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# CHINA DAILY

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Visitors photograph a concept model of a ThinkBook laptop featuring a transparent display at the Lenovo Group booth during the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona, Spain, on Monday. The event runs from Monday to Thursday. ANGEL GARCIA VIA GETTY IMAGES

## Chinese firms shine at intl mobile tech show

Innovative offerings, products draw worldwide attention

By MA SI masi@chinadaily.com.cn

Chinese technology companies are in the limelight at the ongoing Mobile World Congress 2024, a major telecommunications industry event in Barcelona, Spain, as they showcase their latest innovations to explore new business opportunities and gain a wider presence in Europe and beyond.

The event, which runs from Monday to Thursday, has attracted more than 300 Chinese companies, almost twice as many as last year. The enterprises are displaying their latest products, from upgraded 5G portfolios and artificial intelligence-powered smartphones to smart cars and augmented-reality devices.

The robust participation underscores Chinese companies' willingness for global collaboration and their technological prowess in strategic industries, despite the increase in the United States' arbitrary tech sanctions on them, experts said.

According to the GSMA, an industry group representing the world's biggest mobile phone operators and the organizer of MWC

2024, Huawei is the largest exhibitor this year, and China Telecom and Alipay have made their debuts at the show. Other leading Chinese tech companies that are participating include Xiaomi, Lenovo, Honor and ZTE.

Mats Granryd, director-general of the GSMA, said there is a need for companies to align with the challenges and opportunities. "As connectivity brings us together, technology opens possibilities. ... Together we are strong, and alone we are nobody," he said.

As 2024 marks the commercial launch of 5G-advanced, or 5G-A, technology, which is a crucial upgrade of the 5G network in functionality and coverage, Chinese telecom companies are moving to center stage.

During this year's MWC, Huawei launched the world's first 5G-A intelligent core network to support more cutting-edge applications. According to Huawei, 5G-A can improve network performance tenfold. For instance, it can support a downlink speed of 10 gigabits per second, compared with the current 5G speed of 1 Gbps.

Li Peng, senior vice-president of Huawei, said, "The combination of 5G-A, artificial intelligence and cloud computing will help nurture new growth drivers." Li added that the technology can help address challenges that 5G cannot solve in certain application scenarios before the commercialization of 6G.

Eager to tap into the huge potential, China Mobile, the world's largest telecom carrier in terms of mobile subscribers, announced at the tech show that it will start deploying 5G-A commercial network in more than 300 Chinese cities this year, which would make its scale the largest in the world.

Yang Jie, chairman of China Mobile, said the company has made progress in experimenting with new 5G-A applications. For instance, over 4 million users in China are now using a new calling service that can support automatic translation and other AI functions during ultra-high-definition video calls.

Xiang Ligang, director-general of the Information Consumption Alliance, a telecommunications industry association in China, said the progress comes amid the country's

unparalleled edge in 5G.

China has built the world's largest 5G network, which had more than 800 million mobile subscribers at the end of 2023, according to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

Meanwhile, the country accounts for 42 percent of the global patents that are essential to 5G technology standards, the largest share in the world, the ministry added.

"Chinese companies' enthusiasm toward the MWC event highlights their commitment to globalization and to leveraging it as a window to demonstrate China's openness, cooperation and win-win opportunities to Europe and the world," Xiang said.

As artificial intelligence takes the world by storm, Chinese companies are also eager to bring AI to more devices. On the sidelines of the MWC, Honor unveiled its latest AI-powered smartphones, highlighting its ambition to make a big splash in the global high-end smartphone market this year.

Zhao Ming, CEO of Honor, said: "We have more than 100 innovation laboratories, and have established cooperation with more than 200 telecom operators and distributors across the world. All of these resources will get us ready to expand our global presence."

Frank Meng, chairman of US chip company Qualcomm's China branch, said, "Chinese companies will be the first to popularize AI smartphones and push them into more markets, as they embrace high-end brand strategies and boast advantages in supply chains."

## Recovery of demand expected to be priority

By ZHOU LANXU, LIU ZHIHUA and OUYANG SHIJIA



Chinese policymakers will likely prioritize the recovery of demand this year as a crucial step to promote steady economic growth, while fine-tuning of housing market policy and a further easing in macroeconomic policies are necessary, economists and experts said.

The comments come as focus turns on how China will draw up key economic targets and policies to push the world's second-largest economy through challenges at home and abroad when the country's top legislature and top political advisory body meet early next month at the annual two sessions.

Experts highlighted the lack of demand as the most urgent and prominent challenge that deserves policymakers' attention, as the year-on-year growth of China's consumer price index, a main gauge of inflation, stayed negative for four consecutive months for the first time since 2009 as of January.

"The main challenge facing the Chinese economy is insufficient demand, as well as the resultant weakening of expectations, with the subdued housing sector a main reason for the situation," said Xu Gao, chief economist at BOC International.

Boosting demand should be taken as a key means to stabilize economic growth, Xu said, adding that it is necessary to fine-tune the focus of property sector support policy to addressing property developers' financing woes.

He suggested the country set aside special relief funds for the real estate industry to the tune of 1 trillion yuan (\$138.9 billion) to 2 trillion yuan to help ease the credit risks facing property developers, adding that more real estate projects could encounter financing and delivery problems if the credit risks of developers are not effectively alleviated.

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed that 56 out of the 70 large to medium-sized cities in China saw the prices of new residential properties drop in January from the previous month, down from 62 cities in December.

Stating that clear signals of the housing market bottoming out are yet to be seen, Su Jian, a professor of economics at Peking University and director of the university's National Center for Economic Research, said it is advisable to further ease homebuying restrictions in mega cities to help homebuyer confidence recover over time.

To achieve this year's economic growth target — which is expected to be set at about 5 percent — Su said that fiscal and monetary policies may need to be relaxed to boost domestic demand, including boosting the issuance of central government bonds to expand spending in areas like infrastructure.

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## NATIONAL WINTER GAMES PUT ICING ON OLYMPIC LEGACY

Sports' popularity gets major boost across country, thanks to wider representation at event

By SUN XIAOCHEN sunxiaochen@chinadaily.com.cn



Taking advantage of the Beijing 2022 Olympics' legacy, the 14th National Winter Games have delivered another huge boost to the popularity and status of winter sports in China.

With thrills and chills over 10 days, China's highest-level winter sports gala capped its largest-ever staging in Hulunbuir, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, on Tuesday to widespread acclaim.

For the first time in its history, the games, which were delayed due to the pandemic, saw a broad representation of the country's demographics. A record number of over 3,700 athletes from 35 delegations, including provinces from the warm

southern regions, competed in Hulunbuir and the co-host cities. Since being launched in 1959, the games had only been a "regional" meet of city teams, mostly from the snowy northeastern provinces.

This year, there was also a record 176 medal events after China's sports governing body expanded the program. The expansion was in line with changes to the Olympic format to give Chinese athletes a head start in their preparations for the 2026 Milano Cortina Winter Olympics in Italy.

See Sports, page 2

## Clear targets bring 'Beautiful China' within reach

In the first weeks of this year, China's central government issued a policy document clarifying what is meant by building a "Beautiful China", and setting a broad range of environmental targets through 2035 and even beyond.

The document covers everything from controlling pollution to protecting habitats and reducing climate emissions. Many of the goals are ambitious, which is very timely, given the urgency of the environmental crises facing the world.

For some, it may be easy to forget that people in China still face a number of environmental challenges. Real-time air quality data first became available in 2013, and it shocked many people. Resolute



government action followed, and the national average concentration of PM2.5 — particulate matter of 2.5 microns in diameter or smaller that is harmful to health — fell from 72 micrograms per cubic meter of air in 2013 to 29 in 2022. This sets a powerful example of what can be achieved through improved environmental transparency, governance and law.

Building a "Beautiful China" has become a priority for China's leadership. It links environmental

objectives with the desire for better living conditions, and some national pride. It is also recognition that much more work is needed in the coming years and decades, as the country needs to simultaneously address air, water and land pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity loss, plastic and chemical pollution, and much more.

This new policy document is important, as it was issued at the highest level and spells out a number of key targets.

For example, electric vehicles are set to account for 45 percent of the sales of new cars by 2027. China is a leader in the production and sales of EVs, with about 60

percent of the global total. This is the first national level target for the overall share of EV sales, giving a major boost to not only the EV sector, but also the booming and rapidly evolving battery industry. It follows another recent government document promoting the integration of EVs with renewable energy in the power grid.

Tremendous progress has been made with electric cars, scooters and buses in China's big cities in recent years. The majority of taxis, and almost all e-commerce delivery scooters and minivans, are now electric.

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## Embassy vigil



Demonstrators gather for a vigil outside the Israeli embassy in Washington, DC, on Monday. An active-duty member of the United States Air Force died after he set himself ablaze outside the embassy while declaring that he "will no longer be complicit in genocide". MARK SCHEFFELBEIN / AP See story, page 7

INSIDE Major-country relations in Northeast Asia intertwined Global Views, page 13

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## PAGE TWO

## Sports: Athletes popularize winter activities

From page 1

The larger-than-expected participation, coupled with impressive performances by young athletes whose talents were nurtured in emerging winter sports provinces, has borne witness to the progress of ice and snow sports in China.

The project to boost interest in winter sports was launched before Beijing 2022, with a boom triggered by the home Olympics. The domestic games offered yet another opportunity to keep the momentum going, especially with regional supporters who could cheer on their own athletes.

"Hosting the national games on a bigger scale and involving more athletes — despite being delayed from its original schedule — speaks volumes for the home Olympics' influence on the promotion of winter sports," Zhang Xin, director of athletic competitions at the General Administration of Sport of China, said on Sunday.

"The much-improved performances of athletes hailing from regions such as the central and southern provinces, where skating and skiing used to be only niche choices for sporting activities due to the climate limitations, was particularly encouraging.

"It proves that we are on the right track developing into a more balanced winter sports power and taking advantage of the legacy of Beijing 2022," he said.

**True national games**

Thirty delegations out of 35 represented in Inner Mongolia won at least one medal, according to official results as of Sunday. The number is up from eight provinces and municipalities that had athletes finish on podiums at the previous national games in 2016.

A joint talent development program, which was designed to combine the financial strength of affluent southern provinces with the training expertise and resources in the country's north, was put in place for the national games and earned credit for leveling the playground.

Under the program, an athlete was allowed to represent two delegations if coaching, financing and technical support were shared between provincial teams. Each medal won was counted for both delegations involved in the athlete's development.

"Sure, we'd like to encourage everyone to cultivate talent on their own, but the joint program works well for sparking greater interest in less-developed winter sports regions," Zhang said.

"The gap in winter sports know-how and facilities between the northern and southern regions remains a challenge, but through this reform we are narrowing it to make the national games more competitive."

China's reigning Olympic champion snowboarder Su Yiming is an example of the success of the joint program. Su represented both Shanxi and Sichuan provinces at the games, winning a pair of gold medals in the Big Air and slopesstyle competitions.

"It's been quite healthy competition for all the Chinese snowboarders to go all out against each other and motivate each other at the national games, which helps elevate the level of Chinese snowboarding as a whole," said Su, who became the first Chinese to win an Olympic snowboarding gold medal in the Big Air event at Beijing 2022.

The fact that Su was seriously



Thousands of people enjoy themselves on the waterfront of the Hanjiang River, a major tributary of the Yangtze River, in Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province, on Saturday after several days of heavy snowfall across the city. CHEN ZHUO / FOR CHINA DAILY

challenged in Friday's final by runner-up Yang Wenlong from Anhui, an eastern province little known for its winter sports, shows that the gap between the best athletes and the chasing pack is closing fast.

"I am really excited to see so many young athletes express themselves and challenge their senior opponents at the national level. The future of Chinese snowboarding is in good hands," said Su, who turned 20 on Feb 18.

**Green, sustainable**

Promoted as a "green, sustainable and shared" event, the winter nationals maximized the use of existing facilities, such as the National Sliding Center in Beijing's Yanqing district and the National Ski Jumping Center in Zhangjiakou, Hebei province, which co-hosted the 2022 Games.

The reuse of Olympic venues prevented unnecessary investment in highly technical and costly construction, while guaranteeing venues for national competitions were up to Olympic standards.

A venue for bobsled, skeleton and luge events, the Yanqing sliding center has been busy since the Olympics. In November, the 1.9-kilometer track hosted an International Bobsled and Skeleton Federation World Cup race.

Training facilities and performance analysis methods developed for the Beijing Olympics also benefited athletes' preparations for the national games.

Wang Zhiyu and Zhu Zeyangxu, who represented East China's Fujian province and were surprise runners-up in the mixed doubles curling, owed a lot to Beijing 2022's "ripple effect," said their coach Li Hongbo.

"We never expected we would end up on the podium at our curling debut at the National Winter Games," Li, a former curler, said. It was the first medal Fujian had ever won at the games after the team's narrow 7-6 defeat by a more experienced pair from Heilongjiang province.

Li said following Beijing 2022, curling, an indoor winter sport



China's reigning Olympic champion Su Yiming and snowboarder Liu Haoyu compete during the recent 14th National Winter Games. PHOTOS BY LONG LEI AND BEIHE / XINHUA

unaffected by weather conditions, has gained traction in Fujian. "Our athletes now have more competition opportunities and the sport has drawn more fans in the province," Li said, adding his charges learned from reviewing competition videos and postgame analyses. "This strategy quickly builds experience and trains our athletes," Li said.

Derek Livingston, the Canadian coach of China's star snowboarder Liu Jiayu, applauded the rapid development of skiing facilities in China since Beijing 2022.

"In Canada, we have only one world-class halfpipe. However, in China I've encountered at least three world-class halfpipes, with another one under construction for the national team. It's impressive to see the level of support and resources China offers to its athletes," said the 33-year-old former pro who helped Liu win the silver medal in the women's halfpipe competition in Hulunbuir.

Thirty volunteers who worked at Beijing 2022 also attended the Winter Games to help organizers ensure events were run to Olympic standards.

"To serve as a volunteer at a major sporting event again brought back all my fond memories of the Beijing Winter Olympics. I really appreciate this second chance," said Qin Jiaxin, a graduate student from Beijing Normal University, who left his family on the third day of the Chinese New Year holiday to travel to Hulunbuir.

**Jobs, tourism boom**

Similar to the Beijing 2022 Olympics, which ran from Feb 4 to 20, the 14th National Winter Games saw the majority of its competitions overlap with the Spring Festival holiday. This overlap spurred an even bigger tourism boom around winter sports and related leisure activities than two years ago, when pandemic control measures were in place.

Traditionally, Chinese prefer to spend their Spring Festival holidays in warmer southern destinations, such as Hainan province.

However, the attraction of ice and snow activities, promoted by the National Winter Games, proved a "game-changer" this year.

Hulunbuir received a record number of 1.66 million visits during the eight-day Spring Festival holiday, nine times the total in 2023. Tourism revenue increased tenfold from the previous year to 1.14 billion yuan (\$160 million), according to the city government.

"Hosting the National Winter Games offered us a great opportunity to promote our ice and snow tourism attractions," Sun Hui, a deputy mayor of Hulunbuir, said at a news conference on Feb 16, a day before the opening ceremony.

Inspired by star athletes such as Olympic freestyle skiing champion Gu Ailing and snowboarding prodigy Su, more and more people are taking up winter sports in cities with warmer climates that rarely see snow.

In Southwest China's Chongqing, a passion for winter sports has gripped the city. Known better for its scorching summers, it has been transformed into a hub for ice and snow activities thanks to the development of indoor facilities.

Chongqing, which sent a team to the National Winter Games for the first time, has seen surging public demand at nine skating rinks and 10 ski venues, including two indoor ones, this winter.

Ma Fuqiang, a ski instructor at Jinfo Mountain Ski Resort who hails from Heilongjiang, has noticed the growing interest in winter sports. "Most tourists at the ski resort are beginners. They get very excited when they see snow, which drives a high demand for ski instructors," Ma said.

At Jinfo Mountain resort there are more than 140 ski instructors, most of whom come from Northeast China and work from mid-November to early March. During periods of strong demand on weekends or holidays, the resort sometimes experiences a shortage of instructors.

The demand will only grow stronger, said Wu Yannian, a professor from the School of Physical Education at Jinan University in Guangzhou, Guangdong province.

"The majority of ski resort visitors in the south are still winter sports beginners. The progression in their skill levels will result in higher demand for services and facilities, helping tap into greater market potential," he said of winter sports participation in South China.

The newfound passion of ordinary Chinese for winter sports has also impressed international officials, such as Sarah Henderson from the United Kingdom, the short-track speedskating chief referee at the Hulunbuir games.

"There is everything we need for a competition. It is a great event for the athletes and coaches with the fantastic ice rink and facilities here," Henderson told Xinhua.

After witnessing an exceptionally successful competition at Beijing 2022, Henderson said she was again in awe of the Chinese crowd's enthusiasm for winter sports.

"They love skaters. I saw the posters of Wu Dajing (Olympic champion skater). It is an enjoyable environment," said Henderson, who has visited China four times since her first trip to Beijing for an Olympic test event in 2021.

"I really enjoy seeing the promotion of winter sports. There are many young talents in China. Keep going. It will be exciting."



Students take skating lessons on an ice rink at a primary school in Tianjin on Jan 10. LI RAN / XINHUA



Curler Zhu Zeyangxu, who represented Fujian province, competes during the recent National Winter Games. YANG CHENGUANG / XINHUA

## TOP NEWS

## Govts launch campaigns on fire hazards

Authorities set their sights on tackling risks related to parking, charging of electric bikes

By JIANG CHENGLONG  
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Governments at various levels have launched campaigns to address fire hazards caused by the improper parking of electric bicycles, as experts warned of the reasons behind fires caused by these vehicles, including one in which 15 people were killed last week in Nanjing, Jiangsu province.

The Ministry of Emergency Management said on Monday that the lessons from recent fires must be deeply learned, and called for resolutely preventing and containing major accidents.

The ministry said that all regions should comprehensively and thoroughly investigate and rectify various types of fire safety risks and hidden dangers, focusing on prominent issues including the entry of electric bicycles into buildings and residences, and especially targeting high-rise residential buildings.

On Friday, a fire broke out in the early morning in a high-rise residential building in Nanjing, killing 15 people and injuring 44.

A preliminary investigation indicated that the fire was caused by an electric bicycle parked in the building's ground floor.

The fire immediately prompted governments nationwide to comprehensively tackle potential fire hazards.

The day after the fire, the Jiangsu provincial government announced a comprehensive campaign on fire safety inspection, focusing especially on fire hazards in residential communities, with an emphasis on fire-fighting facilities, evacuation passages and illegal charging issues.

On Tuesday, the fire rescue department in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, reminded all residents of the city that electric bicycles should not be parked or charged in any indoor public areas.

Also on Tuesday, the market supervision administration in Hefei, Anhui province, told electric bicycle manufacturing, sales and repair companies to comply with national standards on the production of electric bicycles, otherwise they would face legal measures.

Furthermore, the sale of items failing to comply with national safety technical standards or industry standards, including electric bicycles, batteries, chargers and helmets, was strictly prohibited in the city.

The fire in Nanjing has shocked

Chinese netizens, with many expressing their condolences and concerns over fire hazards related to electric bicycles.

Ji Huaying, a clothing store owner in Bozhou, Anhui, said the Nanjing fire made her "very afraid".

Her family owns two electric bicycles, and she uses one to commute to her store every day.

"Electric bicycles are very convenient. Nearly every household in our community has at least one electric bicycle," she said. "The elderly often use them to pick up and drop off children from school or to go shopping."

Fortunately, in Ji's community, few residents risk charging their electric bicycles inside their homes, since there have been dedicated parking spaces and charging stations for electric bicycles for more than a decade.

However, Ji said that in other communities, many residents still charge their electric bicycles at home because it costs less or due to a lack of safety awareness.

"That phenomenon requires the property management companies of residential communities to take responsibility and persuade these residents," she said.

Wang Lijun, an employee of Beijing Chengcheng Property Management Co, said it is currently conducting a door-to-door survey on the number of electric bicycles owned by each household and the owners' information.

He will report the information to the local government and also informs owners that electric bicycles cannot be charged inside rooms.

Wang is responsible for managing two residential buildings in a community in northern Beijing with over 400 households.

