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The second session of the 14th National People's Congress opens at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Tuesday. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

WORLD WATCH
By Jon Taylor

Two sessions a significant opportunity for rural vitalization

The second session of the 14th National People's Congress, China's top legislative body, will convene on Tuesday in Beijing, and Premier Li Qiang will present the Government Work Report at the annual meeting. His speech is expected to elaborate on the government's targets for China's economic growth and its broader strategy for economic and social development and foreign policy for the year ahead.

In addition, the NPC will hear a report on the implementation of the 2023 plan for national economic and social development and review the 2024 draft plan for national economic and social development.

One area that will warrant particular focus during the two sessions — the annual meetings of the nation's top legislative and political advisory bodies — is China's continuing pursuit of rural vitalization. The two sessions will provide a significant opportunity to push rural vitalization forward.

The rural vitalization strategy has been one of President Xi Jinping's hallmark campaigns since taking office and forms a substantial part of China's push for common prosperity, a moderately prosperous society in all respects for the new era, and attaining the goal of socialist modernization.

For over two decades, the government's annual No 1 Central Document has focused on the three rural issues of agriculture, rural areas and farmers. The 2024 document, released in early February, emphasizes several priorities to further promote rural vitalization. These include ensuring national food security, preventing a return to poverty, enhancing rural industries' development, improving rural construction, strengthening rural governance, and reinforcing the leadership of the Communist Party of China in agricultural work.

As a part of China's comprehensive rural vitalization, this year's document continues to call for promoting the integration of primary, secondary and tertiary industries in rural areas in order to vitalize the rural economy and create jobs and incomes for rural residents. The document also calls for an upgrading of agricultural product processing, and strongly recommends high-quality rural logistics distribution to support the rural digital economy. We might expect substantial deliberation during the two sessions on how to best put the No 1 Central Document's priorities into action.

See **Rural**, page 5

China pushes for 5% GDP growth

By WANG KEJU and MASI

China aims to see economic expansion at around 5 percent for 2024, unchanged from last year, as the world's second-largest economy will leverage intensified and targeted macro policies to sustain stable growth, according to the Government Work Report released on Tuesday.

The country pledged to pursue a proactive fiscal policy that will be intensified as appropriate with improved quality and efficiency, and exercise a prudent monetary policy in a flexible, moderate, targeted and effective manner, according to the report delivered by Premier Li Qiang at the opening of the second session of the 14th National People's Congress in Beijing.

China has set its projected deficit-to-GDP ratio to 3 percent for 2024 and targeted a whole-year inflation



Special Coverage, pages 2-4

rate of around 3 percent, according to the report, which has been submitted to the country's top legislature for deliberation.

Meanwhile, China, as laid out in the report, aims to create more than 12 million urban jobs this year, and keeps the surveyed urban unemployment rate at around 5.5 percent.

The country will maintain RMB exchange rate generally stable at an adaptive and balanced level and will effectively prevent and defuse risks in major areas, said the report.

Moreover, the country will fully implement the guidelines and

supporting measures on driving the development of the private sector, intensify efforts to attract and utilize more foreign investment, and increase the volume and raise the quality of foreign trade, according to the report.

Steps will be taken toward refining the real estate sector policies and meeting reasonable financing needs of real estate enterprises under various forms of ownership on an equal basis, so as to ensure stable and sound development of the real estate market, the report said.

Great efforts should be made to advance the construction of a modern industrial system and accelerate the development of new quality productive forces, with special emphases on upgrading industrial and supply chains, fostering emerging industries and future-oriented industries, and growing the digital

economy, said the report.

Xu Guanju, a deputy to the National People's Congress and chairman of Transfar Group, a leading chemicals manufacturer, said that he was inspired by the country's efforts in developing new quality productive forces in the Government Work Report.

Xu said that the report pointed out the direction of relying on technological innovations to drive development and relying on quality instead of quantity to improve manufacturing, Xu said. "It will inspire us to prioritize quality improvement and technological breakthroughs to boost our competitiveness on the global stage," he said.

Lei Jun, a deputy to the National People's Congress and chairman of Xiaomi Corp, said China's emphasis on cultivating new quality productive forces will motivate companies



Premier Li Qiang delivers the Government Work Report at the opening meeting of the second session of the 14th National People's Congress at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Tuesday. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

to embrace higher-end, greener and smarter manufacturing.

Contact the writers at wangkeju@chinadaily.com.cn.

Strengthened rule of law to consolidate high-level opening-up

By CAO YIN

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China will continue to promote high-quality opening-up through the rule of law, with stronger legislative efforts to continue to safeguard the legitimate interests of foreigners and overseas enterprises in the country, said an official from China's top legislature.

Lou Qinjian, spokesman for the second session of the 14th National People's Congress, said at a news conference on Monday that China will promote the strengthening of the rule of law in the process of expanding opening-up, and consolidate its legal foundation for high-quality opening-up.

He said that the NPC Standing

Committee has formulated and revised several laws involving foreign affairs in recent years, with several other items of related legislation on its current legislative agenda.

"These legislative items aim to provide a legal basis for protecting the legitimate rights and interests of foreigners and overseas companies and organizations, and they are also to help build a market-oriented, legalized and internationalized first-class business environment," he added.

He made the comment in response to questions regarding a number of newly revised laws. These laws have been misinterpreted by foreign media, which have raised concern among some foreign

investors about whether they will be punished for engaging in normal business practices.

Lou explained that more such laws are on the nation's legislative agenda, but the purpose of such legislation is to bring more certainty and protection to the market and foreign and domestic market players.

Saying that some foreign media previously reported that the revised Counter-Espionage Law expands the scope of espionage activities, and that they had alleged that this led to greater risks for foreigners and foreign companies in China, Lou emphasized: "This is a misinterpretation of the law."

See **Law**, page 5



Lou Qinjian, spokesman for the second session of the 14th National People's Congress, attends a news conference to brief the media on the session, which is scheduled to run from Tuesday through Monday. ZHANG WEI / CHINA DAILY

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Sino-US economic interdependence too deep to falter, says scholar

By ZHONG NAN

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The deep-rooted economic interdependence between China and the United States will continue to be sustained, offering a guarantee of peace and prosperity for both countries, a renowned US scholar said on Monday.

"The interdependence between China and the US is so substantial that it cannot be rolled back. The concept of decoupling is impossible," said John Quelch, executive vice-chancellor of Duke Kunshan University, a joint venture of Duke



John Quelch

University in the US, Wuhan University in Hubei province and Kunshan, a city in Jiangsu province. Quelch, who was a professor of business administration at Harvard Business School for over three decades, said that while some economic activity between China and the US can be redirected to third countries, the close economic relationship between the world's two biggest

economies is too important to both countries to be scaled back.

Quelch, a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, also stressed the importance of China-US ties.

"The vast majority of US businesspeople and multinational corporations have a significant presence in China. Companies such as Starbucks, Boeing, Coca-Cola and Pfizer are deeply entrenched in the Chinese market."

Highlighting that extensive commercial activities in China serve as a crucial foundation for maintaining a peaceful relationship between the

two countries, he said there is substantial mutual dependency in terms of exports and imports between the US and China, which cannot be easily reversed. This mutual dependency will continue to serve as a key guarantee of peace and prosperity for both nations.

Despite some US businesses expressing concerns over de-risking and tariff-driven rising operational costs in recent years, the Chinese market remains significant to US companies. About half of these companies view it as among the top three global investment destinations, marking a 5-percentage point

increase from the record low observed in 2022, according to survey results released by the American Chamber of Commerce in China in early February.

"China is a vital market for many US businesses. It is also an important source of talent and innovation that helps US companies boost their global competitiveness," said Sean Stein, chairman of AmCham China.

Eddy Chan, senior vice-president of FedEx Express and president of FedEx China, said that China's enormous market, supportive policies to

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INSIDE
Shaping inclusive digital economy
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TWO SESSIONS

By WANG KEJU

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China should roll out more robust measures to better attract and utilize foreign investment, further optimize its business environment, reduce its negative list and remove discriminatory practices, according to national legislators and political advisers.

They stressed China's vast and expanding market, coupled with its increasing openness to foreign investment, would present new opportunities for many businesses across sectors, and its well-developed industrial and supply chains could provide a solid production foundation, further enhancing its appeal to foreign investors.

"The current global economy is grappling with various uncertainties, particularly the rise of trade and investment protectionism and unilateralism, which have severely disrupted the global decision-making of multinational corporations," said Tian Xuan, a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress.

China should introduce a package of well-targeted policies to shape itself as a key player in mitigating the negative impacts of instability and intricacy, so as to offer a more enabling climate and catalyze foreign investment amid a rapidly changing world, said Tian, who is also associate dean of Tsinghua University's People's Bank of China School of Finance.

The country saw a significant increase in the number of newly established foreign-invested enterprises last year, according to data released by the Ministry of Commerce, with 53,766 companies being set up nationwide, representing a year-on-year growth of 39.7 percent.

China's robust economic resilience and vast potential, which is evident in its ability to weather global economic uncertainties and challenges, have established a solid foundation for a predictable investment environment, said Pan Yuanyuan, an associate researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of World Economics and Politics.

With a growth rate of 5.2 percent in 2023, the world's second-largest economy not only outperformed the global estimate of approximately 3 percent growth, but it also took the lead among the world's leading economies, she said.

China, according to the International Monetary Fund, contributed more than 30 percent to global economic growth last year, solidifying its role as a main force behind the global economy.

Going forward, the country's all-out efforts to sustain stable economic growth are an essential component that will further draw international investors, contributing to the overall attractiveness of China as an investment destination, Pan added.

It's of great significance to not only attract foreign investment but also retain it, so optimizing the business environment and providing more streamlined and convenient services to businesses are crucial steps, said Quan Heng, a deputy to the 14th NPC and an economist at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences.

According to a poll released by the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade in late January, more than 90 percent of foreign businesses consider the Chinese market to be attractive, and over 80 percent expressed satisfaction with China's business environment in 2023.

The survey conducted by the country's top foreign trade and investment



Trucks are loaded onto the ship *Winning Confidence* in Yantai, Shandong province, in January. The vehicles will be exported to Guinea in Africa. TANG KE / FOR CHINA DAILY

Action needed to attract foreign investment

More should be done to enable companies to take advantage of China's vast market, industrial and supply chains, advisers say



Left: Foreign businessmen negotiate with a Chinese vendor at the Yiwu International Trade Market in Yiwu, Zhejiang province, last month. SHI BUFA / FOR CHINA DAILY Right: Workers inspect the paintwork and glass before cars roll off a production line at the Tesla gigafactory in Shanghai in December. The United States-based company announced it will build a new megafactory in Shanghai focusing on energy storage systems last year. FANG ZHE / XINHUA



promotion agency also showed that nearly 70 percent of polled enterprises are upbeat about the prospects of the Chinese market over the next five years.

That said, improving the facilitation of foreign investment and enhancing the enabling environment for innovation will remain high on the Chinese government's work agenda, said Jiang Ying, chair of market consultancy Deloitte China and also member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

By simplifying administrative procedures and promoting collaboration and knowledge exchange between

foreign and domestic entities, China will foster a conducive ecosystem for foreign businesses to establish research and development centers in the country, and contribute to its innovation landscape, Jiang added.

Expanding market access for global investors needs to be promoted on an ongoing basis, with efforts weighed toward slashing the negative list for foreign investment and enhancing the openness of modern service industries such as education, healthcare and elderly care, Jiang added.

In late October, China took a significant step to help attract foreign investment by announcing the com-

plete removal of restrictions on foreign investment access to the country's manufacturing sector.

Despite the diversification of multinational companies' global expansion strategies, China continues to be a crucial choice for top-tier enterprises thanks to its infrastructure development, technological advancements and industrial capabilities, as well as its super-sized market.

By the end of this year, Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co, a United States tire manufacturer, plans to complete the second phase of its factory located in Kunshan, Jiangsu province. This project is anticipated to yield an annual operating revenue of 700 mil-

lion yuan (\$98 million) with a \$200 million investment.

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership has helped the company reap more business opportunities to ship tires made in Chinese factories to Japan and several Southeast Asian nations, said Chris Helsel, Goodyear's senior vice-president for global operations.

Working mechanisms to expedite the progress of major foreign investment projects will be further improved, and targeted and efficient services will be provided, so that they can focus on business operations, said Pang Ming, chief economist with global consultancy JLL China.

Looking ahead, China is expected to further consolidate and enhance its attractiveness for foreign investment, with particular emphasis on sectors such as the digital economy, green economy and high-tech industries, Pang said.

Stronger policy support should be provided and restrictions removed as appropriate, to guide more foreign investment toward such sectors as digital economy, green economy, high-tech, and medium- and high-end manufacturing, as well as the central, western and northeastern regions of the country, he added.

Last year, high-tech industries accounted for 37.4 percent of total foreign direct investment, increasing by 1.3 percentage points compared with 2022 and posting a record high. Additionally, the manufacturing sector saw an increase in its proportion of FDI by 1.6 percentage points, registering 27.9 percent, data from the Ministry of Commerce showed.

China should introduce a range of incentives, including tax breaks, subsidies and research grants to attract foreign investment in the aforementioned industries, said Xu Hongcai, deputy director of the China Association of Policy Science's Economic Policy Committee.

Moreover, governments at all levels should scale up efforts to remove any obstacles that may impede foreign businesses from operating on an equal footing, with focuses on clearing laws and regulations that hinder fair competition, eliminating local protectionism and dismantling discriminatory practices based on ownership, Xu said.

The National Development and Reform Commission, China's top economic regulator, vowed to take steps in November to align government procurement practices, land supply, tax exemptions, qualification licensing, standard-setting, project declaration and human resources policies with international standards, in a bid to remove any discriminatory barriers and guarantee fair competition for foreign-funded enterprises.

