for our kids. Our parents and our students said it was the best trip they'd ever taken. You know, the Chinese culture is very hospitable, and they really took care of our kids. It was a really good experience," said Morris.

Wang Zeqi, a coach of the TUHS basketball team, said he and the team have benefited a lot from competing with US teams.

"We experienced their athletic talent, sportsmanship, and learned about the sports industry. These experiences significantly contributed to our improvement," said Wang, adding that the team has won numerous high school championships.

In recent years, several members of the school's boys' and girls' basketball teams have pursued opportunities in the US for studies and professional basketball. Notable players such as Han Xu, Li Yongwei and others have represented their schools and country on the international stage.

Bai Xuefeng, TUHS vice-principal, said the school remains committed to fostering the exchange of youth basketball.

"I hope to see more American teenagers visit China in the future, experiencing its richness firsthand, showcasing China's positive image and cultural diversity, and nurturing additional Chinese cultural ambassadors and advocates," Bai said.

The TUHS is not the only school supporting exchanges among young people.

On Feb 6, students from the art troupe of the Beijing-based High School Affiliated to Renmin University of China, or RDFZ, also charmed their audience at the International Studies Learning Center, or ISLC, in Los Angeles, with dance, music and martial arts.

Noticing that the center's logo is a dragon, a symbol of China, Guo Shaochun, the Chinese consul general in Los Angeles, said that while the two countries may have differ-



Players from the Tsinghua University High School basketball team play against a team from Duarte High School on Feb 2 in Los Angeles. RENA LI / CHINA DAILY

"I believe the performance will deepen the understanding of Chinese culture, allowing youth to appreciate the shared pursuit of artistic expression between the East and the West."

Guo Shaochun, Chinese consul general in Los Angeles

ent interpretations of the dragon, cultural exchange has built a bridge for both peoples to better understand each other.

"The future of China-US relations lies in the youth," he said.

"I believe the performance will deepen the understanding of Chinese culture, allowing youth to

appreciate the shared pursuit of artistic expression between the East and the West.

"I hope the young people of the two nations will have conversations and interactions and serve as goodwill ambassadors between our two countries and two peoples," he said.



Muscatine students learn how to make dumplings in Beijing during their 10-day trip to China in January. PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

BUSINESS

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Airlines see significant recovery in bookings

By ZHU WENQIAN
zhuwenqian@chinadaily.com.cn

The eight-day Spring Festival holiday that lasted from Feb 10 to Saturday, coupled with relaxed visa policies of several countries, has significantly boosted travel demand and fueled further growth of the air travel market.

During the holiday period, the total number of air passengers handled in China, including via domestic and international flights, reached 17.99 million. The daily average number of passenger trips handled hit 2.25 million, setting a new high, said the Civil Aviation Administration of China.

Over the festival period, the total number of flights operated in China reached 137,000, up 4.9 percent compared with the same period of 2019, or before the COVID-19 pandemic. The figure jumped 33.2 percent year-on-year, the CAAC said.

"Domestically, Guangzhou Baiyun, Shenzhen Bao'an and Chengdu Tianfu international airports were the busiest airports during the holiday," said Zheng Hongfeng, founder and CEO of VariFlight, an aviation data and solution service provider.

For international and regional routes, the number of flights operated during the festival period reached 15,000, which rebounded to nearly 70 percent of levels seen in 2019, with the figure surging 364 percent year-



Passengers seen at Beijing Capital International Airport during the Spring Festival holiday. AP

on-year, VariFlight found.

During the period, a total of 13.52 million Chinese and foreign travelers entered or exited the country, an increase of 2.8-fold compared with the holiday period last year, and the number resumed to nearly 90 percent of 2019 levels, said the National Immigration Administration.

With more flights connecting China and Southeast Asia becoming available, an increasing number of passengers from Southeast Asian countries traveled to or transferred through China during the festival period.

Shanghai-based China Eastern Airlines operated more flights to Southeast Asian island destinations to meet growing travel demand from China. During the holiday, the carrier operated more than 2,300 round-trip flights between domestic

cities and Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok.

"The visa-free policies of multiple countries and accelerated recovery of international flights have further stimulated Chinese visitors' enthusiasm for traveling abroad," said Fan Dongxiao, director of short-haul outbound tours at Tuniu Corp, a Nanjing, Jiangsu province-based online travel agency.

"The number of orders for trips to Southeast Asia, ice and snow tours in Northern Europe, and off-season tours in Australia and New Zealand have all experienced significant growth," Fan said.

In addition, Guangzhou-based China Southern Airlines operated some 25,400 flights during the holiday, up 20.95 percent over the same period of 2019. The carrier handled

4.17 million passenger trips, up 23.25 percent over 2019.

For domestic flights, the number of passengers departing from Ningbo and Yiwu in Zhejiang province, Jieyang in Guangdong province, Changsha in Hunan province and Beijing showed a significant increase compared with the same period of 2019.

Domestic tourism cities such as Lijiang and Dali in Yunnan province, Haikou and Sanya in Hainan province, and Changbaishan and Yanji in Jilin province were popular destinations, China Southern said.

Internationally, passengers departing from Frankfurt, Moscow, London, Tokyo, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur during the holiday showed an apparent increase compared with 2019, the airline said.

FDI to recover on stabilizing trend of Q4

Experts: Chinese economy remains resilient, attractive despite pressure

By ZHOU LANXU
zhoulanxu@chinadaily.com.cn

China's real economy and securities markets attracted positive net inflows of foreign investment last year despite the pressures posed by overseas central banks' interest rate hikes, underscoring the resilience of the Chinese economy, experts said on Monday.

Looking at 2024, foreign capital inflows into China are poised to further stabilize and recover as external pressures fade, they said. They, however, hastened to caution that policy efforts to consolidate domestic economic recovery remain critical to stabilizing foreign investors' confidence in renminbi-denominated assets.

The State Administration of Foreign Exchange said on Sunday that a net total of \$62.1 billion in equity-based foreign direct investment flowed into China last year, with a noticeable surge in the fourth quarter compared to the previous one.

China also attracted net foreign inflow of securities investment in 2024. In the fourth quarter, the size of net inflows reached the highest level in almost two years, SAFE's preliminary estimates showed, albeit without giving the specific numbers.

"These data indicate that more foreign investors are investing in China, developing their business here and allocating renminbi-denominated assets," said Wang Chunying, deputy head of SAFE.

Earlier data from the Shanghai Head Office of the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, also showed that overseas institutions' holdings in China's interbank bond market rose by about 280 billion yuan (\$38.9 billion) year-on-year to 3.67 trillion yuan as of December.

The inflows took place despite the US Federal Reserve imposing its most aggressive interest rate hikes in decades, which sharply widened the US-China interest rate spread and put pressure on the renminbi.

Liu Chunsheng, an associate professor at the Central University of Finance and Economics, said China was able to sustain FDI and securities investment inflows last year despite a harsher international environment.

This, he said, showed the Chinese economy is resilient. "China's vast domestic market remains an invest-

ment destination that foreign enterprises can't afford to overlook."

Wang Youxin, a senior researcher at Bank of China, said China's FDI inflows started to improve in the fourth quarter as the pressure of global industrial chain adjustments eased while prospects of returns on investment in China improved amid a steadier economic recovery.

Capital inflows into Chinese onshore bonds also picked up in the fourth quarter, Wang said, as the US Fed stopped interest rate hikes in September, sparking expectations of US rate cuts in 2024, which caused the renminbi to rebound, he said.

SAFE data showed that foreign holdings of Chinese onshore bonds rose every month from September to December, leading to a net increase of more than \$60 billion in holdings during the period.

The trend of improving cross-border capital inflows may continue in 2024, Wang said, backed by the narrowing US-China interest rate difference, the continuous recovery of the Chinese economy and the ongoing policy efforts to facilitate a revival of China's A-share market.

Nevertheless, China recorded a deficit in FDI of \$152.5 billion in 2023 — which means Chinese enterprises' overseas investments outnumbered foreign companies' investments in China — versus a surplus of \$32.3 billion in 2022, according to SAFE.

With China feeling some pressure of capital outflows, the government's commitment to enhancing the business environment is vital for boosting the confidence of foreign investors, said Pan Yuanxuan, an associate researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of World Economics and Politics.

"Domestic economic fundamentals and capital market investor sentiment remain the most critical factors determining cross-border capital flows. Policy efforts should be deepened to ensure a sustained economic recovery and bolster investor confidence," said Wang at Bank of China.

SAFE data also showed that China's current account surplus amounted to \$264.2 billion in 2023, continuing to be within a reasonable range and equivalent to 1.5 percent of the country's GDP. In 2022, the ratio was 2.3 percent.

Bright resumption augurs well for A shares

By SHI JING in Shanghai
shijing@chinadaily.com.cn

Stock-market mavens welcomed the positive start to trading in the Lunar New Year as the bourses reopened on Monday after the eight-day Spring Festival holiday, noting there is still room for further uptrend amid various growth indicators, recovery in market appetite and anticipation of more stimulative policies.

The benchmark Shanghai Composite Index rose 1.56 percent to regain the 2,900-point level on Monday while the Shenzhen Component Index rose 0.93 percent.

Technology-focused ChiNext in Shenzhen closed 1.13 percent higher. The total trading value at the Shanghai and Shenzhen bourses exceeded 950 billion yuan (\$132 billion).

Artificial intelligence companies reported the strongest daily price increase of 5.96 percent on average, spurred by the instant fame won by Sora, the text-to-video generator released by ChatGPT's maker OpenAI on Friday.

Experts from China International Capital Corp said that major over-

seas markets reported gains as the A-share market took the Spring Festival break, with latest progress made by technology companies attracting market attention.

The Hang Seng Index in Hong Kong reported three consecutive days of gains as it resumed trading on Feb 14 in the Chinese New Year that began on Feb 10, rising 3.77 percent by Friday. The sub-index Hang Seng Tech spiked 6.89 percent in the three trading days to touch the highest level in a month.

Combined with the strong travel and consumption data in the Chinese New Year, investor sentiment is likely to further recover and a bullish performance can be expected in the following days, said CICC experts.

As Central Huijin, an arm of China's sovereign fund, expanded its investment scope in the A-share market before the Lunar New Year, the liquidity deficiency in the stock market has been properly addressed and the returns to investors are likely to improve, said Qiu Xiang, joint chief strategist at CITIC Securities.

The better-than-expected data on January aggregate financing to the real economy, released on Feb 9,

combined with the many consumption highlights during the Spring Festival holiday, could mean that government policies will likely be more flexible this year, to respond to the disruptions in economic activities, he said.

Analysts from Haitong Securities said that marginal improvements can be expected in policies and capital this year. As the A-share market is gradually bottoming out, investors can look for opportunities in hard technology and pharmaceutical companies, they said.

During a State Council's plenary meeting on Sunday, Premier Li Qiang said that more efforts should be made to boost confidence and expectations. Policymaking and implementation should be consistent and stable, he said.

In its latest quarterly review released on Feb 13, index provider MSCI Inc removed 48 A shares from its MSCI China Index and added another four new A shares. The adjustment will take effect on Feb 29.

Wu Xinkun, chief analyst of Haitong Securities, said the removal of the 48 A shares was mainly because their market value fell to

between 10 billion yuan and 24 billion yuan each, lower than the MSCI's lower limit.

Liu Gang, chief strategist for overseas markets at CICC, said the 48 companies accounted for only 0.097 percent weighting in the MSCI Emerging Markets Index. The capital passively tracking the A shares via the MSCI Index may thus lead to 330 million yuan in outflows due to the latest adjustment. But such capital outflows will exert very limited impact on the A-share market, as it equals to only 0.04 percent of the daily trading value of the A-share market in 2023.

Zhou Wenqun, equity portfolio manager at international asset manager Fidelity International, said that A-share companies' profitability has started to bottom out since the third quarter of 2023. If more stimulative policies are adopted this year, A-share companies' profitability is expected to come in at a high single-digit level.

As China's economy further recovers, Fidelity will increase its exposure to the undervalued A-share cyclical sectors, including consumption, materials and industries, she said.