The community has outdoor parking areas for electric bicycles, which are equipped with charging stations.

To prevent residents from bringing electric bicycles into their homes, since 2021 the elevators in the high-rise buildings of the community have been equipped with smart cameras.

"If a resident brings an electric bicycle into the elevator, the camera will automatically detect it, causing the elevator to stop operating," Wang said.

However, many netizens have questioned whether these frequent fires are due to the quality of electric bicycle batteries.

## Never too late



Graduates make heart signs with their hands at a high school graduation ceremony in Seoul, South Korea, on Tuesday. The school offers elementary and secondary education courses to female learners over the age of 40 who were unable to complete their studies on time for various reasons. YONHAP

## Experts call for healthy lifestyle as weight loss becomes trendy

By WANG XIAOYU  
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Inspired by an actress who dropped 50 kilograms for the lead role in a recent box office hit, Liu Tianian, a pastry chef in Beijing, decided to attempt fasting for one day — a diet method touted online as one that cleanses the body and jump-starts weight loss.

Later that day, she got acid reflux and had to quit.

"It was unwise of me to suddenly stop eating. I simply cannot carry on my life on an empty stomach," the 35-year-old said.

For lunch on Monday, Liu treated herself to a hearty bowl of stewed beef and potato, with rice and a side salad.

"I realized that we cannot follow celebrities' methods blindly, and the sustainable way for me to lose weight is to eat a balanced, low-fat diet," she said.

The film that has sparked a weight loss frenzy among the Chinese recently is YOLO, the highest-grossing movie of this year's Spring Festival holiday that portrays the struggle of a jobless woman who

became a boxer. It is directed by and stars Jia Ling, who became known for her rotund figure and quick wit after her breakout roles in comedies.

Though Jia said the story is intended to highlight self-care and self-esteem, her startling physical transformation — she halved her weight in about a year — coupled with the inspirational film, has stirred a discussion on slimming and encouraged viewers to hit the gym or change their diets.

Another resident surnamed Liu in Beijing said that the movie has prompted her to reflect on weight management.

"I used to only do physical activities that I like, such as cardio workouts and high-intensity interval training that would increase my heart rate and release endorphins," said the 34-year-old. "Now, I also push myself to lift dumbbells to gain muscle."

As a foodie often frustrated by excess weight, Liu said that she understood and admired the excruciating efforts that Jia devoted to overcoming mood swings and how she endured lactic acid buildup to

achieve her current figure.

"Considering that she's done it within a relatively short period, it is truly impressive," she said.

While applauding growing interests in healthy lifestyles, medical experts said that dramatic weight loss like Jia's is hard to replicate and warned of common pitfalls.

He Fang, a nutrition specialist at the Second Affiliated Hospital of Zhejiang University's School of Medicine, said that shedding weight at a rapid pace the way Jia did could trigger endocrine disorders and other health problems.

"It is more advisable to emulate Jia's perseverance and determination in pursuing a goal," she said. "How to enact a weight loss plan depends on each individual's gender, body mass index, muscle density and other factors."

She said that fad diets, such as low-carb, high-fat keto meals and weight loss pills, should be adopted under professional medical supervision.

"At the hospital, diet pills cannot be prescribed until we have run tests on patients and evaluate their health condition," she said. "Regard-

ing workouts, the most important thing is to find a type of exercise that is safe and easy to continue in the long run, and it is important to combine cardio with resistance training."

In China, about 34 percent of adults are overweight, and more than 16 percent are obese. The National Health Commission estimated that by 2030, 65.3 percent of China's residents will be overweight or obese.

He, the doctor, said that her nutrition department has handled an increasing number of seriously obese patients weighing over 100 kg.

"The key to staying fit is adopting and adhering to a healthy lifestyle and understanding that weight loss is a long, gradual journey," she said.

Jia, the actress, said in a letter addressed to moviegoers in January that on the night that production of the film wrapped up, she ate 30 chocolate wafer bars.

Fan Zhihong, a professor of nutrition at China Agricultural University, said that sustaining an ideal weight is even harder than losing weight, and coping with weight loss anxiety by bingeing on tons of snacks is concerning.

"Many people who went on weight loss reality shows ended up relapsing off screen," she said. "Major weight fluctuations are no less harmful than being overweight."

## Transition: Green targets specified for medium term

From page 1

As a result, the streets are quieter, the air quality is better, and greenhouse gas emissions have been reduced. I live in Beijing, and the difference in noise and exhaust gases is really noticeable when I visit other countries in Asia.

Targets have also been set for waste management, which has been problematic, especially with the explosive growth of e-commerce and takeaway and with the amount of plastic in the countryside and water bodies. By 2027, 60 percent of cities should be "zero-waste" and 40 percent of villages "beautiful". All cities should be "zero-waste" by 2035.

In terms of air quality targets, average PM2.5 concentrations are to fall below 28 micrograms per cubic meter of air by 2027, and below 25 by 2035. This would be a further improvement, although at

a much slower rate than in previous years.

The areas protected within "ecological conservation red lines" are to stay above 3.15 million square kilometers. That would be more than 32 percent of China's total land area. This exceeds the target agreed upon at the end of 2022 by all member countries of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework that over 30 percent of the planet (including land and oceans) should be effectively protected by 2030. Setting targets and road maps for stepping up China's marine area conservation will be an important next step.

In terms of climate action, the document makes no explicit new numerical targets. However, some recent analysis by independent experts suggests that China's CO2 emissions could soon peak, due to the extremely rapid installation of

solar and wind power in recent years. The document mentions reduction of methane emissions, which have accounted for about 30 percent of global warming to date.

The document also looks further into the future, beyond 2035. It mentions that by the middle of the 21st century, key sectors will be deeply decarbonized, the ecological environment will be healthy and beautiful, and a "Beautiful China" will be comprehensively achieved.

This set of targets for a "Beautiful China" is an important milestone. It can be compared to the EU Green Deal, and the "Fit for 55" packages in Europe, which also specified medium-long-term targets and were coupled with tangible support policies. Having clear targets, such as the share of electric vehicles by 2027, gives guidance to all actors, including ministries, manufacturers, investors and local governments, allowing

them to develop implementation strategies.

China is placing a high priority on the green transition, even in the face of major economic headwinds. It is recognized that the economy and environment are no longer a trade-off. The green transition is becoming a real economic driver, with green sectors such as renewable energy, batteries and electric vehicles accounting for a major share of economic growth.

In the coming years, we expect more detailed policy documents to follow, and we expect the "Beautiful China" targets to be actively implemented, achieved and exceeded.

The author is regional director for Asia at ClientEarth and special adviser of the China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

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## Recovery: Special treasury bonds, financial instruments, fiscal stimulus likely, economist says

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"The monetary policy is expected to be eased further and interest rate cuts may become the main theme while reductions in the reserve requirement ratio may be adopted as well," Su said. China reduced a key benchmark for mortgage rates on Feb 20.

The People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, said on Tuesday it will make full use of monetary policy tools and ensure that the favorable policies regarding re-lending precisely support key areas.

Xiong Yuan, chief economist at Guosheng Securities, said the government may set this year's deficit-

to-GDP ratio at more than 3 percent and arrange about 3.8 trillion yuan of annual quota for special-purpose local government bonds at the upcoming two sessions.

Last year's two sessions set the deficit ratio at 3 percent — which was later increased to about 3.8 percent after the issuance of special

treasury bonds — and the special-purpose local government bond quota at 3.8 trillion yuan.

Xiong added the country may issue special treasury bonds, leverage financial instruments to boost government-led spending and front-load fiscal stimulus this year.

"With effective measures to tackle

the issue of lackluster demand, price levels will gradually return to a reasonable range," said Zou Yunhan, deputy director of the macroeconomic research office at the State Information Center's Department of Economic Forecasting.

Zou said China's economic recovery is poised to strengthen this year

as consumer spending recovery accelerates, the downturn in real estate investment mitigates, fiscal policy drives infrastructure investment while structural exports drivers sustain.

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## CHINA

## Study sheds light on early detection of Alzheimer's

By WANG XIAOYU  
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Chinese scientists have traced biological changes related to Alzheimer's disease that happen as early as 18 years before diagnosis in a new study that provides valuable guidance for early detection and the development of drugs to treat the debilitating disease.

They ran regular spinal fluid tests, brain scans and cognitive assessments on a large number of people age 45 to 65 over a span of 20 years. Their study, published in the New England Journal of Medicine on Thursday, was led by researchers from Xuanwu Hospital Affiliated to Capital Medical University in Beijing.

Researchers were able to compare the test results of 648 patients who were eventually diagnosed with sporadic Alzheimer's disease with the same number of people with normal cognitive capacities.

Sporadic Alzheimer's disease accounts for more than 90 percent of cases, striking people without a family history of the disease.

Results show that people diagnosed with the disease began registering differences in several key biological markers around six to 18 years before receiving an official diagnosis.

For instance, differences in beta amyloid — a pathological hallmark of the disease — were noted 18 years before its onset, and differences in two types of toxic tau proteins were detected around 10 years before. In addition, rates of cognitive decline diverged six years before a formal diagnosis, according to the study.

"This is, so far, the world's largest study with the longest follow-up periods on biomarker changes before Alzheimer's disease diagnoses," Xuanwu Hospital said in Thursday's article.

It said that the study revealed for the first time the dynamic changes in brain and spinal fluid and imaging scans from the asymptomatic to symptomatic stage, and clarified the key turning point when pathological changes occur.

"The finding provides guidance for the development of novel drugs targeting abnormal proteins, as well as robust evidence for ultra-early diagnosis and precise intervention of the disease," the hospital said, adding that it provided "a time window guide for the development of new AD drugs targeting beta amyloid and related pathological proteins".

Richard Mayeux, a neurology professor at Columbia University in the United States, said in an accompanying editorial that the importance of the study could not be overstated.

"Knowledge of the timing of these physiological events is critical to provide clinicians with useful starting points for prevention and therapeutic strategies," he said.

China has about 15 million people age 60 and above living with dementia, including 10 million with Alzheimer's disease, according to the National Health Commission. Worldwide, about 55 million people are affected by the disease.

Scientists around the world are still striving to explain what triggers and accelerates pathological changes related to the disease.

There is currently no cure for the disease, although some novel therapies have been approved in recent years to slow its progression.

## Electric flight



Two five-seater Shengshilong electric aircraft fly from a port in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, on Tuesday. After a 20-minute flight, they arrived in Zhuhai, marking the first demonstration flight of the cross-sea and cross-city route for vertical takeoff and landing electric aircraft. WEN ZI / FOR CHINA DAILY

## State secrets law revised to handle online leaks

Top legislature unveils revisions to protect national security on the internet

By CAO YIN  
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A revised law aiming to guard State secrets and protect national security has been unveiled by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, China's top legislature, calling for greater efforts to handle online leaks.

The revised Law on Guarding State Secrets was passed by the NPC Standing Committee when it wrapped up its latest session on Tuesday, and will take effect on May 1.

"As information and digital technologies have developed rapidly and been widely applied in various areas, managing State secrets has become increasingly difficult," the National Administration of State Secrets Protection said, adding that was why the content in the law related to online information had been improved.

The 65-article law clarifies that every step regarding online information, including production,

replication, publication and dissemination must abide by the requirements for safeguarding State secrets.

It says internet operators should help investigate and handle cases suspected of involving leaked State secrets, requiring them to report the leaks to relevant departments and take emergency response measures in a timely manner.

While removing content involving the disclosure of State secrets, internet operators also need to check relevant devices through technical means to guarantee the problematic information is thoroughly eliminated, according to the law.

"In the digital age, data is an important factor of production, as well as a basic strategic resource for a country," the administration said.

"Data security is closely related to national sovereignty, security and development interests."

It added that the revised law enriches the content concerning

secrets-related data to ensure the connection with the Data Security Law, which centers on the collection, storage, use, processing, transmission, disclosure and supervision of general data.

Considering the accelerated emergence of new scientific and technological applications such as big data, cloud computing and artificial intelligence, the revised law encourages research on technology for guarding State secrets and its application.

Intellectual property rights in the field of protecting State secrets should also be supported in line with the law to promote the capability of self-innovation, the administration said.

The Law on Guarding State Secrets was formulated in 1988. Before the latest revisions, it was modified in 2010, according to the NPC Standing Committee's Legislative Affairs Commission.

"To better face new security challenges at home and abroad, we've further improved the law to provide stronger legislative supports to consolidate the firewall against risks and upgrade the national security system," the commission said.

## Astronaut sets record for time in space

By ZHAO LEI  
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Senior Colonel Tang Hongbo ended his 216th day in orbit on Tuesday, extending his lead as the Chinese astronaut to have spent the longest time in space.

The 48-year-old from Hunan province is a member of China's second generation of astronauts and mission commander of the ongoing Shenzhou XVII mission. He is also the first person to have returned to China's Tiangong space station.

Tang made his first journey into space in June 2021, on the three-month Shenzhou XII mission, becoming one of the space station's first inhabitants.

During that mission, he spent 92 days and four hours in orbit.



Tang Hongbo

On Oct 26, Tang and two crewmates, Lieutenant Colonel Tang Shengjie and Lieutenant Colonel Jiang Xinlin, set out on the Shenzhou XVII mission, arriving at the Tiangong station that afternoon.

By noon on Monday, Tang Hongbo's current mission had lasted 123 days, taking his total time in orbit to 215 days.

That meant he surpassed Chen Dong, who previously held the record for the longest time in-orbit for a Chinese astronaut after spending a total of 214 days and 15 hours in orbit on two space missions.

The Shenzhou XVII mission crew is scheduled to spend over

two more months in orbit, which means Tang Hongbo will return to Earth having clocked about 280 days of orbital flight.

He has also made two space flights within the shortest interval — two years and one month — of any Chinese astronaut.

Twenty Chinese astronauts have been in space on 12 space flights.

Among them, Tang Hongbo, Chen Dong and Jing Haipeng — the first Chinese astronaut with four spaceflights — each have more than 200 hours in orbit.

Oleg Dmitriyevich Kononenko, a 59-year-old Russian cosmonaut, boasts the longest time in space of any astronaut in the world. He has accumulated more than 900 days in orbit during his five flights to the International Space Station, including his current one-year flight.

## Shanghai sets up tax tribunals to improve dispute resolution

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai  
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Shanghai recently announced the establishment of two tax affairs tribunals, the first of their kind in the country, to centralize jurisdiction over such administrative cases and provide a better business environment under the rule of law.

The Shanghai High People's Court said the move demonstrated its determination to meet judicial needs as the city builds itself into an international center of economics, finance, trade, shipping, and scientific and technological innovation.

The court unveiled the two tax affairs tribunals, at the Shanghai Railway Transport Court and the Shanghai No 3 Intermediate People's Court, on Friday. They will have centralized jurisdiction over first-instance administrative cases, in which city tax departments at all levels are the defendants, and second-instance administrative cases in which a tax department is the appellee or appellant.

The two courts said the new tribunals will contribute to the efficient resolution of tax-related disputes through mechanisms including convenient litigation and fair trials, substantive dispute resolution, interaction and cooperation with government agencies and universities, and communicating high-quality cases and reform experience to the public.

"The World Bank's new assessment criteria in 2023 paid particular attention to the independence and professionalism of resolution of tax disputes," said Cao Jie, deputy head of the Shanghai High People's Court. "Meanwhile, as one of the first pilot areas for the reform of courts to work across administrative zones, Shanghai has been pondering how to optimize and improve Shanghai's centralized jurisdiction mechanism for administrative cases."

With the deepening of fiscal and taxation reforms and the in-depth promotion of tax administration, the number of tax-related administrative cases has been increasing in recent years, and the content of litigation is becoming diversified and complex, Cao said.

"The establishment of tax affairs tribunals is conducive to promoting the construction of the rule of law in taxation, promoting the legitimate rights and interests

Such practice will also help enterprises with temporary tax difficulties survive as much as possible on the basis of protecting the rights of all parties in accordance with the law."

Yang Guoping, a lawmaker in Shanghai

of taxpayers, facilitating the effective resolution of tax-related disputes, and making remedies smoother," she said.

Yang Guoping, a lawmaker in Shanghai, said the Shanghai court needed to set up such tribunals, which can handle tax-related disputes independently and professionally, so that market players from all over the country and around the world can feel Shanghai's open, fair and just business environment.

"It is expected that the tribunals will deepen cooperation with relevant functional departments, establish a coordination mechanism, and promote the substantive resolution of tax-related disputes through a multiple dispute resolution mechanism combining mediation, arbitration and litigation," he said. "Such practice will also help enterprises with temporary tax difficulties survive as much as possible on the basis of protecting the rights of all parties in accordance with the law."

Cheng Junfeng, Party secretary and head of the Shanghai Municipal Tax Service of the State Taxation Administration, said the city's tax departments at all levels will strictly regulate fair and civilized law enforcement, support the courts in accepting and hearing tax-related administrative cases in accordance with the law, and help Shanghai continue to build a market-oriented, law-based and first-class business environment complying with international practice.

In recent years, an intellectual property court, a financial court and a bankruptcy court have been established in Shanghai, and the pilot comprehensive reform of the city's judicial system is being further promoted.

## Unlicensed liquor



Police officers display seized counterfeit Moutai liquor at a news conference in Shanghai on Tuesday. Shanghai police disclosed a major case of producing and selling counterfeit Moutai liquor, arresting 52 suspects. ZHANG LONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

## New court platform open for online searches

By CAO YIN  
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A new online platform for searching civil, criminal and administrative cases was opened to the public on Tuesday, indicating that China's approach to ensuring judicial transparency has become more diverse, an official from the country's top court said.

Established by the Supreme People's Court, the platform has details of 3,177 cases, covering several hot legal issues, including cyberbullying, telecom fraud, food safety, self-

defense and domestic violence, Yang Wanming, vice-president of the Supreme People's Court, told a news conference on Tuesday.

The uploaded cases were not only solicited from courts nationwide, but also provided by law firms, universities and even non-legal institutions, such as a middle school, "expanding the types of cases and enriching their sources," he said.

"All of the cases were reviewed by the top court and deemed to have reference value before going online," he added.

For instance, justifiable defense

has been regarded as a "dormant clause" for some time in China due to challenges in interpretation and the influence of misconceptions, such as "whoever is injured or killed is right".

To meet the challenges and respond to public concerns, the platform disclosed 34 cases concerning justifiable defense to help judges accurately apply the provision and grasp the essence of the legal concept, said Yu Haisong, deputy head of the top court's Research Office.

A case involving a man who was

convicted of mentally abusing his ex-girlfriend and given a prison term was also included in the platform, "as it clarified the scope of family members for the crime of maltreatment in the Criminal Law", he said.

Under the law, people will be convicted of maltreatment if they physically or mentally abuse their family members, such as by assaulting, insulting, confining, binding or leaving them in the cold, or failing to offer them medical care or forcing them to do excessive labor.

"Considering new circumstances

are emerging with social development and to strongly protect the victim's personal rights, the case showed that those with a stable relationship or living together for a long period to start a family also needed to be deemed family members," Yu added.

People can search for the cases on <https://rmfyalk.court.gov.cn>. While reading the cases, visitors can also learn about how the disputes happened, what laws were applied and why the courts arrived at their verdicts.

Saying the platform was a new measure to optimize the country's legal services and promote judicial openness, Zhou Jiahai, head of the office, said it was also conducive to

unifying verdict-rendering standards across the country to improve the quality of case hearings.

"With the adoption, abolishment and modification of laws as well as the adjustment of judicial interpretations, cases uploaded on the platform will be updated in a timely manner to ensure users can access the latest and most accurate legal knowledge," he added.

Another verdict disclosure website — China Judgements Online — was set up by the top court in 2013. Yang said that the website will not be shut down. He said the two platforms will complement each other and will jointly help improve judicial transparency to meet the public's stronger legal demands.

## POLICY REVIEW

## New zones help push nighttime economy

102 areas add to efforts to boost consumption in cities after sunset

By LI YINGXUE  
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The nighttime economy, spanning the dining, tourism and leisure sectors, has emerged as a new driving force for economic growth nationwide. Regions are swiftly developing unique nighttime economic hubs tailored to various industries.

In line with the State Council's measures to boost tourism consumption and enhance industry quality, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism recently announced the third batch of China's National Night Culture and Tourism Consumption Agglomeration Zones.