Some foreign investors have shifted their production lines away from China in recent years, driven by cheaper costs elsewhere.

The lion's share of foreign investors is primarily attracted by the country's development opportunities and by its sheer size and expanding domestic market. These market-oriented investments, with a key focus on acquiring bigger market share, either grew local production in China or shipped their products manufactured overseas to China, said Zhang Yan-sheng, chief researcher at the China Center for International Economic Exchanges.

China's massive market and huge demand provide foreign investors strong incentives to move facilities closer to their Chinese customers without being bogged down by relatively higher labor costs, Zhang said.

As the world's manufacturing powerhouse, China boasts the world's biggest and most complete industrial system, as well as full-fledged infrastructure, which reinforces its appeal for foreign companies and investors amid a flagging global economic recovery and headwinds of protectionism, he added.

As rising geopolitical tensions undermine confidence among foreign investors, the basic State policy of reform and opening-up must remain front and center no matter how the external situation may evolve, to promote high-standard liberalization and facilitation of foreign investment, Zhang said.

Expanded free trade zones to combat protectionism

By WANG KEJU

China has set its sights on expanding its network of high-standard free trade zones this year by proactively engaging in negotiations, implementing existing pacts and seeking new partnerships, which will help stabilize the country's foreign trade and facilitate sustainable economic growth, according to officials and experts.

They added that by promoting free trade and pursuing economic openness, the country aims to counteract the rising wave of protectionism and trade barriers, and create a more inclusive and interconnected global trading system that benefits all participants.

China, according to the Ministry of Commerce, had inked 22 free trade agreements with 29 countries and regions by the end of January, accounting for some one-third of its total foreign trade volume.

By slashing trade barriers and opening up new avenues of market

access, China has unleashed a wave of opportunities for its export-oriented businesses, empowering them to explore previously untapped markets and expand their global footprint, said Liu Xiangdong, a researcher at the China Center for International Economic Exchanges.

The sheer size of China's market, with its population of some 1.4 billion people, and in particular, a constantly growing middle class, offers immense potential for its trading partners looking to expand their customer base, Liu added.

That said, the current global economic landscape is marked by persistently low levels of export, consumption and investment demand among major economies. Reduced consumer purchasing power and slower economic growth in key markets will present inevitable implications for export-oriented economies, including China, said Ming Ming, chief economist of CITIC Securities.

The rise of protectionist measures,

such as tariffs and trade barriers, imposed by various countries, as well as intensifying geopolitical tensions, will dampen market confidence to some extent and result in a cautious approach by businesses and consumers alike, limiting the growth potential of foreign trade activities, he added.

Despite a challenging global economic environment, China's continuous efforts to push ahead with the network of high-standard free trade zones will help the country stay competitive in shifting global market dynamics.

The nation will strive to conclude the China-Association of Southeast Asian Nations Free Trade Area agreement 3.0 upgrade negotiations this year, as well as the free trade negotiations with Honduras and upgraded FTA talks with Peru, said Wang Shouwen, China's international trade representative, at a news conference in late January.

The country is set to embark on a series of free trade negotiations and upgrades with key partners, includ-

ing the Gulf Cooperation Council, New Zealand, South Korea and Switzerland, to further build a global network of high-standard free trade zones, said Wang, who is also vice-minister of commerce.

China's steps to diversify its trading partners shield the country from vulnerabilities associated with overdependence on any one market, and can mitigate risks and help it navigate uncertain global conditions with greater ease, said Zhou Mi, a senior researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

The country will continue to advance its accession into the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement, vice-minister Wang added.

In particular, China has taken the initiative to exercise pilot programs on par with the CPTPP standards in pilot free trade zones where conditions are ripe, as well as at the Hainan



Visitors browse the first China Nanjing Foreign Trade Fair in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, in November. WANG LUXIAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Free Trade Port, said He Yadong, the ministry's spokesman.

A working group on China's accession to DEPA has been established to fully advance the negotiations, and China is currently having in-depth exchanges with member economies on relevant issues of the agreement, He added.

The agreements provide a frame-

work for aligning regulations, intellectual property rights and labor standards with international best practices. These reforms not only enhance China's competitiveness but also help foster a more conducive business environment, attracting foreign investment and driving technological innovation, said Zhou.



TWO SESSIONS

PERSPECTIVE

Think tank praises China's democracy

People-centered, highly inclusive system helps 'curb division in society'

By XU WEIWEI in Hong Kong
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China's practice of whole-process people's democracy as exemplified by the two sessions emphasizes people's welfare and inclusive consultation for scientific decision-making, the head of a Pakistani think tank said.

"China's whole-process people's democracy does not discriminate on the basis of religion, gender or class," said Shakeel Ahmad Ramay, CEO of the Islamabad-based Asian Institute of Eco-civilization Research and Development. "It ensures delivery of services and livelihood opportunities to every citizen on an equal basis."

In an interview with China Daily ahead of the two sessions, which are the annual meetings of China's National People's Congress and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Ahmad said the deep consultative mechanism helps "curb division in society and paves the way for peaceful coexistence, liberty and a prosperous society".

China's whole-process people's democracy has several distinctive characteristics that set it apart from Western models, he said.

Ahmad noted that first of all, the Chinese model of democracy is people-centered and highly inclusive. The nation's decision to eliminate absolute poverty and its success in that endeavor is one of the best examples.

Furthermore, the development of a five-year plan may start two to three years before its finalization, he said. The Communist Party of China and government agencies both welcome input from all sectors, including the scientific and research community, think tanks, political parties and the general public.

Consultation often starts at the lowest level and culminates at the highest. After compiling feedback, a draft is formed and shared with



Shakeel Ahmad Ramay

the NPC, the CPPCC and the CPC's Central Committee, Ahmad noted.

The final draft is also discussed with other political parties as well as experts who are political advisers, he pointed out.

The Chinese government has also shared drafts of plans on the internet to collect even more opinions from the public, Ahmad noted. Once all the suggestions are taken into account, the plans are finalized and put forward for implementation.

A prime example of inclusivity that Ahmad cited is the structure of the CPPCC. It gives opportunities to all political parties of China, including the CPC, and professional organizations and representatives from all sectors of society to play a role in the decision-making and support policy implementation at all government levels, from the county and township levels to the central government.

Despite some differences between the parties in respect to their ideologies, "they are unanimous in steering the people's welfare and development", Ahmad said.

Moreover, elections of officials are deeply rooted in society and start from the lowest level, usually on the basis of recommendation and selection by various social organizations.

For example, at the village level, people have candidates represent them. These representatives elect delegates at a higher level, who in turn elect representatives for congresses at different levels, and the NPC elects the top leadership.

"In this way, all communities and ethnicities participate" in electing the leadership and making decisions related to the State and their respective areas, Ahmad said.

Full support



Members of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference attend the opening meeting of its second session at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Tuesday. ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

Inland needs more foreign language talent

By TAN YINGZI and DENG RUI in Chongqing

As China remains committed to further opening up to the outside world, the country, especially its inland regions, needs more foreign language talent to better communicate with the international community, said Dong Hongchuan, a political adviser and one of China's top foreign language scholars.

Having served on the Chongqing Municipal Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference for 20 years, Dong, president of Sichuan International Studies University, became a member of the CPPCC's National Committee last year.

SISU is one of the nation's top higher education institutes for nurturing foreign language talent, especially for the underdeveloped western region.

"For various reasons, the western part of the country is lagging far behind the affluent coastal region in the quantity and quality of foreign language talent, which is hamper-



Dong Hongchuan

ing the opening-up efforts of the region," he said. "The central government should give more resources and support to inland areas to help strengthen their foreign language talent base."

Dong, 58, was born in Hongya county in Sichuan province's Meishan city.

He has spent four decades studying and teaching British and American literature and translation. He became a professor at SISU in 2004 and head of the university in 2020.

Last year, his remarks about the importance of learning English sparked a heated discussion in China, as some of the country's elites questioned the necessity of studying the foreign language at Chinese schools.

As a national political adviser, the university president listens to the ideas, concerns and suggestions from people from all over the world.

He then conducts research about the problems presented to him and submits proposals to the CPPCC National Committee.

During the two sessions — the annual gatherings of the National People's Congress, China's top legislature, and the CPPCC National Committee, the country's top political advisory body — last year, he proposed that the western region, particularly the Chengdu and Chongqing Economic Circle, should build a sound language service system to help improve the regional economy.

Language services include translation, project management, proof-reading, editing and sign language.

Last year, he met with ambassadors from eight countries, visited multinational companies such as tech giant Huawei and China's major automaker Chang'an, and talked to students, parents and teachers to learn about their concerns and needs.

"I found that language services in about 50 languages are needed in at least 22 fields, including laws and

regulations, information technology, equipment manufacturing and logistics," he said. "At SISU, we only teach 22 foreign languages."

He suggested that colleges in the western region should join hands to set up a cooperation mechanism in which they share teaching resources and foster student exchanges to cultivate language talent.

At this year's two sessions, Dong's proposals will focus on how to use artificial intelligence to help train foreign language talent and issues related to Chinese students studying abroad at a very young age.

Though still facing some backlash from his remarks on learning English, the president believes in the power of language.

"In today's era of global integration, a country with cultural confidence should attach great attention to foreign language studies, because they are tools connecting China with the rest of the world," Dong said.

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What CPPCC members say



Mo Rong, CPPCC National Committee member, president of the Chinese Academy of Labor and Social Security

Having a job is the most important matter for the average person, and this has led the government to increase efforts to boost employment in recent years. We have diversified employment services for different groups of job seekers. For example, job-seeking and career planning consultancy are available to college students and graduates, which can help them to get more sound knowledge of their personal skills and clearer career plans. The government has encouraged some departments and State-owned companies to expand their job recruitment plans in recent years, and the increasing number of grassroots job openings has also offered more opportunities to young job seekers. I went to the countryside in northwestern Shaanxi province last month, and met a young man in his 30s. He was in poor financial condition and left his hometown to find work. He then got involved in a government-supported entrepreneurship training course and successfully shook off poverty through hard work.



Wu Belli, CPPCC National Committee member, researcher at the Shanghai Institute of Materia Medica at the Chinese Academy of Sciences

In recent years, I have witnessed the public giving more attention to major and rare diseases. Promoting the

health of all people requires concerted efforts from colleges, research centers and medical institutes. Chinese authorities are not only striving to ensure that patients have access to medications, but are also emphasizing affordability. The development of domestic novel drugs has been bolstered by price negotiations with drugmakers and constant adjustments of the national medical reimbursement list. A large number of drugs for cancer and rare diseases have thus been added to the national list, and more than 80 percent of innovative drugs have been included in less than two years after gaining market approval.



Liu Ruiling, CPPCC National Committee member, general manager of the International Land Port in Hebei province

A foreign trade company in Shijiazhuang (capital of Hebei) specializing in children's toys and electric bicycles previously faced logistical challenges, as their exports relied solely on sea freight. Containers they needed to ship their products had to be transported from the seaport back to the factory for product loading before being sent back to the port for export, which led to a significant increase in logistics costs. With the establishment of the international land port in Shijiazhuang, the company relies on the China-Europe freight train service, which has saved more than 2 million yuan (\$277,800) in logistics services.

CHENG SI, WANG XIAOYU AND LUO WANGSHU

'New productive forces' key to economic growth

As a technology industry reporter for about a decade, I stay abreast of the latest developments and trends in the fast-changing high-tech sector. As the curtain of China's most important annual political event has been raised, "new productive forces", a key phrase reiterated by China's top authorities recently, has become a hot topic catching public attention nationwide.

Emphasizing the key role of innovation, new productive forces refer to advanced productivity freed from traditional economic growth models. They feature high-tech, high efficiency and high quality, and come in accordance with the country's new development philosophy.

China has placed great emphasis on the development of new productive forces, which are mainly led by technological innovation and new production factors such as data, and are playing an increasingly vital role in the promotion of the country's high-quality economic development amid downward pressures and external uncertainties.

I interviewed some national legislators and political advisers from the manufacturing sector ahead of the two sessions, the annual gathering of the National People's Congress and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, and learned that they are most concerned about how



Fan Feifei
Reporter's log

traditional Chinese manufacturing enterprises nurture new productive forces, how they achieve transformation and upgrades and how they advance new industrialization.

Most of them have perceived that promoting sci-tech innovation and nurturing strategic emerging industries and future industries such as new-generation information technology, high-end equipment manufacturing, artificial intelligence, new energy and quantum computing, are crucial to developing new productive forces.

The manufacturing sector serves as the foundation of the real economy and is critical to the development of a modern industrial system. China is the world's largest manufacturer, with its output accounting for nearly 30 percent of the global total, ranking first for 14 consecutive years, according to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

Meanwhile, high-tech manufacturing has become an important driver in efforts to bolster the high-quality development of China's economy. China has taken the lead in semiconductor display technology, new energy photovoltaic panels and new energy vehi-

cles, but there is still a lot of room for improvement in the fields of high-end computer chips, high-end equipment and industrial software.

Li Dongsheng, a deputy to the 14th NPC, the country's top legislature, told me that accelerating the development of new productive forces means further stimulating the vitality of technological innovation, continuously investing in sci-tech research and talent cultivation, giving full play to the role of tech-savvy talent and leveraging intelligent technologies to bolster industrial upgrades.

Li, who is also the founder and chairman of Chinese consumer electronics maker TCL Technology Group, stressed that enhancing independent innovation capacities and increasing capital input are key for the growth of the high-tech manufacturing segment and the advancement of new industrialization.

He said his company will step up its use of artificial intelligence, augmented reality, virtual reality, next-generation display technology and new energy photovoltaic panels, while improving its digital and intelligent manufacturing capabilities.

China has built a relatively complete manufacturing industrial and supply chain covering design, research and development, technology and capital.