Harbin's ace ice and snow host shares in city's success

HARBIN — Jiang Kedong still remembers his teacher's angry words when he was punished for talking during class — "Can you make money by talking?" Now, he can answer that question. This winter, Jiang became a celebrity in China, dubbed "Brother Left and Right", as host of performances at Harbin Ice-Snow World, a landmark theme park in the capital of Heilongjiang province. Since it opened for the new winter season on Dec 18, the park in China's northernmost province has received more than 2 million visitors.

"People are coming not for me, but for my hometown," the 38-year-old celebrity host told Xinhua as he walked past the park's main sculpture in the shape of a tower, which was brightly illuminated for the evening. Against this backdrop, he raised his arms and right foot to make the gesture of a soaring eagle.

"She has always been so beautiful," he said, pointing to the sculpture as an example of the city's visual riches. "Now, more people are beginning to see her beauty," he said, highlighting the growing appeal of Harbin, which

has gained in prominence since the beginning of this year as a top winter destination in China.

Jiang described Harbin as a "fashionable city" of that era. "I remember seeing many foreigners in downtown Harbin when I was eight or nine," he recalled. That was in the early 1990s, not long after the start of China's reform and opening-up. At that time, there were not many foreigners in China, even in Beijing.

However, Northeast China, an old industrial base formerly known as China's "eldest son", later became a "rust belt" because of the difficulties it encountered in terms of transformation and development. In 1998, Jiang's mother was laid off.

Jiang became an auto production worker in 2006. But his factory didn't prosper, so he held several part-time jobs, including as a drummer for a wedding band.

The development of science and technology saw live performances replaced by digital music files at weddings. Jiang's drumming career ended, but this experience connected him with the wedding industry.



A drone photo shows the Harbin Ice-Snow World in Harbin, North-east China's Heilongjiang province. ZHANG TAO / XINHUA

In 2011, he resigned from the factory to become a wedding host. It was at a wedding that he met the person in charge of performances at the Harbin Ice-Snow World, who invited him to the extravaganza.

This chance meeting marked the beginning of Jiang's association with Ice-Snow World.

The theme park grew from the former Harbin Ice Lantern Festival, which started in 1963.

"My first impression of the park 12 years ago was 'Wow, it's so big!'" said Jiang. "In the following years, I witnessed it becoming even bigger, and the use of science and technology also improved."

Over the years, Jiang has enjoyed growing success. In 2019, the number of people following him on social media soared from 50,000 to 600,000. At the time, there were too many visitors at the site. For fear that they would fall and cause a stampede, during the interactive session he would shout: "Left foot, right foot!" This earned him the nickname "Brother Left and Right".

However, he has also faced some bleak moments, with the COVID-19 pandemic a major cause of disruption. He did not give up, switching instead to livestreaming from the park. "There were so many spectacular ice sculptures. It would be a pity if no one saw them," said Jiang.

"There are ups and downs; it's the law of nature," he added philosophically. "As long as you work hard, you will be appreciated one day."

His thoughtful comments apply not only to his life, but also to Harbin.

Since the beginning of 2024, Harbin has become prominent as a top winter destination. According to research by Tongcheng, a major online travel agency, the city has been ranked as the most popular destination for the 2024 Spring Festival holiday.

Briefly

High-tech firms in Guangdong top 75,000

The total number of high-tech enterprises in South China's Guangdong province has exceeded 75,000, said local authorities. By the end of 2023, the province's estimated annual research and development expenditure topped 460 billion yuan (\$64.8 billion), according to statistics revealed at a provincial conference on high-quality development.

PBOC adds liquidity via reverse repos

China's central bank conducted 32 billion yuan (\$4.51 billion) of seven-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 1.8 percent on Monday. The move aims to keep liquidity in the banking system reasonable and ample, the People's Bank of China said in a statement. A reverse repo is a process by which the central bank purchases securities from commercial banks through bidding, with an agreement to sell them back in the future.

BUSINESS



Consumers check out festive products in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, on Friday. LIU JIANHUA / FOR CHINA DAILY

Retailers strike gold during 8-day festival shopping spree

Sales of festive lanterns, paintings, embroideries hit seasonal peak

By FAN FEIFEI
fanfeifei@chinadaily.com.cn

Chinese consumers unleashed their massive purchasing power during the eight-day Spring Festival holiday, which ran from Feb 10 to Saturday, with homegrown brands that weave traditional Chinese cultural elements into their designs, health-related commodities, jewelry and electronic devices gaining in popularity, especially among younger shoppers, experts said.

They said the consumption boom during the Chinese New Year holiday indicates the enormous vitality and strong resilience of the world's second-largest economy, and will provide a strong boost to the country's economic recovery and further shore up market confidence.

Data from Chinese e-commerce platform JD showed that between Feb 7 and Thursday, sales revenue of festive lanterns, Lunar New Year paintings and embroideries deemed to be intangible cultural heritage products surged 9.6-fold, 175 percent and 166 percent, respectively, compared with last year's Spring Festival.

Turnover of down jackets with dragon elements in the Year of the Dragon quadrupled on JD's online marketplaces, while dragon-themed *hanfu* — traditional Chinese-style clothing — worn by children skyrocketed 3.6-fold.

Health-related and nutritional goods to boost the immune system are increasingly favored by Chinese

“The authorities have taken a series of policy measures to stimulate consumption, such as issuing shopping vouchers and cutting taxes and fees ...”

Pan Helin, co-director of the Digital Economy and Financial Innovation Research Center at Zhejiang University's International Business School

shoppers, with the transaction volume of protein powders and wolfberry juice gift boxes soaring 96 percent and 200 percent year-on-year, respectively, JD said.

According to Taobao and Tmall, online marketplaces of Chinese tech heavyweight Alibaba Group, sales of gold products jumped more than 300 percent over the past two weeks from a year earlier. Over 40,000 gold bracelets and lucky beads were sold out at jewelry retailer Chow Tai Seng's Tmall online flagship store.

China's consumption market has picked up steam during the Spring Festival holiday, said the Ministry of Commerce on Sunday. Sales figures from key retail and catering enterprises nationwide

monitored by the ministry rose 8.5 percent year-on-year over the extended holiday.

Sales of green organic foods, gold, silver and jewelry increased about 20 percent year-on-year, while revenue of on-demand large supermarket chains grew nearly 10 percent compared with the same period last year, the ministry said.

In addition, consumer electronics — including digital cameras and handsets — as well as intelligent home appliance products like dishwashers and coffeemakers, have seen booming sales at both online and offline retailers.

Analysts said that this year's sizzling Spring Festival consumption bodes well for the year as a whole, and the release of pent-up demand will inject strong impetus into the country's economic rebound.

Chen Lifan, a researcher with the Development Research Center of the State Council, said Spring Festival is the most important traditional festival for the Chinese people and has typically been a peak season for consumption, adding that catering, tourism, culture and entertainment, and service-related consumption segments have rapidly rebounded during the holiday and showed great vitality.

Chen said the robust growth of consumer spending during the Lunar New Year holiday also showcased the huge potential and resilience of the country's consumer market, which will further boost market confidence and expectations, as well as promote consumption recovery.

Data from Chinese video-sharing

platform Douyin showed the daily consumption scale of services consumption — including catering, accommodation, tourism and entertainment — surged 153 percent year-on-year from Feb 9 to Thursday, with consumers from third-tier cities and smaller areas seeing their spending soar 187 percent year-on-year.

Food orders increased by 99 percent over the previous year, while orders for tourism and accommodation, as well as leisure and entertainment activities, increased by 130 percent and 119 percent, respectively, year-on-year during the holiday, Douyin said.

Noting that consumption has become a major driving force in bolstering the country's economic growth, Pan Helin, co-director of the Digital Economy and Financial Innovation Research Center at Zhejiang University's International Business School, said the consumption spree during the holiday revealed a further recovery in consumer confidence.

“The authorities have taken a series of policy measures to stimulate consumption, such as issuing shopping vouchers and cutting taxes and fees, which have played a positive role in propelling the recovery of consumption,” he said.

The rapid development of e-commerce and other new types of consumption models will further expand sales channels for traditional retailers, Pan said, adding that more efforts are needed to encourage enterprises to use cutting-edge technologies in order to create new types of intelligent consumer goods.

Mainland a hot holiday attraction for HK tourists

By CHENG YU
chengyu@chinadaily.com.cn

The just-concluded Spring Festival holiday witnessed a fivefold increase in consumption from Hong Kong residents on the Chinese mainland as the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area becomes more integrated and convenient for residents within the region.

According to a report published on Sunday by Weixin — known as WeChat overseas — the number of online and offline consumption transactions from Hong Kong residents on the Chinese mainland soared nearly fivefold year-on-year, while the total consumption amount increased threefold during the Spring Festival holiday, which lasted from Feb 10 to Saturday.

Money spent on offline catering through WeChat Pay HK saw an over 30-fold year-on-year jump in terms of consumption value. Weixin Pay is a mobile payment service within the Weixin app designed for users on the Chinese mainland, while WeChat Pay HK is an electronic wallet denominated in Hong Kong dollars and available for WeChat users in the special administrative region.

Meanwhile, the number of tourists from the Chinese mainland traveling to Hong Kong during the extended holiday also increased significantly. The average daily number of Weixin Pay offline transactions in Hong Kong surged fivefold year-on-year, the report said.

Such figures represented ever-increasing enthusiasm for intercity

travel in the GBA during the eight-day holiday, as most people in the area speak Cantonese and share similar social customs, consumption preferences and culinary habits.

Recent years have witnessed rising numbers of Hong Kong residents flocking to cities on the Chinese mainland for weekend get-aways, thanks to convenient transportation and services, as well as more affordable groceries.

EGL Tours, a Hong Kong-based travel agency, said in January that more than 3,000 people booked places to visit mega-retailer Sam's Club in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, in the few weeks prior to Chinese New Year.

Analysts from The Economist Intelligence Unit said in a note that far more Hong Kong residents traveled to the Chinese mainland and overseas than arriving tourists in 2023, reversing pre-COVID-19 pandemic trends.

“Hong Kong consumers' increased spending on the Chinese mainland — particularly in Shenzhen — will probably be a long-term trend,” they said.

As the GBA celebrated its 5th anniversary on Sunday, Liu Guohong, deputy head of the China Development Institute in Shenzhen, said the GBA has developed to be more integrated, with infrastructure connectivity of the city cluster becoming more convenient.

“More importantly, such integrated development helps strengthen the advantages of the area on the global stage as a whole,” Liu said.



A Huawei store in Hengshui, Hebei province. TANG KE / FOR CHINA DAILY

Huawei plans dividends of \$10.7b on strong comeback

By MASI
masi@chinadaily.com.cn

Huawei Technologies Co plans to give its staff 77.1 billion yuan (\$10.7 billion) in dividends under its employee stock ownership plan or ESOP, after the Chinese tech company made a strong comeback to the 5G smartphone market.

The dividend will be 1.50 yuan a share, and the payment will be made in March or April, three Huawei employees told China Daily. The company did not respond to requests for confirmation.

Huawei, which is wholly owned by its employees, has about 51.3 billion shares outstanding. Huawei founder Ren Zhengfei has shares in the firm as a natural person and he also participates in the ESOP, which has been in place since Huawei was set up in 1987 and is implemented through the Union of Huawei Investment and Holding.

Some 142,315 workers were part of the plan as of the end of 2022, according to the firm's earnings report for that year, the latest full-year data that are available as of now.

The dividend plan came after Huawei regained the No 1 spot in China's smartphone market in the first two weeks of 2024, according to a report by research firm Counterpoint.

That marked the first time Huawei recaptured the top spot as the US sanctions imposed on the company since 2019 have continuously eroded its sales share.

Counterpoint said the three reasons behind Huawei's success were its latest Mate 60 sales with Chinese-developed chips, brand loyalty among consumers and the rapid evolution and consumer acceptance of its in-house Harmony OS 4.0 operating system.

Xiang Ligang, director-general of the Information Consumption Alliance, a telecom industry association, said Huawei's comeback will cut into Apple's market share in China and also weigh down its domestic peers, especially Honor Device

Co Ltd, a spinoff from Huawei, which was formed three years ago.

Zhang Quanyi, a retailer who owns more than 10 smartphone stores in Suqian, Jiangsu province, said Huawei's Mate 60 series smartphones have become the most sought-after product in his stores and almost every consumer who visits his stores enquires first about the series.