The list features 102 areas, including Longfu Temple Cultural Street in Beijing's Dongcheng district, Tianjin's aircraft carrier theme park and Shenyang's 1905 Cultural and Creative Park in Liaoning.

During a ceremony to launch the 2024 National Spring Festival Cultural and Tourism Consumption Month event on Jan 25, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism's industry development department awarded certificates to representatives from these hubs.

The ministry is urging provincial-level cultural and tourism authorities to work with other government departments in places where the agglomeration areas are situated to advance their development.

Their goal is to enhance the range of cultural and tourism offerings, promote the fusion of culture and tourism and foster new consumer experiences.

Furthermore, they are encouraging each agglomeration area to organize activities that benefit consumers, improve the quality of nighttime services, ensure safety and create a pleasant environment for consumption.

The 2023 China Nighttime Economy Development Report by the China Tourism Academy reveals that nighttime tourism raked in 1.57 trillion yuan (\$218 billion) in revenue last year. With 95 percent of the surveyed people showing interest in nighttime excursions, it's clear that evening adventures are becoming more popular.

An official from the ministry's industry development department has stated that they will focus on strengthening policy support and refining assistance measures to illuminate China's nighttime culture and tourism hubs.

Song Yangyang, vice-president of the Institute of Creative Industry Technology at the Renmin University of China, believes that promoting nighttime culture and tourism through agglomeration zones or industrial hubs is crucial because they provide an array of cultural and tourism experiences, meeting people's increasing desire for a better lifestyle.

He sees nighttime culture and tourism as vital components of modern cities, extending cultural and tourism activities beyond traditional time and space boundaries.

To address the sameness in nighttime consumption, Song said brands should offer diverse experiences focusing on leisure, entertainment and relaxation. By blending creativity and technology, they can create innovative nighttime experiences centered around cultural and spiritual enrichment, he said.

Song emphasized the importance of incorporating regional flavors into nighttime consumption. He recommends utilizing local cultural resources to develop products tailored to different seasons, audiences and cultural preferences.

Iyu Fengyong, a researcher at the National Academy of Economic Strategy, China Academy of Social Sciences, noted that nighttime tourism environments offer something special. They have a unique atmosphere with captivating lighting and colors, something people can't experience during the day.

"The deep darkness of night and the vibrant lights create a sense of fantasy and transcendence," he explained. "They allow visitors to temporarily escape the noise and rush of daytime life, immersing themselves in a moment of calm and spiritual connection."

A survey report from the Ministry of Commerce reveals that over 60 percent of consumer spending now happens during the night. Sales



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

between 6 pm and 10 pm in major shopping centers make up more than half of daily sales, making nighttime the prime time for consumption.

#### A growing industry

China's nighttime economy has seen robust growth over the past two years, creating not only new consumer markets but also providing a broader platform for the cultural and creative industries.

The year 2019 was dubbed the "Year of Nighttime Tourism" by the media. That year, the State Council released guidelines encouraging commercial districts and themed streets to feature culture, tourism and leisure activities. This included extending operating hours and establishing late-night zones, 24-hour convenience stores and unique dining areas.

The guidelines highlighted the importance of investing in creating nighttime spaces and agglomeration zones where conditions permit.

In July 2021, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism launched the first phase of the National Night Culture and Tourism Consumption Agglomeration Zone project to boost nighttime cultural and tourism activities.

Four months later, they revealed the first 120 areas, including famous spots like the Bund area in Shanghai and the Jiangnan Road pedestrian street in Wuhan, Hubei province.

These zones were chosen based on specific criteria, requiring clear boundaries and a focus on cultural and tourism industries.

Tourist sites needed to offer frequent nighttime tours, with at least 40 percent of facilities or areas open during the night.

By August 2022, the second phase added 123 areas, including the Wangfujing commercial area in Beijing and the Wuzhen scenic area in Jiaxing, Zhejiang province. These areas mainly comprised historical districts, cultural parks and commercial streets.

Since the project began, 345 areas have been designated as nighttime agglomeration zones nationwide. In the past year alone, zones that were part of the first two phases saw a significant increase in nighttime visitors, reaching 3.12 billion, a year-on-year increase of 56.4 percent.

Researcher Zhao Min from the Pengpai Institute analyzed the 345 zones and found that the majority of them are tourism resorts, making up over one-fifth. Following closely are historical areas and leisure streets, as well as historical cultural cities.

Comparing the lists, it's clear that there's been a notable increase in tourism resorts and urban leisure areas, possibly reflecting a growing interest in outdoor activities. Zhao believes that commercial main streets not only imply shopping but also cater to various needs such as square dancing, sports, fitness and socializing.

Aside from historical sites, commercial streets and new city centers are crucial for nightlife. Zhao emphasized the importance of improving transportation and adding cultural elements to consumers' journey home after activities, and

also stressed the need to support workers in ensuring nighttime economy security.

During the just-concluded Spring Festival holiday, the designated nighttime cultural and tourism consumption areas saw bustling crowds and a great deal of spending. These areas recorded a total of 98.5 million nighttime visitors, marking a significant 58.3 percent increase year-on-year, according to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

"In 2024, with the sustained consolidation and enhancement of China's economic recovery, the cultural industry will maintain rapid growth, and the tourism industry will flourish," Ma Li, deputy director of the industry development department of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, stated in an interview with People's Daily Online.

Ma also said that this year, the ministry will vigorously promote cultural and tourism consumption and drive the innovative development of nationally designated nighttime cultural and tourism consumption agglomeration areas.

Zhao Yijing, who leads the nighttime tourism research team at the China Tourism Academy, suggested that this year, consumers should transition from simply touring cities at night to experiencing nighttime activities within cities.

"We shouldn't just recreate the past; we should also look ahead and create vibrant urban nightlife," Zhao Yijing said.

#### Policy Digest

##### School-related crimes down for 11th year in row

The number of school-related crimes in China has fallen for 11th year in a row, thanks to strengthened security and law enforcement measures, according to the Ministry of Public Security.

In a statement released on Friday, the ministry said that in recent years, law enforcement officials and relevant authorities have made continuous efforts to prevent risks, ensure security and maintain stability on campuses.

As a result, strong security guarantees have been provided for more than 250 million students in over 520,000 primary and secondary schools and kindergartens nationwide.

Last year, a total of 270,000 police stations and substations, as well as 470,000 security posts, were set up in areas near schools nationwide so that officers could patrol during key periods at critical road sections.

##### Guidelines to protect gig economy workers

The central government published guidelines on Friday to improve the protection of the rights of workers engaged in the platform economy such as ride-hailing and food delivery.

The guidelines, compiled by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, lay out detailed and practical rules to help platform businesses improve labor management and mitigate problems such as excessive working hours and a lack of transparency.

According to the guidelines, workers involved in the platform economy, including those engaged in food delivery, transportation and housekeeping services, will start to enjoy minimum wage protection.

Platform businesses are required to prevent their employees from being overworked, ensure they are paid more for working during holidays, and solicit their opinions before changing algorithms affecting their rights and interests.

Together with new modes of business and evolving consumption patterns, new types of occupations have been emerging in China in recent years and have become key sources of job creation.

##### Three-year plan looks to curb noise at civil airports

China has released a three-year action plan targeting noise pollution prevention and control at civil airports, as part of its efforts to promote the green transformation of civil aviation.

The plan, made public on Feb 21, was jointly issued by the Civil Aviation Administration of China, the Ministry of Ecology and Environment, the Ministry of Natural Resources and the State Administration for Market Regulation.

By 2025, a standard system for noise pollution prevention and control at airports should be essentially established, and progress should be made on the development of key monitoring technologies, according to the plan.

Airports with an annual throughput of at least 5 million passengers should have real-time monitoring and source tracing capability of civil aircraft noise events by 2025, the plan said.

By 2027, the surrounding regions of airports with an annual throughput of at least 10 million passengers should enjoy a better, quieter environment, it said.

CHINA DAILY—XINHUA

## Shougang Park one of Beijing's latest evening destinations

By LI YINGXUE  
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As night fell during the Spring Festival holiday, Shougang Park in Beijing's Shijingshan district underwent a remarkable transformation.

What was once an industrial-style park turned into a spectacle of red lights and yellow lanterns, evoking the ambience of ancient China.

From Feb 10 to 25, Shougang hosted its inaugural Spring Festival Garden Party, featuring traditional activities such as dragon and lion dances, lantern riddles and traditional games.

Visitors had the opportunity to savor a variety of delicacies, watch intangible cultural heritage inheritors make crafts, try on hanfu — traditional Chinese clothing — and

immerse themselves in the spirit of ancient New Year celebrations.

The park, along with the Longfu Temple Cultural Street in Dongcheng district and the Beijing (Tongzhou) Grand Canal Cultural Tourism Area Central Zone, was one of 102 areas listed as part of the third batch of National Night Culture and Tourism Consumption Agglomeration Zones announced by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism on Jan 25.

This recognition adds to Beijing's already impressive tally of 14 selected areas, including Qianmen Street from the first batch and the Wangfujing area from the second.

Over the past two years, Beijing's night economy and tourism have flourished, making it a prime destination for nighttime activities and contributing to its status as a hub for night tourism and consumption.

According to data from e-commerce services platform Meituan, during the Spring Festival holiday, nighttime spending in Beijing accounted for about 45 percent of total spending, a 45 percent year-on-year increase.

Furthermore, most consumers conducting searches related to "nighttime entertainment" on the platform were looking for places in the capital.

Statistics from the Beijing Municipal Commerce Bureau reveal that foot traffic in key commercial areas of the city saw steady growth during the holiday period.

The Longfu Temple commercial district experienced an impressive 62.3 percent increase in foot traffic compared to the previous year. The central business district commercial area welcomed just over 1 million people at night during the holiday, while Wangfujing saw 419,000 nighttime visitors.

During the Lunar New Year, Beijing's various gathering spots offered exciting options for nighttime adventures. Places like the Liangma and Tonghui rivers dazzled visitors with captivating light displays. Wangfujing and the Wukesong commercial areas also showcased futuristic 3D light shows that could be viewed without special glasses.

"We fully utilize elements such as dragon culture and dragon totems to bring excellent Chinese traditional culture to life in landscape arrangements," said Qu Lijian, director of the landscape department of the Beijing Municipal Commission of Urban Management.

Qu highlighted the extensive decorations throughout the city, including over 250,000 lanterns and decorations, about 2 million meters of tree lights and 220 large-scale ornaments.

"In terms of color, we deliberately chose Chinese red as the main tone, complemented by warm colors such as red, yellow and gold to make citizens and tourists feel the warmth of home and the warmth of the city," she said.

Shi Peihua, a professor at Nankai University in Tianjin, believes that designing cultural and tourism night activities should highlight cultural uniqueness.

By leveraging cultural resources and creating custom-themed light and multimedia art, these activities can evoke various emotions such as dreaminess, awe or romance, and diversifying nighttime experiences beyond mere sightseeing can enhance emotional engagement, Shi said.

Shi also suggested planning themed tour routes based on venue conditions and cultural assets. By combining various landmark attractions and night tour experiences, cities can create a cohesive brand for nighttime cultural and tourism activities, fostering greater impact and appeal, he said.

## WORLD

## Envoy: US, China 'have to live together'

By HENG WEILI in New York  
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The US ambassador in Beijing told an American news program that the two countries have to get along because of how intertwined their economies are.

"Our two countries have to live together. ... China is our third-largest trade partner; 750,000 American jobs at stake," Ambassador Nicholas Burns told Lesley Stahl, an anchor of the long-running CBS show *60 Minutes*, in a roughly half-hour segment broadcast on Sunday.

"Agriculture — China's the largest market for US agriculture. One fifth of all our export products from agriculture are sent to China. That was \$40.9 billion last year," Burns said.

And while the news show negatively portrayed China's economy and military exercises near Taiwan, Burns conceded that American companies were competing put in the country.

"A few American companies have left, but most have stayed," he said.

Stahl noted how Disney is expanding its theme park in Shanghai.

She interviewed Xiangwei Gong, the president of Aptar Asia, at one of the company's five manufacturing facilities in China. Burns sat with Gong, an American citizen born in China, during the interview.

Aptar Asia is a subsidiary of Aptar, a maker of consumer-product dispensing and drug-delivery devices, based in Illinois.

"We are manufacturing for some of the largest US brands, actually the US consumer brands," Gong explained.

Stahl asked Gong what makes the company confident about operating in China.

"Because we are here for the long run, and we believe in the consumption power of the rising middle class," she said.

Stahl noted that China has 80 percent of the solar panel market and dominates the wind turbine market.

She interviewed Jörg Wuttke, a German businessman who represents the chemicals giant BASF and has been in China for more than 30 years.

He said China is "fantastic in development" and a "world champion in actually making products better, faster and cheaper."

Stahl, who said that China was

poised to overtake Japan as the world's leading exporter of vehicles, also explained how Shenzhen-based BYD recently surpassed Tesla as the manufacturer of the best-selling electric vehicles in the world.

She also interviewed William Li, founder and CEO of Shanghai-based Nio, an EV maker that in December unveiled a battery with a driving range of 620 miles, more than 200 miles better than Tesla's top-end model.

Also featured was Alex Gu, the founder and CEO of Fourier Intelligence, a robotics company that introduced the world's first mass-produced humanoid robot, the GR-1, in August. He said that the robots could eventually provide healthcare assistance for senior citizens.

"Maybe ... we can remote-control such kind of robots to help my grandpa," Gu said.

At one point, Stahl asked the ambassador if China was the US' most competitive relationship in the world.

"This is the most important, most competitive and most dangerous relationship that the United States has in the world right now and will, I think, for the next decade or so," Burns said.

Burns, 68, said that "750,000 American families wouldn't be able to put dinner on the table" if the US decoupled economically from China.

"We have competing interests here, and balancing those interests is the reality in the US-China relationship. We're going to compete; we have to compete responsibly and keep the peace between our countries, but we also have to engage."

"They're the leading trade partner of twice as many countries in the world than the United States," Burns said, which amounts to "over 60 countries."

"I think we're back to a more settled and stable relationship between the two countries, but it's been a roller-coaster," he said after Stahl mentioned the November summit in California between President Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden.

The ambassador, in making a comparison to the US and the former Soviet Union during Cold War days, said that China is much stronger economically than the Soviet Union was.

"We're dealing with an adversary, a competitor in China that is stronger than the Soviet Union was in the 1940s, '50, '60s, '70s and '80s," he said.

## Sweden set to join NATO after Hungary's approval

By JULIAN SHEA in London  
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Hungary's Parliament has removed the final obstacle to Sweden joining the NATO military alliance, after lawmakers voted to approve the application following a standoff that lasted almost two years.

New members of the alliance must receive unanimous support from all member states before being allowed to join, and Hungary was the last country that had not approved Sweden's membership bid.

In the end, only six lawmakers voted against the proposal out of 194 parliamentarians who voted on Monday in Budapest.

Sweden's Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson called it "a historic day".

NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg said Sweden would make the alliance "stronger and safer". The news was also welcomed by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who said all NATO members would benefit from Sweden's membership.

"It is good that the Hungarian Parliament approved Sweden's accession today," Scholz said. Elod Novak, vice-chair of the opposition party Our Homeland, was one of the six members of parliament who voted against it.

"Let's veto Sweden's NATO accession," he said before the vote, urging MPs to "veto the path that leads to World War III".

Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban had long stalled Sweden's membership, but told parliament that it would "strengthen Hungary's security".

Although repeatedly saying it supported Swedish membership in principle, Hungary kept prolonging the process, asking Stockholm to stop "vilifying" the Hungarian government.

After a meeting between the

nationalist Orban and Kristersson in Budapest on Friday, the Hungarian leader announced that the two had clarified "our mutual good intentions".

Hungary also signed a deal to buy four Swedish-made fighter jets, a sign of the improved relationship between the two countries.

"We not only keep our air defense capability, but will increase it," said Orban, adding that it meant that his country's "commitment to NATO will strengthen and so will our participation in NATO's joint operations".

Previously, Hungary and Sweden have had very public differences over security matters.

"We do not agree on everything, but we do agree that we should work more actively together when we have common ground," Kristersson said.

### Turkiye's green light

The other country to hold out over the membership of Sweden and its neighbor Finland — the previous most recent new member — was Türkiye, which is of huge strategic importance to NATO because of its geographical location, close to the Middle East and the Black Sea.

Monday's ratification by Hungary followed the green light from the Turkish parliament last month. Sweden, which has been militarily neutral for two centuries, will officially become the 32nd member of the alliance at its next summit in Washington in July.

The application still needs to be signed by the newly elected President of Hungary Tamas Sulyok to become law. It will then be sent to the United States' Department of State, which is the protocol for new members joining the alliance.

Xinhua and agencies contributed to this story.



A tractor discharges hay onto Belgian riot police officers in Brussels on Monday during a protest called by farmers' organizations. NICOLAS MAETERLINCK VIA AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

## New farmer show of force shakes Europe

EU ministers gather to reduce red tape and discuss proposed changes to policy

By CHEN WEIHUA in Brussels  
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Farmers across Europe continued their protests on Monday against the rising production costs, excessive environmental regulations and cheap imports despite recent appeasement by European Union politicians.

Some 1,000 tractors took over the areas and blocked streets around Brussels' Schuman Roundabout, which houses EU institutions. Traffic in the area was paralyzed.

"Farmers' mobilizations continue across Europe because policymakers have so far failed to listen to those who feed our populations in Europe and who are on the front line of climate crisis," said Morgan Ody, a farmer from Brittany, France, and member of ECVC, which represents small farmers in more than 20 EU states.

The protest was held on a day when EU agriculture ministers were meeting in Brussels to discuss targeted changes to the Common Agriculture Policy and the reduction of red tape in a bid to appease angry farmers.

While most farmers, some from France, Italy, the Netherlands and Portugal, staged peaceful protests, some set fire to piles of tires and threw eggs. Several tractor drivers spread hay and manure on streets while a few tried to break the police barricades.

Police responded with water cannons and tear gas that also targeted farmers who were peacefully demonstrating.

On the same day, farmers from across Spain held a massive demonstration in Madrid against excessive EU regulations.

"It's impossible to put up with these rules, they want us to work

with the Mercosur countries — Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay.

The latest round of protests came despite the announcement weeks ago by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen of the withdrawal of a controversial pesticide law that would halve the use of pesticide by 2030.

The EU has also laid out some safeguards to stop Ukrainian imports from flooding the market under a tariff-free scheme adopted after the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict two years ago.

"We don't just want a few crumbs. We want the bread, and if we don't want the bread, we want the bakery," said farmer Tijs Boelens, who demonstrated in Brussels.

"So this Europe needs to stop trying to appease us with anti-environmental or antisocial measures. No, they have to support us in developing sustainable agriculture."



(Europe) needs to stop trying to appease us with anti-environmental or antisocial measures. No, they have to support us in developing sustainable agriculture."

Tijs Boelens, a farmer who demonstrated in Brussels

in the field during the day and deal with paperwork at night — we're sick of the bureaucracy," said Roberto Rodriguez, who grows cereal and beetroot in the central province of Avila.

On Tuesday, thousands of Polish farmers took to the streets of Warsaw. Earlier on Sunday, they protested by blocking a major highway leading to Germany.

They have also blocked border points with neighboring Ukraine to protest against the unfair competition from the non-EU state's cheap imports.

Protesters in Poland had destroyed 160 metric tons of Ukraine grain en route to other countries via the port of Gdansk, prompting Ukrainian officials to call on the Polish government on Monday to punish those responsible for it.

Besides cheap imports from Ukraine, the fear of cheap beef from South America is also a concern for farmers as the EU hopes to conclude a trade deal

with the Mercosur countries — Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay.

Whether that happens before or after the European elections does not matter — what matters is moving forward," he said.

German Minister of Food and Agriculture Cem Özdemir admitted there is "a lot of anger faced with promises that have not been kept".

"The current (Common Agricultural Policy) is a bureaucratic monster," he said, calling for reforms to encourage "working the land rather than paperwork".

Agencies contributed to this story.

## Schools in French town embark on uniform trial

By JONATHAN POWELL in London  
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Hundreds of students in southern France wore uniforms to school for the first time on Monday, as part of a national trial to test the feasibility of making the attire mandatory.