It is important to move the manufacturing sector toward higher-end, smarter and greener

production, so as to gain an edge over international competitors.

In recent years, the country's strength in sci-tech innovation has taken a major leap.

According to the 2022 Global Innovation Index released by the World Intellectual Property Organization, the country has risen to 11th place and remains the only middle-income economy in the top 30.

However, it still faces some bottleneck issues, such as a lack of access to integrated circuits, basic materials, and core components due to restrictions implemented by the United States.

Furthermore, China lags behind its foreign counterparts in basic scientific research.

To shore up weak links in industrial chains, Li said more efforts should be made to achieve breakthroughs in key and core technologies, strengthen international exchanges and cooperation on science and technology, and enhance operational capacities in overseas markets.

Although China is facing internal and external challenges regarding its economic growth and future development, I believe the rise of new productive forces will inject new impetus into China's economic recovery, strengthen the nation's capacity to shield itself against external risks and help boost its core competitiveness on the global stage.

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TWO SESSIONS

'Irresistible' opportunities in economy

Former World Bank chief economist remains bullish on China's prospects

By LIU ZHIHUA
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China will continue to be one of the most dynamic economies in the world, making great contributions to the global economy and providing irresistible development opportunities to high-tech companies from developed countries, a senior economist and political adviser said.

Justin Yifu Lin, a member of the Standing Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference National Committee and vice-chairman of the Committee on Economic Affairs of the CPPCC National Committee, said China's potential annual growth rate in the coming decade could be 8 percent or higher.

The Chinese economy can grow by 5 percent to 5.5 percent this year, Lin, who is also dean of Peking University's Institute of New Structural Economics, said during an interview.

"China will still be the most dynamic growing economy, make the most contribution to global growth, and provide a driving force for global growth and stability," he said, rebutting views that China will never catch up with the United States in terms of economic scale.

The former senior vice-president and chief economist of the World Bank also said that China's growth will be an opportunity not only for China, but also for the world.

China is expected to further deepen reform, reduce investment barriers and improve infrastructure to make investment and economic operations more effective, he said.

"As long as China maintains dynamic economic growth, and as long as China continues to open up its market, I think that most companies, and most nations, will not have the incentive to restrict their access to the Chinese market," Lin said.

To achieve technological breakthroughs, high-tech companies need to invest generously in research and development, he said, but if they are not highly profitable, they cannot continue to invest



Justin Yifu Lin

large amounts in R&D — which would likely see them relinquish market leadership. How profitable they can be depends on the size of the market, he added.

China has the largest market in the high-tech sector, and if high-tech companies cannot export their products and technologies to China's huge market while their competitors can, their market shares will likely be captured by competitors, he said.

Lin said that as the global economy slows down, China's exports are under pressure, causing difficulties to private enterprises, the pillar of China's export sector. Under such circumstances, it would be desirable for the government to adopt more proactive countercyclical fiscal expansion, as well as monetary expansion, to provide more support for domestic investment and consumption, he said.

He suggested the government invest in areas that private enterprises might not be interested in, such as basic research, green infrastructure and skills training, to promote technological innovations and industrial upgrades.

Speaking on the aging issue in China, Lin said it is unnecessary to feel pessimistic. The number of working people is not as important as how effectively they provide their labor input, which largely depends on their education, and statistics indicated that China's effective labor input is, in general, on the rise.

Data released by the National Bureau of Statistics on Friday showed that China's nonmanufacturing activity expanded at a faster pace last month, with the nonmanufacturing purchasing managers index coming in at 51.4, up from 50.7 a month earlier.



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Nation leads world in deep-sea exploration

By ZHAO LEI
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China accounted for more than half the world's crewed deep-sea explorations over the past three years, according to a project insider.

Ye Cong, deputy director of the China Ship Scientific Research Center in Wuxi, Jiangsu province, said on Monday that the nation's three manned deep-sea submersibles — *Jiaolong* or Sea Dragon, *Shenhai Yongshi* or Deep-Sea Warrior; and *Fendouzhe* or Striver — have completed more than 1,100 dives since their commissioning and carried out over 50 percent of the world's total crewed deep-sea expeditions over past three years.

He said *Fendouzhe*, capable of taking humans to depths exceeding 10,000 meters, has done 230 deep dives, including 25 that took 32 Chinese and foreign scientists to depths of more than 10,000 meters.

It is currently working in the Sunda Trench, in the Indian Ocean near Sumatra, fulfilling a China-Indonesia joint scientific task, Ye said before attending the second session of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, which opened in Beijing on Monday afternoon.



Ye Cong

He is a member of the CPPCC National Committee, the top political advisory body in China.

Fendouzhe was designed and built by Ye's center, a China State Shipbuilding Corp subsidiary known for its research on the development of deep-sea submersibles.

It set a national depth record of 10,909 meters on Nov 10, 2020, in the Challenger Deep, an 11,000-meter chasm located at the bottom of the Mariana Trench in the western Pacific Ocean.

"In the future, we will further extend the reach of our deep-sea explorations even to waters under glaciers in polar regions," he said.

"We will also establish an omnidimensional system that will span from skies to seabeds to bolster our knowledge and management of oceans."

Hu Zhen, a senior researcher at the Wuxi center who is also a CPPCC National Committee member, said the center's engineers have begun to develop next-generation technologies for China's future submersibles.

He also said that polar regions have become a new destination for Chinese deep-sea explorers.

Meeting time



Political advisers walk to the Great Hall of the People before the second session of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference opens in Beijing on Monday.
JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY

Adviser urges focus on AI security

By CUI JIA
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While focusing on catching up with the development of artificial intelligence, China needs to attach greater importance to security issues brought about by the wide use of AI, a cybersecurity expert and national political adviser said.

Zhou Hongyi, founder of Chinese cybersecurity company 360 Security Group and a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, said OpenAI's recent release of Sora, a text-to-video AI generator that can create realistic videos based on users' text prompts, illustrated the gap between the United States and China in terms of AI development.

"The main gap between China and the US in AI lies in the original direction for AI technology," Zhou said on the sidelines of the annual session of the National Committee of the CPPCC, which opened on Monday. "Although it's difficult for



Zhou Hongyi

China to create a universal large model that surpasses OpenAI's GPT-4 for now, the gap can be bridged within one to two years."

Once the direction is determined, Chinese companies are capable of learning very quickly and can soon catch up, especially when open-source projects are released by others, he said.

The development of AI is not only a competition between different companies, but also different nations, Zhou said.

"The US Department of Defense has enhanced cooperation with OpenAI, which later removed a clause banning the military use of AI," he said. "So China needs to plan ahead to be in the lead in AI development because it matters to the country's fate."

Zhou said this year is the "year of application" for Chinese AI as large

models have great potential in many fields of enterprise and will trigger an industrial revolution.

Besides closely following the development of AI, Zhou has also paid close attention to issues brought about by the application of large models.

At this year's two sessions, he will propose that the country regulate AI security issues, because the technology will eventually influence all sectors of society.

The speed of AI's development has been unimaginable, and security issues related to its technology, content and ethics pose significant dangers, Zhou said.

"As AI technology advances, it can be used to make more targeted and realistic 'deepfake' content for fraud and even be used as a weapon to sabotage a country's political and national security systems," he said.

Zhou's proposal says that China needs to draft security standards for AI large models and conduct security evaluations to prevent them from being misused or exploited by others.

Multilateralism key to climate issue

By CAO DESHENG
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As challenges mount in global climate governance amid complex shifts in the international landscape, cooperation is needed more than ever to tackle climate change issues, a national political adviser said.

Zhang Xingying, a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the nation's top political advisory body, underlined the importance of upholding multilateralism in meeting the climate goals set out in the 2015 Paris Agreement.

As China's representative on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the United Nations body that assesses the science related to climate change, Zhang has witnessed the nation's efforts to strengthen partnerships with the international community to address the issue.

"As a significant player in the global response to climate change, China has been endeavoring to promote international cooperation to implement the Paris Agreement and advance the establishment of a fair, reasonable, cooperative and win-win global climate governance system," he said in an interview.

Global climate governance is confronted with many challenges, he said. While countries worldwide acknowledge the severity of climate change, many do not have sufficient political will to take effective measures on climate issues, he said.

"Developed nations, in particular, are reluctant to fulfill their responsibilities to take the lead in emissions reductions, and they also fail to fulfill their commitments to provide financial support to developing countries coping with climate change," said Zhang, who is also deputy director-general of the department of science, technology and climate change at the China Meteorological Administration.



Workers monitor solar panels at a solar power plant jointly built by China and Kazakhstan in the town of Kapchagay, in southeastern Kazakhstan's Almaty Region. XINHUA



Zhang Xingying

Geopolitical competition and rising unilateralism have also made it more difficult to rally collaborative efforts in addressing climate change, he added.

In order to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement, Zhang said that countries need to adhere to a multilateral process under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, uphold the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, and boost global partnerships.

China has made important contributions to adopting the Paris Agreement and worked actively toward its implementation by adopting vigorous policies and measures.

The country aims to see carbon dioxide emissions peak before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060.

China will lower its carbon dioxide emissions per unit of GDP by over 65 percent from the 2005 level before 2030, increase the propor-

tion of non-fossil fuels in primary energy consumption to around 25 percent, and take its total installed capacity of wind and solar power to over 1.2 billion kilowatts.

China has taken a series of measures to cut emissions, including adjusting its economic structure, promoting technological progress, improving energy efficiency and developing renewable energy, Zhang said.

While promoting its own green and sustainable development, China has also engaged in South-South cooperation to address climate change, providing as much support and assistance as it can to developing countries and making a positive contribution to jointly addressing climate change, Zhang said.

China has assisted Bangladesh and the Maldives in establishing extreme weather warning systems to improve the countries' capabilities to forecast climate-related natural disasters, he said.

China has also cooperated with countries such as Pakistan and Kazakhstan, as well as some African states to deal with climate risks and meteorological disasters, Zhang added.

Digital access for people with disabilities improved

By LI LEI
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A motion submitted to the top legislature this time last year fast-tracked a law's rollout with an aim to promote digital access for those with visual and hearing disabilities amid a fast-growing older population.

It also bolstered the supply of accessible digital products that expand the group's entertainment options, said the motion's author, Qian Fangli, who last year was elected a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress, the top legislative body. Her term will last through 2028.



Qian Fangli

The motion's stated aim was to construct a barrier-free environment for digital consumption.

Qian suggested in the motion that the legislature speed up enacting the Barrier-Free Environment Construction Law, and revise existing rules and laws with the digital needs of visually and hearing impaired communities in mind.

She noted that China's past efforts to curb such barriers mainly targeted the physical world, such as adding accessible facilities to public spaces, but fewer rules were available to ensure digital access, including for the disabled.

"We have 17 million visually impaired citizens, and 27 million with hearing problems," she said, adding that as China ages, more are expected to develop visual and hearing-related problems.

In the motion, Qian suggested authorities use tax breaks and other incentives to guide digital service providers to revamp their products, and introduce disabled-friendly functions, such as in navigation, search engines and social media. Authorities should also advance the adoption of artificial intelligence, virtual reality and other emerging technologies in such makeovers.

"Training is also needed to improve disabled people's digital literacy," she said.

The motion sought to shore up the supply of accessible cultural products online. It advised favorable policies for service providers to set up special channels in their products catering to disabled users. Authorities should also attempt to mobilize content producers and third-party organizations to make mainstream content accessible and deliver such content to disabled users using information technologies and big data.

"Authorities should also explore the option of setting up a special fund to foster the industry," she said.

Qian, who has suggestions regarding artificial intelligence and new energy vehicles for this year's NPC meeting, which opens on Tuesday in Beijing, said progress in accessibility across the board is a sign of civilization.

"Reducing such barriers is a very specific thing, but it has far-reaching benefits," she said.

The State Council, China's Cabinet, in 2012 introduced a regulation on promoting a barrier-free environment. Prompted by Qian's motion, the NPC Standing Committee in June passed the Barrier-Free Environment Construction Law, which became effective three months later.

"Traces of many suggestions in my motion can be found in this new law," Qian said. "China now has a more solid network of rules and legislation on promoting accessibility."

Qian also noticed notably improved accessibility in cyberspace.

Streaming services, including those owned by Tencent and Youku, have rolled out accessible viewing options, she said.

TOP NEWS

Rich history of China depicted in paintings at Cleveland museum

By BELINDA ROBINSON
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China's deep, rich history is on display at the Cleveland Museum of Art, which has gathered rare paintings and precious artifacts from several prominent Chinese museums and private collections worldwide.

The exhibition, *Six Dynasties of Chinese Painting*, opened on Nov 10 and will run through Sept 1. The museum, in the US state of Ohio, is known for having one of the largest and most distinguished Asian art collections in the West.

The exhibit covers the six dynasties leading up to the modern era. It depicts a wide range of subjects, including landscapes, animals, birds and flowers, along with religious and historical themes.

The museum, which was founded in 1913, says on its website that it had acquired the art "from the museum's founding years to the most recent additions, demonstrating a continuous commitment to Chinese painting, a field that has always been the strongest asset of the Chinese collection."

The featured works include *Landscape after Ni Zan*, from 1707, by Wang Yuanqi, and *Listening to the Qin (Zither)* by Liu Songnian (circa 1150 to after 1225).

There also is a statue, *Bodhisattva Guanyin of the South Sea*, from Fujian province in the 1600s.

The museum's general Chinese art collection spans more than 5,000 years. Some of the most important paintings are from the period between the Song Dynasty (960-1279) and Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

The museum said it aims to showcase the "highest level of Chinese

artistic accomplishment", including bamboo carvings, jade, bronze and lacquer ware, sculptures, paintings, calligraphy and furniture. It also has paintings, ceramics, Buddhist sculpture and textiles, which it describes as "works of international significance".