Last month, Hu Houkun, Huawei's rotating chairman, said: “After years of hard work, we've managed to weather the storm. And now we're pretty much back on track.”

Huawei Technologies Co expected its revenue to hit 700 billion yuan in 2023, after the company made a strong comeback in its smartphone business and saw positive results in diversifying its revenue streams.

If Huawei's expectation comes to pass, that would mark a 9 percent year-on-year increase in revenue from 642.3 billion yuan in 2022, confirming the company's emergence from the effects of US government restrictions over the past four years.

“Our information communications technology infrastructure business (including base stations) has remained solid, and results from our device business (including smartphones) surpassed expectations. Both our digital power and cloud businesses are growing steadily, and our intelligent automotive solutions have become significantly more competitive,” Hu had said in January.

According to Hu, hard work has enabled Huawei to not only survive but grow. Nevertheless, it still has serious challenges to contend with. “Geopolitical and economic uncertainties abound, while technology restrictions and trade barriers continue to have an impact on the world. Together, these forces are reshaping business models and the global value chain.”

“No matter what changes we see in the external environment, we firmly believe that digital, intelligent and low-carbon transformation will continue to be the predominant development trend around the world.”

Sino-Saudi JV builds Fujian ethylene complex

By ZHENG XIN in Beijing
and HU MEIDONG in Fuzhou

The SABIC Fujian Petrochemical Complex, an ethylene project between China and Saudi Arabia and located in East China's Fujian province, kicked off construction on Monday, marking a significant milestone in cross-regional cooperation for both sides, said major shareholder SABIC, a Saudi petrochemical giant.

Located in Gulei petrochemical industrial park, one of the seven national petrochemical hubs in China, the complex will be built by SABIC Fujian Petrochemicals Co Ltd, a 51:49 joint venture established in 2022 between SABIC Industrial Investment Co — a subsidiary of SABIC — and Fujian Fuhua Gulei Petrochemical Co Ltd. With an estimated total invest-

ment of 44.8 billion yuan (\$6.4 billion), the project is scheduled to commence preparation for commissioning and start-up from the second half of 2026, with an expected annual ethylene capacity of up to 1.8 million metric tons, to meet growing market demand for high-end chemical products, while stimulating downstream investment opportunities, it said.

“The SABIC Fujian Petrochemical Complex is a landmark project in our development in China and a testament to SABIC's ambition to become the world's preferred leader in chemicals,” said Abdulrahman Al-Fageeh, CEO of SABIC.

“China, as one of the key major petrochemical markets globally, is also a very crucial and strategic market for SABIC. By leveraging our unique strengths, SABIC will continue to invest in China and

collaborate with our local partners to contribute to the country's high-quality sustainable development.”

SABIC announced its final investment decision for the project last month.

An analyst said SABIC's investment decision reflects its proactive approach to capitalizing on growth opportunities and strengthening its position in key markets like China.

“The initiation of this project marks a further advancement in cooperation between China and Saudi Arabia in the petrochemical field,” said Luo Zuoxian, head of intelligence and research at the Sinopec Economics and Development Research Institute.

Luo said Saudi Arabia, as a major exporter of petroleum, is committed to advancing the integration of

the upstream and downstream sectors of the petroleum industry. On the other hand, China, being a major player in the petrochemical industry, is a significant importer of petroleum.

“The collaboration between the two parties in this project is mutually complementary and sets an exemplary precedent for future collaboration between China and petroleum-exporting countries,” he said.

In addition to the groundbreaking ceremony, the EPC (engineering, procurement and construction) Contracts and a Project Financing Loan Agreement for the SABIC Fujian Petrochemical Complex were signed on Sunday, said SABIC.

Contact the writers at
zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

BUSINESSFOCUS

BYD making inroads into Japanese market

China to remain world's top vehicle exporter, with nation's automakers set to expand overseas presence, focusing on NEVs

By JIANG XUEQING in Tokyo and LI FUSHENG in Beijing

In July 2022, when Chinese electric vehicle maker BYD launched its passenger car in Japan, it surprised the local media, consumers as well as peers.

However, companies familiar with BYD's development in Japan over the years said it was inevitable because the automaker had accumulated years of industry experience in Japan, a country with a strong automotive sector, said Liu Xueliang, general manager of BYD Asia-Pacific auto sales division.

"We have implemented BYD's development philosophy in Japan over the past 24 years through its industrial layout. Therefore, what you see in this market today is not only a single product, but also a contribution to the Japanese economy from information technology to transportation, from batteries to cars," Liu said.

BYD's journey overseas, which Liu described as "challenging but promising", is closely related to China's booming EV exports. Last year, China overtook Japan as the world's largest auto exporter.

According to the General Administration of Customs of China, the country's automobile exports reached 5.22 million units in 2023, a year-on-year growth of 57.4 percent.

As China vigorously advances a green and low-carbon transformation of the automotive industry, it exported 1.77 million electric passenger vehicles last year, up 67.1 percent year-on-year.

In comparison, Japan's auto exports in 2023 were 4.42 million units, according to data released by the Japan Automobile Manufacturers Association.

China surpassing Japan in automobile exports is an inevitable outcome of its industrial transformation and social development, Liu said.

"In the field of new energy vehicles, China has taken a leading position globally. Today, the richness of China's NEV products, the maturity of technology and stability have been validated through the country's development over the past decade. The international acceptance of Chinese automakers venturing abroad is evident," he said.

As consumer demand for NEVs is increasing, Liu expects China will maintain its position as the world's top vehicle exporter. Chinese automakers will continue to expand their presence worldwide, with a focus on NEVs, he said.

Since its establishment, BYD has been firm in its international development strategy.

The carmaker entered the Japanese market with rechargeable batteries in 1999. Subsequently, it became involved in Japan's IT industry and brought solar panels to the Japanese market around 2008.

In 2015, BYD's electric buses arrived in Japan for the first time. It took the Chinese automotive brand nearly 10 years to make Japanese customers in the public transportation sector fully realize the reliability and trustworthiness of its electric buses.

Today, the company holds a market share of over 70 percent in electric buses in Japan. Twenty-four prefectures in the country use its electric buses, with the number totaling nearly 200.

"In 2024, our electric bus sales should double. We hope to have 4,000 BYD electric buses in operation in Japan by 2030," Liu said.

EV ambitions

BYD has launched two passenger EV models in Japan — the Atto 3 mid-size sport utility vehicle and the Dolphin hatchback. Another mid-size fastback sedan, Seal, will be launched in Japan this year.

As of end-December 2023, the number of newly licensed BYD electric passenger vehicles in Japan exceeded 1,440.

"Japanese consumers are discerning when it comes to cars, with various preferences. BYD will gradually introduce different popular models based on actual market demand in Japan, allowing consumers to choose the model that suits them best from the BYD



EV family," Liu said.

The starting price of the Dolphin, released in Japan in September 2023, is 3.63 million yen (\$24,200). EV-related public subsidies from Japan further bring the cost down to 2.98 million yen.

Comparable in size to the Nissan Leaf, BYD says the Dolphin can travel around 400 kilometers per charge, surpassing the Leaf's range.

Shinya Omori, president of SC-ABeam Automotive Consulting, told Japanese daily Yomiuri Shimbun that the Dolphin's affordability and its classification as a compact car, popular in Japan, could contribute to its swift sales success in the country.

Nonetheless, a source close to a Japanese car manufacturer expressed concerns about BYD's limited recognition in Japan, potentially hindering widespread adoption of the model.

Gaining recognition from Japanese customers is a challenging task for Chinese automakers in the short term, said Roy Lu, an independent auto analyst in Shanghai.

"Compared with other overseas markets, Chinese automotive companies are not very familiar with Japan and their understanding of local consumers is limited as well, so cultivating brand awareness and winning the first group of buyers will be a particularly crucial start," Lu said.

As a startup passenger car brand, BYD's brand awareness in Japan is far from the expected target.

"How to instill confidence in consumers about the BYD brand is an area where the company still has a long way to go. Because of this, we continuously focus on and value our cooperation with dealers," Liu said.

Apart from working together with local partners to consistently bring products that suit different consumers, the EV maker also aims to optimize its after-sales service system in the Japanese market.

BYD has partnered with Meiji Sangyo, a Tokyo-based auto parts company, to address the shortage of EV mechanics in Japan. Staff from BYD's dealerships commute to an e-garage operated by Meiji Sangyo in Kanagawa prefecture for specialized training sessions, Nikkei Asia reported.

Currently, the pace of EV adoption in Japan is slow. On the one hand, there are relatively few models of electric cars to choose from in the country. A survey conducted by BYD found that though Japanese consumers have expressed an interest in electric cars, they have not



found suitable models in the domestic market.

On the other hand, hybrid electric vehicles in Japan are well-made and highly recognized. This may have affected the speed of growth of pure electric cars.

Policy support

Despite these factors, Japanese automobile manufacturers have gradually released information about upcoming electric vehicles, including lightweight electric cars. Additionally, the Japanese government has introduced carbon neutrality goals and subsidy support for electric cars.

The likely widespread adoption of electric vehicles is a crucial pathway for the country to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and a 46 percent cut in greenhouse gas emissions in fiscal year 2030 from its fiscal year 2013 levels. BYD's EVs will actively contribute to Japan's early achievement of carbon reduction targets, Liu said.

"Electric vehicles are not targeted at a single market, but represent the overall trend and direction of future development. Japan may need more time, but it is necessary and feasible

for us to let Japanese consumers have sufficient exposure to BYD's products through different scenarios," he said.

Last year, BYD showcased five EV models and core technologies at the Japan Mobility Show 2023, formerly known as the Tokyo Motor Show.

"As the first Chinese automaker to participate in the history of the event, attending this exhibition is significant for BYD. It not only helps promote the BYD brand, but, more importantly, allows Japanese consumers to personally experience that EVs are a direction and trend," Liu said.

On Feb 1 last year, BYD opened its first dealership in Yokohama, Kanagawa prefecture. By the end of last year, there were 51 sales outlets in Japan where one could buy BYD electric cars, including 17 dealerships. The company aims to establish 100 dealerships in Japan by 2025.

"Apart from bringing BYD's technology and products to Japan, it is more important for us to promote and accelerate the development of electric cars in Japan. We hope to collaborate extensively with more local dealers," Liu said.

BYD's marketing model in Japan is based on collaboration with local dealers because this is believed to be the closest approach to consumers.

"To make consumers truly feel that BYD is around them, it is essential to engage in face-to-face communication. Although this approach may not lead to rapid promotion, it subtly and gradually builds trust in BYD electric cars among Japanese consumers," Liu said.

The EV maker has participated in exhibitions, organized test drives, and offered consumers various experiential activities. It conducted outdoor camping activities near Mount Fuji, where power sources came from BYD vehicles at night. At the end of last year, the company used its electric car to illuminate a Christmas tree in central Tokyo.

"We let customers feel that BYD cars are not just a means of transportation, but an integral part of their lives. Consumers can treat BYD cars as their living room, cinema and more. We showcase the upcoming lifestyle with many aspects relying on the EV platform," Liu said.

Japanese consumers have unique perspectives on cars, quality requirements, and service system expectations compared to consumers in other markets. Consequently, the market share of imported vehicles in Japan has never exceeded 10 percent.

Local carmakers enjoy very strong loyalty of Japanese consumers. Though some foreign brands have been present in Japan for decades, they have insignificant market share, said Yale Zhang, managing director of consultancy Automotive Foresight.

Despite this, Chinese automakers can, like those foreign brands, prove their capability to enter this market, which will contribute to their global brand awareness, Zhang said.

"Establishing a subsidiary in Japan of a reasonable size to ensure its visibility not only benefits the global brand image of an automaker, but also helps it recruit more and better experts in various aspects such as design, research and development, and marketing in the Japanese automotive industry," he said.

Lu, the Shanghai-based auto analyst, said some Chinese automotive companies see Japan as a stepping stone to larger markets like Europe and the United States; so they will leverage their advantages in electrification and smart in-cabin experience.

As such features will eventually become the norm for carmakers, the early-mover advantages will help Chinese automotive companies secure a position in the future, Lu said.