In an effort to assess the potential benefits of reducing inequality and improving behavior, about 700 students across four schools in the town of Beziers became the first to reintroduce uniforms as part of a government pilot program, Agence France-Presse reported.

Compulsory uniforms have not been required in state schools across the French mainland since 1968.

Following the government's ban on Muslim abayas in schools last year, along with the previous ban on headscarves in 2004, President Emmanuel Macron recently unveiled the uniform trial at about 100 schools, aiming for nationwide mandatory implementation by 2026 if the trial is deemed successful.

So far, 92 schools have agreed to the trial, Education Minister Nicole Belloubet said.

"What we would like to see is if, yes or no, wearing a uniform can create tranquility in classrooms," Belloubet said. "We know you learn better in a peaceful environment."

Students in Beziers, a town under the governance of the far right and facing high unemployment rates, were recently invited, along with their parents, to collect their uniforms consisting of a navy blue blazer with the school logo, two white polo shirts, a gray pullover, a pair of trousers and either shorts for boys or a skirt for girls, with the city and local education authority sharing the cost of 200 euros (\$217) for each uniform.

"The implementation of uniforms would assist in the fight against bullying," Beziers' Mayor Robert Menard said.

"When you're rich or poor, you don't dress exactly the same way," he said. Now, "it will be less visible".

### Opposition voiced

The initiative has faced strong opposition from some teachers, students and parents, with critics arguing that the funds would be more beneficial if allocated to other aspects of public education aimed at enhancing learning.

The SE-UNSA teachers' union criticized the measure, saying that it is a "superficial response to a fundamental problem" that would "in no way help resolve the troubles and failures of students".

"A poor child wearing a uniform remains a poor child," Michel Tondellier, a sociologist and lecturer at Antilles University, was quoted by The Guardian as saying. "One-size-fits-all clothing will not eradicate socioeconomic inequalities, but only attenuate their most visible aspects."

Schools have until June to take part in the initiative, which has garnered support from first lady Brigitte Macron, a former drama teacher, as well as far-right former presidential candidate Marine Le Pen, who both endorse the implementation of a compulsory dress code.

## Italy shipwreck survivors call for justice one year on

CROTONE, Italy — Survivors and family members of victims of a tragic shipwreck a year ago that killed 94 migrants, including 35 minors, just a few meters off Italy's southern coast, returned for three days of commemorations ending on Monday, calling for justice to be done.

A torchlight vigil on the beach where the ship was wrecked, a photo exhibition and a protest march were among events organized by a group of activists named Network Feb 26 — after the date of the tragedy — around the town of Crotona. Most of the dead came from countries in the Middle East or South Asia.

"One year after the carnage, their right to the truth, to justice and to be reunited with their families has not been guaranteed yet," the group wrote on its Facebook page.

On Feb 26 last year, a wooden boat departed from Türkiye carrying about 200 migrants and sank just a few meters off the coast of



Two survivors of the Feb 26, 2023, shipwreck visit a photo exhibition on the disaster in Crotona, Italy, on Saturday. VALERIA FERRARO / AP

southern Calabria, while trying to land on the seaside resort beach of Steccato di Cutro.

Over the past year, survivors and relatives of the victims have voiced their rage, stressing that the trage-

dy could have been avoided if authorities reacted earlier to the migrants' desperate calls for help.

At a news conference held in Crotona on Monday, some relatives of the victims announced they intend

to sue the Italian government for failing to rescue the boat in distress and for damages suffered by the families.

The group Network Feb 26 includes more than 400 associations that have repeatedly asked the Italian government to seek the truth about one of the deadliest migrant shipwrecks in the Mediterranean.

It has denounced repeated policy failures and alleged violations of human rights by Italian and European Union authorities, seen as the main cause behind the long string of deaths of migrants who face risky trips to reach European coasts in their search for a better life.

Activists have also complained that some of the relatives and survivors were denied the right to return to Crotona for the anniversary of the shipwreck because of difficulties in obtaining proper documents.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## WORLD

# Conservation efforts bring rich dividends

Kenya's fishermen maintain balance between use, protection of biodiversity

By EDITH MUTETHYA  
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The community-led projects initiated along the Kenyan coastline to find a balance between use and conservation, and fishermen's needs today and their fate tomorrow, are bearing fruit.

As delegates from more than 180 nations gather in Nairobi this week for the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, with protecting biodiversity a major topic of discussion, these coastal communities have shown they are able to sustainably earn their living without overexploitation of living marine resources.

Watamu, a small town in Kilifi County about 108 kilometers north of the port city of Mombasa, boasts clean beaches, rich and diverse bird life, dugongs, turtles and fish, thanks to community-led conservation efforts.

Turtle conservation is one of the key community-led projects along Watamu coastline. It's run by the Local Ocean Conservation, a non-profit organization committed to the protection of Kenya's marine environment.

Started in 1997, the project consists of a nest monitoring and protection program, a bycatch net release program, and a specialist rehabilitation center for sick and injured sea turtles. Bycatch is the portion of a commercial fishing catch that comprises marine animals caught unintentionally.

Nest monitoring involves patrolling the beaches day and night by a dedicated team from the local community to protect the female sea turtles coming to nest, their eggs and their hatchlings from predators like crabs and birds. They also relocate nests that are at risk from natural or human dangers.

"When a nest is hatching, we make sure as many turtles as possible make it to the ocean. Many die before getting into the water because they are eaten by crabs and birds," Teresa Njeri, marine education coordinator at the Local Ocean Conservation, said.

She said turtles are not carried back to the ocean because doing so would interfere with their memory, so they are allowed to make their own way. Once they are fully grown, turtles head back to where they were born to mate.

"We usually make runways for them so that they follow one route instead of dispersing all over," she said.

Njeri said turtles are indicators of a healthy marine ecosystem, and the reason they are conserving them. They help in maintaining the balance in the ecosystem.

Green turtles graze on seagrass beds thus increasing productivity and nutrient content of the beds, benefiting other species in the food web.

Leatherback turtles, on the other hand, feed on jellyfish, thus controlling them. Jellyfish feed on fish larvae, hence they can wipe out the fish population when they are in high numbers.

Additionally, nutrients left behind by decomposing eggshells

or hatchlings that die benefit coastal vegetation. Hawksbill turtles aid reefs by eating sponges that compete with them for space.

On the bycatch and release program, the organization works closely with the fishermen and the Kenya Wildlife Service.

"In case of accidental catch of turtles, the fishermen call us to go and rescue them. If it's a healthy turtle, we assess, tag and release it back to the ocean. The tagging helps in case the turtle is stuck in another country," she said.

Njeri said they give incentives to fishermen who bring accidentally caught turtles to the organization.

To date, more than 23,218 turtle rescues have been conducted with the collected data providing insights into turtle behavior and physiology.

Sick and injured turtles are monitored and nursed back to health at the organization's rehabilitation center and then returned to the ocean. The facility also serves as an educational tool for local and international visitors.

More than 810 patients have been treated at the facility so far, with afflictions ranging from exhaustion and minor injuries from fishing nets and hooks to severe spear gun puncture wounds and predation injuries.

## Habitat restoration

About 7 kilometers from the Local Ocean Conservation, another community is running Dabaso Creek Conservation Group, a 46-member group, that focuses on crab fattening, beach cleaning, conservation education awareness, and habitat restoration. It also runs an eco-restaurant and boardwalk.

The group fattens crabs in a cage system under technical knowledge from the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute. In this way, the demand for wild crabs is eased, contributing to the protection of local wild crab species.

Kahindi Charo, the group's marketing manager, said the crabs are fattened for at most two months in 20 structures, each holding 10 cages. Each cage holds one crab.

Initially, they sold the crabs to the local hotels but later on they established their own restaurant, The Crab Shack.

"We send fishermen to bring us crabs. We then sell the bigger ones in our restaurant and fatten the small ones in the cages. If a 300-gram crab is well-fed, within one month it doubles the weight," he said, adding that the demand is still higher than the supply especially during the Christmas holidays.

The Crab Shack restaurant is popular with tourists, who visit the place for seafood delicacies, including the popular crab samosas, and drinks as they watch sunset over Mida Creek.

The 32-square-kilometer broad water tidal creek is surrounded by extensive mangroves and lined with palms, and is one of the most beautiful natural attractions on the Kenyan coast.

Some of the profits from the restaurant go toward conservation of the creek's wildlife and mangroves.



A wounded man lies on a cart as Palestinians gather to wait for trucks carrying bags of flour to arrive near an Israeli checkpoint in Gaza City on Monday. MAHMOUD ISSA / REUTERS

## Airman dies after self-immolating in protest against attacks on Gaza

WASHINGTON/GAZA — An active-duty member of the US Air Force, who set himself on fire outside the Israeli embassy in Washington in an apparent act of protest against Israeli raids on Gaza, has died, the military and local police said on Monday.

Senior airman Aaron Bushnell, 25, a cyber defense operations specialist with the 531st Intelligence Support Squadron, died from injuries sustained in the incident, the Air Force said in a statement.

"When a tragedy like this occurs, every member of the Air Force feels it," US Air Force Colonel Celina Noyes said in the statement.

Lee Lepe, a spokesman for the District of Columbia Metropolitan Police Department, confirmed the death.

The Pentagon said the death was a "tragic event" and that US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin was following the situation.

Bushnell was initially hospitalized in critical condition after US Secret Service officers put out the flames on Sunday. Bushnell, wearing military fatigues, broadcast the incident live over the internet.

"I will no longer be complicit in genocide," the man said before dousing himself in a clear liquid and setting himself on fire, screaming "Free Palestine," according to a video seen by Reuters.

"We express our heartfelt condolences and full solidarity with the family and friends of the pilot Aaron Bushnell, who immortalized his

name as a defender of human values and the plight of the Palestinian people, who are oppressed by the American administration and its unjust policies," Hamas said in a post on Telegram.

The incident comes amid ongoing pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli protests in the United States following the Oct 7 attack on Israel by Hamas that killed 1,200 Israelis and seized 253 hostages in a cross-border attack.

Israeli forces then launched a military campaign against the group that rules Gaza, destroying much of the coastal enclave, with nearly 30,000 people confirmed killed, according to Palestinian health officials.

## Negotiations underway

Negotiators from the US, Egypt and Qatar are working on a framework deal under which Hamas would free some of the dozens of hostages it holds, in exchange for the release of Palestinian prisoners and a six-week halt in fighting. During the temporary pause, negotiations would continue over the release of the remaining hostages.

US President Joe Biden said on Monday that Israel would be willing to halt its fighting against Hamas in Gaza during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan if a deal is reached to release some of the hostages held by the militants.

Biden said on Monday that he hopes a cease-fire deal could take effect by next week. However, at the

same time, Biden did not call for an end to the conflict.

Hamas has said it received a draft proposal from Gaza truce talks in Paris, which includes a 40-day pause in all military operations and the exchange of Palestinian prisoners for Israeli hostages at a ratio of 10 to one, a senior source close to the talks told Reuters on Tuesday.

Under the proposed cease-fire, hospitals and bakeries in Gaza would be repaired, 500 aid trucks would enter into the strip each day and thousands of tents and caravans would be delivered to house the displaced, the source said.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said earlier that the army had presented to its cabinet its operational plan for a ground offensive in Rafah, Gaza's southernmost town along the border with Egypt, where 1.4 million Palestinians have sought safety.

In response to the resignation of the Palestinian government led by Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayeh, a UN spokesman said the world body wants to see a strengthened and empowered Palestinian government.

The United Nations stands ready to continue supporting efforts aimed at overcoming the humanitarian, political, financial as well as security challenges facing the Palestinian people, the spokesman said.

AGENCIES—XINHUA



## Moving house

The Stage Coach Inn building is transported along corn fields to avoid power lines in West Liberty, Iowa, on Sunday. The building was moved about 4.8 kilometers by the West Liberty Heritage Foundation to Heritage Park. SAVANNAH BLAKE VIA AP

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## At UN, China calls for aid to make it to Gaza

By MINGMEI LI at the United Nations  
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A Chinese envoy at the United Nations said on Tuesday that China will make "tireless" efforts to restore peace, save lives and ensure that humanitarian aid makes it to Gaza.

More than four months since the outbreak of the conflict in Gaza, nearly 30,000 civilians have died, and Gaza "has sunk into an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe," said Dai Bing, chargé d'affaires a.i. for China's UN mission.

Dai said that what is happening in Gaza violates international law and "goes beyond the bottom line of human morality and conscience, as millions of people in Gaza are suffering the pain of losing their loved ones or still unable to find safe shelter after multiple times of forced displacement."

"People lack the most basic safety guarantees and supplies for survival

and are constantly faced with the threat of death, hunger, and disease," Dai said. "Women and children are living in fear and desperation every single day."

China urges the international society to take action to protect civilians, save lives and make every effort to prevent an even greater humanitarian disaster, he said.

Dai noted that the UN Security Council has adopted resolutions 2712 and 2720, calling for aid to get through and for the release of hostages.

"However, due to man-made obstacles, the entry of humanitarian supplies into Gaza has faced many difficulties. For nearly a month now, the humanitarian supplies received in Gaza have been far below the average of earlier periods, and Northern Gaza has not received any humanitarian supplies," Dai said.

"We call on Israel to earnestly fulfill its obligations as the occupying power

under the Geneva Convention, fully cooperate in the implementation of Security Council resolutions, open up all land, sea, and air access routes, and ensure the safe, rapid, and unimpeded entry of humanitarian supplies."

Dai said that Israel "should strictly comply with the requirements of the de-confliction mechanism, guarantee the safety of humanitarian agencies and personnel, and provide necessary facilitation for humanitarian agencies to carry out assistance in Gaza."

The International Court of Justice ordered provisional measures that require Israel "to take all measures to prevent genocide and provide the population in Gaza with urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance, and the order must be effectively implemented," Dai added.

Dai said that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is the "lifeline" for the people in Gaza,

## Plan to offer apology for racist laws 'insufficient'

SAN FRANCISCO — San Francisco's supervisors plan to offer a formal apology to black residents for decades of racist laws and policies perpetrated by the city, a long-awaited first step as it considers providing reparations.

The San Francisco Board of Supervisors was scheduled to vote on Tuesday on the resolution apologizing to African Americans and their descendants. All 11 members have signed on as sponsors, guaranteeing its passage. It would be one of the first major US cities to do so.

The resolution calls on San Francisco to not repeat the harmful policies and practices. There are about 46,000 black residents in San Francisco.

"An apology from this city is very concrete and is not just symbolic, as admitting fault is a major step in making amends," Shamann Walton, the only black member of the board and chief proponent of reparations, said at a committee hearing on the resolution earlier this month.

However, others say the apology is insufficient on its own for true atonement.

Amos C. Brown, a member of the San Francisco reparations advisory committee that proposed the apology among other recommendations, said: "An apology is just cotton candy rhetoric. What we need is concrete actions."

An apology would be the first reparations recommendation to be realized of more than 100 proposals the city committee has made. The African American Reparations Advisory Committee also proposed that every eligible black adult receive a \$5 million lump-sum cash payment and a guaranteed income of nearly \$100,000 a year to remedy San Francisco's deep racial wealth gap.

## No action

But there has been no action on those and other proposals. Mayor London Breed, who is black, has stated she believes reparations should be handled at the national level. Facing a budget crunch, her administration eliminated \$4 million for a proposed reparations office in cuts this year.

Reparations advocates at the previous hearing expressed frustration with the slow pace of government action, saying that black residents continue to lag in metrics related to health, education and income.

Black people, for example, make up 38 percent of San Francisco's homeless population despite being less than 6 percent of the general population, according to a 2022 federal count.

Cheryl Thornton, a San Francisco city employee who is black, said in an interview after the committee hearing that an apology alone does little to address current problems, such as shorter life spans for black people.

"That's why reparations is important in healthcare," she said. "And it's just because of the lack of healthy food, the lack of access to medical care and the lack of access to quality education."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



A rescue team releases an endangered sea turtle into the sea at the Watamu National Marine Park in Kenya in August. PHOTO PROVIDED BY LOCAL OCEAN CONSERVATION

## BUSINESS

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## At Asia events, C919, ARJ21 go global

By ZHU WENQIAN  
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The C919, China's domestically developed single-aisle passenger jet, and the ARJ21, a regional jet, have begun their two-week demonstration flights in Southeast Asia, indicating a brisk start to their overseas marketing, an expert said.

The two Chinese-developed aircraft started their demonstration flights at Van Don International Airport in Vietnam on Tuesday. In the two-week period, they will cover Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia and Indonesia, according to their manufacturer Commercial Aircraft Corp of China.

The flights will verify the adaptability of the aircraft models to airports and routes in Southeast Asia, the adaptability of ground service and equipment of local airports, the applicability of special flight procedures, and the economy of commercial operations, COMAC said.

During the events, the two aircraft will be also on static display, and COMAC will conduct product promotional activities to attract potential customers.

"By demonstrating the good performance of the aircraft models to its potential customers, COMAC hopes to gain more potential



A C919 passenger jet is displayed at the Singapore Airshow in Singapore. THEN CHIH WEY / XINHUA

orders and lay the foundation for future market development in Southeast Asia," said Lin Zhijie, a civil aviation industry analyst.

The two planes impressed audiences and experts alike at the Singapore Airshow, the biennial event that concluded on Sunday.

The ARJ21, China's first domestically developed regional passenger jet, was put into commercial operation in 2016. The model has clocked more than 11 million passenger trips and 127 aircraft have been delivered. With a flying range of 2,225 kilometers to 3,700 km, the ARJ21 is mainly used to meet the transportation demand between major cities and surrounding smaller cities.

TransNusa Airlines, an Indonesian carrier and the first overseas

customer of the ARJ21, currently operates two ARJ21 planes. Based in Jakarta, it has launched four routes using the aircraft model, and has transported more than 100,000 passenger trips. With a large number of islands, the country is suitable for the operation of regional airliners.

For Southeast Asian customers, COMAC has established a regional representative office and built a regional warehouse for aviation materials in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, in South China.

Next, relying on customers' own maintenance, repair and overhaul facilities, it will build a maintenance network. Besides, the aircraft manufacturer plans to serve Southeast Asian and global customers by setting up training bas-

es near customers and providing customers with high-quality operational support.

The C919, comparable with the narrowbody Airbus A320 and the Boeing B737 series, has 158 to 192 seats and a flying range of 4,075 km to 5,555 km. The model made its first commercial flight in May 2023. Four C919 jets have been put into commercial operations by Shanghai-based China Eastern Airlines and handled more than 130,000 passenger trips.

So far, the C919 has netted more than 1,100 orders from home and abroad. As the global air travel market continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, the C919 is expected to meet growing travel demand and break the market duopoly of Boeing and Airbus.

## Plans on for big city cluster with capital at core

NDRC: Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region set for more coordinated development

By OUYANG SHIJIA  
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China is considering building a global city cluster in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region — and more steps to further promote the coordinated development of the region are in the offing, according to the country's top economic regulator.

Guo Lanfeng, a member of the CPC Leadership Group of the National Development and Reform Commission, pledged further steps to promote high-quality development in the region's key areas, in a bid to create a world-class city cluster with Beijing as the core.

"We will formulate and introduce policy measures to support the high-quality development of Tianjin's Binhai New Area, continue to do a good job in the coordinated high-quality development of (Beijing's sub-center in) Tongzhou district and neighboring Sanhe city, Xianghe county and Dachang Hui autonomous county in Hebei province," he said at a news conference in Beijing on Tuesday.

"We will also leverage the leading role of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region in driving the development of surrounding areas such as Shandong province, the Inner Mongolia autonomous region and Shanxi province."

The focus will also be placed on relocating some non-essential industries from Beijing that are not commensurate with the city's role as the national capital, promoting the high-quality development of Beijing's sub-center in Tongzhou and Xiongan New Area in Hebei and advancing coordination on rules in key areas, Guo said.

The region needs to take a step forward in terms of accelerating the removal of barriers to the free flow

and optimal allocation of production factors. More efforts will be made to integrate the industrial chain and supply chain to promote more scientific research and institutional cooperation in open platforms such as free trade zones, to jointly align with high-standard international economic and trade rules, he said.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the implementation of the strategy for Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei coordinated development. During the past few years, the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region has witnessed rapid development in regional economic integration.

The combined GDP of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region reached 10.4 trillion yuan (\$1.44 trillion) in 2023, 1.9 times that of 2013, offering the latest proof of China's coordinated high-quality development at regional level, data from the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics showed.