The curators are continuously updating the collection to reflect "the rich traditions as well as the ongoing artistic developments of China", the museum said.

William Griswold, the museum's director and president, has worked with exhibition curator Clarissa von Spee to highlight works from all over the globe, especially Asia.

Highlighting Chinese art was a central mission for former museum director Sherman Lee, who was in charge from 1958 to 1983. He established the bulk of the institution's Chinese painting collection.

In another of the museum's recent exhibitions, *China's Southern Paradise*, which ran from September to January, more than 200 items sourced from institutions in China and beyond were on display.

The exhibition featured the Jiangnan region of China, which is south of the Yangtze River, focusing on its changes over the years and its long-running importance in producing key products such as jade and silk.

China's Southern Paradise also looked back to Neolithic times, with highlights including grains of rice that are considered to be the first rice cultivated anywhere in the world. The rice was found in Tianluoshan, an ancient site found in the 2000s, which scientists believe was inhabited around 7,000 BC.

Working with the Zhejiang Archaeological Institute in China, the rice was carefully packaged and sent to the US for the exhibition.



Listening to the Qin (Zither) by Liu Songnian (circa 1150 to 1225) is one of the works of art on display at the Cleveland Museum of Art in Ohio, the United States. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

University: 4,700 apply for fewer than 200 available seats

From page 1

attract global capital, ongoing industrial upgrading and its status as an increasingly strong innovator make the country one of the most important markets for many US companies.

Eager to enhance its growth in the country, the US logistics service provider opened its new China headquarters in Shanghai in January.

For the graduating class of 2028, Duke Kunshan University received 4,705 undergraduate admission applications from international students in 123 countries, setting a record with a 41 percent increase over 2023. However, fewer than 200 international students will be selected for enrollment, with classes beginning in August this year.

With China encouraging more young people from the US to come to the country for exchanges and study, about half of the applicants are from the US, while others are from countries such as Germany, the United Kingdom, Argentina, India and Nigeria, according to the university's admission office.

"It is crucial for Americans to gain a deeper understanding of China

It is crucial for Americans to gain a deeper understanding of China and Chinese culture. Chinese people know much more about the US than American young people know about China."

John Quelch, executive vice-chancellor of Duke Kunshan University

and Chinese culture. Chinese people know much more about the US than American young people know about China. If the US is going to be a strong competitor of China, it must know China better than it does. It is in the interest of the US, as well as in the interests of both countries," said Quelch.

The university currently has 1,713 students hailing from nearly 70 countries and regions across the world.

Two-million milestone



Passengers pose for photos on Sunday with a model of an electrical multiple unit train car of the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway in the waiting hall of Halim Station in Jakarta, Indonesia. The high-speed railway, built with Chinese expertise, has so far transported more than 2 million passengers, China Railway International Limited announced on Sunday. The railway is the first of its kind in Indonesia and Southeast Asia. LI ZHIQUAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Envoy hails new highs in Sino-French relations

Ambassador calls for more progress on visas, investment environment

By ZHANG YUNBI
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Relevant departments of the Chinese and French governments are working hard on planning this year's high-level visits between the two countries, said Chinese Ambassador to France Lu Shaye.

Lu, who is also a national political adviser, said there has been a long tradition of exchanges of high-level visits between Beijing and Paris.

In April, French President Emmanuel Macron made a state visit to China.

When concluding his trip to France last month, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said the two sides agreed to roll out high-level mutual visits.

Lu noted that in the past decade, "bilateral relations have reached a new height" due to the strategic leadership and personal push by President Xi Jinping together with then French president Francois Hollande, and in recent years with Macron.

"It is particularly noteworthy that amid the complex international situation and rising impulses in the West to contain China, it is not easy for China-France ties to have sailed upstream," Lu said.

"When looking around the world today, China-France ties could be said to be the most stable and positive among the relationships between the East and the West," he added.

Lu also touched on hot topics such as visa facilitation and improving the investment environment.

In November, Beijing announced a 15-day visa-free policy for short-term stays of French citizens in China, and Paris announced that Chinese holders of a master's degree obtained through study in France would be granted a five-year visa.

Lu also anticipated that the two sessions will discuss legislation and policies aimed at expanding the project with an eye toward not only benefiting farmers, but also providing a role model for promoting comprehensive rural revitalization throughout China.

Related to this, the two sessions will likely deliberate on legislation seeking to improve sewage and waste treatment systems and rural toilets, and establishing a rural sol-

This year marks the 60th anniversary of China-France diplomatic ties as well as the China-France Year of Culture and Tourism, and Paris will host the 2024 Summer Olympic Games.



Lu Shaye

progress in recent years.

During recent bilateral talks, Beijing expressed its hope that Paris would provide a fairer, more just and nondiscriminatory business environment for Chinese enterprises.

Lu noted that some restrictive and discriminatory measures taken by the European Union and France against Chinese companies in the areas of trade and investment still remain in force, such as those against Huawei's 5G products.

The Chinese government is constantly improving market access for foreign companies, and "we expect the French government to work together with us to mutually improve investment environments and further advance bilateral trade and investment cooperation," he said.

In response to the negative cases and problems in China-EU and China-France ties, he said, "We should not be blinded by momentary and negative things, but look ahead, see through the mist and keep a positive mindset."

Lu pointed out that it is a general trend in the world to advance economic globalization, and the EU should not withdraw from economic globalization just because the United States seeks to decouple with China and sever related production and supply chains.

"There is now an unsettling tendency" that Europe is following the US' lead in an increasing number of cases, and is explicitly, implicitly, or unknowingly seeking to "de-risk" China, he noted.

"This is actually an unspoken version of 'decoupling' and breaking the chains," he said.

Law: New measures safeguard foreigners

From page 1

In April last year, the NPC Standing Committee adopted the revised Counter-Espionage Law, while the amended Law on Guarding State Secrets was adopted at the end of last month.

He said that China opposes any attempt to attack its business environment by misreading the law, noting that it did not broaden the scope of espionage activities, but rather refined the definition of activities and drew a clear line between legal and illegal activities.

"In fact, the law has beefed up foreigners' and foreign enterprises' sense of certainty and security in China," he stressed.

"It won't affect the normal activities of business, science and research cooperation, and academic exchanges," he added.

China is committed to the State policy of reform and opening-up, with the development of external relations and the promotion of friendly exchanges, he said, underscoring that "this attitude has never changed and will not change."

"China's door will always be open to the world, and will not be closed," he said. "With the door open, the world can enter China, and China can go global."

Last year, China stepped up its pace in formulating foreign-related laws. It passed a law on foreign state immunity in September, and adopted another item of legislation on foreign relations in June, laying a stronger legal foundation for the protection of national security and serving opening-up.

Rural: Project seen as vitalization role model

From page 1

One initiative that will see proposals for legislation is an expansion of the "Thousand Villages Demonstration, Ten Thousand Villages Renovation" project, which was personally planned and implemented by Xi Jinping in 2003 when he was Party secretary of Zhejiang province.

I also anticipate that the two sessions will discuss legislation and policies aimed at expanding the project with an eye toward not only benefiting farmers, but also providing a role model for promoting comprehensive rural revitalization throughout China.

China's leaders ... continue to consider rural development and prosperity to be the No 1 long-term economic issue for the nation.

Related to this, the two sessions will likely deliberate on legislation seeking to improve sewage and waste treatment systems and rural toilets, and establishing a rural sol-

id waste classification and disposal system. Furthermore, we will probably see legislation aimed at improving rural water supply networks, the rural power grid, roads and bridges, expanding the development of earthquake-resistant rural houses, and boosting rural broadband internet access. Additionally, there will likely be discussion of improving rural public education, township health service centers and village clinics.

Amid concerns about income inequality created by four decades of growth, the Communist Party of China has focused greater attention on the nation's rural

population and rural economic development, with an eye toward vitalizing the countryside. Specifically, while there has been substantial improvement in the living standard of the rural population — particularly the elimination of extreme poverty — China's leaders, including legislators participating in this year's annual NPC gathering, continue to consider rural development and prosperity to be the No 1 long-term economic issue for the nation, now and for the foreseeable future.

The author is a professor of political science at the University of Texas at San Antonio. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA

Xinjiang women take giant steps for progress

By CHEN MEILING
and MAO WEIHUA in Urumqi

Treating patients like family

Bijannat Ahmat, obstetrician

"Her body was as purple as an eggplant and she had convulsions. Her oxygen saturation was as low as 70 percent. And the fetal heart could barely be heard."

Bijannat Ahmat, 48, an obstetrician in Qira county, Hotan prefecture, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, was recalling the urgency of the situation in 2022 when a pregnant patient showed symptoms of amniotic fluid embolism, an often fatal condition.

Doctors at Qira County People's Hospital quickly initiated emergency procedures to save the woman. Her blood pressure had dropped sharply and she had fallen unconscious.

"She was dying. I was about to cry, feeling like there was nothing I could do," Bijannat said. After five hours of medical attention and surgery, the woman was saved, but her baby died. The patient's womb was removed and she received a full blood transfusion.

For such a potentially fatal condition, it was a near miracle the woman was saved at a county-level hospital. "The patient is a mother of two children. If she had died, the family would be broken," Bijannat said.

Over the past two decades, she has dealt with numerous emergencies, saving women's lives and welcoming newborns into the world.

The county has a population of 160,000, and every month about 90 pregnant women give birth at the hospital. The average age of these women is 25, with about half of them having their first child, Bijannat said.

"I tell our doctors to treat every pregnant woman as their own sister, to make sure she can be discharged from hospital in good health," she said. "Delivering a baby is a natural process, and what we do is assist them."

Bijannat has been promoted to chief of the hospital's obstetrics and gynecology department due to her medical skills and contribution to women's health. In October, she was further promoted to vice-president of the hospital.

A rescue center for critically-ill pregnant women has been opened at the hospital under Bijannat's watch.

Through her suggestions, the hospital has also implemented a system to send physicians to township health centers one day a week to give medical treatment, while department heads are sent to do mentoring two days a week.

She is also working to open a postpartum recovery center, and trying to introduce pelvic floor reconstruction surgery to help women.

"Bijannat is a highly professional and experienced doctor, not only proficient in medical skills, but also with high medical ethics," Gu Jinfeng, a doctor at the hospital, told Hotan Integrated Media Center in an interview. "She is quite strict in regard to our daily work, explaining each operation and surgery step by step."

Bijannat, who studied medicine at Shihezi University in Xinjiang, said obstetrics and gynecology was her first choice. She added that she enjoys performing surgery, as it is a delicate operation that can finally solve a problem.

Over the past five years, no maternal deaths have been recorded at Qira County People's Hospital and the neonatal asphyxia rate — which leads to brain damage in infants — has dropped steadily, she said.

Whenever a patient needs urgent treatment, Bijannat is quick to leave her home. She said she wakes up at night if there is no phone call, worrying that she may have missed an emergency call.

When she was breastfeeding her baby, her husband looked after the infant while she worked. Sometimes he waited outside the operating room for two or three hours so Bijannat could feed the

Obstetrician,
police officer
and technician
working for region's
brighter future



Bijannat
Ahmat

Subinur Ahat

Ayyul Ayup
PHOTOS PROVIDED TO
CHINA DAILY

child after performing surgery.

Also a deputy to the Xinjiang People's Congress, Bijannat takes queries and complaints from patients and encourages doctors and nurses to offer medical services with patience and a smile.

"Only by regarding patients as your own family can they truly trust you. Whoever comes to me for treatment puts their life in my hands. I must not fail that trust," she said.

Worthy of people's trust

Ayyul Ayup, police officer

When police officer Ayyul Ayup and her colleagues visited a disabled single mother in Kulbagh village, Aketao county, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, she was greeted with indifference bordering on hostility.

Rabigul Bakram has three children and her suffering had made her mistrustful of most people. "It's all formalism. Just take a few photos yourselves," she told the visitors.

The woman's left hand is paralyzed due to her illness. She and her husband are divorced, with the oldest child only 14 years old.

Ayyul said she wanted to argue with Rabigul, but she held back. "We must let people know that we are absolutely not engaging in formalism. We are here to listen to everyone's voices and to

solve their problems," she said.

Ayyul asked about the woman's physical condition and economic situation. Rabigul said: "I'm in poor health. There is no work at home. Life is very difficult."

On hearing about her difficulties, the police officer tidied Rabigul's yard, gave her daily necessities such as rice, flour and oil, and helped organize subsistence allowances for her.

"Since then, whenever she encounters difficulties, she tells me. Now, when I go to her house she treats me as one of her own family," Ayyul said. She also helped Rabigul find a job with a stable salary as a security guard at a kindergarten.

Ayyul, 44, leaves a lasting impression on every household she visits. She believes sincerity is the only way to gain people's understanding and support.

Over the past 22 years, Ayyul, from Aketao Police Bureau, has put her belief into practice and won multiple awards and honors, including an award for outstanding performance in the national public security system in 2022.

During the second session of the 14th Xinjiang People's Congress from late January to early February, Ayyul suggested addressing the problems of wolves in pastoral areas and promoting high-quality development of animal husbandry.

"Some 30 to 50 wolves can be elusive. Last year alone, they killed over 700 head of livestock, seriously affecting the confidence

of herdsmen," she said. In recent years, with the restoration of grassland ecology, wild animals such as foxes and wolves, which had disappeared, have reappeared on the grasslands, she added.

Since last year, Ayyul has traversed most of the grasslands near Charlon town, hearing complaints from herdsmen about their livestock being attacked by wolf packs.

Wolves are a second-level protected species in the country, but Ayyul has questioned who will foot the bill for the herdsmen's losses. She hopes her proposal gains the attention of relevant departments, and they formulate strategies to control wolf packs and provide subsidies for pastoral areas.

As a senior police officer and a deputy to Xinjiang People's Congress, Ayyul has visited people's homes thousands of times to learn about their difficulties, impart legal knowledge, listen to their questions and offer solutions.