"We highly respect the Japanese market. Entering this market also demonstrates BYD's confidence in its overseas strategy," said Liu.

Should BYD successfully penetrate the Japanese market, known for its advanced automotive industry, it stands to gain global support, said Takeshi Miyao, CEO of industry research firm Carnorama Japan, in an interview with Nikkei Asia.

Additionally, the experience gained in the Japanese market, especially the service requirements in Japan, can be extended to the development of surrounding markets.

The development of Japan's EV market has not yet entered a truly competitive track, Liu said.

Japanese automakers have introduced EVs, but the variety is limited, and market attention is not very high. Foreign brands, whether German or Korean, have also launched electric cars in Japan.

"With BYD's arrival, everyone, through their respective efforts in enriching product lines, is aiming to generate more consumer interest in electric cars and encourage people to consider owning an EV. Only then will genuine competition emerge," he said.

Contact the writers at jiangxueqing@chinadaily.com.cn

BYD showcases five electric vehicle models and core technologies at the Japan Mobility Show 2023, formerly known as the Tokyo Motor Show, in Tokyo in October. TOP PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY. OTHER TWO BY JIANG XUEQING / CHINA DAILY

... it is more important for us to promote and accelerate the development of electric cars in Japan. We hope to collaborate extensively with more local dealers."

Liu Xueliang, general manager of BYD Asia-Pacific auto sales division

COMMENT

Editorials

Germany's insistence on autonomy ensures its relations with China continue to flourish

Sino-German relations are built on mutual trust and respect, pragmatic cooperation, and win-win results. The ties have always been considered a good example of international relations that transcend different social and political systems, bringing tangible benefits to the peoples. Over the past more than half a century, the relationship has forged ahead despite the fast-changing international landscape, with the two countries now enjoying a strategic partnership on all fronts.

The separate meetings that Foreign Minister Wang Yi held with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock on Saturday, on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference, were part of the close communications of the two sides. Thanks to their joint efforts, they can continuously expand consensus and strengthen cooperation. The frequent high-level exchanges between the two countries have laid a solid foundation for the healthy and sound development of bilateral relations. That the two countries are collaborating also on issues beyond their bilateral relations, such as global economic governance and international industry and supply chains, serves to provide some stability and certainty in a turbulent world.

Thanks to the vision of their respective policymakers, cooperation between the two countries has achieved new results in various fields. German direct investment in China increased by 4.3 percent to a record high of 11.9 billion euros (\$12.7 billion) last year, with major German companies such as

Daimler, Volkswagen, and BASF continuing to expand their business in China. And in 2023, trade between China and Germany reached 253 billion euros, with China becoming Germany's most important trading partner for the eighth year in a row.

China's march toward modernization will continue to bring long-term opportunities for German enterprises. That the two countries are now seeking to become partners in green development, to propel their green transitions and to deepen cooperation on green energy technology means new dynamism is being added to Sino-German economic and trade cooperation.

History shows that Sino-German relations have been able to flourish mainly as a result of the joint efforts to free their constructive engagement from geopolitics so that they can seek common ground while shelving differences. It is revealing that during his meeting with Wang, Scholz reiterated that Germany welcomes China's development and opposes decoupling and the severing of supply chains.

Maintaining the strategic autonomy that Germany applies in the handling of its relations with China — against the background of Washington pushing for a "de-risking" strategy aimed at excluding China from the global industry and supply chains — will be crucial for the future development of Sino-German relations, and for reinforcing their cooperative relations as a settling counterbalance to the United States' excessively self-serving and aggressive economic and trade measures.

DPP to blame for worsening cross-Strait ties

The Fujian coast guard authority has strengthened its maritime law enforcement capabilities and is conducting regular patrols in the waters near Fujian's Xiamen and Kinmen islands.

This is a natural move after two Chinese mainland fishermen drowned as a result of their vessel being chased from the area by the Taiwan authorities. It is meant to maintain order in these areas and safeguard fishermen's lives and property.

If the tragedy had not occurred, it would be unnecessary for the Fujian coast guard to do so.

The island's Democratic Progressive Party authorities claim that the mainland boat was entering "prohibited" waters off the coast of Kinmen island, and the crew ended up in the water when it was being chased away. Such a claim is provocative. The waters near Xiamen and Kinmen have long been traditional fishing grounds for fishermen from both sides of the Taiwan Strait, and, as a spokeswoman for the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council pointed out, there is "no prohibition or restriction" that pertains to the waters. Yet the DPP authorities have repeatedly detained mainland fishing boats under various pretexts and treated mainland fishermen in a rude and dangerous manner.

In contrast, the mainland has long upheld the principle that both sides of the Strait are one family, and made a lot of efforts to facilitate the operation of fishermen from both sides.

The mainland has established reception facilities

for Taiwan fishermen in numerous coastal areas, providing them with assistance such as shelters and supplies, and rescuing Taiwan fishing boats and fishermen when they are in need of help.

This incident that caused the death of two mainland fishermen is the result of the DPP authorities' misperception of the relations across the Strait and their long-term wrong practices under their secessionist policies.

There is no reason for the mainland to tolerate the DPP authorities' disregard for the safety of its fishermen and property and it may take further measures.

The ball is in the court of the DPP authorities. They should release the boat and fishermen they have detained as soon as possible, hold those responsible for the tragedy to account, give an explanation for what happened to the families of the victims and provide them compensation for their loss.

The DPP authorities need to be reminded that there is a limit to the mainland's tolerance of the moves it has taken aimed at portraying the island as being independent of the motherland. How this incident is settled will be consequential to relations across the Strait. The worsening cross-Strait ties will only infringe on the interests of Taiwan residents, who are hostages to the DPP's ill intention of seeking the island's "independence".

It is only a pipeline dream for the DPP authorities to expect to benefit from the increased tension across the Strait.

Gaza and Ukraine extended fronts of US election

The generosity US lawmakers have displayed in approving sizable military assistance to Israel — about \$32 billion over the past month — is in stark contrast with their stinginess toward Ukraine.

That is directly reflected in the respective situations on the ground. While the Ukrainian forces withdrew from Avdiivka last week, a key town which in recent months had become one of the most fiercely contested battles on the eastern front, because of critical shortages of ammunition, Israel is continuing to carry out large-scale bombing of Rafah, the city on the southern edge of the Gaza Strip where 1.4 million Palestinians have fled. Interestingly, US President Joe Biden tells Tel Aviv enough is enough and Kyiv never to give up.

It is the moral pressure from the international community over the heavy loss of civilian lives in Gaza that has prompted the Biden administration to fake its discontent at Tel Aviv going too far. Its true intention is that Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu government should take advantage of the once-in-a-lifetime chance of the Hamas-led Oct 7 attacks to get things done over the Palestinian question once and for all, while avoiding open conflict with Iran.

The US' aim is for a stronger Israel to help offset the US' withdrawal from the Middle East to a certain extent. Neither the Israeli hostages nor Pales-

tinian civilians have ever been the consideration of Washington or Tel Aviv.

The US' strong support also provides the Netanyahu government a golden chance to pull through its domestic troubles that would have flared up resulting in its step-down were it not for the crusade it started under the excuse of self-defense and "counterterrorism".

In a similar light, it is also too early to predict the Ukrainian forces' withdrawal from Avdiivka represents a turning point in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, as Kyiv can use it as a leverage to prompt the US lawmakers to give a green light to more aid. No wonder Biden directly tied the Ukrainian withdrawal from Avdiivka to the US Congress not approving additional military aid for Ukraine, seeking to make the most from the incident to pass the buck for the Ukraine quagmire to the Republicans.

Actually neither the Republicans nor the Democrats would like to see a quick end to the Ukraine crisis as they both want to claim the credit for engineering an end to it under their respective government after winning the upcoming presidential election.

That being said, until Washington thinks the political value of the Gaza and Ukraine crises have been exhausted, neither one will have a quick end.

Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Ethical guidelines set BCI research on right wavelength

The Ministry of Science and Technology has published on its official website the nation's first ethical guidelines on Brain-Computer Interface research, providing guidance for the emerging technology.

The guidelines provide clear definitions of the key terms related to BCI technology, assess the potential risks for different types of BCI technology, and lay out targeted regulatory details in response to the identified risks. For instance, while making general requirements for conducting BCI research, the guidelines emphasize the technology developers must comply with the relevant laws and regulations in China, adhere to internationally recognized ethical principles, and conform with the professional consensus and technical standards established by the scientific community, which is widely believed to have set a "bottom line" for the development of BCI technology.

On the basis of the "bottom line", the guidelines also draw a clear "redline" by prohibiting illegal activities such as infringement of the legitimate rights and interests of others and disruption of social stability through BCI research. Additionally, publishing advertisements that include information exaggerating the true effects of BCI is also prohibited.

These prohibitions embody research ethics that are a recognized consensus of the scientific community, which is also the principle that other emerging technologies need to comply with. To make it stricter, the guidelines also indicate that it will be "regularly evaluated and timely revised" to catch up with the latest breakthroughs in the technology. This indicates that the ethical norm itself may be updated at any time in order to construct an integrated mechanism that will best serve the emerging technologies.

Of course, the issuing of the guidelines is only the first step in

ensuring the healthy development of the emerging technology. To implement the guidance, it is important to establish a comprehensive governance framework that can guide enterprises to strengthen their self-discipline with regard to key aspects of the technology such as data storage, product development, early warning systems, and emergency response capabilities, so as to make the industry prosper on its own.

Emerging technologies such as BCIs possess immense potential to change the world, but the research also poses greater ethical risks, which highlights the necessity of timely releasing ethical guidelines to demarcate the boundaries for research. It is hoped that more guidelines will be established for more emerging technologies so as to ensure their healthy and orderly development.

— THE PAPER.CN

Consumption key to revving up economy

China's huge domestic market of more than 1.4 billion people, coupled with significant growth in demand for food, hotels, travel, shopping and entertainment during the Spring Festival holiday, has led to the heating up of its holiday economy.

Data from the Alipay platform show that during the eight-day holiday, overseas consumption by platform users increased by 140 percent year-on-year, with consumption in Southeast Asian countries surging by 580 percent year-on-year, partly driven by the region's visa-free poli-

cy toward Chinese tourists.

Greater efforts to restore and expand consumption, create new consumption scenarios and new consumption drivers, and enhance people's consumption capacity and consumption desires have injected a strong momentum into the sustained recovery of the Chinese economy.

From the perspective of the law of economic development, the characteristics of major economies are dominated by domestic demand and internal circulation. As an important engine for unimpeded

domestic circulation, consumption will remain a lasting driving force for the Chinese economy.

The rosy consumer market during the Spring Festival holiday once again tells that China still has a broad space for consumption growth. If the country follows the development trend, and makes great efforts to enrich market supply, innovate consumption scenarios and stimulate consumption potential, it will have a stronger and more vibrant engine for high-quality development.

— BEIJING YOUTH DAILY

What They Say

Clear double standard for EU's subsidy probe

The European Commission launched an in-depth investigation into the "potentially market distortive role of foreign subsidies" on Friday.

The probe concerns Bulgaria's procurement of several electric "push-pull" trains as well as related maintenance and staff training services from CRRC Qingdao Sifang Locomotive, with EU antitrust regulators investigating whether the company, a subsidiary of CRRC Corporation, received a direct or indirect benefit from its parent company that enabled it to submit an unduly advantageous tender.

Although the investigation is a routine procedure under the European Union's Foreign Subsidies Regulation, the highly politicized de-risking backdrop against which it is being carried out has raised concerns that some China-bashing EU lawmakers are taking advantage of the probe to block the otherwise normal deal between China and Bulgaria.

Even though they never provide any concrete evidence to substantiate the charges, these politicians are good at smearing Chinese enterprises, such as those making solar power products and electric vehicles, as recipients of government "subsidies" that give them "an unfair advantage".

The politicized intent behind their smears are evident from the studied silence they maintain over the wide use in public projects in the EU of advanced chips manufactured by companies in the United States that do receive government subsidies.

It is also these politicians who urge the EU to provide subsidies on a similar scale on the grounds that it will prevent EU chipmakers from being lured to the US.