Xia Linmao, executive vice-mayor of Beijing, said Beijing will continue to promote the high-quality development of its sub-center in Tongzhou, with focus on handling the relationship with Xiongan New Area, Beijing's central urban area, and its surrounding areas.

Looking ahead, Beijing's sub-center will continue to maintain an annual investment intensity of more than 100 billion yuan, he said.

During the news conference, Liu Guiping, executive vice-mayor of Tianjin, highlighted the importance of pursuing coordinated development between Beijing and Tianjin by further widening and deepening cooperation. More efforts will be made to boost scientific and technological innovation, and deepen cooperation in fields like infrastructure, public services, social governance and environmental protection.

## Terminus opens intl headquarters in Dubai

By ZHONG NAN  
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Amid increased efforts by many Middle Eastern countries to utilize the digital economy for sustainable growth, Terminus Group — a Beijing-based artificial intelligence services provider — has launched its international headquarters in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, to capture a larger market share in the region.

The new headquarters, operational since Friday, will facilitate Terminus' projects and business expansion initiatives in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman and other countries in the region. It will also support the group's operations in Singapore and Australia, as well as many countries participating in the Belt and Road Initiative.

The Chinese company will set up an AI laboratory in the new facility, focusing on cutting-edge exploration in the field of AI and the development of targeted solutions for the international market.

Victor Ai, founder and CEO of Terminus Group, said that as many Middle Eastern countries strive to advance in eco-friendly energy,

manufacturing and smart city initiatives, the company aims to fully capitalize on its AIoT (artificial intelligence of things) strengths to engage in related projects in these markets and contribute to regional prosperity.

Since 2020, Terminus has experienced significant growth in its international business, leveraging global platforms such as Expo 2020 Dubai. Supported by more than 1,000 employees in both China and overseas, Terminus enjoys a market presence in more than 10 countries, including Singapore, Australia, Zimbabwe and Bahrain.

Ai said that the digital economy in the Middle East has tremendous potential for development. Accelerating joint construction of the Digital Silk Road between China and Middle Eastern countries will help further share the opportunities of the digital economy between both sides and maximize the results of such joint efforts.

Sharing similar views, Abdulla Al Saleh, undersecretary of foreign trade and industry at the UAE's Ministry of Economy, said that the economic and trade relations between the UAE and China have kept strengthening and growing

prosperously, and the commercial, investment, energy and technological cooperation between the two countries has been deepening and making remarkable progress.

Many Middle Eastern countries highly value and encourage development of the digital economy to enhance the resilience and sustainability of their economies.

For instance, Bahrain's government has introduced Bahrain Economic Vision 2030, along with initiatives such as the Cloud First Policy, aimed at establishing the country as a regional data hub and developing a comprehensive data ecosystem.

Similarly, Saudi Arabia has outlined a national transformation program within its Saudi Vision 2030 — a transformative economic and social reform blueprint. The program emphasizes digital entrepreneurship, investment in digital technologies and the enhancement of digital education and training.

According to a report published by UBS Group AG — a Switzerland-based multinational investment bank — the size of the digital economy in the Middle East is projected to grow from \$180 billion in 2022 to

\$780 billion by 2030, with an average compound annual growth rate of 20 percent. This makes it one of the fastest-growing regions in the global digital economy over the coming years.

With the rapid development of Chinese technology, "Made in China" and "globalization" have become labels of Chinese business culture, said Liu Jianli, a researcher at the Beijing-based Institute of Industrial Economics, which is affiliated with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

"The journey of Chinese companies in going global has significantly evolved from their early roots in traditional manufacturing and infrastructure development industries to today's focus on technology, e-commerce and culture," Liu said.

China's nonfinancial outbound direct investment (ODI) increased 16.7 percent year-on-year to 916.99 billion yuan (\$127.41 billion) in 2023, said the Ministry of Commerce.

In the meantime, Chinese companies' nonfinancial ODI over the same period in other countries participating in the BRI amounted to 224.09 billion yuan, an increase of 28.4 percent year-on-year.

## Briefly

## China to better guard industrial firms' data

China has released a three-year plan to enhance the protection of industrial firms' data. From 2024 to 2026, China will work to raise awareness of data protection, protect important industrial data, strengthen data security management at key enterprises, and enhance data protection in key scenarios, according to a plan released by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology. The plan specifies 11 tasks to improve the country's ability to protect industrial firms' data, regulate data security and support the data security industry.

## Warehouse storage sector expands

China's warehouse storage industry got off to a smooth start in 2024, with development remaining in expansionary territory, according to a survey released by the China Federation of Logistics and Purchasing and CMST Development Co Ltd. The index tracking the sector's development came in at 51.2 percent in January, edging down 0.4 percentage point month-on-month. A reading above 50 percent indicates expansion, while a reading below 50 percent reflects contraction.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

## Huaneng to step up investments in new energy projects

By ZHENG XIN  
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China Huaneng Group, the second-largest power utility in the world by installed capacity, said it will increase investments in new energy projects, including solar and offshore wind power, this year amid the country's green energy transition.

The company said during a news conference in Beijing on Monday that it will invest in 222 such projects nationwide this year, as part of efforts toward green and low-carbon transformation.

The company recently initiated and resumed construction of new energy projects with a combined capacity of nearly 34 million kilowatts, it said.

Huaneng's accumulated installed capacity of new energy projects exceeded 72 million kilowatts last year and new energy generation surpassed 100 billion

kilowatt-hours for the first time.

The proportion of low-carbon clean energy installed capacity in the company's overall capacity increased by 5.4 percentage points year-on-year, it said.

Li Lailong, head of Huaneng's planning and new energy business department, said the company's heightened investments illustrate its commitment to sustainable and clean energy development.

Huaneng will further increase technology empowerment and innovation, intensifying efforts in research and development with a focus on pioneering technologies crucial to the evolution of the energy sector, he said.

The active involvement of Huaneng, one of the largest State-owned power generation companies in China, in various new energy projects across the country aligns with the nation's broader goals of transitioning toward a greener and more sustainable ener-

gy landscape, said Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University.

The company's expansion in the new energy sector will further strengthen its position as a leading contributor to the country's green transition, Lin said.

The significant scale of construction and production underscores the company's efforts to diversify its energy portfolio, he said.

By investing in regions like the Shandong Peninsula and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, Huaneng is contributing to the growth of new energy capacities in key economic zones in China, he said.

Lin added that the remarkable surge in investments in the renewable energy sector in China underscores the country's strategic focus on diversifying its energy portfolio and reducing reliance on traditional sources.

Investments in China's energy sector surged last year on the back of the government's commitment to fortify the country's energy infrastructure and embrace diverse energy formats, with total investment in key energy projects under construction or those newly initiated rising to 2.8 trillion yuan last year, according to the National Energy Administration.

This year marks the largest scale of construction and production for Huaneng in offshore wind projects since 2021, with such projects of scale located in the Liaoning Bay, Shandong Peninsula, Yangtze River Delta region and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, it said.

The company will also accelerate the construction of hydropower projects in the country's southwest regions this year, to further alleviate local supply-demand imbalances while optimizing the local power structure and ensuring stable power supply, it said.



Technicians check photovoltaic power facilities in Yixing, Jiangsu province. DING HUANXIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

A mega photovoltaic and energy storage project, located in Southwest China's Xizang autonomous region, commenced construction on Monday.

With an installed capacity of 250,000 kilowatts, the project features a 50 megawatts/200 megawatt-hours energy storage system, making it the largest solar and energy storage project in Xizang to date.

Scheduled for grid connection in June, the project is expected to gen-

erate an annual output exceeding 490 million kilowatt-hours, equivalent to replacing about 119,000 metric tons of standard coal and reducing carbon dioxide emissions by around 329,000 tons annually.

The completion of this project is poised to accelerate the development of clean energy in the region, contributing to local economic and social development while effectively addressing local power supply and demand challenges, it said.

## BUSINESS



Visitors check out AstraZeneca products during the sixth China International Import Expo in Shanghai in November. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## AstraZeneca sets global strategic center in Shanghai

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai  
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Multinational pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca said on Monday that Shanghai will be its fifth global strategic center, leveraging on the city's as well as China's market strength and reflecting the confidence of the United Kingdom-based company's development in the country.

Following the four strategic centers in the UK's Cambridge, Boston and Gaithersburg in the United States, and Gothenburg, Sweden, which all focus on research and development, the one in Shanghai will become another global strategic center but integrates R&D, commercial and production operations.

It will also function as an important strategic fulcrum for AstraZeneca's global strategy, R&D and long-term development, the company said.

Chen Jining, Party secretary of Shanghai, met with Pascal Soriot, CEO of AstraZeneca, and his team, the same day.

"The purpose of leading the global senior management team to Shanghai is to deepen their understanding of China and Shanghai, continue to increase investment in innovation, and carry out more in-depth cooperation with local innovative pharmaceutical companies in China, so as to make greater

"We'll make every effort to create a first-class business environment that is market-oriented, law-based and internationalized, and provide a full range of high-quality services for global enterprises and talent to thrive in Shanghai."

Chen Jining, Party secretary of Shanghai

contributions to promoting high-quality development of Shanghai's pharmaceutical industry and better benefit patients around the world," Soriot said.

The company's Asia-Pacific headquarters, China headquarters and global R&D China center are located in Shanghai.

Chen said that biomedicine is one of the three leading industries in Shanghai. Since last year, Shanghai has unveiled a number of inno-

vative policies to support enterprises and promote new breakthroughs in R&D facilitation, innovative drug and device listings as well as clinical trials.

"We'll make every effort to create a first-class business environment that is market-oriented, law-based and internationalized, and provide a full range of high-quality services for global enterprises and talent to thrive in Shanghai," said Chen.

Data from the Shanghai Municipal Science and Technology Commission showed that the industrial scale of Shanghai's biomedical industry jumped from 383.3 billion yuan (\$53.25 billion) in 2019 to 933.7 billion yuan last year.

Sharon Barr, executive vice-president of biopharmaceuticals R&D at AstraZeneca, said that the proportion of China R&D in the company's global R&D has been growing constantly.

"Over the past decade, we have 167 studies in China. In addition to that, our China team leads studies that are global. So, from China, we are initiating and leading studies that span the entire planet," she said.

Barr also said that in the clinical development space, partners in China have an edge in being creative and innovative.

"They test new concepts, and they do this at scale with large patient populations. Also, they use

innovative approaches, like leveraging investigator-initiated trials to test our molecules in real populations and understand how they're best working. That's a unique and collaborative approach that's not seen everywhere," she said.

AstraZeneca also unveiled a plan to assist 30 Shanghai enterprises to go global in 2024. The plan will cover emerging markets involved in the Belt and Road Initiative as well as the US, Japan, and some developed countries in Europe. Through two-way visits, the company will promote cross-border cooperation and exchanges in pharmaceutical innovation.

This will also help strengthen the connection between Shanghai and the international innovation ecosystem, and enhance the city's international reputation as a science and technology innovation hub, said the company.

Guo Shuting, deputy director of the Shanghai Medical Products Administration, said that among the 10 most representative trades of license-out in the country in 2022, five involved Shanghai-based enterprises with a total amount exceeding \$4.7 billion.

Trades of license-out refer to a local enterprise conducting early drug R&D and authorizing the project to other pharmaceutical businesses for later clinical R&D and marketing.

## Foreign firms bullish on China market

Survey shows players still committed to country, buoyed by business prospects

By ZHENG CAIXIONG  
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About 62 percent of foreign companies in China have chosen not to shift their investments out of the country, as they believe that the nation has large room for further development, according to a recent survey.

Among these foreign-funded enterprises, 66 percent of US companies said they remain committed to the Chinese market, representing the highest proportion of all businesses studied, according to the 2024 Special Report on the State of Business in South China.

The report was released by the American Chamber of Commerce in South China, or AmCham South China, on Tuesday. It is based on interviews with 183 member companies late last year.

"Not a single company declared a complete withdrawal from the Chinese market," said Harley Seyedin, president of AmCham South China, at a news conference in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, on Tuesday.

About 76 percent of polled companies plan to reinvest in China this year — one percentage point higher than in 2022, Seyedin said.

Meanwhile, 88 percent of polled companies reported profits in China, among which 46 percent reported that they had met their budget expectations. Also, 90 percent of the polled US companies have achieved profitability in China.

Among the companies that have yet to make profits in China, 60 percent said they expected to achieve profitability within two years, while 15 percent believe it will take over six years.

"Generally speaking, the polled companies believe that they enjoy a high rate of return on investment (ROI) in China," said Seyedin.

Eighty percent of these companies reported that their overall ROI in China is positive, or very positive — a proportion far higher than the average positive ROI (74 percent) during three years of the COVID-19 pandemic, he added.

Compared with their overall return on global investment, over half of the companies studied (51 percent) believe their overall ROI in China is better, said Seyedin.

Referring to business in the Chinese market, 62 percent of the companies said they are bullish on prospects here.

Seyedin said the Chinese economy in 2023 beat its annual growth target, with GDP expanding 5.2 percent and reaching a total of \$17.52 trillion.

"The country is estimated to have contributed around one-third of global economic growth last year, remaining a crucial locomotive in promoting the world's economy," he said.

"According to a study by Enright, Scott and Associates, foreign-invested enterprises account for 33 percent of China's GDP and 27 percent of its

"Not a single company declared a complete withdrawal from the Chinese market."

Harley Seyedin, president, American Chamber of Commerce in South China

employment," said Seyedin, adding that US companies also contribute big to China's GDP.

"This explains the reason why foreign enterprises, however cautiously, continue their interest in the Chinese market in spite of continued difficulties facing all companies — such as the impact of three years of COVID-19, interruptions in the supply chain, shipping container shortages, exorbitant cost of international travel and logistics and anemic world demand."

Seyedin said the proportion of US companies budgeting to reinvest \$250 million or more has increased to 4 percent.

"Sales, marketing and business development remain the primary areas of reinvestment for our member companies. But at the same time, they are also paying attention to innovation and talent cultivation."

"This will strengthen corporate competitiveness and provide momentum for China's transition from high-speed growth to high-quality development," said Seyedin.

Guangzhou has been recognized for seven consecutive years as the most preferred investment destination in China, followed by Shenzhen in Guangdong province, Shanghai, and Beijing, he said.

Seyedin said he believes the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area will be attractive for international investors in the following years, as the cities in the cluster have strong complementarity in terms of their major growth drivers, such as Shenzhen's innovation talent and Dongguan's manufacturing prowess.

Official statistics showed that the GBA, which includes nine Guangdong cities, and the Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions, reached a GDP of more than 13 trillion yuan (\$1.83 trillion) last year.

William Huang, managing partner, Guangzhou branch, South China, Ernst and Young Hua Ming LLP, also said he is confident of the GBA's future development, as the region has the country's strongest economic vitality.

The GBA has been boosting infrastructure to support its interconnectivity, allowing people in the GBA to travel more efficiently through high-speed railway services and expressway networks, Huang said.

Efforts are also being made to facilitate connections between system mechanisms, laws and regulations and mutual recognition of certificates, he added.

## Danone posts strong biz results in nation

By WANG ZHUOQIONG  
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Sports drink Mizone and infant nutrition products continued to drive the performance of food and beverage giant Danone in financial year 2023.

The company experienced strong competitive growth in China, Japan, Australia and New Zealand, according to its financial report.

China, North Asia and Oceania delivered 74 percent like-for-like sales growth in the fourth quarter from 817 million euros (\$887 million) to 822 million euros. For the full year, sales rose 10.1 percent to 3.5 billion euros from 3.42 billion euros compared with a year ago.

In China, specialized nutrition maintained its momentum, in both infant nutrition and medical nutrition. Mizone also performed strongly.

In 2023, the region of China, North Asia and Oceania saw Mizone bottled water and beverage sales of 692 million euros, up 14.1



Danone's booth is seen during an expo in Wuhan, Hubei province, in June. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

percent year-on-year. Its specialized nutrition sector, including its infant nutrition brand Aptamil, achieved net sales of 2.4 billion euros, up 8.3 percent.

Zhu Danpeng, a food and drink analyst in China, said Danone was one of the earliest multinational brands to enter China. Its brand, scale and fans have started to show an evident upside effect.

Aptamil initially focused on cross-border e-commerce sales, later expanding into all channels. With its unique and differentiated product advantages, Aptamil achieved growth through new mom care groups and marketing

through positive consumer reviews, said Zhu.

Danone's Group Deputy CEO Juergen Esser said that in the infant milk formula business in China, Aptamil posted another quarter of solid growth and continued to gain more market share, thanks to local team's efforts alongside tight controls over inventories and pricing, especially during the market transition from old to newly registered recipes.

Their medical portfolio in China registered double-digit growth, driven by both adult nutrition and pediatric specialties.

"In water, Mizone delivered another quarter of double-digit

growth led by market share volume gains," he said.

Antoine de Saint-Affrique, CEO of Danone, said the company is satisfied with the quality and quantity of growth in China. "The business remains extraordinarily strong," said the CEO. He highlighted the launch of Essensis, the top product in its premium portfolio of infant milk formula, with promising initial feedback.

In the infant milk formula category, the company has opportunities for penetration into third- and fourth-tier cities, he added.

For adult consumers, the company will keep growing, leveraging its pharmaceutical license in China to focus more on post-hospital discharge patients with nutritional powders and expand its product offerings.

The CEO said 2023 was a year of consistent progress and strong deliveries, with a focus on reintegrating science into their operations and linking sustainability with business performance.

"We made significant progress in sharpening our portfolio. We further invested behind our brands, our innovations and our capabilities, progressively improving the quality of our growth," he said.

In terms of the company's global performance, it posted fourth-quarter sales of 6.7 billion euros, up 5.1 percent on a like-for-like basis. In 2023, consolidated sales stood at 27.6 billion euros, up 7 percent on a like-for-like basis.



Harley Seyedin (second right), president of AmCham South China, addresses a conference on the release of the 2024 Special Report on the State of Business in South China in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, on Tuesday. ZHENG CAIXIONG / CHINA DAILY

# BUSINESSFOCUS

By ZHENG YIRAN in Beijing  
and YUAN HUTI in Hohhot

In the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, the small town of Ningcheng produces some two-thirds of all the cat litter in China, and one-fifth of the world's total, with the business bringing improved livelihoods to locals.

The sector has developed to such a scale that a major cat litter industry conference was held in Ningcheng county last year. During the event, industry experts, academicians and entrepreneurs gathered to discuss the development of the business. Ningcheng inked deals with three cat litter enterprises worth over 850 million yuan (\$118 million).

Pursuant to the signings, Ningcheng plans to build up the largest bentonite cat litter production base in China — and likely the world's biggest as well — targeting annual production of 2.4 million metric tons.

Cat litter can be divided into clumping and non-clumping varieties, with the former currently most widely used as it has strong moisture absorption and good deodorization properties, as well as being easier to clean. Bentonite is the main component of clumping cat litter. It has good physical and chemical properties, and can be used as a purification and decolorization agent, binder, suspension agent and catalyst. It is also widely used in agriculture, light industry, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals and other applications.

Ningcheng boasts 16.4 million tons of bentonite and 2 billion tons of potential mineral resources. It is one of the high-quality bentonite raw material bases in the country. Cat litter enterprises in Ningcheng have rich experience and technological advantages in the fields of bentonite and kaolin processing, and have conducted extensive research into lightweight cat litter and aseptic technologies.

Bentonite cat litter produced in Ningcheng is sold to more than 80 countries and regions around the world. In the domestic market, products are mainly sold in first and second-tier cities, while in overseas markets, they are mainly sold to Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Japan, South Korea and Indonesia.

With decades of development, bentonite cat litter produced in Ningcheng is highly recognized by the market. Official data showed that local annual sales have reached 1.5 million tons, while demand has been constantly rising.

Zhang Yongsheng, deputy general manager of Ningcheng County Chong'ai Pet Products Co Ltd, said: "In terms of technology, we have introduced advanced granulation machines, dust removal and other equipment. Through the introduction of advanced talent alongside research and development transformation, we have made breakthroughs in coagulation, deodorization, dust-free qualities and renewable properties of cat litter products. Meanwhile, working with the Ningcheng Cat Litter Industry Association and the School of Materials Science and Engineering at the University of Science and Technology Beijing, we have made innovations and reforms in cat litter manufacturing technology, taking a leading role in the industry."