Years ago, when she was about to graduate from high school, she dreamed of being a doctor. However, after her outstanding performance in a physical fitness test at People's Public Security University of China, she became a police officer.

"As I came to understand the work of the police, I gradually realized that it's not just about looking good; it also requires intelligence, skills, courage and a sense of responsibility. I feel that, like doctors, we

are all in the business of saving lives and improving people's lives," she said.

In safe, reliable hands

Subinur Ahat, chemical technician

At the age of 32, Subinur Ahat became one of the youngest female chemical technicians at her company. Over the past seven years, she has been promoted despite fierce competition in an industry often regarded as unsuitable for women.

A graduate of China University of Petroleum in Beijing, in 2016 she chose to work at Karamay Petrochemical Co, a branch of China National Petroleum Corp, in her hometown of Karamay, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

To ensure safety standards, the company's oil refining equipment is closely monitored 24 hours a day. For the first four years of her job, Subinur patrolled late at night to check whether pipelines and instruments were functioning properly.

She reported to the office if there was an oil leak, smoke, abnormal readings, device malfunctions or other anomalies. Sometimes she had to climb 10 meters in freezing conditions to inspect equipment with a flashlight. On other occasions she had to figure out a quick solution to problems while protecting herself from hazards such as toxic fumes, fire or explosions.

The outdoor work also required strength. Subinur said she doubted herself in one emergency when she failed to close a valve because it was too heavy. "Real work is so different from learning from textbooks in a class," she said.

But she performed well in theoretical and operational tests and was quick to comprehend the whole process of oil refining. She was transferred to a new post indoors to monitor performance parameters on computer screens.

"You need to be familiar with every parameter so that you can respond to abnormal situations quickly," Subinur said. "We need to keep monitoring the screens while on duty, and report to co-workers when we have to leave for the restroom or go to dinner."

Due to outstanding work performance, she was again promoted two years later. Subinur is now one of two female technicians on a team of 30, supervises other people's work and deals with emergencies. She also checks outdoor equipment twice a day as part of double security measures.

Her position requires her to act quickly and offer solutions to problems within five minutes.

"Though there is more stress at work, I feel a great sense of achievement. Every time I see black crude oil turn into clear, clean, pure oil, I feel that my work to maintain stable and safe production has great meaning," she said.

Last year, she was elected a deputy to Xinjiang People's Congress. She was surprised but honored.

"I got to know more about what's happening in the country, understand how Xinjiang is developing, and have contacted people from different sectors," she said. "I learned that so many people are making efforts to build a beautiful homeland and improve people's lives."

This year's Xinjiang government work report stated that the region will cultivate and strengthen oil and gas production and the processing industry. Subinur proposed encouraging companies to adopt advanced equipment to make production green, low-carbon and intelligent.

Last year, her company improved the efficiency of energy consumption such as hydro power, nitrogen and fuel gas. "We saved over 700,000 yuan (\$97,000) in chemical raw material costs and electricity consumption for the entire year," she said.

As mother of a 4-year-old boy and wife of a police officer, she is optimistic about her life and career.

"I want to contribute more to national energy security and promote economic development of Xinjiang," Subinur said.

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WORLD

Bulgarian edition of Xi's book launched

By ZHOU JIN
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The Bulgarian edition of the first volume of *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* was released on Monday, as Beijing and Sofia celebrated the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties.

The book is a compilation of Xi's major works between November 2012 and June 2014, comprising 79 speeches, talks, interviews, instruc-

tions and correspondence over 18 chapters.

It provides important references for the international community to understand China and the Communist Party of China.

The Bulgarian version of the book was jointly translated and published by the Foreign Languages Press and the Iztok-Zapad (East-West) Publishers in Bulgaria.

The launch of the book is of great significance in enhancing Bulgarian

readers' understanding of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, Chinese modernization, as well as the modern civilization of the Chinese nation.

It also helps deepen the China-Bulgaria friendship.

So far, four volumes of *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* have been translated and published, of which the first volume has been translated into 41 languages.

Having a ball



A child throws a ball, with the Arc de Triomphe in the background, during a free sports session on the Champs-Élysées in Paris on Sunday. Paris took advantage of the pedestrianization day at the avenue to organize free sports events ahead of the Olympic Games this summer. STEPHANE DE SAKUTIN / AFP

Fukushima discharge case hearing begins

Japanese citizens call for halt to release of nuclear-contaminated water into sea

By JIANG XUEQING
in Fukushima, Japan
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Japanese citizens have called for a halt to the discharge of nuclear-contaminated water from the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant into the ocean and demanded that the government revoke the permission for the controversial program at the first public hearing of a lawsuit in Fukushima on Monday.

The hearing of the lawsuit, filed by 363 Japanese fishery stakeholders and ordinary citizens nationwide against the Tokyo Electric Power Company and the government over the ocean discharge, was held at the Fukushima District Court in Fukushima City.

TEPCO started releasing nuclear-contaminated water into the Pacific Ocean on Aug 24 last year. It is now in the fourth round of discharge.

Tsuguo Hirota, a co-representative of the plaintiffs' lawyers, said the discharge constitutes a deliberate "double harm" to the victims of the nuclear disaster, following a 9.0-magnitude earthquake and tsunami in Japan in 2011, and is by no means permissible.

"In August 2015, the government promised Fukushima Prefecture that it would not proceed with ocean releases without the consent of stakeholders," Hirota said.

"For the past eight years, news on this matter has been widely discussed. Nevertheless, the government and TEPCO have blatantly ignored such promises and have calmly released contaminated

water into the sea. For the citizens, it might be said that the government of this country is the government that can lie without hesitation," Hirota added.

He stressed that what is being released into the sea in Fukushima this time is not just tritium-contaminated water but also a wide variety of radioactive substances. These have raised clear concerns about harm to the human body.

Shigeo Suzuki, a resident of Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture, and one of the plaintiffs, used to be a junior high school teacher. The last school where he worked was located along the coast in Iwaki and was affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011.

"Some of the students affected have been working hard since the earthquake," Suzuki said.

"And for those students, there's a possibility that the release of contaminated water into the ocean could cause even more damage. To encourage those hardworking children, I participated in this lawsuit as a plaintiff."

Suzuki said he wants to see the lawsuit achieve its goal of stopping the discharge of the nuclear-contaminated water.

'Not logical'

The process leading to the contaminated water release does not follow the logic that ordinary Japanese people would expect, he said.

"The government and TEPCO are deciding to release it forcibly against our will. Additionally, there have been various accidents related to nuclear power plants in the

past, and the government and TEPCO have hidden information or lied," Suzuki said.

"That's why various things that they are saying, such as the tritium concentration, are not trusted by the public," he said.

Chikara Yoshida, an Iwaki resident who served on the board of directors of a welfare facility for people with disabilities, said he believes in above-ground storage as the radiation dose will decrease over time.

"Is it OK for the side that caused the Fukushima nuclear accident to casually break such procedures? That's a lack of responsibility. They don't understand their own problems. A lack of responsibility could lead to even more frightening things in the future," Yoshida said.

Lawyer Hirota told China Daily that Japan's legal proceedings will progress in stages through the district court, high court, and then the Supreme Court of Japan.

It is difficult to predict how long the current hearing at the Fukushima District Court will take, as it will depend on how the government and TEPCO respond.

"Particularly noteworthy in this trial is that there will likely be considerable scrutiny of scientific matters such as the toxicity of the contaminated water. We want to simplify those disputes as much as possible so that the conclusions are easily drawn," Hirota said.

The lawyers and the plaintiffs hope to conclude the district court proceedings within three years. However, regardless of who wins, it is highly likely that the case will be appealed to the high court and Hirota estimated that decision could take about five years.

Earlier reports said the discharge of the nuclear-contaminated water could take at least 30 years.

Top court: Trump will stay on ballot in Colorado

By AI HEPING in New York
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The US Supreme Court on Monday unanimously ruled that former President Donald Trump can't be excluded from Colorado's primary election ballot because of his actions surrounding the Jan 6, 2021, attack on the US Capitol.

The justices said the Constitution doesn't permit a single state to disqualify a presidential candidate from national office, ruling that such responsibility "rests with Congress and not the states".

"Because the Constitution makes Congress, rather than the States, responsible for enforcing Section 3 against federal officeholders and candidates, we reverse," the justices wrote.

The justices issued their decision one day before Super Tuesday, when Colorado and more than a dozen others hold primary contests for the November presidential election. The ruling applies to other states with similar challenges to Trump's candidacy.

The court's decision was expected because during oral argument in February, nearly all of the justices signaled skepticism of Colorado's authority to remove Trump from the ballot. They worried about the chaos it would cause if states had the unilateral authority to determine a candidate had engaged in insurrection and worried it could result in a chaotic, partisan tit-for-tat.

Trump wrote on his social media platform, Truth Social, "BIG WIN FOR AMERICA!!!"

Speaking at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida, Trump praised the decision as historic, "something that will be spoken about 100 years from now and 200 years from now".

Voters can eliminate candidates

"very quickly, but a [state] court shouldn't be doing that, and the Supreme Court saw that very well," Trump said. "I think it will go a long way to bringing our country together, which our country needs."

Trump had appealed the Colorado Supreme Court's decision to disqualify him under the 14th Amendment's Section 3, the so-called insurrection clause of the Constitution. The court acted on a lawsuit filed by a group of Republican and independent voters.

It is the first time that the Supreme Court has weighed in on the insurrection clause.

Enacted after the civil war in 1868, the measure says that any member of Congress or officer of the United States who engages in insurrection after taking an oath to the Constitution is barred from holding office. It has never been used to bar a presidential candidate from office.

Trump has been charged with numerous federal and state felonies over his effort to keep power after losing the 2020 election, but he hasn't been indicted on the specific federal crime of insurrection, which carries a maximum sentence of 10 years and an automatic ban on holding federal office.

"Nothing in the Constitution requires that we endure such chaos — arriving at any time or different times, up to and perhaps beyond the inauguration," the court said in an unsigned, 13-page unsigned opinion.

The court's three liberal members suggested that the majority had gone too far in the decision and unnecessarily insulated Trump "from future controversy".

That prompted Justice Amy Coney Barrett, a Trump appointee who also didn't embrace all of the decision, to emphasize that the court had come together on the bottom-line outcome.

"That is the message Americans should take home," she wrote.

Barrett wrote that she hopes Americans will look to the decision and see common ground, not divisiveness.

"The Court has settled a politically charged issue in the volatile season of a presidential election. Particularly in this circumstance, writings on the Court should turn the national temperature down, not up. For present purposes, our differences are far less important than our unanimity. All nine Justices agree on the outcome of this case. That is the message Americans should take home."

Record wildfire wreaks havoc in Texas

By MAY ZHOU in Houston
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More than 1 million acres have burned in the largest wildfire in Texas history, causing the evacuation of towns, two deaths and heavy damage to the cattle industry.

There are five active wildfires in Texas, with the Smokehouse Creek fire in Hutchinson County the largest at 1.07 million acres and only 15 percent contained, according to the latest update by the Texas A&M Forest Service on Monday afternoon. Four other fires are smaller and are between 50 and 85 percent contained.

Fires in the Texas Panhandle have burned nearly 1.3 million acres since erupting last week. The Smokehouse fire has burned through more than 1.1 million acres — equivalent to more than 1,700 square miles — killing livestock, destroying hundreds of structures and burning crops. The fire also has spread to Oklahoma, where more than 31,500 acres have been scorched.

The Texas A&M Forest Service said Monday that cooler temperatures and less wind will aid in attempts to contain the active wildfires. However, it warned that "an underlying risk for new wildfires will continue in the Texas Panhandle and South Texas until spring green-up occurs in the abundance of grass vegetation found in these regions".

More than 50 Texas National Guard members and hundreds more personnel from various state emergency response resources have been deployed to



A rancher works on collecting dead cattle in an area burned by the Smokehouse Creek Fire on Friday in Skellytown, Texas.

JULIO CORTEZ / AP

battle the wildfires.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott has said that much of the affected areas are "completely gone", with "nothing left but ashes on the ground". Early assessments show that up to 500 structures had been destroyed as of Friday afternoon.

On Facebook, people have posted photos of burned-down structures and skies covered by smoke or orange glows.

"These fires not only threaten lives and property but will also have a substantial impact on our agriculture industry," Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller said in a statement.

"Over 85 percent of the state's cattle population is located on ranches in the panhandle. There

are millions of cattle out there, with some towns comprising more cattle than people. The losses could be catastrophic for those counties," Miller said.

Abbott said he is going to request a federal disaster declaration to help in the recovery.

On Feb 29, President Joe Biden said he had directed his team to "do everything possible to help protect the people and the communities threatened by these fires".

More than 100 federal firefighters were headed to the state, he said, as well as "dozens of additional fire engines, air tankers, small planes, helicopters to help fight the flames".

The two deaths were of truck driver Cindy Owen, 44, and Joyce Blankenship, 83.



These fires not only threaten lives and property but will also have a substantial impact on our agriculture industry."

Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller

Owen was working about 50 miles north of Pampa, Texas, on Feb 27 when the Smokehouse Creek fire overcame her, her sister-in-law told CNN. She left her truck and tried running for safety but suffered fatal burns over almost her entire body, said the wife of Owen's brother.

In nearby Hutchinson County, Blankenship was found dead in her house, her family said. "The house was gone," her grandson Nathan Blankenship said. "There was no way she could've gotten out."

The Texas Tribune reported that while fire officials have yet to determine the causes of the Texas Panhandle wildfires, lawyers for landowners are either filing or planning to file lawsuits against some utility companies.

Melanie McQuiddy, a homeowner in Canadian, Texas, filed a lawsuit that alleges a splintered utility pole owned by the company fell and started the Smokehouse Creek fire and destroyed her house.