The telecommunication, new energy and transportation products that Chinese companies sell to EU countries all have a competitive cost-to-performance ratio which originates from the scale effect of

the Chinese manufacturing industry, the efficiency of the operation of the Chinese economic system, the long-term and huge input in research and development, and the fierce competition that is unique to the Chinese market.

It would be ridiculous to assume that a country with the economic size of China can win the world market in these key sectors simply by providing "government subsidies", which actually hinders the development of companies by nurturing corruption and distorting market competition.

But ironically some in the EU and the US are actually embracing what they oppose as a panacea to reboot their competitiveness, while their true intention is to attract, if not coerce, high-tech companies to withdraw from the Chinese mainland. It is they that try to resort to "potentially market distortive" subsidies in a bid to outcompete Chinese companies.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

Contact us at

China Daily
15 HuiXin Dongjie Chaoyang District,
Beijing 100029
News: +86 (0)10 6491-8366
editor@chinadaily.com.cn
Advertisement: +86 (0)10 6491-8631
ads@chinadaily.com.cn
Subscription: +86-400-699-0203
subscription.chinadaily.com.cn
App: www.chinadaily.com.cn/mobile/daily.html

China Daily UK
90 Cannon St. London EC4N 6HA, UK
+44 (0) 207 398 8370
editor@chinadailyuk.com

China Daily Asia Pacific
China Daily Hong Kong
Unit 1818, Hing Wat Centre, 7 Tin Wan
Praya Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong
+852 2518 5111
editor@chinadailyhk.com
editor@chinadailypacific.com

China Daily USA
1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,
New York, NY 10036
+1 212 537 8988
editor@chinadailyusa.com

China Daily Africa
P.O. Box 27281-00100, Nairobi, Kenya
+254 (0) 20 242 8589 (Nairobi)
editor@chinadailyafrica.com
enquiries@chinadailyafrica.com
subscription@chinadailyafrica.com

COMMENT

Rachael Beaven, Arman Bidarbakht Nia, Dayyan Shayani, and Patricia Wong Bi Yi

No one in Asia-Pacific should be left behind

Based on the current rate of progress in Asia and the Pacific, the Sustainable Development Goals will only be achieved by 2062 — a sobering reminder of how much work remains. Women and girls continue to face discrimination in accessing basic needs, and men face health and personal safety challenges which will need to be urgently addressed so everyone can meet the SDGs.

Our Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2024 shows that while the Goals are meant to be universal, their implementation varies significantly across different segments of the population. Factors such as sex, age and location contribute to existing inequalities and sometimes exacerbate them. Women and girls often face discrimination in accessing education and employment opportunities while men suffer from higher rates of intentional homicide, suicide and road traffic deaths. These analyses reaffirm the need for granular data to better understand how different population groups are affected and how these lead to unequal outcomes. Governments can act upon these data insights to formulate policies which target the causes of inequality.

Data gaps hinder progress assessment

However, half of the SDG indicators do not have sufficient data to properly assess their progress. Gender equality (Goal 5) and peace, justice, and strong institutions (Goal 16) continue to be the Goals with the least data. Filling the data gaps requires more investment in data systems, as well as better coordination for effective data sharing and increased use of the data within countries and by international partners. We see positive developments in North and Central Asia, where Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have partnered with the United Nations to upgrade their national statistical systems to better support stateless populations. Initiatives such as universal registration, mapping of statelessness and improved domestic legal frameworks contributed to the movement to end statelessness in these countries.

There is some good news despite the average regional progress towards achieving all SDGs standing at 17 percent. Even though progress in the region is significantly behind schedule, the vision set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development remains as relevant today as it was in 2015. Countries in the region remain committed to the SDGs, as demonstrated by their voluntary national reviews (VNR). The VNR process provides an opportunity for countries to take stock of progress in implementation, share experiences and



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The realization of a sustainable, prosperous and inclusive future for all can only be achieved through our collective commitment and action based on high quality data.

strengthen policies for accelerating SDG achievement. In 2023, we saw an increased use of SDG indicators in these VNR reports, which highlights an increased commitment by countries to evidence-based SDG reporting, including through the implementation of our National SDG Tracker.

SIDS have made much slower progress towards the SDGs
Stepping up climate action is an

immediate priority, and we need to strengthen our capacity to address climate-related hazards and natural disasters. This is of particular importance to small island developing States (SIDS), which stood out as the most in need of support. In the Pacific, we see examples of how enhanced data availability has informed environmental decisions. The establishment of national environmental portals contributed to improved monitoring of environmental policies and better management of conservation projects in countries such as Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. In the Maldives, coastal biodiversity conservation offers a powerful means to combat the threats posed by climate change while contributing towards several SDGs at the same time. Integrating robust climate action measures into national policies, strategies and plans is of paramount importance.

Despite this challenging landscape, we see countries and stakeholders step-

ping up to make steps towards achieving the 2030 Agenda. These initiatives can be transformative if they are sustained and scaled up. In essence, we need to continue advocating for data-informed decisions to be at the core of our actions for the SDGs. The realization of a sustainable, prosperous and inclusive future for all can only be achieved through our collective commitment and action based on high quality data.

Rachael Beaven is director of Statistics Division, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Arman Bidarbakht Nia is head of Statistical Data Management Unit, Statistics Division, ESCAP.

Dayyan Shayani is a Statistician with ESCAP.

Patricia Wong Bi Yi is an associate statistician, with ESCAP.

The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

Wei Ke

A searing climate reality in 2024 calls for urgent action

During the final days of Spring Festival, many individuals and vehicles found themselves stranded in Gansu province as a result of the effects of sand and snow. This situation prompted local authorities to swiftly implement measures to provide assistance. And before that many others were stuck on the way home because of freezing weather in southern China. In fact, extreme weather has posed more and more challenges for governance. Therefore China has to make better preparations to handle an increase in climate-related incidents this year.

In a poignant address in July 2023, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres pleaded for immediate radical climate action, saying that the record-shattering July temperatures show the Earth has passed from a warming phase into "the era of global boiling". The analogy of a pot of boiling water is apt, as the world has been subjected to prolonged warming.

The implications of this "era of global boiling" are glaring, with the international community grappling with the devastating consequences of climate change.

In China, intense heat waves swept across the northern part of the country, including Beijing, in June and July 2023. The capital had high temperatures for 14 out of the 30 days in June. In addition to scorching temperatures, June saw extreme drought conditions. However, a drastic shift occurred in late July and early August when sudden, torrential rains inundated Beijing.

This impact wasn't confined to Bei-

By choosing low-carbon products and lifestyles, consumers can reduce emissions and build a better future.

jing alone. The entire Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region was flooded following continuous heavy rainfall. Urban areas were waterlogged, rivers overflowed, mudslides caused havoc, with houses, vehicles and people's belongings submerged in murky floodwaters.

Globally, extreme weather events, including high temperatures, torrential rain, floods and wildfires, ravaged regions across North America, Europe, Southeast Asia, and South America. Extreme weather events continued throughout the year, with global temperatures consistently surpassing historical records. On Nov 30 last year, the World Meteorological Organization announced that 2023 was set to be the warmest year on record, with temperatures about 1.45 C higher than the pre-industrial baseline (1850-1900).

Global warming was not the sole reason for the extreme weather events. They could be attributed also to El Niño, which had been developing since May. El Niño, characterized by significantly high sea temperatures in the Central and Eastern Pacific, tends to impact the entire globe and contribute to a rise in average global temperatures.

According to the forecasts of the

Institute of Atmospheric Physics of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, El Niño will cause land warming in 2024. Heat waves, droughts and forest fires will become more frequent. And global warming will intensify along with heat waves in oceans, ocean de-oxygenation, marine ecosystem disruptions, and continuous loss of marine biodiversity.

Extreme weather conditions are closely intertwined with global agricultural production. The high temperatures and extreme weather events in 2024 will significantly affect the production of crops such as corn, rice and wheat, which will have a profound impact on global poverty alleviation and sustainable development. In the post-COVID-19 pandemic era, with the looming clouds of war and strife in some regions, frequent extreme weather events will exacerbate regional vulnerabilities and turmoil, making it more challenging to realize the UN Sustainable Development Goals such as "No Poverty" and "Zero Hunger".

Climate change amplifies global and regional issues, testing the resilience of cities, communities, infrastructure and the very essence of humanity. In underdeveloped regions and countries, and even in some developed countries and urban areas, many households become more vulnerable to climate change after being battered by sustained extreme climate events.

Parents, especially in developing countries, marry off their daughters in childhood, as a means of coping with the changing situation after climate disasters, resulting in a tragic modern-day

social phenomenon and a blow to social development. There is a need therefore to take immediate global climate action to prevent the reverse of the gains of the Sustainable Development Goals worldwide.

In conclusion, the 28th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, emphasized the need to mobilize global resources for a just and equitable transition to green development. With record-breaking temperatures in 2023 and an increasing number of days exceeding the 1.5 C threshold, achieving the carbon reduction goals and mitigating anthropogenic climate change have become extremely urgent.

But the narrow time window to achieve the goals demands prompt and resolute global response. This is not only a test for global leaders but also a test for the global public. As consumers, every individual plays a role in increasing emissions. Factories emitting toxic smoke, vehicles plying on roads, and ships navigating oceans all serve consumers. By choosing low-carbon products and lifestyles, consumers can reduce emissions and build a better future. On the other hand, by indulging in blind consumerism, they will put that better future out of reach. So the choice lies not just with global leaders but also with every consumer.

The author is a research fellow at the Institute of Atmospheric Physics, Chinese Academy of Sciences. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



Kang Bing

The author is former deputy editor-in-chief of China Daily.

kangbing@chinadaily.com.cn

Water conservancy, instead of vanity projects, will boost food security

The Ministry of Water Resources recently said the country invested over 1.19 trillion yuan (\$165.44 billion) in water conservancy projects last year. The figure, a new high, was 10.1 percent more than the previous year.

The double-digit increase is remarkable, especially given a slowing national economy and budget cuts for most other ministries due to the huge expenditure on COVID-19 prevention and control measures in the previous three years. The increase in investment also shows the importance the central authorities attach to water conservancy — an issue that concerns not only the livelihoods of the people but also food security.

China's 5,000-year history is also a history of fighting against floods and droughts. Every Chinese national is familiar with the legend of Dayu trying to divert water from a river to control floods. And the Chinese people are grateful to Li Bing, a local official in Chengdu who designed and helped build the Dujiangyan irrigation and flood control system over 2,000 years ago. The irrigation and flood control system is still operational, benefiting millions of local farmers even today.

Water conservancy usually refers to efforts to control floods, provide irrigation, supply water to households, industries and other establishments, generating hydropower and preserving water bodies.

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China about 75 years ago, more than 98,000 reservoirs of different sizes have been built in the country. In the 1950s, top Chinese leaders spearheaded the water conservancy efforts by working with local workers and farmers to build the Shisanling Reservoir in the suburbs of Beijing.

Costing billions of yuan each and taking more than a decade to build, the projects will boost China's development in the long run.

With older generation leaders laying a solid foundation for water conservancy, a big part of the present investment today is used to strengthen the existing dams — most of which are at least 50 years old and need repair. Last year, officials inspected and strengthened more than 10,000 reservoirs. As a result, not a single dam collapsed, according to the Ministry of Water Resources.

Besides, the investments have boosted water security in rural areas, where the more than 6.78 million water supply projects that have been completed are capable of providing clean water to 870 million people. Residents of more than 90 percent of China's villages now get tap water, with the water supply projects not only providing villagers with clean water but also enabling them to develop local food processing industries and thus increase their incomes as part of the rural vitalization program.

The rising investments in water conservancy projects have helped China increase the total area of irrigated farmlands — by the end of last year, China boasted 1.05 billion mu (70.33 million hectares) of irrigated land, the highest in the world. Making up 55 percent of the country's farmlands, the irrigated farmlands contribute 77 percent of China's total crop output and over 90 percent of cash crop such as vegetables and fruits.

China's goal is to gradually increase its irrigated land to a level that would ensure food security. China feeds nearly 20 percent of the world's population with just 9 percent of the world's cultivable land, as it has made "holding the rice bowl solidly in our own hands" its strategic food security target.