## Inner Mongolia town top cat in kitty litter biz

Ningcheng makes two-thirds of products sold nationwide



Zhang said that currently, the main distribution channels of the company are Alibaba International, offline exhibitions, social network platforms, independent networks and customer referrals. More than 80 percent of products are exported to over 80 countries and regions in Southeast Asia, South America and

the Middle East. Meanwhile, in the domestic market, products are sold via e-commerce platforms, pet stores and shopping malls, and sales have been growing at a compound annual growth rate of around 20 percent.

Zhang Wenhan, head of the Ningcheng Cat Litter Industry Association, said that the cat litter business

in Ningcheng is promising. "The local industry started at a relatively early stage. The county boasts mature technology and rich natural resources, which conform to the development basis of the industry. The county has established an industry association, and held the first industry conference, constantly

**Above:** A visitor checks out cat litter products during a pet supplies expo in Shanghai in May.

PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY  
**Left:** Researchers test cat litter quality at a lab in Chifeng, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, in November.

QI XUETAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

“The county boasts mature technology and rich natural resources, which conform to the development basis of the industry.”

Zhang Wenhan, head of the Ningcheng Cat Litter Industry Association

enhancing its industrial influence. In addition, the local government has included cat litter industry development into the government work plan, and has been optimizing the business environment. There are vast business opportunities," Zhang said.

He said the pet economy in China is still at an initial stage, and the annual growth rate of the market over the past five years has surpassed 10 percent. During the pandemic, the growth rate was as high as over 20 percent.

"With the increasingly graying society, the continuous increase of urbanization rates in China, and backed by the development and scale of overseas pet markets, the sector in China is expected to grow rapidly," Zhang added.

According to a recent report jointly issued by the National Technical Committee on Pet of Standardization Administration, the China Pet Industry Association, the Chinese Veterinary Medical Association and Beijing-based pet platform Pethadoop, China is now the world's second-largest pet market, with the urban pet market worth some 279.3 billion yuan in 2023, up 3.2 percent on a yearly basis. The pet canine market in cities in 2023 rose 0.9 percent year-on-year, while the pet feline sector grew 6 percent.

In 2023, the number of pet dogs nationwide totaled 51.75 million, up 1.1 percent on a yearly basis. Meanwhile, pet cats reached 69.8 million, 6.8 percent higher than the 2022 total.

According to the report, post-1990s and post-1980s pet owners were still the main consumption demographic in the sector, with the number of post-1990s and post-1980s pet owners growing 2.1 percentage points and 10.8 percentage points, respectively.

With the market boom, Zhang suggested the area grasp business opportunities and tap into the cat litter market.

"Taking advantage of the local high-quality bentonite resources, and making full use of the Ningcheng Cat Litter Industry Association, we should further explore business opportunities in the pet economy, and make Ningcheng a renowned spot for cat litter and the pet economy," he said.

According to a guideline issued by the bureau of industry and information technology in Ningcheng, it plans to invest 1 billion yuan to build a national-level cat litter technology industry park, which is estimated to take up 800 mu (5.33 hectares) and produce over 600,000 tons of cat litter annually.

Meanwhile, it plans to join 32 cat litter enterprises in the area to establish an industry association, register for a Ningcheng cat litter geographical indication trademark, and set up an industry standard for bentonite cat litter.

Chen Qiang, head of the bureau, said: "We will strengthen technological support, enhance product quality, effectively solve the problem of cat litter export tax refunds, vigorously develop the sector, and actively organize enterprises to participate in exhibitions to promote the development of the cat litter business in Ningcheng."

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## Pet-friendly cafes make 'purrfect' combo

By ZHENG YIRAN

With consumption upgrades and the growth of cat and dog owners, pet cafes — a new business concept — are gaining popularity across the country.

For Yu Miao, a 30-year-old cat owner in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, one of the criteria when she selects a coffee shop is whether it is pet-friendly.

"There are so many coffee shops in Hangzhou. As a cat owner, I sometimes take my cat out, and I would like to choose a coffee shop that allows my cat to accompany me in cafes," she said.

With the number of animal lovers like Yu growing in recent years, pet-friendly coffee shops are sprouting up like mushrooms after a spring shower.

At a pet-friendly cafe in Hangzhou's Hubin business area, a steady stream of coffee fans arrive for a cup of joe with their trusty four-legged friends in tow. The shop is divided into two sections. The outside portion is for canines and their masters while the inside area is for felines. The venue can accommodate up to 60 such furry creatures, with a wide

variety of breeds popular among young brewed-beverage fans.

Duan Mu, owner of the coffee shop, said that it has been popular ever since its opening in April, especially during weekends, when single-day passenger flows can be as high as over 500.

"Due to limited living space and busy work schedules, many young people are now unable to raise pets themselves. The pets here satisfy their needs to play with them. To attract more visitors, we also introduced water pufferfish, alpacas and ducks," he said, referring to the several animals he looks after in the shop.

With the expansion of the pet ownership market, pet-friendly coffee shops in other cities are also enjoying wide popularity. "Capacity rates during normal operating days stand at around 70 to 80 percent. During weekends, sometimes visitors have to wait in line before being seated. As customers are all here to enjoy themselves with animals, they think the experience is worth the wait," said a pet-friendly coffee shop owner surnamed Li in Beijing.

In fact, the emergence of pet economy-derived businesses is not acci-

“Young people prefer to pursue personalized, unique user experiences. Pet-friendly coffee shops should think carefully on how to improve products and services to win the hearts of consumers.”

Zhang Shule, a columnist at people.cn

dental. Behind the trend is a huge group of animal lovers who are willing to pay for the well-being of domesticated animals. According to a recent report by market consultancy iiMedia Research, in 2022, the market scale of China's pet economy totaled 493.6 billion yuan (\$68.6 billion), with the penetration rate of families with pets rising year by year. It is expected that the market will reach 811.4 billion yuan by 2025.

China's first cat-friendly coffee shop opened in Guangzhou in 2011. As of February, there were more than 4,000 pet-friendly coffee shops in China, data from corporate data provider Qichacha showed.

Pet-friendly coffee shops can be mainly divided into two modes. One raises cats and dogs in the shop and enables consumers to play with them. These venues charge admission fees in addition to costs for beverages and snacks. Some charge by the hour, while others have no time limits. Taking Shanghai as an example, admission tickets for time-limited cat cafes range from 40 yuan to 200 yuan per hour.

The other model simply allows pets to visit and enjoy coffee with their owners. There is no admission fee levied, but customers need to order if they want to remain on the premises. Some pet-friendly coffee shops do have minimum charges.

Pets are the highlight of pet-friendly coffee shops, but they can also present difficulties. Many shop owners said that there are occasional incidents of cats biting or scratching customers. Although every cat has been fully vaccinated, there are still some customers who demand



Consumers play with cats at a pet cafe in Beijing in June.  
ZOU YU / XINHUA

compensation, especially when children come home after being injured. Parents who are not familiar with the situation often make things more complicated. The cases also happen among dogs and other animals.

Industry experts said that uncontrollable factors associated with such animals often increase the operating costs of pet-friendly cafes, let alone various contagion prevention fees and medical costs of the pets themselves. In addition, there are also hygiene-related food and beverage hazards caused by animals.

Zhang Shule, a columnist at people.cn, said that pet-friendly coffee shops should address the above-mentioned problems in order to build customer loyalty and burnish brand images.

"Meanwhile, they should develop diversified services, such as introducing pet grooming services, to achieve long-term growth. Young people prefer to pursue personalized, unique user experiences. Pet-friendly coffee shops should think carefully about how to improve products and services to win the hearts of consumers," Zhang said.

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## The Philippines blindly upping the ante by betting on US backing for its brinkmanship

The record of the law enforcement actions taken by the China Coast Guard so far this year shows that two-fourths of them have been in response to provocations by the Philippines.

In February alone, the CCG released at least five notices or statements on measures that it had been forced to take because of the Philippines' provocative activities around Chinese islands and reefs in the South China Sea, namely Huangyan Island and Ren'ai Reef.

Taking advantage of the restraint China has shown, the Philippines has sent its coast guard ships, government vessels and fishing boats to repeatedly trespass into waters adjacent to Huangyan Island. It has also repeatedly and with increasing frequency attempted to send building materials to reinforce the disintegrating warship it illegally grounded on China's Ren'ai Reef in 1999.

No country would sit idle in the face of such blatant provocations and infringements on its territorial integrity.

The Foreign Ministry's confirmation that China has recently reinstated a barrier at the mouth of Huangyan Island in the South China Sea should drive home the message that China has both the resolve and the capability to counter the provocative intrusions by the Philippines.

In response to a related question on Monday, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning said China was compelled to take such measures to

firmly safeguard its sovereignty, territorial integrity and maritime rights, and that Manila bears all the blame for the latest escalation of tensions, which is the outcome of its imprudent bravado.

It is no secret that much of the Philippines' newly found brio stems from the support of the United States, which is seeking to use the maritime disputes between the Philippines and China to advance its own strategic goals in the region.

It is at the incitement of Washington that Manila has recklessly upped the ante with its antics in the South China Sea since last year.

Hence, the latest measure taken by China near Huangyan Island is fully justified and necessary.

Manila should recognize it is a clear warning that it should stop playing with fire.

Both Manila and Washington should not be lulled into the false sense of security that their games are without risks. They are rashly raising the stakes by continuously ratcheting up tensions in the South China Sea. Both would suffer consequences from a head-on clash with China, no matter what the scale.

Back in 2012, Manila did not gain any advantage from unilaterally stoking tensions on Huangyan Island, which led to a standoff with China in the waters that lasted for weeks.

It will also fail to benefit from its doubled-down roguery this time. It will pay a dear price if it continues to bet on the US' aggressive wagering in the South China Sea for its brinkmanship with China.

## Germany should name pipelines saboteur

Denmark announced on Monday that it had ended its investigation into the explosions that damaged the underwater Nord Stream gas pipelines in September 2022, with the Danish authorities saying the "comprehensive and complex" probe jointly carried out by the Copenhagen Police and the Danish security service concluded the blasts were acts of sabotage, but they did not have sufficient grounds to pursue a criminal case.

The announcement came after Sweden closed its investigation into the explosions earlier this month. While its investigation came to the same conclusion, Swedish officials went so far as to say that a state actor was the most likely culprit. But they too refused to point the finger at the perpetrator, saying the country didn't have jurisdiction.

The two countries' investigation materials remain confidential, but Sweden has said it had handed over to the German authorities "material that can be used as evidence" in investigation that Germany is carrying out.

It is clear from what they have said that both Denmark and Sweden have identified the country responsible for blowing up the pipelines, but they are unwilling to say which one it was.

The Germans are therefore bound to reach the same conclusion.

The resounding silence over the Danish and Swedish investigations' conclusions, which have no doubt been quietly revealed to friendly ears, are in a stark contrast to the hasty and loud allegations made by some Western countries in the immediate

aftermath of the explosions that Russia's was the hand behind the sabotage.

There is no reason why the Western nations, which are accustomed to blaming Russia for many a wrong committed, would not rush to point the finger at Russia if there was evidence to back up their accusation.

The country/countries that neither Denmark nor Sweden is willing to publicly name, also had the weight, or the necessary support, to block a public, independent probe of what was also a huge environmental crime as early as March 2023 when Russia moved to form such an investigative committee under the auspices of the United Nations.

As Zhang Jun, China's permanent representative to the UN, said at the time, those countries that blocked the international investigation only called into question their motives and raised suspicions that they had something to hide.

An impartial international investigation into the Nord Stream pipeline explosions is important because it was the sabotaging of cross-border infrastructure. Pursuing the responsibility of the perpetrator/s concerns the interests of every country. That's why China continues to call for an objective and professional investigation to hold the hand/s behind the act answerable for the crime.

Announcing the end of its investigation, Sweden said that it was not pursuing the case as the perpetrator/s posed no threat to its national security. But Germany's national security, in the form of its energy security at least, has been threatened. It should bite the bullet and name the party responsible.

## Cold War mentality burns for 60 Minutes

Despite his candidness, United States Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns' interview with CBS' 60 Minutes, which aired on Friday, offered little that was fresh.

Burns has made good use of the past two years since he came to China to cultivate a friendly and open image. But as the interview revealed, the veteran US diplomat, who has served both Republican and Democratic administrations, still harbors a Cold War mentality, a defining feature of the China hawks who inhabit Washington.

He echoed their typical scaremongering, claiming that China, which has repeatedly stressed otherwise, wants to overtake the United States as the dominant country globally. Ringing a fearful alarm, Burns told Lesley Stahl, a reporter of the CBS News program, "We don't want that to happen. We don't want to live in a world where the Chinese are the dominant country".

Burns arrived at that point after taking the initiative to hype up the Chinese mainland's higher rate of "air activity and naval activity" near the island of Taiwan since then House of Representatives speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to it in August 2022, which he decried as "intimidating, meant to intimidate".

As a senior and professional diplomat and a scholar in international relations during the Cold War, Burns should have a very clear understanding

of the Taiwan question, and thus how provocative Pelosi's visit was, and how provocative it was meant to be. He will also be well aware that it is Washington that has been playing the Taiwan card to try and intimidate Beijing, in violation of the promises and the commitments that it has made.

Burns should also be reminded that many nations do not want to live in a world where the US remains dominant as a rogue country that defies the accepted rules of behavior at will, and engineers confrontations, conflicts and wars.

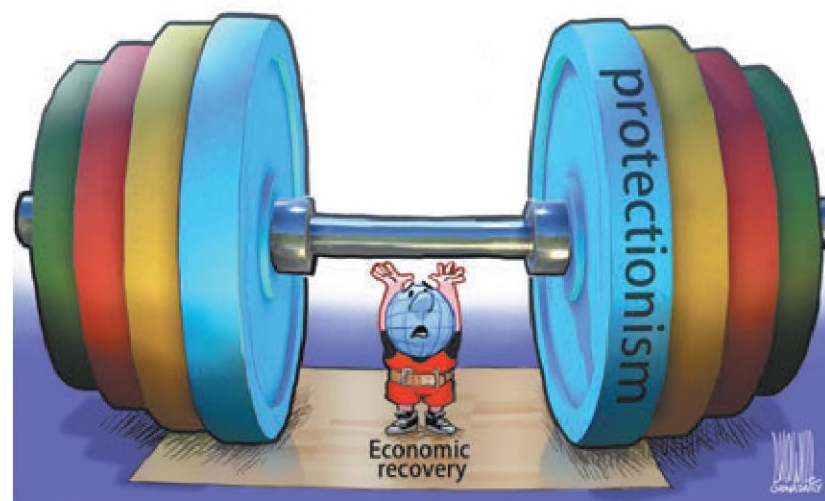
Like China, they want a multipolar world that is fairer, more peaceful and stable, and an international system that fosters common development and shared security.

If the US thinks that China represents a threat to the world, it is telling the world that maintaining an unfair system, starting wars and keeping the development gap are exactly what it wants.

By presenting a false picture that there is "a competition of ideas" between "America's big idea of a democratic society and human freedom" and China's ideas as a "communist state", Burns only showed how US minds remain mired in the Cold War era.

US ideas have benefited the world tremendously. But true democracy and freedom are open to the ideas of all. Diversity, inclusiveness, harmony and mutual learning are the practical ideas that China offers the world as a "communist state".

Luo Jie



## Opinion Line

## Varying manufacturing recovery casts shadow on global growth

The recovery of global manufacturing in the past month has given a boost to global economic growth expectations, but under the influence of declining growth momentum and high inflation, the recovery of global manufacturing has been varying in different regions.

China and other emerging markets and developing economies have displayed remarkable resilience in the development of their manufacturing industries in the face of complex and severe situations. Statistics from the China Federation of Logistics and Purchasing show that Asia's manufacturing purchasing managers' index rose above 50 percent again in January, and China's manufacturing PMI in particular rose 0.2 percentage points in January from the previous month.

Compared with the previous month, members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, except the Philippines, saw their manufacturing PMI rising to varying

degrees in January. Brazil and Mexico, too, saw a significant rise.

Although the manufacturing industry in Africa has declined, the index level has stayed at around 49 percent for two consecutive months, and many countries have introduced economic reforms to promote diversified development and improve economic resilience, contributing to their steady economic recovery.

S&P global data shows that the eurozone's manufacturing PMI was higher than market expectations in January, hitting a new high in nearly 10 months, but relevant data fell sharply in February. Not only that, as a main engine of the eurozone's economy, Germany's manufacturing PMI fell sharply after six consecutive months of growth. The zero or negative growth of Germany's heavy industry for a fourth quarter in a row has also put pressure on the eurozone's economy. In mid-February, a European Commis-

sion report lowered the growth rate of the EU's economy in 2024 from 1.3 percent to 0.9 percent, and that of the eurozone economy from 1.2 percent to 0.8 percent. The Deutsche Bundesbank has also warned that Germany's economy could shrink slightly in the first quarter of this year, slipping into a technical recession.

Although the manufacturing index in the United States has rebounded, many believe it is difficult for the US economy to grow under high interest rates. A Wells Fargo Bank report believes that as the US' job market tends to saturate and layoffs begin to increase, the US economy is expected to cool sharply in the coming months.

Since the beginning of this year, central banks in Europe and the US are asking for suppressing market expectations of rapid interest rate cuts, reflecting concerns about the risks from quick rate cuts.

— ECONOMIC DAILY

## Making payment easier for foreigners, seniors

At the State Council executive meeting on Feb 23, a guiding document on further optimizing payment services and improving convenience of payment was reviewed and approved. Focusing on the inconvenience faced by senior citizens and foreigners visiting China, the guiding document aims at promoting multiple payment methods such as mobile payment, bank cards and cash.

With mobile payment so convenient for many, it has created digital divides, not only between the young and the elderly, but also between locals and foreigners.

Especially, as China's visa-free policy continues to expand, coupled with the recovery of cross-border tourism following the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of foreign visitors to China has been increasing.

China has a developed system of mobile payments, while many other countries and regions still use credit cards and cash. Efforts should be made to include cash and bank card payments along with mobile payments.

Bank fee rates can be lowered to encourage businesses to use point of sale machines, enabling cus-

tomers to pay by card.

In 2022, the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, together with relevant departments, encouraged payment through card swiping, QR code scanning and cash payments, which was aimed at further strengthening the compatibility of existing mobile payment options for foreigners.

Finally, it should be noted that such relaxations do not mean the efforts to popularize mobile payments will stagnate. On the contrary, both need to be advanced in parallel.

— BEIJING NEWS

## What They Say

## State of Palestine elusive solution to conflict

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh announced the resignation of his government on Monday, and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas accepted it later the same day.

That move paves the way for a shake-up in the Palestinian National Authority that is conducive to putting an end to the de facto split between Fatah, which dominated the PNA that governs the West Bank and Gaza, which has been seen as being a Palestinian enclave under Hamas' control, since 2007.

Reportedly, Russia has already invited the two sides, along with other Palestinian factions, to hold negotiations with the aim of forming a unified governing body, toward which most of the invitees held an open attitude.

Although both the United States and Israel would also like to see that, there is a big gap between what they want from the future Pal-

estinian governing body and what the Palestinian people want from it. Not to mention the difficulty in forming an authority that can please all sides at the same time given the differences between them as exposed in 2007.

It remains to be seen to what extent the Gaza conflict can prompt the different Palestinian factions to shelve their disputes and pool their efforts to realize the common goal of founding an independent and sovereign state of Palestine.

Based on the two-state solution of the United Nations, apart from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the Palestine State should include East Jerusalem, which Israel has occupied since 1967, and some other area that Israel has exercised de facto control over in the past decades.

But even if Fatah and Hamas can join hands temporarily in the face of common external threats, it might be very difficult for Washing-

ton and Tel Aviv to accept such a Palestinian State. What they want to see is a Hamas-free Gaza that Israel exercises actual control over and a US-friendly West Bank controlled by a US-proxy government.

Abbas is expected to choose Mohammad Mustafa, chairman of the Palestine Investment Fund, as the next prime minister. Mustafa is a US-educated economist who has held senior positions in the World Bank and has a good, longstanding working relationship with US officials. If so, whether the Moscow-brokered negotiations of different Palestinian factions can yield their expected results remains to be seen.