She claims the pole was in bad physical shape before it fell.

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WORLD

Protesting farmers set out on New Delhi march

MUMBAI — Indian farmers are planning to escalate their protests from Wednesday by entering the capital New Delhi by bus and train, and increasing their numbers at border points that are currently blocked by tractors.

Thousands of farmers began the "Delhi Chalo", or Let's go to Delhi, march last month, but were stopped by security forces about 200 kilometers north of the capital with tear gas and water cannons.

The farmers, who are demanding higher prices for their crops, intensified their protest after several rounds of failed talks.

Farmers from various states, from Kerala in the south to Madhya Pradesh in central India, will arrive in New Delhi by trains and buses on Wednesday, Ramandeep Singh Mann, a farmer leader, told Reuters.

"Farmers from Punjab and Haryana will continue protesting at the existing protest sites with tractor trolleys," he said.

Thousands of farmers, mainly from the northern states of Punjab and Haryana, with around 3,000 tractors, are stuck at three borders that were blocked by police and paramilitary troops with barricades.

Clashes between farmers and security forces have played on television screens for several days. Farmers said at least one protester has died in the clashes, while dozens have been injured on both sides.

The protesting farmers will also block railway lines across the country for four hours on Sunday afternoon, Mann said.

Farmers are determined to continue their protests until their demands for higher support prices, backed by law, are met, he added.

The government announces support prices for more than 20 crops each year, but state agencies buy only rice and wheat at the support level, which benefits only about 6 percent of farmers who grow those two crops.

Reduction in tax

A sharp reduction in the import tax on edible oils, to 5.5 percent from 30 percent in 2021, has led to record vegetable oil imports and dampened local prices of oilseeds such as soybean and rapeseed, farmers in western India said.

Currently, the government offers minimum purchase prices only for wheat and rice, but these have only been relatively modest increases, said Devinder Sharma, a farm and food policy expert.

During the 10 years of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rule, government-fixed minimum purchase prices for rice and wheat rose 67 percent and 63 percent versus 138 percent and 122 percent over the previous decade, government data showed.

The farm sector, which accounts for around 15 percent of India's \$3.7 trillion economy, has grown at an average of around 3.5 percent a year in the last nine years, compared to over 6 percent growth in manufacturing and services.

"The disparity between urban and rural India has widened in recent years, and that imbalance will only get wider if the government does not address the crisis in agriculture," Arun Kumar, a former economics professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, said.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



Palestinians try to remove the debris from a humanitarian aid vehicle heavily damaged by airstrikes in Deir al-Balah, in the Gaza Strip, on Sunday. BELAL KHALED VIA GETTY IMAGES

'Significant progress' gained in truce talks

Calls grow for immediate cease-fire as Netanyahu rebukes cabinet minister

GAZA/WASHINGTON — Mediators have made "significant progress" toward a truce in Gaza on Monday as Benny Gantz, a political rival of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, visited the United States, signaling widening cracks within the country's leadership nearly five months into its fighting with Hamas.

After weeks of diplomatic efforts, Egypt, Qatar and the United States have been scrambling to lock in a proposed six-week truce in the conflict between Israel and Hamas before Ramadan.

The proposal includes the release of hostages abducted during Hamas' Oct 7 attack in Israel, in exchange for Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

Al-Qahera News, linked to Egypt's intelligence services, quoted an unnamed senior official as saying: "Egypt continues its intense efforts to reach a truce before Ramadan", the Muslim fasting month which begins on March 10.

"There has been significant progress in the negotiations," the report said after the latest talks began on Sunday in Cairo, without Israeli representation.

Israel has declined public comment on the talks or its decision not to attend.

According to a senior US official, Israel has broadly accepted the terms of the proposed truce, which would also see stepped-up aid deliveries into Gaza.

Sticking points had hampered the efforts, including a Hamas demand that Israeli forces entirely withdraw from the Gaza Strip.

And Israel, which has so far announced no plans to join the Egypt talks, has demanded Hamas provide it with a list of all 130 remaining captives.

Despite the latest push to halt the fighting, there was no letup in Israeli bombing and urban combat in Gaza.

Late on Sunday, a correspondent of Agence France-Presse reported several airstrikes in southern Gaza's Rafah and Khan Younis.

Earlier, 90 Palestinians were killed within 24 hours, said the Hamas-ruled territory's health ministry.

Witnesses told AFP that an Israeli strike hit an aid truck in central Gaza, killing several people, but the military denied the truck carried relief.

Sticking point

Netanyahu has so far rejected pulling troops out of Gaza before Hamas is destroyed and all hostages are freed, as he faces mounting calls from their desperate families and from a resurgent anti-government protest movement, to secure the release of the hostages.

On Sunday, Netanyahu rebuked Gantz, a top cabinet minister, who arrived in Washington for talks with US officials, according to an Israeli official, signaling

widening cracks within the country's leadership.

The trip by Gantz, a centrist political rival who joined Netanyahu's cabinet organizing its campaign in Gaza following Hamas' Oct 7 attack, comes as friction between the US and Netanyahu is rising over how to alleviate the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza and what the postwar plan for the enclave should look like.

An official from Netanyahu's far-right Likud party said Gantz's trip was planned without authorization from the Israeli leader. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Netanyahu had a "tough talk" with Gantz and told him the country has "just one prime minister".

Gantz met on Monday with US Vice-President Kamala Harris and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and is expected on Tuesday to meet with Secretary of State Antony Blinken, according to his National Unity Party.

A second Israeli official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Gantz's visit is intended to strengthen ties with the US, bolster support for Israel and push for the release of Israeli hostages.

Before meeting with Gantz, Harris on Sunday urged an immediate cease-fire in Gaza, upping the pressure on key ally Israel. "Taking an unusually sharp tone, she demanded Israel 'do more to significantly increase the flow of aid' into Gaza, where she said people are starving and the conditions 'inhumane'."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Arab League denounces deprivation of lifesaving aid

Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit said on Sunday that depriving Palestinians in the Gaza Strip of basic lifesaving aid is tantamount to a "death sentence and collective punishment".

The AL chief made the remarks during his meeting with Sigrid Kaag, United Nations senior humanitarian and reconstruction coordinator for Gaza, at the league's headquarters in Cairo, the

organization said in a statement. Aboul Gheit attributed the deteriorating humanitarian conditions in Gaza, home to more than 2 million people, to "the green light that some major powers gave to Israel to practice aggression in such a hideous and inhuman manner".

He reiterated that the priority at this stage is to reach an immediate cease-fire and stop the bloodshed. The siege on the Gaza Strip has

sparked warnings of famine. About 80 percent of Gaza's population of 2.3 million have fled their homes, and UN agencies said hundreds of thousands are on the brink of famine.

Egypt, Jordan and some countries have started airdropping food to the enclave in an effort to relieve the humanitarian disaster in Gaza.

XINHUA-AGENCIES

Russia summons German diplomat over leaked tape

By REN QI in Moscow renqi@chinadaily.com.cn

The Russian Foreign Ministry summoned the German ambassador on Monday, TASS news agency reported, after Russian media published an audio recording of Berlin's potential involvement in the conflict in Ukraine.

In the purported call released by Russia's RT broadcaster, German military officers were heard discussing weapons for Ukraine and a potential strike by Kyiv on a bridge in Crimea, prompting Russian officials to demand an explanation.

The Kremlin said on Monday that the content of a leaked conversation between German officials about potential strikes on Crimea proved Western countries were participating in the conflict in Ukraine.

"The recording itself suggests that the Bundeswehr is discussing substantively and specifically plans to strike Russian territory," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

Peskov was speaking as the German ambassador to Russia was summoned to the foreign ministry in Moscow.

Ambassador Alexander Graf Lambsdorff left the ministry building without giving any comment, Russian news agencies reported.

Dmitry Medvedev, deputy chairman of Russia's Security Council also said on Monday that Moscow would show restraint in response to the purported intercept of the German military discussing a strike on Russia, but would not forget about it.

He made the comments at a youth forum in southern Russia, the RIA news agency reported.

German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius earlier responded to the leak, describing it as part of Russia's "information war" against the West, and that it was aimed to create discord within Germany.

In the 38-minute recording, German military officers also discussed how the Taurus long-range cruise missiles could be used by Ukraine. It was said the audio was leaked as a debate had been taking place in Germany over whether to supply the missiles.

Pistorius told reporters on Sunday that the Bundeswehr officers did not discuss specific plans, but talked about hypothetical options, keeping in mind that Germany should not become part of the conflict in Ukraine.

He said the timing was not a coincidence.

"It is part of an information war... There is absolutely no doubt about that," he said. "It is a hybrid attack aimed at disinformation. It is about division. It is about undermining our resolve."

He also said it does not mean it is a green light to supply the weapons to Ukraine.

On Saturday, the German Defense Ministry confirmed the call had been wiretapped. Chancellor Olaf Scholz pledged a prompt investigation into the situation.

Earlier last week, Scholz said the Kremlin said on Monday that the content of a leaked conversation between German officials about potential strikes on Crimea proved Western countries were participating in the conflict in Ukraine.

NATO member Turkiye hopes talks for a cease-fire in Ukraine will start soon, Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said on Sunday after meeting his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov on the sidelines of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum.

Rail network targeted

But a truce seemed to be far away from happening as Ukraine said it blew up a railway bridge in Russia's southwestern Samara region on Monday because it was being used to transport "military cargo". It was the latest in a string of explosions targeting Russia's rail network.

Meanwhile, NATO was scheduled to kick off an exercise on Monday to defend its newly expanded Nordic territory, with more than 20,000 soldiers from 13 nations expected to take part in drills lasting nearly two weeks in the northern regions of Finland, Norway and Sweden.

With over 4,000 Finnish soldiers taking part, the Norway-led Nordic Response 2024 represents the NATO newcomer's largest-ever participation in a foreign exercise, Finland's military said.

Finland, which shares a 1,340-kilometer border with Russia, joined NATO in April in a historic move following decades of military nonalignment. With its bid now ratified by all NATO members, neighboring Sweden is currently finalizing formalities to enter the military alliance as its 32nd member — most likely in March.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Rallying cry



Protesters shout slogans in Seoul on Monday during a rally demanding an end to the joint military exercises between the US and South Korea. LEE JIN-MAN / AP

Moving adrift



A fishing vessel is washed ashore in Kozushima village, Tokyo, on Monday. The vessel is a tuna fishing boat with 25 crew members. The Japan Coast Guard carried out the rescue operation using helicopters, and 24 people have been rescued. THE YOMIURI SHIMBUN VIA AP

Briefly

UNITED STATES Haley beats Trump in Washington, DC, primary

Former US ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley on Sunday defeated former US president Donald Trump in the Republican presidential primary in Washington, DC, marking her first win in the party's nominating contest. Haley's victory came after Trump's recent sweep of the Republican contests. On Saturday, the former president won Missouri's and Idaho's Republican presidential caucuses. Also on Saturday, he was awarded more delegates during a Republican convention in Michigan. Despite consecutive losses, Haley has said she would remain in the race at least through Super Tuesday races.

INDIA 3 accused of raping foreign tourist held

Indian police have detained three men and were searching for four others accused of attacking two tourists and gang-raping the woman, Reuters quoted authorities and the couple as saying on Sunday. Police found the couple, who are Spanish citizens, around 11 pm on Friday on the roadside, looking like they had suffered a beating. Pitamber Singh Kherwar, superintendent of police in Dumka in eastern India, told reporters on Saturday. He did not give details on the crime or identify the victims, adding the two people told authorities "their modesty had been outraged", in an incident involving seven men.

HAITI Emergency declared after prison break

Haiti's government declared on Sunday a state of emergency and nighttime curfew in a bid to regain control of the country after a deadly gang assault on the capital's main prison that allowed thousands of inmates to escape. The curfew will be enforced from 6 pm to 5 am in the Ouest region, which includes the capital, through Wednesday, the government said in a statement, adding that both the curfew and the state of emergency can be extended. About a dozen people died as gang members attacked the National Penitentiary in Port-au-Prince overnight Saturday into Sunday, Agence France-Presse reported.

PAKISTAN 36 killed, 41 injured due to heavy rains

At least 36 people were killed and 41 others injured in separate incidents in Pakistan as heavy rains swept across the country from Feb 27 to March 3, Pakistan's National Disaster Management Authority said. The deceased include 21 children, nine males and six females, it said in a situation report released on Sunday night. The northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province was the worst-hit region, where 27 people were killed, followed by the southwestern Balochistan Province with five deaths, while four deaths were reported in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, it added.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

BUSINESS

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Scholars see ample space for further GDP growth

By OUYANG SHIJIA and LIU ZHIHUA

National legislators and political advisers have refuted certain pessimistic narratives regarding the Chinese economy circulated by Western media, asserting that China's economy has not peaked and in fact has ample space for further growth and development.

"I do not agree with the view that China's economy has reached its peak," Tian Xuan, vice-dean of Tsinghua University's PBC School of Finance, said in an exclusive interview with China Daily.

"Though China's economy is not growing as rapidly as before, it is still growing."

Tian, who is also a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress, said China's economy has sustained robust growth despite uncertainties and challenges — in stark contrast to the situations in some other major economies.

China's economy expanded by 5.2 percent in 2023, significantly higher than that of the United States at 2.5 percent, the eurozone at 0.5 percent and Japan's 1.9 percent, data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed.

He said the final growth rate of the country will be around 5 percent for 2024, indicating better economic performance this year compared to last year, given the low base rate in 2022.

"Such a growth rate would be in line with the laws governing economic development," Tian added. "For a huge economy like China, with a GDP exceeding 100 trillion yuan (\$13.9 trillion), maintaining double-digit growth is unrealistic."

Looking ahead, the country has ample policy space to bolster the world's second-largest economy, he said, adding that it is advisable for the country to expand central borrowing.