The increasing investments in water conservancy projects have also helped China to build three water diversion projects that channel water from water-rich South China to drought-prone North China. Two of the projects have been completed, and the third is under construction. Costing billions of yuan each and taking more than a decade to build, the projects will boost China's development in the long run.

Continuously increasing investments in water conservancy projects remains a challenge. The lack of direct economic returns — even if there are such returns, they take time to realize — makes water conservancy projects less attractive to many investors. No wonder central government funds make up about half of the total investment in water conservancy with the rest coming from local governments.

Some officials invest in office buildings and new stadiums instead of water conservancy projects whose economic returns they may not see in their life time. Therefore, reins should be tightened on such officials and local governments through legislation and strict central orders to make water conservancy one of their priorities, as it is for the central authorities.

GLOBAL VIEWS

MARCOS CORDEIRO PIRES

Call for action

The Global South, having gained its voice, advocates an effective rules-based order

Among the issues currently polarizing the attention of the international community are the conflicts in Ukraine and Palestine. The first will turn two years old at the end of this month. The invasion of the Gaza Strip by the Israel Defense Forces, in response to the Hamas-led attacks that resulted in the death of 1,200 Israelis and the seizing of over 200 hostages, is now in its fifth month. The human and material costs of both conflicts are incalculable.

Both conflicts are matters of concern for many governments and they have been debated in the Security Council and the United Nations General Assembly. A well-defined pattern was established in successive votes for resolutions dealing with these crises. The G7 countries and their allies are on one side; the countries of the Global South are on the other. In March 2022, for example, although many of these countries denounced Russia for the Ukraine crisis, few adhered to the economic sanctions imposed on Russia by the United States and the European Union.

The most recent discussion concerns the filing by the government of the South African Republic to the International Court of Justice, denouncing the Israeli government for committing genocide against the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip. This action had broad support from countries in the Global South, including several Latin American countries.

It is important to note that in both events the positioning of developing countries was not marked by ideological or cultural preferences but by dissatisfaction with the current configuration of the international order in which these nations find themselves excluded from the most critical decisions. Additionally, the resentment toward colonialism is worth mentioning, as it persists to this day. Despite being formally independent, the populations of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, for example, still resist France's current political, economic and military influence in their nations. This resentment occurs in most countries in the Global South that have been victims of imperialism and colonialism.

Like the Non-Aligned Movement before, the Global South movement questions the

This new protagonism of the Global South must be reflected in global governance to build a new international order that is effectively based on rules that respect democracy among nations and that are applied without the current selectivity. In this aspect, the recent expansion of the BRICS group is encouraging.

so-called rules-based international order led by the US because it is pretty selective in its application. Since the end of World War II, Western countries have always chosen the rules that benefit themselves and simultaneously imposed rules on third parties that they did not follow. Free trade is one of them, as well as respect for the principles of integrity and sovereignty of nations, which are essential aspects of international relations. Theoretically, this should apply to Ukraine, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen or Sudan. However, the same powers that question the independence of the Donbas region, or even the creation of a national state for the Kurds or the independence of Scotland, work together to break up other countries.

Another selectivity concerns the defense of "human rights". This theme embarrasses countries that do not submit to the hegemonic powers. Many wars, hybrid or hot, were started under this pretext. Venezuela still faces the harsh impacts of sanctions imposed by the US and its allies, as well as the Cuban government, which has faced an economic blockade for 61 years.

Still, the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine is real, with the destruction of infrastructure and the emigration of hundreds of thousands of families who have fled the conflict, as are the humanitarian problems that involve Haitians, Burmese and others. However, despite the similarity

of human tragedies, the way each crisis is addressed differs substantially. "People of color" from the Global South are treated as second-class people and subjected to various types of humiliation by Western governments. The invisibility of the plight of immigrants on the northern border of Mexico or of people trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea toward Europe is an example of this.

In this aspect, it is important to return to the topic of the action taken by the Pretoria government against the atrocities committed in the Gaza Strip. As of writing, the deaths in Gaza have reached more than 27,000 people, including civilians and combatants. For comparison purposes, between Feb 24, 2022, which marked the beginning of the conflict, and Sep 24, 2023, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights recorded 9,701 deaths in Ukraine. It is worth remembering that the population of Gaza is almost 20 times smaller than that of Ukraine, which reveals the scale of the tragedy.

In conclusion, when analyzing the recent positioning of countries from the Global South in international forums regarding the conflicts in Ukraine and the Gaza Strip, in contrast to the G7, we must consider two aspects. First, the historical wounds of colonialism have not yet healed, as the harmful effects of domination, exploitation and racism still affect subjugated nations. Second, it reflects the greater protagonism of developing nations, since being freed from the colonial yoke they have managed to regain control of their destinies and accumulated economic and political strength to guarantee their rights. This new protagonism of the Global South must be reflected in global governance to build a new international order that is effectively based on rules that respect democracy among nations and that are applied without the current selectivity. In this aspect, the recent expansion of the BRICS group is encouraging.

The author is a professor of international political economy at the Sao Paulo State 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.



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

ZHU FENG

Peace dividend

The world would benefit from Washington being more calm and composed in face of contemporary global changes

The international order is undergoing a substantial reversal since the end of the Cold War as the geopolitical landscape witnesses new structural conflicts and confrontations. The rapid growth of the emerging markets and developing countries as a whole has given rise to a new historic trend of "the ascent of the East and the decline of the West".

Although the Western-centralism dominating the world since the era of exploration and the First Industrial Revolution is waning, the West is still more powerful than the East. The global geopolitical landscape faces a worsening situation in the forms of the protracted Ukraine-Russia crisis, great-power confrontation and conflicts, and the racial, religious and moral disputes over the Israel-Palestine conflict. Humanity is facing a tense situation unprecedented since the end of World War II.

In terms of geoeconomics, the competition among nations in the restructuring of supply chains, the development of the digital economy and infrastructure construction is growing increasingly fierce. Political and security factors are eroding and replacing the rules of globalization marked by openness, free competition and common development. The globalization trend of the world economy has suffered severe setbacks. This tendency has intensified since Joe Biden took office as US president, as his administration has been pursuing "de-sinicization" in the name of "de-risking".

To maintain its hegemony and preserve its narrow self-interests, the United States has been rallying support from its traditional allies in Europe and Asia to launch technology, trade, digital and market offensives against China by exploiting the US' edge in high-tech industries, and blocking normal cultural, social, education and media exchanges with China, which seriously undermines the open, cooperative and interdependent relations between China and the US and with the US allies.

In 2023, to cement its advantages in the industry and supply chains of high-tech fields such as microchips, quantum computing and artificial intelligence, the US has set obstacles to hinder China's technology trade and investment cooperation with Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Taiwan region of China and European countries and wooed leading manufacturers from these regions to increase investment in the US by offering lucrative subsidies.

The US' politicizing of economic and trade issues with China and overstretching the concept of security have undermined the development process of the world in the post-Cold War era. As the China-US

In a volatile world, China remains the most constructive and stable force in addressing global issues and conflicts. The meeting between the heads of states of China and the US in San Francisco demonstrated the two sides' willingness to manage their differences constructively.

relationship has a profound influence on the development trend of the global political and economic landscapes, it is of paramount significance to view and handle the bilateral ties in a rational and objective manner.

To contain and suppress China, the US has been piecing together "small multilateral mechanisms". These "small multilateral mechanisms" are a continuation of the inherent logic of the hegemonic system led by the US, and also exclusive arrangements based on bigger multilateral systems to protect the security and economic interests of members within the blocs.

With the world caught in the protracted Ukraine crisis and worsening Israel-Palestine conflict, as well as a sluggish economic recovery, it is unlikely that major-power confrontation and regional hotspot issues will cool down in the coming years. Bloc confrontations are expected to escalate as the US, Europe and Japan are doubling down on forming exclusive geopolitical camps.

The risk of the Israel-Palestine conflict spilling over into a regional conflict has raised alarm among the international community. The war, which has entered the fifth month since its breakout, has sparked opposing emotions around the world, and severely disrupted the shipping and energy security in the Middle East. The conflict is polarizing people's attitudes and emotions across the world, and fueling both anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment, which has triggered geopolitical turbulence and rising extremism worldwide.

Meanwhile, the attacks of Yemen's Houthi militants on ships passing through the Red Sea, and the consequent US retaliatory strikes against Houthi targets have aggravated the turmoil in the region. As a result, major shipping and oil companies have halted ship-

ping services in the Red Sea, sending shockwaves across the global energy and shipping markets.

In this context, the Asia-Pacific region has become a geopolitical hotspot with the most complex situation. As Japan, India, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, and Australia choose to join the US "Indo-Pacific" strategy, the US system of alliances is clearly evolving into a bloc. While enhancing bilateral alliances, the US has been attempting to create a multilateral network of partners by forming the US-United Kingdom-Australia partnership, upgrading the quadrilateral security dialogue among the US, Japan, India and Australia (the Quad), promoting the transformation of the Five Eyes intelligence alliance into a military bloc and extending the tentacles of NATO into the Asia-Pacific region.

Its purpose is to accelerate the implementation of the "Indo-Pacific" strategy to contain China. By pursuing interventionism in diplomacy, politics and military, the US is taking more responsibility for its allies in East Asia, heightening the risk of military conflicts in the region. By bringing a new Cold War to the Asia-Pacific region, the US has emboldened Japan to amend its pacifist Constitution and to aggressively pursue a military buildup. Whether regional countries can respect China's sovereignty, stick to the one-China principle and stop intervening in the domestic affairs of China is the biggest challenge for East Asia to maintain stability and development after the Taiwan elections.

In a volatile world, China remains the most constructive and stable force in addressing global issues and conflicts. The meeting between the heads of states of China and the US in San Francisco demonstrated the two sides' willingness to manage their differences constructively. The rapidly aggravating geopolitical tensions should prompt the Biden administration to realize that its attempt to escalate bloc confrontation and preserve the dominance and monopoly interests of a few allied countries will damage the cooperative, inclusive and joint development of the global economy, worsen the fragmentation of the global governance system, and intensify geopolitical confrontation. China and the US need to assume their shared responsibility to maintain stability and development, and prevent the world from sliding into even more chaos.

The author is executive dean and a professor of the School of International Relations at Nanjing 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.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

CULTURAL HERITAGE



FROM THE FRONTLINE



From left: A jade disc and a dragon-phoenix jade piece with unique patterns of the Chu culture are among the thousands of jade wares unearthed from the Xiongjiazong National Archaeological Heritage Park in Jingzhou, Hubei province. A lacquer ware figurine collected by the Jingzhou Museum shows the vivid imagination of the Chu people.



Horses, history, chariots and verses

Though still not fully excavated, the ancient Chu mausoleum site attracts increasing numbers of visitors from across the country, **Deng Zhangyu** reports.

Dressed in the costumes of the 2,500-year-old Chu culture, Zhou Zhou, a marketing manager at the Chu King's Mausoleum at the Xiongjiazong National Archaeological Heritage Park in Jingzhou, Hubei province, begins work. During the Spring Festival holiday, he and his colleagues at the heritage park, all the way from the ticket sellers to the cleaners, will be dressed Chu-style and will be putting on special performances to welcome visitors from across the country.

The Chu King's Mausoleum is known for its large chariot horse pits and well-preserved tombs, one of which houses one of the rulers of this powerful vassal state, which existed during the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC) and the Warring States Period (475-221 BC). Altogether, the site is comprised of 40 chariot horse pits, from which 43 chariots and 164 horses have been unearthed.

Although the majority of the tombs are yet to be excavated, the presence of chariots and horses attracts tourists interested in exploring ancient military power and experiencing the rich and imaginative culture of the Chu state.

According to Zhou, the site will be staging reenactments of wars in ancient China, including soldiers shooting arrows. In the large hall housing the chariot horse pits, visitors can clearly see the neat layout of chariots with six horses, four horses or two horses, which were used by different levels of nobility.

"The Chu people believed that the world after death is the same as the real world. That's why they buried the horses and vehicles used by their rulers," says Zhou.

Four kinds of chariots have been found in the pits — those used for war, for the transportation of army supplies, for maintenance and large chariots with exquisite umbrellas used by rulers during ceremonies.