One thing the West must bear in mind is that the bloodshed in Gaza has only consolidated the Palestinian people's determination to protect their own lives and rights to an overdue statehood, rather than subjugating it.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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## COMMENT

Nie Jun

## Consumption upgrade boosts new productive forces

In the pursuit of economic growth, enhancing productivity is of crucial importance. New productive forces, grounded in cutting-edge technologies and emerging industries, serve as a novel force driving output. The development of such productivity is driven not only by the intrinsic demand for China's economic transformation and high-quality development but also from the external pressures due to the fast-changing global economic landscape.

To harness new productive forces, therefore, we need a synergistic alignment with the evolving needs of the people to foster a virtuous cycle of supply and demand.

It is important to assert here that new productive forces are the organic integration of new technologies, pathways and industries.

**New Technologies:** Productivity growth primarily hinges on innovations in technology, akin to the transformative impacts witnessed during past technological revolutions in the West. The digital and green revolutions have been rapidly unfolding, ushering in a plethora of general-purpose technologies, epitomized by innovative products such as ChatGPT.

China has already gained an advantage in these revolutions, laying a solid foundation for the Fourth Industrial Revolution and new productive forces.

**New Pathways:** Since the launch of reform and opening-up, China has gained knowledge of and developed advanced technologies, following the path of "intro-

duction, digestion, absorption and re-innovation" to catch up with the Western developed economies. However, since leading-edge technologies in Western countries are often intrinsic to their resource endowments, not necessarily compatible with China's comparative advantages, the difficulty in surpassing them following the same path is considerable. Hence, it is necessary to integrate China's unique characteristics and forge new advantages and paths in technological development, facilitating a strategic big leap forward.

The United States' leap ahead of Germany in the chemical industry — transitioning from coal-based to oil-based processes — and its strategic pivot from chemical to biomedicine in the medical field is a vivid illustration of its astute lane-changing strategy.

**New Industries:** New industries are carriers of new productive forces, embodying the commercial realization of new technologies and pathways. As technologies mature and develop large-scale production capability, strategic emerging industries are formed. These industries are characterized by knowledge-intensive operations, minimal resource consumption, substantial growth potential and potential positive benefits. Strategic emerging industries can lead to a harmonized integration with new labor forces, new capital, new infrastructure, new organizational structures and new governance models.

To develop new productive forces, it's also crucial to align with the evolving demands of the people, because that creates a dynam-

**There is a need to improve financial, tax and industrial policies, too, which support innovation and foster the deep integration of talent, innovation, industry and capital chains.**

ic, positive and efficient growth path where demand drives supply and supply stimulates demand.

As China's per capita income continues to increase, consumer preferences are changing, as reflected in the rising demand for better, world-class products and services. With their focus shifting from having enough goods for basic sustenance, consumers are now seeking much better quality and a wider variety of goods and services. This transition extends beyond material goods, with a gradual shift from demand for tangible products to a pursuit of service-oriented offerings in areas such as culture, eldercare, healthcare and finance.

To effectively boost new productive forces, it is imperative to respond to the escalating demands of the people. In domains witnessing rapid growth in consumer demand, new technologies must be harnessed to form innovative industries, with the upgraded consumer needs driving new productive forces.

China's unique market advantages — marked by its vast scale, diverse supply and demand regime, innovations and robust driving force — provide an ideal experimental ground for various new technologies, formats and models to hasten the industrialization process.

By tapping into the huge Chinese market, the diverse supply and demand structure and dynamic innovation process, numerous local innovative companies that succeeded in the Chinese market have emerged as global leaders. Reforms, continuously unleashing the domestic potential demand, leveraging China's market advantages and integrating technological innovation resources through consumer upgrading, are the crucial pathways for the development of new productive forces.

Simultaneously, the development of new productive forces serves as a key means of upgrading consumption and enhancing the well-being of the people. The emergence of new productivity not only fuels economic growth but also increases wages and household incomes, ensuring continuous consumption upgrading, and thus building a virtuous cycle of "high output, high income, high consumption and high welfare".

Moreover, the alignment of new production generated by new productive forces with new consumption coming from consumption upgrading helps keep the balance between supply and demand, and thus maintains price stability and ensures the stability of financial markets and monetary

policies — laying the foundation for China's long-term stable growth.

As far as policy is concerned, there is a need to further optimize the policy framework supporting new productive forces. This involves enhancing the efficient, collaborative and open system of promoting innovations, emphasizing the role of market mechanisms and entities, and facilitating positive interactions between demand-driven innovation and innovation-driven demand. It is also necessary to fine-tune the allocation of innovation resources and establish a dynamic technology governance system through multi-entity collaborative partnerships.

There is a need to improve financial, tax and industrial policies, too, which support innovation and foster the deep integration of talent, innovation, industry and capital chains. And building a favorable environment and micro-ecosystem for promoting innovations and entrepreneurship is necessary to increase input in science and technology R&D, improve financial technology, and refine mechanisms for the transformation of technological achievements.

Furthermore, following digitization and the rule of law and expediting the construction of a unified national market are also necessary to expand the demand for new productive forces.

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Mercy Tedeku

## China's diversified and deepened engagement with Africa

In the dynamic landscape of Sino-African relations, the year 2024 is unfolding as a pivotal chapter, marked by the impending Ninth Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in China. FOCAC 2024 signifies not only a renewed commitment to enhance collaboration between China and Africa but also a year of looking ahead, where the outcomes of various initiatives in the Africa-China space are expected to be reviewed and the way forward discussed.

Amid this pivotal event, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi recently concluded his first foreign trip of the year to Africa as part of the established tradition. Wang's visit marked the 34th consecutive year Africa has been the chosen destination for the Chinese foreign minister's first overseas visit.

His visits to Egypt, Tunisia, Togo and Cote d'Ivoire are of great diplomatic importance in the context of broader Africa-China engagement. Beyond the formal platforms of the FOCAC and the Belt and Road Initiative, the visits not only serve as a dynamic channel to deepen bilateral cooperation, address issues of mutual benefit and set the stage for a future characterized by strengthened diplomatic ties but also send a powerful signal regarding the future trajectory of Africa-China collaboration.

**Economic cooperation has far-reaching impact**

During Wang's latest visit to Africa, China's diplomatic relations with the four countries were reviewed, with the focus being on key areas such as the economy, infrastructure, healthcare, agriculture, education and culture. The China-Togo relationship, spanning over half a century, and the China-Tunisia relationship, which completes 60 years this year, were highlighted for their importance and for China's firm support and continuous enhancement of political mutual trust.

As for Wang's visit to Cote d'Ivoire, the emphasis was on the two countries' friendship and partnership for development, which are yielding some tangible, mutually beneficial results — notably, China's contribution to Cote d'Ivoire as it hosted and won the just-concluded 34th Africa Cup of Nations showcasing the diverse facets of collaboration.

Egypt, on the other hand, was congratulated for becoming a new member of BRICS from Jan 1.

Wang's discussions in each of the four countries focused on strengthening economic ties and promoting development initiatives. Discussions revolved around increasing trade volumes, diversifying trade products and promoting investment in key sectors such as infrastructure, manufacturing, agriculture and the implementation of the Belt and Road projects with special, renewed emphasis on environmental sustainability.

The visits also showcased China's commitment to promote peace and stability in the African continent. Wang emphasized China's support for Africa-led initiatives and China's willingness to contribute to resolving regional conflicts.

In Egypt, hotspot issues especially the



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

**The result will be a strengthened partnership, deeper bilateral cooperation, and a shared commitment to achieve development goals.**

Israel-Palestine conflict and its spillover effects on the region, the Red Sea turmoil, for example, were discussed, with the two sides asserting there is a need for an immediate cease-fire, in order to prevent the further escalation of the conflict. Wang emphasized that China supports African countries' efforts to safeguard their sovereignty, territorial integrity and national security. It also supports African countries in their quest for strength and to choose

their respective development paths with African characteristics, so that they continue to develop further while maintaining their independence and stability.

The fact that Africa has been the chosen destination for the Chinese foreign minister's first overseas visit for 34 consecutive years shows the importance China attaches to its diplomatic ties with African countries.

The China-Africa friendship has withstood many challenges, is proud of its accomplishments and is looking forward to a promising future. It demonstrates China's commitment to maintain and deepen its relationship with the continent, highlighting the long-standing and enduring nature of their partnership.

Wang's annual tour to Africa not only reinforces the long-standing diplomatic relationship between China and African countries but also demonstrates China's

dedication to further boost collaboration and cooperation with Africa. The visits therefore have significant implications for the future trajectory of Africa-China relations.

Also, the emphasis on continuous enhancement of political mutual trust, as seen in the case of China and Togo, suggests a commitment to a stable and supportive political relationship. In fact, this trust is the foundation for deeper cooperation in various domains.

The commitment to advance pragmatic cooperation and opening up new prospects for bilateral relations, guided by the consensus reached by the heads of state, implies a forward-looking approach. Both China and Togo asserted they are committed to exploring new opportunities and adapting their collaboration to the changing circumstances, while China envisions

greater collaboration in emerging fields such as green development, digitalization and healthcare.

As Africa's economic and technological landscapes undergo transformation, China aims to support its partners in leveraging these opportunities to achieve sustainable development.

The discussions between Wang and the African countries' leaders and officials underscored a shared vision for development, focusing on economic growth and sustainable development. China's commitment to further develop the Belt and Road Initiative aligns with Africa's aspirations for infrastructure development and economic transformation.

Wang's latest visits to Africa also show China's aim is to strengthen trade ties with African countries, help them improve their infrastructure, and increase investments in sectors such as mining, agriculture, manufacturing and energy for mutual benefit.

**China's engagement with Africa diversifying and deepening**

China's engagement with the African countries is aimed at diversifying and deepening its partnerships on the continent. This strategy promotes inclusivity and allows for a more comprehensive and robust collaboration in various fields. By visiting countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, Togo and Cote d'Ivoire, Wang has taken bilateral relations beyond traditional partnerships, which reflects China's intention to engage with a diverse range of African nations and highlights China's recognition of Africa's growing importance on the global stage and its desire to forge stronger relationships with a broader array of African states.

That China has helped build three of the six soccer stadiums that hosted the just-concluded Africa Cup of Nations shows the diversification of collaboration and cooperation between China and African countries. China's engagement with African countries goes beyond the traditional areas to cover the cultural and sporting fields as well.

In conclusion, Wang's visits to Africa highlight China's commitment to deepen cooperation in key areas such as the economy, infrastructure, healthcare, agriculture, education and culture. It signifies a forward-looking approach, the enduring nature of diplomatic ties and a dedication to explore new opportunities.

The result will be a strengthened partnership, deeper bilateral cooperation and a shared commitment to achieve development goals. The visits serve as not only a testament to the diplomatic relationship between China and African countries but also a proactive step toward shaping a future characterized by strengthened diplomatic ties, mutual benefit and shared prosperity.

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## GLOBAL VIEWS

HAN XIANDONG

## Crucible of challenges

Major-country relations in Northeast Asia are complex and intertwined

In recent years, major-country competition, characterized by the United States' suppression and containment of countries such as China and Russia, has emerged as a key factor influencing the global and regional orders. However, competition is neither the defining trend of the era nor the whole of major-country relations. Cooperation still plays an important role in major-country relations.

Currently, the main factors driving the evolution of geopolitical landscape in Northeast Asia include China-US relations, the domestic politics and economy of regional countries, and the Ukraine crisis.

First, China-US ties concern not only the two nations. The intensity of the competition between them and the extent of their cooperation affect the strategic decisions of other regional countries in Northeast Asia. If the US continues to challenge China's bottom line on issues concerning its core interests such as the Taiwan question, there is a genuine risk of a direct China-US conflict. If the US respects China's core interests and manages the bilateral relations in a responsible way, the competition will develop in a stable way and steer the Northeast Asia region away from a full-scale confrontation.

The meeting between the leaders of the two countries last November laid out the future-oriented "San Francisco vision", pointing out the direction for the healthy, stable and sustainable development of China-US ties. The meeting injected a strong dose of certainty and stability into a volatile world.

Second, the domestic politics of the US and the Republic of Korea are also important factors shaping the future of Northeast Asia.

The ROK is a "structural power" which endows the nation with an influence that's beyond its real strength. The country's policy decisions have a big impact on the relations among regional nations and combination of power. The ROK has deep-seated political divisions, with the progressive party and the conservative party having taken divergent stances on many issues such as the control of its military forces in times of war, the transformation of



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

US-ROK alliance, the "United Nations Command", the establishment of a peace mechanism of the Korean Peninsula, as well as the policies toward the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Japan.

The domestic politics of the US is another key factor affecting the order of Northeast Asia. Since Joe Biden took office as president, his administration has had a

consistently low approval rate, hovering around 40 percent. The US Congress has grown ever more polarized, and it's increasingly impossible for the Democrats and the Republicans to work together and make compromises on key issues. A return of Donald Trump to office after the 2024 presidential election in November would have a big impact on the US' policy toward

Russia, its attitude toward allies in the Asia-Pacific region, and its DPRK policy, thus affecting the security policies of and relations among Northeast Asian countries and inducing changes in the regional political landscape.

Third, in today's world, due to the global division of labor and the forming of supply chains, economic elements, such as tech-

nologies, materials, energy, food, finance, and market, might be used by major countries as instruments or tools in their competition with each other. However, natural resources endowment and position in the global industry chains, as well as the interdependent relations developed among countries mean that no country can wield these "tools" unscrupulously.

The ROK and Japan are highly reliant on China both for materials and market. And the three neighboring countries have developed close partnerships via the industrial division of labor. The volume of intermediate goods trade is a key indicator of the closeness of the three countries in their industry chains. From 1998 to 2022, the intermediate goods trade took a majority share in China-Japan trade. And research by ROK scholars shows that in 2020, among the 5,300 types of goods the ROK imported from China, 1,088 had a rate of dependency on China of over 50 percent, while 653 types had a rate of over 70 percent, among which 604 were intermediate goods. The data show that it is impractical for the ROK and Japan to decouple from China in the short term.

For high-tech companies of the ROK and Japan, it best suits their interests to have both access to US technologies and the Chinese market. It is likely that both countries will cave to the US pressure and choose US technologies over the Chinese market. However, once they lose the Chinese market, the technologies would ultimately become valueless. Recently, Chey Tae-won, the chairman of the SK Group, said if the ROK gives up the large market of China, the country won't be able to recover. That the US replaced the hype of "decoupling" with a more low-profile "de-risking" also indicates that economic elements are also shaping the regional landscape.

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HE YUN

## Stakes couldn't be higher

US raising tariffs on Chinese-made solar imports would sacrifice a shared sustainable future for marginal commercial gains today

Last month, a bipartisan group of US senators called on President Joe Biden to increase tariffs on Chinese-made solar imports. They argue China's heavily subsidized products undermine the efforts of the United States to rebuild domestic manufacturing. However, imposing additional tariffs would be a regressive step, threatening the US' vibrant clean energy economy and green jobs. It risks unwinding climate progress and international cooperation at this pivotal moment when solar power is essential for an urgent and just transition. Rather than confrontation, competing clean tech superpowers must prioritize the shared goal of rapid decarbonization.

The powerful US solar lobby argues that cheap Chinese photovoltaic imports have posed threats to US manufacturers and energy security. They downplay the vast economic potential of affordable panels to electrify the US with sustainable energy and downsize carbon footprints across key industries, not to mention tariffs are like quicksand — they spark retaliation ad infinitum until everyone gets dragged down, as the US-China trade war has showed.

First, knee-jerk tariffs will hurt US consumers and the adoption of green technologies the most. Chinese solar is unbeatably cheap. Average US panels cost around 40 cents per watt against Europe's 30 cents and China's 15 cents. Imposing solar tariffs risks torpedoing US President Biden's ambition to reach 50 percent clean electricity by 2030, as it will drive up prices when affordability is most critical for adoption.

Second, tariffs are job killers for the US' booming clean economy. Cheap Chinese imports drive rapid growth in higher-value solar construction, maintenance and design jobs on US soil. Destroying this golden goose by boosting a small fraction of manufacturing jobs makes little sense.

Third, cheap solar energy helps cushion the impact on households and businesses from rising electricity prices driven by volatile gas costs and reduces overall inflationary pressure at this delicate economic moment. Why undermine the competitiveness of renewable energy? It is the ultimate antidote to inflation and gas volatility.

Fourth, turnkey tariffs overlook China's geographical edge in production. According to a report by the International Energy Agen-

cy, China's investment in solar PV manufacturing capacity significantly exceeds that of other regions. It accounts for more than 80 percent of all manufacturing stages for solar panels. Whether Washington raises tariffs or subsidizes US capacity, hyper-efficient Chinese costs are impossible to compete with. For example, despite trade tensions, China's solar exports grew by 64 percent to \$52 billion in 2022, according to the latest analysis from Wood Mackenzie. China's dominance in solar panel production cannot be easily offset by protectionist trade policies.

What's more, leading Chinese manufacturers such as Longi are expanding manufacturing elsewhere in Asia and even in the US. Washington would have to hike solar tariffs everywhere to make the smallest amount of sense.

Rather than reject China's manufacturing largesse, the US should capitalize on it. Solar energy accounts for just 6.2 percent of US electricity. With abundant land and sunlight, the US has only tapped a very small portion of its solar energy potential. Ambitiously incentivizing deployment of Chinese imports is critical to helping the US catch up in the accelerating global race to clean electricity.

More broadly, the climate crisis transcends borders and requires cooperation between the world's largest economies. We must avoid insular policies made for narrow political or commercial gains that undermine shared progress.

By bowing to protectionist lobbying pressure, the US administration also signals that parochial commercial interests override existential planetary ones.



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

This race can have no winners if climate action stalls worldwide. China's manufacturing ascent ensures solar energy can power emerging economies still reliant on dirty fuels.

Obstructing affordable technology from China would be a drag on the US' own green transition while damaging the trust and

goodwill vital for global climate action.

*The author is an associate professor at Hunan University's School of Public Administration. 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.*

# Z WEEKLY

All about Gen Z



## A modern take on ancient detective tales

A new TV series explores the ancient Chinese detective tales of Judge Dee, blending historical mysteries, AI visuals, and universal values.

**Above:** Zhong Chuxi (left) portrays Empress Wu Zetian and Zhou Yiwei (right) portrays Judge Dee in the new TV series *Judge Dee's Mystery*. **Below and right:** The key elements in eight mystery cases in the series. **Bottom:** The streets of ancient Chang'an generated by AI. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

By WANG XINGWEI  
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When it comes to ancient Chinese detectives, the name Di Renjie, a renowned judge and administrator of the Tang Dynasty (618-907), often springs to mind.

For centuries, Di has been portrayed as a heroic investigator in popular novels and stories throughout ancient China.

Today, this tradition lives on in Chinese entertainment, with numerous TV and film adaptations of Di's detective stories, firmly etching the judge into the public consciousness.

However, what may be lesser-known is Di's growing recognition in the Western world, earning him the moniker of "China's Sherlock Holmes".

Drawing inspiration from Di and the genre of Chinese detective fiction, Dutch Sinologist and diplomat Robert Hans van Gulik crafted his own original historical mystery tales featuring Judge Dee, collectively known as *Judge Dee's Mystery* in the West.

Since their English introduction in the 1950s, according to CGTN, Van Gulik's works have captured the imagination of audiences across Europe and the Americas, with translations available in over a dozen languages.

Now, the popular collection is experiencing a resurgence on television screens.

The new TV series *Judge Dee's Mystery* chronicles the life of esteemed Judge Dee. While solving various criminal cases in different places where he serves during the early stages of his career, Dee also uncovers the mystery surrounding his own birth.

Premiering on China's Central Television and streaming giant Youku on Feb 6, the drama is set to reach audiences worldwide in over 190 countries and regions. Notably, Netflix has acquired the rights to broadcast the series on its platforms, marking its first purchase of an ancient Chinese mystery drama.

The series presents a total of 17 mystery cases, including "The Phoenix Seal", "The Lacquer Screen", and "The Chinese Gold Murders", evoking the suspenseful atmosphere of Van Gulik's detective stories.

Unlike traditional Chinese detective fiction, which often incorporates supernatural elements, the new series emphasizes logic, reason, and realism. Facing a tangled web of cases, Judge Dee and his assistants employ deductive reasoning akin to Sherlock Holmes to crack mysteries.