More efforts are also needed to support the development of the private sector and foster new productive drivers, which will help boost business confidence and inject strong impetus into the economy, he said.

Justin Yifu Lin, dean of Peking University's Institute of New Structural Economics, said China's economy will grow beyond 5 percent this year if the government adopts more proactive fiscal and monetary expansion to stimulate domestic investment and consumption.

"I personally believe it would be possible for China to reach 5-5.5 percent (growth) this year," said Lin, who is also a deputy-director of the Committee on Economic Affairs of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the country's top political advisory body.

Looking ahead, Lin said that the nation's potential annual growth rate in the coming decade could be 8 percent or higher, rebutting theories that economic growth will continue to drop due to such factors as demographic changes and the so-called balance sheet recession, as experienced by Japan.

Multinational companies also reaffirmed their commitment to the China market, expressing optimism about the country's economic prospects.

"I believe that China will maintain its economic growth and remain a key contributor to global economic recovery in 2024," said Marc Horn, president of Merck China. "In the mid and long run, I am optimistic that China's economy will largely benefit from the current ongoing economic reforms, which target a Chinese path to modernization driven by industrial upgrading, high-tech development and green initiatives."

Contact the writers at ouyangshijia@chinadaily.com.cn



Export-bound vehicles await shipment at Yantai port, Shandong province TANG KE / FOR CHINA DAILY

Auto experts decry threat of US curbs

American automakers slow to adopt electrification; EV protectionism in air

By LI FUSHENG

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The United States is threatening to curb China's electric vehicle industry with trade barriers, primarily because US carmakers have been reluctant to switch toward electrification, said industry analysts and executives.

"China is determined to dominate the future of the auto market ... I'm not going to let that happen on my watch," said US President Joe Biden in a statement on Thursday.

Roy Lu, an independent auto analyst based in Shanghai, said it is "an act of protectionism," because there are "basically no Chinese passenger EVs at all" in the US.

Lu said General Motors and Ford are reaping good profits on their gasoline models so they have been slow to come up with competitive EVs. Development of new EVs would entail huge investment. EV sales do not promise immediate profits.

Ford reported a record net income of \$4.3 billion last year, up from a loss of \$2 billion in 2022. GM's net income hit \$10.1 billion in the same year, up from \$9.9 billion in 2022.

Ford has only two electric models in China and GM's Buick and Chevrolet combined has four, according to their websites, although the NEV competition has been fierce in the Chinese market. In contrast, 10-year-old Chinese startup Nio has eight.

Last year, 9.5 million NEVs, including EVs and plug-in hybrids,

were sold in China, accounting for 31.6 percent of total vehicle deliveries in the country, according to the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers.

Mathias Miedreich, chief executive of Umicore, one of the world's biggest battery materials manufacturers, said sales of Chinese electric cars were surging in contrast to the scene in the US due to better performance and affordability.

"They are simply good cars and people buy them," he said in an interview with the Financial Times, referring to Chinese vehicles. "The American ones (producers) seem to struggle to bring good electric vehicles (to market)."

The US threat to impose curbs on Chinese EV industry came after the European Union started an anti-subsidy investigation in October against Chinese automakers. The United Kingdom is reportedly considering a similar probe.

Yale Zhang, managing director of consultancy Automotive Foresight, said the European auto sector has been halfhearted about electrification.

Mercedes said it will spruce up combustion engine models. It expects sales of electrified vehicles, including hybrids, to account for up to 50 percent of the total by 2030, five years later than its forecast in 2021.

"But Chinese carmakers and suppliers have been steadfast in their electrification despite difficulties over the past years and have built a sound industry chain covering all major components from batteries

to electric motors," said Zhang.

Volkswagen, Europe's largest carmaker, said in December that its development time in China is one-third less than in Germany. One of the reasons for that is, local suppliers can be involved from the very start.

The first-mover advantage and innovation as a result of competition are helping Chinese NEV sales rise both in China and overseas.

Last year, over 1.2 million units were exported, of which a quarter were from Tesla's Shanghai plant. But there is no "dumping" to talk about, as Chinese NEVs are usually priced higher in overseas markets than in China, said Zhang.

One example is BYD's Atto 3, which is priced from 37,990 euros (\$41,211), according to Automotive News Europe. In China, the model has a price tag from 119,800 yuan (\$16,642).

Zhang also hailed the role of Tesla in the development of China's NEV industry, saying that it has stimulated Chinese carmakers to produce competitive models and prompted Chinese car buyers to consider EVs seriously.

While the European authorities are considering unfair measures, some European carmakers have partnered with Chinese peers.

Volkswagen said it is co-developing two models with Chinese startup Xpeng and they will hit the market in 2026.

Stellantis, which owns brands from Maserati to Peugeot, has acquired a 20 percent stake in Leapmotor, another Chinese startup. The European car giant is also planning to produce and sell Leapmotor vehicles in overseas markets.

SOEs urged to unleash 'new productive forces'

By ZHUANG QIANG zhuangqiang@chinadaily.com.cn

"New productive forces" will play a pivotal role in the nation's pursuit of high-quality development, and should be positioned as a key mission by major corporates, especially State-owned enterprises, to help drive the nation's modernization progress, said a political advisor during the ongoing two sessions in Beijing.

"There are existing challenges hindering not only the nation's but enterprises' march to high-quality development, with issues such as reliance on external technologies and the dilemma of 'big but not strong' industries looming large," said Dai Hegen, a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

To address this issue, State-owned enterprises, being major players in the country's economy, should go beyond conventional pathways to actively join the efforts to foster high-quality development, said Dai, who is also the chairman of China Railway Construction Corp, a centrally-administered SOE specializing in infrastructure.

SOEs should embrace innovation as the driving force to help nurture advanced productivity, with a "robust focus on scientific and technological innovation, particularly in pioneering and disruptive realms", he said, adding such disruptive technologies hold the promise of transforming existing paradigms and steering the nation toward a future of unparalleled progress.

New productive forces refer to advanced productivity freed from traditional economic growth models. They feature high technology, high efficiency and high quality, and align with the country's new development philosophy.

Amid China's relentless efforts to seek high-quality development and new advantages, the key to the mission lies in empowering enterprises to be self-reliant in terms of critical technologies, so that they can cultivate new productive forces and boost the nation's high-quality progress, Dai said.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, China's total expenditure on research and development in 2023 grew by 8.1 percent to over 3.33 trillion yuan (\$426 billion), with enterprises being major players in the sector. The country also tops the world in the total number of R&D personnel.

To further leverage innovation and speed up the development of new productive forces, China has established scientific and technological partnerships with more than 160 countries and regions worldwide in clean energy, artificial intelligence and biomedicine.

As for CRCC, it has long been building China's high-speed railways, and continues to be committed to enhancing R&D in technologies, with some of its efforts bearing fruit, like the world's first 1,000-metric-ton bridge erection machine Kunlun and the world's largest-diameter tunnel boring machine or TBM, the company's chairman said.

On this year's proposals, Dai said he is stressing that the potential of urban underground spaces should be unlocked. This represents a strategic choice for the nation's urbanization and sustainable development.

China should make concerted efforts to establish a hub for original technologies in underground space development, intensify research in cutting-edge equipment and materials, and bolster the industrial ecosystem to realize the full potential of underground spaces, he said.



Dai Hegen



A train runs on the Hotan-Ruoqiang railway in the desert area of the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. Partly built by CRCC, the rail line is a key link in Northwest China. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Briefly

Mobile phone shipments up in Jan

Mobile phone shipments in China increased 68.1 percent year-on-year to 31.78 million units in January, said the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology. 5G mobile phones accounted for the majority of the shipments, totaling 26.17 million units, marking a 59 percent year-on-year expansion.

Beijing eyes more smart factories

Beijing plans to add 100 smart factories and digital workshops over the next three years. The goal was revealed in a plan for digitalization in the city's manufacturing sector between 2024-26, issued by the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Economy and Information Technology.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

TCL pushes tech innovation, industrial upgrade

By FAN FEIFEI

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TCL Technology Group Corp is ramping up efforts to bolster industrial upgrading and technological innovation, as part of a broader push to foster new productive forces and advance new industrialization, the top executive of the Chinese consumer electronics maker said.

The essence of nurturing new productive forces lies in promoting high-quality development, said TCL's founder and chairman Li Dongsheng.

Li, who is also a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress, China's top legislature, emphasized that boosting sci-tech innovation, research and development of fun-

damental technologies and materials, as well as the transformation and upgrade of industries are playing a vital role in the development of new productive forces.

In the past six years, the company has invested more than 60 billion yuan (\$8.3 billion) in R&D, with the cumulative number of patents reaching 100,000, he added.

It mainly focuses on three core business segments covering intelligent terminals, semiconductor displays and new energy photovoltaics.

In his proposal to this year's legislative session, Li called for more efforts to further improve the financing environment for high-tech manufacturing enterprises, increase the proportion of direct financing, especially equity financ-

ing, and expand financing channels for enterprises.

The high-tech manufacturing sector has played a vital role in bolstering industrial upgrade and cultivating new growth drivers, Li said, adding he has great confidence in the Chinese economy and the country's manufacturing sector over the long run.

Li also suggested promoting the high-quality development of China's high-definition display industry, which is regarded as a strategic emerging industry, by optimizing the environment of the content creation industry and enriching the supply of premium content.

The Central Economic Work Conference held in December urged efforts to promote industrial innovation through sci-tech inno-

vation and, in particular, develop new industries, models and impetus with innovative and cutting-edge technologies, in order to foster new productive forces.

"Being different from traditional productive forces that are mainly driven by labor, land and capital, new productive forces rely more on technological advancement, innovative allocation of production factors and industrial transformation and upgrade," said Pan Helin, co-director of the Digital Economy and Financial Innovation Research Center at Zhejiang University's International Business School.

Pan said cultivating new productive forces and accelerating the establishment of a modern industrial system are of great significance in moving the country's

manufacturing sector up to the medium-high end of the global value chain and injecting strong impetus into China's high-quality economic development.

China's emphasis on the development of new productive forces is expected to propel the intelligent, green and high-end development of industries, improve the resilience and security of industrial and supply chains, and consolidate the economic recovery momentum, Pan added.

"We will continue to make efforts in the fields of artificial intelligence, augmented reality, virtual reality, next-generation display technology and new energy photovoltaics," Li said.

Li further said Chinese enterprises should improve their presence in global industrial and supply chains, speed up localization efforts and strengthen competitiveness in high-end manufacturing globally.

BUSINESSFOCUS

PV firms eye offshore energy potential

Though industry still exploring new tech, top players are now leading efforts to leverage sector advantages

By ZHENG XIN
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As demand for renewable energy surges across the world, China's solar power companies are turning their attention away from onshore to harness the untapped opportunities and vast potential of offshore solar energy.

Offshore photovoltaics have been an important part of the national plan in China, the world's largest solar market, since 2022, although the industry is still exploring potential technologies, policy designs and procedures, said the Center for Energy and Environmental Policy Research of Beijing Institute of Technology.

Globally, offshore solar has yet to progress beyond a few pilot projects, as most solar panels are not designed to survive the harsh, corrosive environment of the sea. However, some of China's coastal provinces have big plans for their intertidal zones, said Zhao Tianyi, an analyst at BloombergNEF.

China has taken significant strides in offshore photovoltaics in recent years, especially in Shandong and Jiangsu provinces, she said.

Offshore solar projects involve the installation of solar panels on floating platforms or structures in bodies of water, such as oceans or large lakes. These projects offer several advantages, including increased energy production potential due to unobstructed sunlight, reduced land use, and the potential for more efficient cooling of solar panels.

Compared with solar projects onshore, the offshore ones have a higher capacity factor since the reflective water surface will cast light on the reverse side of bifacial modules, making it attractive for solar companies, Zhao added.

Leading Chinese solar companies, including JA Solar Technology, Longi Green Energy Technology Co Ltd and inverter maker SunGrow Power Supply Co Ltd, have been spearheading efforts to tap the advantages of offshore solar projects over the past few years, aiming to overcome challenges associated with onshore development and revolutionize the renewable energy landscape, said BloombergNEF.

JA Solar released two new PV module products designed specifically for offshore floating and fixed pile-based offshore solar projects in January, marking the first-tier photovoltaic manufacturer's debut in 2024 of such products for offshore solar development.

The prevalent designs in China are fixed-pile foundations that are primarily located in tidal flats and intertidal zones, rather than floating systems, which are considered



Workers assemble photovoltaic panels at a smart workshop in Yiwu, Zhejiang province, in June 2021. SHI BUFA / FOR CHINA DAILY



A view of an offshore solar platform off Yantai, Shandong province, in November. TANG KE / FOR CHINA DAILY

more economical with less application limits and environmental damage.

This is part of the company's efforts to further explore offshore solar development as a means of diversifying its renewable energy portfolio. It also comes at a time when traditional onshore solar farms are facing challenges related to land availability, environmental concerns, and grid congestion.

These modules have currently been applied in the country's first offshore floating photovoltaic base in East China's Shandong province, operated by CIMC Offshore Solar Technology (Yantai), a joint venture between CIMC Raffles and Yantai government-owned Yantai Hi-tech Construction Investment and Development.

JA Solar is not alone. Module giant Longi Green Energy Technology Co Ltd has also been intensifying efforts

to advance offshore solar projects. Recognizing the untapped potential of solar power at sea, Longi has strategically invested in research in photovoltaic modules that are corrosion- and wind-resistant to ensure their durability and performance against waves and seawater.

According to Zhang Jun, head of the product technology department at JA Solar, China has about 18,000 kilometers of mainland coastline, presenting a potential installed capacity of over 100 gigawatts for offshore photovoltaics. With the global coastline exceeding one million kilometers, the energy potential is even more significant.