Chariots could only be used by the nobility, and the number of horses permitted varied according to hierarchical ritual system centering around kings of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty (770-256 BC).

During the time of the Chu state, only the Zhou kings, who ruled all the vassal states by name, were allowed a six-horse chariot, while the Chu ruler was allowed four horses. However, the biggest pit at the Chu King's Mausoleum contained six-horse chariots.

At the time, China was divided into several different states, all of which were eventually conquered by Ying Zheng, China's first emperor, of the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC). Officially



Clockwise from left: The largest chariot horse pit in the Chu King's Mausoleum, with remnants of horse teeth and parts of chariots. A chariot sculpture made by artists based on the chariot horses unearthed from the pit. A bird's-eye view of the Xiongjiazong National Archaeological Heritage Park. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

known as Qinshihuang, he united China in 221 BC and his tomb houses the world-renowned Terracotta Warriors.

"Having a six-horse chariot was absolutely against regulations at the time. We guess they demonstrated the ambition of the person buried in the tomb to become the one ruler with supreme power himself, to be on par with Zhou kings," says Jia Hanqing, deputy director of the Jingzhou Museum, who has been involved in the excavation of the mausoleum as

an archaeologist since 2006.

The Xiongjiazong site consists of a king's tomb, a queen's tomb, tombs for their servants, sacrificial pits and chariot horse pits. The site was discovered in 1979 and three rounds of excavation have been carried out since then. In 2012, the Xiongjiazong National Archaeological Heritage Park opened to the public.

"The artifacts unearthed reveal the existence of a rich and powerful state in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River more than

2,200 years ago," says Jia.

Twenty kings ruled Chu over the course of 800 years. The main occupant remains unknown because the king's tomb has yet to be excavated, but the large size of its chariot horse pits makes it the biggest Chu state tomb found to date.

Horses and chariots were strategically important, and represented a state's power. Officials were placed in charge of the ruler's horses, and records show that the Chu state boasted more than 10,000 horses

and 1,000 chariots during its heyday.

"The horses were killed before being placed in the pits and we have found traces of their teeth," says the 57-year-old archaeologist.

The remnants offer a glimpse into a wealthy state and its culture of creativity, imagination and romance.

Over 3,000 artifacts, such as jade ware, lacquer ware and bronze ware, have been discovered at the site.

"The Chu people were very imaginative, and much of their art looks a little bit strange," Jia says.

For instance, a sculpture in the collection of the Jingzhou Museum depicts a man standing on a phoenix. He has a beaklike mouth and a feathered tail, just like a bird. Beneath the phoenix is a toad with a bird's tail.

Jia says that the Chu people worshipped the phoenix and regarded it as their totem. Images of the mythological bird have been found carved on jade ware, lacquer ware and even woven onto the silk robes worn by nobles.

The site is close to many other royal tombs as it was located near the state capital. Large quantities of exquisitely made lacquer ware produced by the Chu people have been found in the area.

"Lacquer items were used in daily life, such as for cooking and also used to decorate musical instruments like drums. They were so well-made that most look more like pieces of art rather than handicrafts," Jia adds.

Apart from these artifacts, Chu also produced one of ancient China's most famous poets, Qu Yuan, who was one of the state elites. The Dragon Boat Festival, which is held on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, commemorates the great poet, who drowned himself in the Miluo River after hearing of his state's fall. His romantic verses have had a far-reaching influence over Chinese poetry.

According to Zhou, during the Spring Festival, any visitors able to recite at least 20 of Qu Yuan's verses could get free admission to the mausoleum. Tickets are otherwise priced at 85 yuan (\$12). And, as this year is the Year of the Dragon, anyone born in the Year of the Dragon is entitled to a half-priced ticket in celebration of the Lunar New Year.

"It's hard to recite Qu Yuan's verses because many of the characters he used are difficult to pronounce. We hope that the free-ticket policy can spark interest in Chu culture," says Zhou, who has worked at the park for eight years and has seen its growing popularity in recent years.

Jia says that it's natural for people to seek other forms of enjoyment once their material needs have been satisfied. "We are always interested in exploring where we come from," he explains.

The heritage park is about a 40-minute drive from Jingzhou city in Hubei province. It has welcomed visitors from all over the world, and Zhou says that, during Spring Festival holidays, it's quite common for tourists to drive to the park from all over the country.

Contact the writer at dengzhangyu@chinadaily.com.cn

By **DENG ZHANGYU** and **QIN FENG** in Xi'an

Apart from the life-size Terracotta Warriors buried in the mausoleum of Qinshihuang, the first emperor to unite China more than 2,000 years ago, bronze aquatic birds also accompanied him into the afterlife.

A show now on at the Qinshihuang Mausoleum Site Museum in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, displays 57 bronze water birds and clay figures discovered in a pit, the contents of which are said to be related to the emperor's favorite entertainments. The show is divided into three sections, which recount the discovery of the bronzes, the ancient crafts used to make them, and how they were designed and made to match their surroundings. It runs through May 5.

Everything on display was unearthed in Pit No 7, a burial pit far from the one containing the terracotta army. So far, 46 life-size water birds, including cranes, swans and wild geese, as well as 15 kneeling pottery figures, have been discovered.

"It's rare to see figures and water birds together in imperial tombs. It's

also very different from what has been found in other pits and chambers at Qinshihuang's mausoleum. It's an illustration of the inner world of Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC) people," says Wang Rui, curator of the exhibition.

The kneeling pottery figures and life-size waterfowl were found arranged neatly alongside remnants of ancient musical instruments when they were unearthed in Pit No 7. According to Wang, this indicates that the figures were keepers, who trained the birds to dance to the music. Entertainment was one of the other themes of China's first emperor's underground world, in addition to military power.

The bronze birds, including

swans, cranes and wild geese standing in lines, are unique and well-made. Even birds of the same species are slightly different from one another.

"They are vivid creations. Their

layers of feathers and feet as thin as paper can clearly be seen. They look as if they are alive," says Wang.

One of the bronze cranes is holding a worm in its beak, frozen at the moment the crane plucked it from



From left: A bronze swan on display at the Qinshihuang Mausoleum Site Museum in Xi'an, Shaanxi province. Kneeling pottery figures were said to be keepers of those waterfowl, who trained the birds to dance to the music. A bronze crane at the exhibition vividly depicts it holding a worm in its beak. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



the water. A wild goose raises its long neck, sending its cries toward the sky. The figures kneel in front of the birds in poses that suggest they are playing music.

The techniques used are sophisticated. The craftsmen applied pigments made from mineral stones onto parts of the birds. Patterns on each part, such as the neck and belly, were also painted differently.

Experts say that, based on relics discovered in the pit, there was once a music department and a garden housing waterfowl for the amusement of the imperial family at the emperor's complex.

Emperor Ying Zheng took the throne of the Qin state at the age of 13 in 246 BC during the Warring States Period (475-221 BC). He defeated a series of rival powers and united China in 221 BC, renaming himself Qinshihuang (or "the first emperor of Qin"). During his rule, the emperor standardized coins, weights and measures, and built an early version of the Great Wall.

His mausoleum is known for its thousands of life-size clay soldiers, each with unique facial expressions. Many of the pits and chambers in the tomb complex remain unexcavated but excavations around the emperor's tomb so far have unearthed lifelike figures of dancers, acrobats and musicians. The bronze water birds discovered in Pit No 7 offer another glimpse into his daily life.

Wang says that the exhibition leaves many questions for archaeologists to answer, such as why only cranes, swans and geese were chosen to accompany the emperor, who made them, and how they were able to make the birds look so lifelike.

"There are still many mysteries about Qinshihuang's mausoleum for us to explore," says Wang.

LIFE

While many awards recognize and support outstanding photographers in China, there are very few that celebrate curators, who are also instrumental in researching and bringing themed exhibitions of photography and moving images to the public, whether in physical or virtual spaces.

So, aspiring young curators, especially those working with lens-based art, rejoiced when the prestigious Jimei x Arles International Photo Festival set up the Curatorial Award for Photography and Moving Image in 2021.

Co-initiated in 2015 by the Three Shadows Photography Art Centre, one of the first contemporary art spaces dedicated exclusively to photography in China, and the Rencontres d'Arles, which is often called the "Cannes Film Festival of the photography world", the annual festival has grown into an essential fixture on China's photography scene. It has organized hundreds of exhibitions that showcase the latest work of local and international artists.

The curatorial award claims to be the first of its kind in China. It's a collaboration between the art center, based in both Beijing, and Xiamen, Fujian province, and the French fashion house, Chanel.

"We set up the award in the hopes of encouraging more talented curators to pay attention to photography and moving-image art, to gradually improve the ecosystem of photography and moving-image art," says Rong Rong (the penname of Lu Zhirong), co-founder of Three Shadows and of Jimei x Arles.

Rong Rong, who's also an established photographer, laments the lack of exceptional curators working in photography and moving-image art, and says this has led to a deficiency in academic research and criticism of these mediums. This means lens-based art, which is a relatively young art form, is relevantly less valued than other mediums, such as painting and sculpture, he says.

Imagining imagery

Rong Rong says excellent curators, with extensive theoretical knowledge and a discerning eye for talent, act as a bridge connecting artists with the public. They catalyze the rise of artists with their research-backed curations.

Over the last three years, 150 young curators and curatorial teams have jostled for the award, according to the organizers.

The creative duo, Gan Yingying and Zhou Yichen, picked up the third Curatorial Award for Photography and Moving Image for their project, *The Via Combusta*, at the festival's ninth edition, which wrapped up on Jan 21.

In addition to receiving a cash prize of 100,000 yuan (\$14,100), the pair will receive sponsorship to turn their winning project into two exhibitions at Shanghai's Fotografiska and Beijing's Three Shadows, and go on a mentorship and exchange program in Europe this year.

Curators must submit a proposal outlining the theme, concept, budget, artworks and public education programs for their projects. An academic committee composed of experienced art historians, critics and curators vets the proposals and



Left: *The Via Combusta* features *Pyramids and Parabolas II*, a video installation created in 2021 by Wang Ninghui. Right: *The Via Combusta* features *Map of Shaman*, a video installation created by Gu Tao in 2023. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Curating talent

An award goes beyond recognizing photographers to honoring the work of the people who organize exhibitions, **Yang Xiaoyu** reports.



A panel discussion on Curatorial Practice and Intercultural Dialogue is held during the opening week of the ninth Jimei x Arles International Photo Festival in Xiamen, East China's Fujian province, on Dec 16, 2023.

selects 10 projects for further consideration. The creators of the long-listed projects then meet with a five-member jury, which shortlists five projects for the award. The finalists' projects are exhibited together at the festival, and undergo final judgment by an international jury.

"The finalists' exhibition serves as an arena for testing the imagination and concepts of new curatorial talent. Their well-prepared curatorial projects are pointed and cutting-edge in their thematic focuses, and are valuable case studies on how to enhance the academic aspect of photography," says Gu Zheng, who is a curator, art critic and member of the Jimei x Arles art committee.

The jury commended Gan's and

Zhou's research process, serious approach and creative exhibition layout.

Both hold a master's degree in photography from Western universities and are known for their performance-based photos. They describe their forays into curation as an organic and spontaneous evolution through years of involvement with their artistic communities.

The duo are based in Shanghai and Beijing, respectively. Gan works closely with members of Bujism, an artist platform that she co-founded in the ancient town of Zhujiajiao in suburban Shanghai. Zhou associates with creatives of MIA Collective Art, a platform she co-founded where artists collaborate on curated themes.



The creative duo of Gan Yingying (left) and Zhou Yichen after receiving the curatorial award for photography and moving image.

"We are both keen on doing things for our communities and are busy organizing collaborative projects, interviewing artists, writing articles to promote them and putting on shows, which have gradually made us curators," Gan says.

They say that although they were not trained in curatorial studies, they went about their projects as if they were creating art.

Managing messaging

Compared to artists, curators must handle so much more work, including sometimes trivial details. These include researching subject matter, pitching curatorial proposals and drawing up budgets, in addition to finding suitable materials for presenting exhibition labels,

according to the awardees.

"The biggest challenge about being a curator lies in communication," Zhou says. "When I work as an artist, I probably don't need to explain what I do to others. But as a curator, I have the responsibility to explain what I do to various stakeholders, including artists, art institutions, space designers, media and audiences, and to make sure I explain it clearly."