For instance, in the case of "The Chinese Gold Murders", a ghost ship adrift at sea with no survivors conceals a "Golden Mystery". As Judge Dee delves into the intricacies of the situation, additional mysteries emerge, intertwining with one another.

"I was most impressed by the plot design of this case, taking pleasure in peeling back the layers to find the truth," said actor Zhou Yiwei, who portrays Judge Dee in the series.

However, *Judge Dee's Mystery* is more than a mere detective drama.

"Compared to other adaptations of Di Renjie's stories, our drama stands out for its diversity and inclusivity," said Li Yunliang, the director of the series.

Exploring various landscapes of the Tang Dynasty empire, from the bustling capital Chang'an to the country's remote western regions, the series

explores a wide range of topics, including judiciary, politics, diplomacy, commerce, religion, customs, and social life, while also shedding light on the darker aspects of ancient society.

However, beneath the veneer of Chang'an's vibrant festivities, a hidden undercurrent persists. For example, Empress Wu Zetian challenges aristocratic interests when she fervently promotes comprehensive reform measures.

Despite her progressive vision, Wu faces familial opposition. The disappearance of the "Phoenix Seal", a symbol of the empress' authority, plunges the court into turmoil, jeopardizing her position. Accidentally embroiled in the case, Judge Dee unveils the truth and ascends the ranks of officialdom.

"The dynamic between Wu and Judge Dee is complicated. Sharing similar political philosophy and reformist ideals, they are more like confidants rather than a ruler and a subject. But tensions sometimes arise between the two due to their different positions," explained actress Zhong Chuxi, who portrays Empress Wu in the series.

In addition to broader contexts, the series also explores various stages of Judge Dee's life. "From his early career to retirement in old age, audiences can witness the chronicles of this legendary figure's life, which is rarely seen in other adaptations," Li said.

However, the series never intends to pursue a faithful recreation of the Tang Dynasty but offers a modern interpretation of the classical stories that still resonate with contemporary audiences.

This modern sensibility permeates various aspects of the series, including its visual aesthetics. The busy streets of ancient Chang'an, for example, are brought to life using AI-generated imagery, according to Li, achieving unparalleled visual authenticity.

Reflecting on the recent global fascination with AI-powered video generation models, Li said he believes that embracing AI technology is an inevitable trend in the film and television industries. "Without leveraging AI, it would be impossible to present grand scenes like a ghost ship at sea in our series," he said.

The technical prowess is just one example of the drama's modernity. Through the narrative of Empress Wu Zetian, China's sole female emperor, audiences can also engage with contemporary themes, such as gender equality.

Zhong views Wu as an independent woman with ambitions, political talent, and lofty ideals, which was very unconventional for her time. Her forward-thinking approach to governance, rooted in the rule of law, aligns with Judge Dee's beliefs, leading him to join Wu's ranks and become a pivotal figure in her administration.

"The series weaves the principles of the rule of law throughout its narrative," Zhou said, emphasizing its goal to prompt contemporary audiences to reflect on the essence of law and justice. For him, the spirit of the rule of law lies in developing a better environment for the vulnerable, a universal ideal that resonates across cultures.

Li believes that Western audiences can gain insight into Judge Dee's character and the cultural roots of Chinese civilization.

"Judge Dee exemplifies traditional Chinese virtues and serves as a hero admired by the Chinese people."



## Z WEEKLY

# Vloggers revolutionizing knowledge sharing

Video content creators foster curiosity and understanding through bite-sized knowledge-sharing videos, sparking ongoing learning beyond traditional education, **Meng Wenjie** reports.

Ever wondered why deep-sea fish look so peculiar or how social media apps track your preferences? The answers to these questions can be found in the videos produced by "Chaizhidao", a channel on multiple Chinese video platforms, including Bilibili and Douyin, dedicated to popularizing science.

Wang Zhenxing, the founder of "Chaizhidao", was born in 1992. Recognizing the increasing trend of young people acquiring knowledge through video content, he started pursuing video creation in 2016. His team initially produced both knowledge-based videos and articles. But in 2019, Wang made the decisive commitment to focus solely on video production.

Comprising over a dozen members mainly from Generation Z, Wang's team boasts diverse professional backgrounds in geophysics, engineering, and design, presenting knowledge in each area in a simple and accessible manner.

However, conveying a complex topic in a digestible 5 to 10-minute video format is not simple. To ensure a comprehensive dissemination of scientific insights, Wang's team employs a variety of techniques tailored to the nature of the information at hand. For topics rooted in everyday life, they incorporate live-action or real-life footage to foster a sense of relatability with their audience. For more abstract principles, hand-drawn animations serve as an invaluable tool in visually conveying intricate concepts.

In a video discussing the existence of garbled characters in computers, Wang's team chose to use purely animated illustrations to explain the underlying principles. "We spent nearly three months creating this 15-minute video," he said.

Their hard work has paid off. The channel has attracted over 10 million followers across different platforms.

Learning through short videos has become a popular trend in recent years. A research report released by Bilibili in 2023 revealed that as of March 2023, 243 million users had engaged with knowledge-based content on Bilibili over the past year. This figure surpasses the number of college students in China by 5.5 times, indicating the widespread appeal of this form of learning.

As the audience for such content continues to grow, video bloggers like Wang are witnessing gradual expansion and are playing increasingly significant roles in internet content creation. Notably, the report highlights that in 2023, general knowledge subject videos made up 41 percent of Bilibili's overall content.

The report also suggests that sharing knowledge through videos prompted the emergence of "niche knowledge" and "implicit knowledge" categories. For instance, Bilibili houses numerous content creators from niche industries, such as professional storm photographers, expert donkey hoof trimmers, and cultural relic restorers. Thanks to these video influencers, the implicit knowledge within these fields has now been more widely popularized.

Among the influencers are Xiaotou (pseudonym) and Mingming (pseudonym), a young couple who run a channel on Bilibili named "Xiaotou Mingming TM", dedicated to sharing cultural and artistic knowledge.

Xiaotou, born in 1994, holds a degree in advertising, while Mingming, born in 1995, holds a degree in art. They started the channel in 2020 and their videos primarily delve into art history, shining a light on the untold stories of often-overlooked artists.

"We strive for highly original content, avoiding topics that have already been extensively covered by others," Mingming said. "This drives us to uncover the more unusual and fascinating details of history, highlighting those transparent, inconspicuous, and often overlooked people and stories."

As a female creator, Xiaotou incorporates a distinctive female perspective into the channel. In a special video series titled *Transparent Her*, Xiaotou unveils the stories of female artists and scientists hidden and overlooked in history.

"In my exploration of art history, I have noticed that while male artists often take center stage, females are predominantly cast as models," Xiaotou said.

Motivated by this realization, she immersed herself in various texts, unearthing numerous narratives of female artists tucked away in the margins. She soon discovered that these stories were scattered across different sources and seldom brought to light.

"As a content creator, I understand that tales of renowned figures are more likely to captivate audiences, whereas narratives of lesser-known female artists might not receive as much attention," Xiaotou admitted. However, she still chose to share the brilliance of these inspiring women, bringing courage and strength to a wider audience.

"Hoping to do more than simply recount historical anecdotes or life stories of artists, I aim to explore their connections with life in the process of sharing knowledge, addressing the confusion and difficulties people may encounter in their daily lives," she said.

## Credibility matters

With the emergence of knowledge-based videos, distinguishing reliable and rigorous content among the abundance of available videos can be challenging for many viewers.

Tang Cheng, born in 1990, is a video blogger on Bilibili. He and his wife, Cai Chunlin, both have academic backgrounds in science.



“Creators of authentic popular science content make things better and more rigorous, whereas pseudoscience naturally wanes in influence over time.”

Tang Cheng, a video content creator

“In my exploration of art history, I have noticed that while male artists often take center stage, females are predominantly cast as models.”

Xiaotou (pseudonym) (right), a video content creator



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Wang Zhenxing, a video content creator



Learning through short videos has become a popular trend. VCG AND PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

In 2019, they ventured into producing general life sciences videos on their channel "Fangsi Tafu" (Fun Stuff).

In 2020, Tang started making a series of short videos focusing on dinosaurs. After surveying existing online popular science videos, he found that most of these prehistoric creatures were either conveyed in an overly simplistic manner or were excessively technical.

"Some videos even address dinosaurs by their fossil numbers instead of their names," Tang said. Recognizing the limitations these videos had in providing general viewers with a comprehensive knowledge of dinosaurs, Tang resolved to create his own series.

Fun Stuff's videos blend entertainment with accuracy. Tang's engaging narration, together with captivating scripts, and fitting background music, selected by Cai, transforms paleontology and the history of evolution into an exciting competition.

"Through these videos, I hope to instill a sense of fascination in the audience toward life sciences," Tang said.

When it comes to science content, precision and reliability are the key. Tang once dedicated nearly two months to crafting a video on the evolution of ginkgo trees, with most of his time spent on thorough investigation and verification. Throughout his research, Tang encountered a lack of systematic research papers or monographs on the topic. As a result, he and his team compiled all relevant papers they found so that they could present comprehensive knowledge clearly and engagingly.

"Referring to one research paper after another, we confirmed nearly every statement made in the video," Tang said. "I would venture to say that this video is the first to thoroughly explore the topic of the evolution of ginkgo trees."

Tang perceives pseudoscience as similar to weeds in a field — harmful yet a natural occurrence. "Creators of authentic popular science content make things better and more rigorous, whereas pseudoscience naturally wanes in influence over time," he explained.

According to Wang, a key criterion for assessing the reliability of a popular science video lies in its sources of information.

"If a video relies on information derived from primary research papers or includes perspectives from interviews with experts and scholars in relevant fields, it is generally considered more credible," he said.

Each video crafted by Wang's team demands a minimum of three weeks to produce. In addition to consulting research papers or authoritative literature, they actively engage in interviews with industry professionals.

"Not all knowledge is documented in traditional sources like books and papers, especially information closely tied to contemporary changes. While such information may not have been systematically compiled in literature, it often resides in the minds of experts at the forefront of their fields," he explained.

Feedback from professional viewers also plays an important role in refining the content. If errors or omissions are pointed out, Wang's team will promptly issue corrections in the video's comment section after verification. "Timely corrections upon discovering errors also foster positive interactions with the audience," Wang said.

## Knowledge sprout

It might be true that the entertainment nature of short knowledge-based videos aids in avoiding the typical boredom associated with learning, but how much do they really teach since they're usually only a few minutes long?

"I don't think short videos provide a structured learning experience," said Wang. However, he also stressed that these videos offer fragmented information, supplementing knowledge gained outside traditional education.

"If the videos spark viewers' interest in a specific subject or field and encourage them to delve into structured learning, it's immensely rewarding for popular science content creators," he added.

Mingming drew upon observed data to underscore the benefits of knowledge-based videos for viewers. "The backend data of our videos show peak viewership after lunch, dinner, and on weekends, which means these videos don't disrupt formal education or structured learning. Instead, they replace entertainment time, enabling people to acquire knowledge in bite-sized chunks."

He believes that these snippets of knowledge plant seeds in viewers' minds. For example, he and Xiaotou often receive messages from viewers who, while traveling or visiting a museum, come across a painting mentioned in one of their videos.

Tang shared his perspective on nurturing a healthy ecosystem for popular science. He believes the audience for such content is diverse, each with unique needs.

"For instance, I created a comprehensive popular science video about a particular type of ancient creature. However, some viewers might not even know that such a creature exists. Therefore, even a short introductory video about it provides new knowledge for them," Tang explained.

"As long as it's a rigorous knowledge-sharing video, it's beneficial. Only with numerous reliable creators catering to diverse audiences and producing varied content online can we establish a healthy popular science ecosystem."

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## Z WEEKLY

## Twin sisters transforming lives

Twin sisters with spinal muscular atrophy overcome challenges, pursue a passion for literature, and open a library to inspire others and advocate for rare disease awareness, **Li Xinran** reports.

Rare Disease Day is observed on the final day of February each year. According to the World Health Organization, rare diseases are conditions that affect between 0.065 percent to 0.1 percent of the population. Many of these diseases are congenital, chronic, and often life-threatening.

Zhao Wenjing and Zhao Yajing, both 27 years old, are twin sisters. They are patients with a rare disease known as spinal muscular atrophy, or SMA, which is a progressive autosomal recessive genetic disease. Patients typically experience muscle weakness and often develop scoliosis.

However, it wasn't until last year that the twins were officially diagnosed with SMA through genetic testing. Their previous diagnosis, in 2000, was said to be neuronal motor injury.

Despite both having the same disease, the twins' situations differ slightly from each other. Zhao Yajing's condition is more severe, as she often experiences shortness of breath. This is why Zhao Wenjing, the elder of the twins, usually acts as the spokesperson.

The twins have always been thankful to have each other. "The only person who can truly empathize with me is my twin sister. Having someone who's the same age as you and understands what you're going through to talk to is incredibly beneficial for mental health," said Zhao Wenjing.

Due to their SMA, the twins only attended school full-time during second grade for one year. However, they didn't perceive this as a significant loss. "Since we had each other as study buddies, it wasn't lonely," said Zhao Wenjing.

The twins' father is both their academic adviser and overall consultant. He encouraged their interest in reading and traveling. "Our father believed that reading and experiencing the world were more important than mere grades," explained Zhao Wenjing.

From 2017 to 2019, the family of four embarked on multiple trips across China, spanning from the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region to Macao. Given the challenges that SMA patients face during long trips, their vehicle was modified so that the twins could lie down and take naps from time to time.



Clockwise from top left: Zhao Yajing (left) and Zhao Wenjing posed for a photo in front of the Ruins of Saint Paul's in Macao in March 2018. The twins posed for a photo at Yunshuiyao ancient town in Zhangzhou, Fujian province, in January 2018. The L-shaped bookshelf in the twins' library. The backyard of the library. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"Through these travels, we have realized that reading and traveling are equally important. Reading stimulates thinking while we're on the road. It's like bringing questions to the trips," said Zhao Wenjing.

Reading also helped the twins uncover their passion for literature and guided them toward their career paths.

"Over the years, we have translated numerous articles and books, written lyrics and scripts for children's stage plays. Moreover, we have developed and enriched our spiritual world through reading," said Zhao Wenjing.

“Just like healthy people, we have rich perspectives and high aspirations. We, too, have careers and dreams that we want to pursue. We're different, yet the same.”

— Zhao Wenjing, 27, an SMA patient

During the family's trips, they distributed books to children living in rural areas, hoping to share their love for reading.

"However, we felt it wasn't enough and we wanted to do more and do it better," said Zhao Wenjing.

Inspired by their father, the twins had been thinking about opening their own library for several years. "We were hoping that visitors could discover their true passions and life goals through reading," said Zhao Wenjing. "Unlike algorithms and big data, which only provide information that you've shown interest in or have searched for before, books

serve as neutral zones to me, and libraries stand as places with the fewest information barriers. When you step into a library, books on any topic, whether you've explored them before or not, are all there."

Recently, the twins decided to put their plan into action, transforming their living room into a mini-library. They sketched a basic design for the bookshelf they desired, and a carpenter brought their vision to life.

"It's a 6 by 2-meter L-shaped bookshelf capable of holding 3,000 to 4,000 books," said Zhao Yajing.

The twins are currently expanding their book collection, having recently acquired new volumes such as the *Percy Jackson* series by US author Rick Riordan and works by Japanese writer Higashino Keigo. "Personally, we enjoy detective novels and foreign literature, so these types of books constitute a significant portion of our inventory," said Zhao Wenjing.

"But we possess only a few domestic works from the past two decades, so we're looking to bring in more of these books."

The twins plan to officially open the library in late spring. Due to limited space, they are going to adopt an appointment system.

"Our intended guests include fellow SMA patients and potentially a small portion of our social media followers," said Zhao Wenjing.

Two years ago, the twins' father passed away and they have been carrying on with his words and memories. "Living with SMA hasn't been easy. But, fortunately, we have each other and parents who always support our endeavors without question," said Zhao Wenjing. "Our family and those who have helped us along the way are like firewood, lighting up the path for us to get here. We hope to pass this hope on to others."

For the twins, Rare Disease Day is about informing the public that people with rare diseases are more than just "patients" — they deserve to voice their thoughts and discover their purpose in life.

"Just like healthy people, we have rich perspectives and high aspirations. We, too, have careers and dreams that we want to pursue. We're different, yet the same," said Zhao Wenjing.

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## Global Insights

## Zimbabwean medical student finds mentorship in China

I have always known that I wanted to be a doctor. As a young child, I found joy in nursing our sick farm animals back to health, driven not by duty but by a genuine wish to help those in need. My father once told me that the greatest gift I can offer to someone is love, which is demonstrated through empathy, patience, and care.

When I embarked on my medical journey at Fudan University in Shanghai, China, these became the principles that I set for myself. My goal was clear: to become a doctor who not only heals the body but also eases the burdens of the mind.

Upon completing my theoretical studies at Fudan in the spring of 2023, I immediately immersed myself in practical learning at Zhongshan Hospital, where I rotated through various departments, each one offering unique insights into the art of medicine. However, it was during my time in the orthopedics department that I encountered a mentor whose approach to patient care has left an indelible mark on me.

The first time I met my supervising doctor, he took me to his outpatient office where I observed him as he talked to the patients. He listened intently, nodding with understanding, and providing a respectful silence for patients to express them-

selves. As they left his office, the gratitude and smiles expressed by the patients made me instantly realize that he is the kind of doctor I aspire to become one day.

Although he tends to so many patients every day, my mentor demonstrated an unwavering commitment to understanding and addressing the needs of those under his care. He made me see that one of our biggest jobs as doctors is to make patients feel heard and respected and to know that their well-being is our utmost priority. If he could do it, then I could too.

Every day of my internship brings unexpected moments, each with the potential to profoundly shape my life.

One such moment occurred during a routine morning hospital round with my mentor. We encountered an elderly patient from Anhui province, suffering from a complex leg fracture. It was evident that he was in considerable pain, although he tried to hide it for the sake of his daughter, who was by his bedside.

My mentor's response was both clinical and compassionate. Though he needed to ensure effective management of the patient's pain as soon as possible, he still examined the leg gently, taking the necessary time and not rushing. He also cared enough to provide reassurance and



Top right: Tawanda Mupini (back) participated in a thyroid surgery at Zhongshan Hospital in Shanghai on Aug 18, 2023. Above: Mupini posed for a photo in front of Zhongshan Hospital. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

comfort to the patient's daughter, understanding that seeing her father in agonizing pain was distressing for her.

This experience has left a lasting impression on me and reinforced my belief in the importance of treating patients with not only medical expertise but also kindness and compassion.

I came to China with a specific vision of the type of doctor I aspired to be. During my internship, being able to follow and observe skilled and kind doctors, like my mentor, was a privilege. It allowed me to witness both their outstanding work firsthand and their genuine empathy toward patients and their families.

After completing my rotation in orthopedics, I started to apply the knowledge and skills I gained across various departments. Despite my limited fluency in Chinese, I have taken the initiative to engage in conversations with patients while attending to their wound dressing and monitoring their blood sugar and pressure. This simple gesture brought them joy and elicited heartfelt expressions of gratitude, leaving me deeply fulfilled. I have also exerted my efforts to connect with their families, offering support to the best of my ability.

One special encounter in the car-

diology department stands out in my memory. A vibrant 95-year-old patient shared her life stories with me as I administered her ECG. Our bond grew over subsequent conversations, and I made it a habit to check on her regularly, even during my night shifts. Despite having four children, she took pride in her energy and zest at 95, sharing the joy of remaining as lively as ever. She even took the time to teach me a bit of Shanghaiese, which I was thrilled to learn. When she was discharged, she made a special effort to bid me farewell and express her gratitude, which really made my day.

I deeply appreciate the opportunities that China has provided me to observe exemplary medical practice and to learn from compassionate and skilled doctors. Their guidance has reinforced the values instilled in me by my father — empathy, patience, and care — and shaped my journey as a future doctor.

Written by Tawanda Mupini, a 26-year-old Zimbabwean, who has been residing in China since 2016. He pursued a bachelor's degree in medicine at Fudan University and is now undertaking an internship at Zhongshan Hospital. Beyond his medical duties, he is also an enthusiastic hiker, biker, and long-distance runner.