Aside from communication skills, the awardees say a curator needs solid academic research abilities, be able to raise thought-provoking questions, and read the exhibition space well to display art in an appealing and compelling manner. They also must have a can-do attitude when it comes to solving problems and organizing engaging public education programs, among many other skills.

"Participating in the competition is definitely good training for young curators, as it teaches them the entire process of curating an art exhibition through practice," says the award's first recipient, Jiang Feiran. "It offers emerging curators a great opportunity to test their mettle, and the awardees can get strong support for their future career development."

Jiang, who was a photographer pursuing her PhD in curatorial studies at the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, at the time, won the award for her curatorial project, *Unnamed River*.

"Winning the curatorial award marked a formal debut for me as a curator ... which is critical to my career advancement," says Jiang, who is currently a researcher at the academy's Institute of Contemporary Art and Social Thought.

"The whole experience not only enabled me to meet like-minded creatives for future collaboration, but also helped me build contacts with art institutions, artists, critics and media."

Gan and Zhou also appreciate the opportunity to take master classes given by renowned international curators Wu Hung, Fumio Nanjo, Sergio Valenzuela Escobedo and Taous Dahmani, which Three Shadows organized for all contestants in 2023.

"I found the master class by Wu Hung very helpful and valuable because the veteran curator shared how he approached research-based exhibitions step by step based on longtime practice," Zhou says.

The celebrated art historian and curator participated in a panel discussion on curatorial practice and intercultural dialogue during the photo festival last December. He compared the role of a curator to that of a film director and praised the award, saying that it will help the public recognize the importance and originality of the work of curators.

Wu emphasizes the importance of curators in facilitating dialogue among artists, stimulating creativity and advancing the development of art. He also suggests that artists should be part of the judging panel to evaluate the impact of curatorial projects involving the exchange and improvement of art.

Contact the writer at yangxiaoyu@chinadaily.com.cn

Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei coordinate tourism development

TIANJIN — During the Spring Festival holiday, tourists tried their hands at making Lunar New Year woodblock prints at a folk culture center in Yangliuqing township in Tianjin municipality.

"Many tourists have a natural affinity for Yangliuqing woodblock prints. I've heard many visitors from Beijing and Hebei say that their families had the tradition of putting up prints when they were little," says Xia Ting, head of the tourism distribution center in Tianjin's Xiqing district.

"Tourists from the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region accounted for about 70 percent of the total number of tourists we received last year," Xia says.

More than 100 million people live in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, which boasts a wealth of cultural and tourism resources. In 2014, a national strategy proposed the coordinated development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, and since then, Beijing, Tianjin and neighboring Hebei province have cooperated on boosting cultural and tourism development.

Gao Cuilian, who owns a farm-



Left: A panoramic view by drone captures two visitors at the border of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei province. Right: An aerial view of the meeting point between the three regions. PHOTOS BY ZHAO ZISHUO / XINHUA



yard in Changzhou village in Tianjin, is busy treating tourists to freshly cooked dishes. "Rural ecotourism is becoming more popular among urban tourists from Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei, and my business is doing very well," she says.

Data from the China Tourism Academy shows that Beijing, Tian-

jin and Hebei were among each other's top sources of tourists in 2023. Among the tourists received by Tianjin, those from Hebei and Beijing hold the top two rankings, accounting for 49.1 percent of the total number of tourists from outside of Tianjin. Hebei and Beijing were the top two destinations for

tourists from Tianjin, and they made up 52.7 percent of the total out-of-town trips made by Tianjin tourists.

Since 2014, Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei have signed agreements on culture, performing arts, protection of the Great Wall and personnel exchanges to promote the integrat-

ed development of the cultural and tourism market in the region.

The three regions have also developed high-quality cultural tourism products and brands, and have held tourism development forums, intangible cultural heritage exhibitions and tourism promotions to enhance the coordinated develop-

ment of tourism in the region.

"We planned Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei winter-tour theme routes for Spring Festival so tourists from the region can enjoy folk customs, lantern shows, winter sports and comfortable hot springs, and celebrate Spring Festival together," says Chen Bing, deputy head of the Tianjin Bureau of Culture and Tourism.

"The culture and tourism industries of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei have a good foundation for coordinated development. They are capable of becoming a tourism community of mutual resources and coordinated development," says Xu Hong, dean of the College of Tourism and Service Management of Nankai University.

"In the future, Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei should give full play to the comparative advantages of their tourism industries, break down the barriers to the flow of tourism elements, and improve the quality of coordinated development of tourism in the region," Xu says.

XINHUA

LIFE



The art of weathering Beijing's winter woes

A message from my mobile health app reminded me that I'd burned fewer kilocalories over the last nine weeks. It used to record 10,000 steps on average, the equivalent of walking 6-8 kilometers, and up to 36,000 steps, or nearly 28 km, on weekends.

But recently, I've been skipping my morning walks, and have only averaged about 2,200 steps every day for the last two months. The reason is all too obvious. The freezing cold and subzero temperatures have "conspired" to confine me within four walls.

My erstwhile fitness regimen included a nearly 7-km walk every morning, accompanied by stretching and bending exercises, which

I'd start at 7 o'clock sharp. But my current morning routine involves yoga, meditation and doing planks on a mat in the comfort of my apartment, and my biggest challenge is getting out of bed before daybreak.

Light Bollywood hits, or songs from Indian regional language films, keep me in good spirits as I exercise, while my mobile alarm ensures I don't doze off when doing the Shavasana, or corpse pose.

For someone who has lived in the southern Indian city of Bangalore, which also goes by the moniker of "air-conditioned city", where temperatures seldom dip below 13 C and the average temperature throughout the year remains around 28-30 C, a thin woolen sweater or jacket over a T-shirt or cotton trousers sufficed to keep me warm.

Beijing, on the other hand, is a total contrast. Despite wrapping myself up in multiple layers of clothing on top of the mandatory jacket, scarf or neck warmer, gloves, woolen cap and shoes, I still find it hard to step into the -17 C temperatures, or face the cold winds.

Often, I've suffered from brain freeze after being exposed to severe cold for just a few minutes, which makes it feel like my mind has gone blank.

I was initially apprehensive that our family holiday would be in jeopardy because of the cold, and while it did give my family — my wife and daughter — the chills when they arrived in Beijing one November afternoon, fortunately, that was not to be.

I had forewarned them about the cold, but they chose to ignore my warnings and refused to put on the winter gear I handed them on arrival. No sooner did they step out of the airport into the car park than they froze in their tracks. They hurried back inside and put on their winter caps, gloves, and scarves, before hopping into a Didi to the apartment.

It was their bad luck that they arrived at a time when Beijing was experiencing its longest cold wave since records began in 1951. This harsh winter had only just begun, but the city had already recorded more than 300 hours of subzero temperatures.

However, we were determined to go ahead with our holiday plans. Xi'an, the capital of Shaanxi province, was our first stop, and conducive weather ensured it was an enjoyable trip. Surprisingly, we were able to put away our jackets for a few hours.

Cold notwithstanding, we decided we could not miss out on the top attractions, with the Emperor Qinshihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum being the highlight, and memories of which remain etched in our hearts.

We weren't so lucky at our second stop in Tianjin, where hostile weather proved a dampener, forcing me to desperately search for a pharmacy, so I could buy paracetamol because the falling mercury levels had caused a raise in my temperature!

Nevertheless, we made sure not to miss the tourist spots, including the Tianjin Eye, although we weren't able to go for a ride, and the Porcelain House.

Contact the writer at manjunath@chinadaily.com.cn

Power of the unspoken word

Inclusive sign language poetry workshop broadens horizons of expression and explores beauty of the medium, **Cheng Yuezhu** reports.

In the flowing sands, I seek my own voice. Calling out to life: I love you, myself." This poem was by Wang Yiming, a performer and blogger with hearing loss.

She wrote the poem at an inclusive poetry workshop, in which most participants had hearing loss, that was hosted by the Beijing Body On&On Cultural Exchange Center and Sign Alley.

Wang says that the inspiration for the poem came from the interactive icebreaker exercises at the start of the workshop, where the participants and the instructor gathered in a circle, moved their fingers in the air, and then massaged the people next to them.

"I felt I could see sands shifting to vibrating sounds in a deserted area, forests, mountains, rivers, the sun, clouds, blue sky ... Endless beautiful images of nature unfolded in my mind. I've never felt so carefree, comfortable or relaxed," Wang says.

"In that wondrous space, I truly felt that life comes from the Earth or nature. Although our lives may not be perfect, they deserve to be valued and cherished."

After the interactive exercises, the participants sat around a table and introduced themselves, describing the feeling of giving and receiving a massage, and then engaged in a series of poetry collage exercises, with each participant writing down a noun, verb or adjective and then passing it on to the next person, and the sixth person arranging the five words into a verse.

The last and main part of the workshop was writing a tercet (three-line) poem. As most of the participants were deaf or hard of hearing, the poems were presented in sign language in front of a camera, and participants without hearing loss were taught how to sign their poems.

Theater artist, writer and curator Ai Kuo was the workshop's instructor. He says that to provide the participants with an experience that would involve different senses, he condensed his previous workshops.

"They usually kick off with getting the body involved. Physical interaction during activities not only brings the participants closer emotionally, but also shows them that the workshop isn't just about arranging words, but that everyday movements can also be a form of poetry," he says.

Ai also chose a variety of exercises to show the participants that



From top: Beijing Body On&On Cultural Exchange Center and Sign Alley co-host an inclusive poetry workshop, in which most participants are deaf or hard of hearing; the workshop begins with the participants and the instructor gathering in a circle and moving their fingers in the air; theater artist, writer and curator Ai Kuo (right) serves as the workshop's instructor.

PHOTOS BY LI XIAOCAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

they could write deep-reaching poems in a fun and enjoyable way.

"When it came to performing and recording sign language poetry, I wanted the participants to see it as an important way of expressing and performing poetry. Learning and filming the movements and symbols was a way of recording and sharing the poems," he says.

While Wang has written, published and performed poems before, she says that this workshop was a refreshing experience, as well as an opportunity to write poetry and share experiences with other people.

"It was a rare chance for me to write and perform poetry in a joyful environment and share my feelings with others. I love interacting with different people. It gives me unexpected inspiration," she says.

Wang first learned about accessibility in 2019, when she was in the audience at the first edition of the UK-China Disability Arts Forum, which is co-hosted by Body On&On.

Last year, she became a speaker at the forum, and gave a speech in sign language about her experience as a theater performer and the impact of artists with disabili-

Feng says that the decision to collaborate with Body On&On was spurred by shared ideals to promote inclusivity, diversity and equality. Raising public awareness of people with disabilities through sign language and art performances has been high on the organization's recent agenda.

"What joy it is that we can use our own language, sign language, to express ourselves in poetry. On behalf of Sign Alley, I sincerely hope to work long term with Body On&On to create a wonderful future together," he adds.

The poetry workshop, hosted on Jan 13 at Beijing's 798 Art Zone, was one of three organized by Beijing Body On&On, alongside a dance workshop for people with learning disabilities on Jan 7, and a sensory integration workshop for people with vision loss on Jan 14.

The workshops were hosted as a continuation of 2023's Fifth Luminous Festival. This edition of the annual festival centered on inclusive arts was themed "to see the other", and was focused on getting to know and care about others in an open-minded and inclusive manner.

"We have organized many different kinds of inclusive workshops, mostly drama and dance. So we are trying to explore new ways of communication and expression for groups we haven't reached," says Ge Huichao, founder of Body On&On and the Luminous Festival.

Among the groups they have started to work with are people with learning disabilities. Ge says that to do so, they have been developing experience by collaborating with international art troupes of performers with learning disabilities.

"We hope to work with people with learning disabilities in the long term, and provide them with good art resources. Also, because our workshops have primarily focused on the performing arts, we are trying out poetry and sensory integration, but for all these inclusive workshops, I think our goals are one and the same."

As its next step, the organization aims to produce art projects and works jointly created by people of different identities. Instead of stressing particular identities or social groups, they would like to simply focus on people, Ge says.

Contact the writer at chengyuezhu@chinadaily.com.cn