"Offshore solar power stations in economically developed coastal regions enjoy vast advantages. They not only require less land for investment, but also achieve higher electricity generation compared with that of land-based ones," he said.

"Located close to the electricity demand centers along coastlines, they also reduce transmission distances and losses, while the utilization of offshore tidal flats and nearshore areas also addresses the issue of limited land and environmental concerns on land."

While offshore photovoltaics have significant potential, Zhang said it requires collective efforts to promote and tackle obstacles, including land expenses in certain maritime areas. Companies should also step up research and development to come up with products that can withstand high waves, strong winds and damage caused by salt water.

"Many countries and regions have introduced relevant policy support to reduce investment risks and increase returns through subsidies, tax incentives, or power purchase agreements," he said.

Apart from China, most offshore photovoltaic activities are in the Netherlands and Scandinavia, where firms are strong in offshore expertise.

Dutch company Oceans of Energy has operated a 500-kW offshore solar farm in the North Sea since 2020, which floats on a raft combining rigid and flexible structures that allow it to ride on the waves.

According to a recently released report by China Renewable Energy Engineering Institute on the current status and prospects of offshore photovoltaics, the development of offshore solar resources is expected to open up a new frontier for renewable energy, enabling countries with limited land to significantly expand their solar capacity.

While the offshore solar sector is still in its early stages in China, the

growing interest from major solar companies underscores the potential for offshore solar projects to become key players in the global renewable energy landscape, said Wu Mudan, technical supervisor of the institute.

According to Wu, fixed pile-based offshore solar projects have been implemented in various provinces and cities across the nation, with continuously optimized costs and enhanced economic viability.

The floating type is currently in the demonstration phase, with some small-scale pilot projects located in Zhejiang, Fujian, Hainan and Jiangsu provinces, among others.

Cutting costs

The most significant bottleneck for offshore photovoltaics at the moment is the considerable pressure to reduce costs and increase efficiencies, said Wu.

The release of JA Solar's offshore photovoltaic n-type modules is, however, expected to stimulate the technical advancement of offshore photovoltaic systems and enhance the investment returns of projects, she said.

In addition to JA Solar Technology, many photovoltaic companies have introduced relevant products or solutions for offshore photovoltaics over the past year, including Trina Solar and Longi Green Energy Technology.

The Institutes of Science and Development, which is part of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, believes that while offshore solar power is still in the initial stages with limited installed capacity and much higher construction cost compared with that of ground-based

centralized photovoltaics, grid parity is anticipated by the end of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) period due to technological advances.

Grid parity means equal or lower cost of generating electricity from renewable sources than that from conventional grid sources such as coal.

Stock brokerage Everbright Securities said significant power consumption and limited land resources in China's coastal regions have constrained new energy development, making offshore solar a rising star.

Against the backdrop of China's ambitious plan to peak carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060, various coastal provinces in the country are progressively focusing on the development of the offshore photovoltaic industry, according to a research report by Everbright Securities.

Boasting abundant marine resources for the development of offshore solar energy, a synergy between offshore solar and offshore wind power can also effectively optimize investment costs, including those associated with sea cables and substation facilities, it said.

Offshore wind and solar can also complement offshore resources. After all, photovoltaics thrive on only a small amount of sunlight — wherever there is sunshine, it can generate electricity, said the agency.

Figures released by BloombergNEF reveal that Shandong plans 12 GW of alternating current capacity of offshore solar power by 2025, while other coastal regions, including Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Fujian provinces, and Tianjin, have also started to release relevant policies and conducted some preliminary studies.

These areas already import significant electricity from the western regions of China, and it is difficult to build new transmission lines due to rising costs and land availability. The provincial governments expect local generation to support future power demand growth, said the think tank.

BloombergNEF believes offshore floating photovoltaic stations will have the potential to become the mainstream form of offshore solar development in the future.

While one of the key factors for the wider application of offshore floating photovoltaic stations is the investment return, Zhang from JA Solar said there is still room for improvement in return on investment as the costs of relevant materials and installations decrease.

The offshore solar market is expected to go through intense competition among top-tier enterprises in the near future, as offshore photovoltaics projects pose higher requirements on cells, modules, materials and technology, Zhang said.

As the first company in the industry to release products specifically designed for floating solar projects, JA Solar is committed to continuing to explore offshore solar development to further diversify its renewable energy portfolio, he added.

By ZHENG XIN

China is on course to achieve its wind and solar power targets despite global economic uncertainties, and is poised to install more than 200 million kilowatts of new solar and wind capacity in 2024, six years ahead of the initial plan, according to a think tank.

In the first half of last year, China's installed capacity of renewable energy surpassed that of coal for the first time, indicating a change in the country's energy structure. The installed capacity of renewable energy continued to grow in the second half of 2023, accounting for about half of the total installed capacity in the country.

Such efforts are contributing to the country's green growth by providing affordable and eco-friendly sustainable energy, the Center for Energy and Environmental Policy Research of Beijing Institute of Technology said in a report released recently.

The innovation prowess of Chinese new energy companies continues to surge, while industry experts anticipate a sustained improvement in efficiency throughout the year, according to the Forecasting & Prospects Research Report on Energy

Economy released by the institute.

Longi Green Energy Technology Co Ltd, a leading enterprise in the photovoltaic industry in China, broke the world record in November with a new conversion efficiency of 33.9 percent for silicon-perovskite tandem solar cells, a crucial indicator and benchmark for evaluating the potential of photovoltaic technologies.

Improved cell conversion efficiency and reduced electricity costs are considered the drivers behind the development of the photovoltaic industry.

According to Jiang Hua, deputy secretary-general of the China Photovoltaic Industry Association, cost reduction and efficiency improvement are at the core of the photovoltaic industry, which is cost-driven. Continuous enhancement of the conversion efficiency of photovoltaic cells is an effective measure to reduce the overall cost of photovoltaic power generation.

Once this high-efficiency cell technology is truly put into mass production, it will lead to a significant reduction in the cost of photovoltaic power generation, which will be extremely beneficial to driving the growth of the photovoltaic market in China and globally, he said.

Nation on track to hit solar, wind power goals



An employee works on a production line at Longi Green Energy Technology Co Ltd in Taizhou, Jiangsu province, in December 2022. TANG DEHONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Enormous investments have gone into not only expanding production capacity, but also fueling research and development efforts and promoting new technology in recent years. Throughout 2023, a large number of new technologies have been integrated into production processes, it said.

In addition to Longi, Chinese photovoltaic manufacturing firm GCL Technology Holdings Ltd also made substantial investments in the expansion of its granular silicon production capacity last year, with better cost-effectiveness and consistency.

According to Yu Biying, a professor at Beijing Institute of Technology, solar power has been emerging as a crucial driver in the high-quality development of China's economy.

Solar cells, together with lithium-ion batteries and new energy vehicles, have become the new top drivers of China's exports, replacing traditional items such as apparel, home appliances and furniture, amid the nation's pursuit of high-quality and low-carbon development.

China's technological advantages in manufacturing quality electric vehicles, lithium-ion batteries, and solar batteries, coupled with the growing global demand for low-car-

bon products, has made the country an important supplier for many economies, she said.

Green exports will remain a strong engine for high-quality growth, thanks to a nurturing policy environment and continued investment, she added.

Projections for 2024 suggest a continual uptick in investments in the renewable energy sector, defying the overall subdued global economic prospects, while an increasing number of Chinese enterprises are expected to strategically invest in overseas plants, fortifying the nation's global position in the renewable energy sector and overcoming international trade barriers, according to the report.

Currently commanding over 50 percent of the global market share in wind power equipment production and more than 80 percent in photovoltaic components, China's renewable energy industry is benefiting from strengthening international competitiveness. A wave of energy equipment and manufacturing enterprises are at the forefront, transitioning from scale expansion to a phase of quality enhancement, it added.

COMMENT

Editorials

Pool wisdom to better explore Chinese path to modernization

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, the 70th anniversary of the National People's Congress, the country's top legislature, and the 75th anniversary of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the country's political advisory body. The lawmakers and political advisers have every reason to carry on their good traditions and work style that have seen the country develop to its current stage in a bid to help it better explore the Chinese path to modernization.

As an important institutional embodiment of the practice of whole-process people's democracy, the annual gatherings of the NPC and CPPCC National Committee, or two sessions as they are commonly known, are a significant event in the political life of the country. They build platforms and channels to transform people's wishes and the country's needs into laws, regulations and workable policies. Given the tremendous resistance the country faces in sustaining its innovation-driven growth, the two sessions convened in Beijing this week are being closely watched for indications of how China will chart its course to navigate the difficulties and forge ahead against the headwinds.

In the face of the strong demands of the people and the pressing requirements to make breakthroughs in some core issues concerning national development this year, the nearly 3,000 lawmakers and more than 2,000 political advisers from all walks of life should take advantage of the opportunity of their face-to-face exchanges to better contribute their knowledge, experience, wisdom and expertise to enable the nation to make the most of what it has to better advance its modernization with Chinese characteristics.

It should be seen that, with the Chinese economy surging at 5.2 percent, hitting over 126 trillion yuan (\$17.5 trillion) last year, the country has withstood multiple pressures to achieve reasonable quantitative growth.

This year is a critical year for realizing the tasks of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25). From a global perspective, the country is facing a more complex external environment, and multiple risks and challenges. That requires it to persist in seeking progress while maintaining stability and balancing different needs. From the domestic perspective, the lawmakers and political advisers should ensure that the legal and policy environments are conducive to law-based governance, so as to create a stable, transparent and predictable institutional environment. And more initiatives are needed to deepen reforms, expand opening-up and domestic demand, and effectively prevent and resolve risks in key areas.

The extent to which these objectives can be realized will have a direct bearing on how effectively people's livelihoods can be improved, how efficiently the country can balance security and development, how successful it is in stimulating innovation, and how well the country can respond to external challenges. All lawmakers and political advisers need to do their best to fulfill their duties during and beyond the two sessions to these ends. The focus of the two sessions should be on unremittingly promoting high-quality development, continuously enhancing the country's national strength, and fostering endogenous innovation. By doing so, the lawmakers and political advisers can better boost public confidence that the nation has the capability and wherewithal to realize the rejuvenation of the nation and stand the test of the times.

US military wants its money fix

The United States' military has a habit. It is in constant need of a fix. And it has repeatedly shown that it will say or do anything, without any shame or qualms, to satisfy its craving. The US already has the most powerful military, yet the US top brass are constantly hyping up external threats to try and get more money for their buzz-giver of choice.

This time, it is Stephen Whiting, head of the US Space Command, who has sounded the alarm over what he perceives as China's rapid advancement in space technology, warning of the potential threats he alleges it poses to the US' interests in outer space.

Speaking before the US Senate Armed Services Committee on Thursday, Whiting set off a siren about China's "breath-taking" progress in military space technology and counter-space capabilities, which he claimed are aimed at denying the US and its allies access to space assets when necessary. By 2030, he cautioned lawmakers, China will have reached "world-class status in all but a few space technology areas".

Whiting didn't bother to hide the addiction motivating such scaremongering, claiming there was "an urgency for our Command to advocate for delivery of new space capabilities and capacity to retain an enduring competitive advantage" in the space domain.

His playing up of a military threat from China was echoed at the same event by Anthony Cotton, head of the US Strategic Command. The purpose of their hustling, as was evident, was to get cash, and lots of it, in order to modernize the US nuclear triad capabilities, that is its ability to strike from the land, sea and air, a mammoth project expected to ultimately cost \$1.5 trillion over the next 30 years. Their unfounded scaremongering was a textbook US military hustle that played to the gallery of their sponsors' bias. Their pantomime portrayal of China as the villain of their story is risible because contrary to their money-tapping tall tales, no country has posed a more serious threat to other countries' security in space than the US.

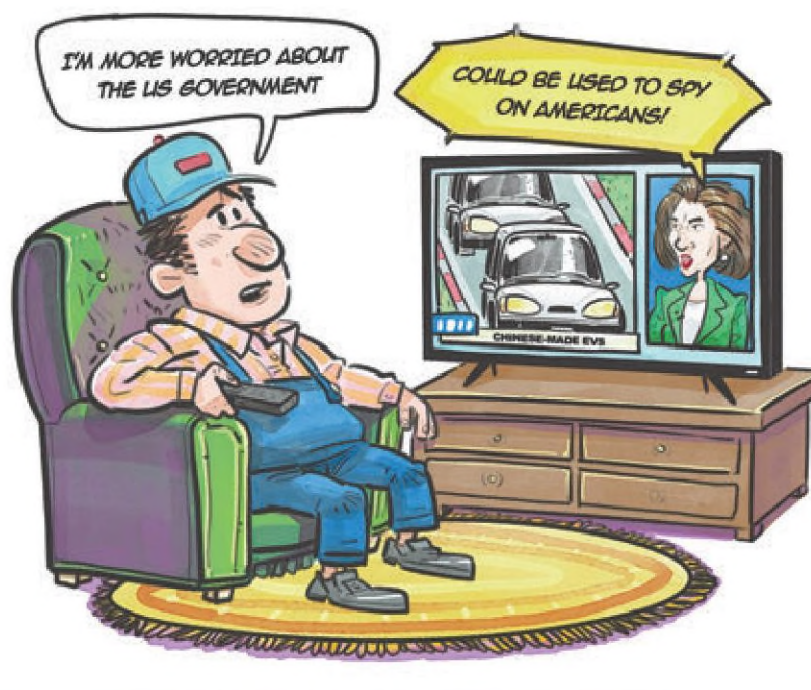
The country has in recent years taken significant actions — such as establishing the US Space Force as a new military wing and setting up the US Space Command as a unified combatant command — to accelerate its militarization of space. It is also actively deploying offensive weapons in space and conducting military exercises and technical experiments there. Such moves undermine world peace and stability and risk triggering an arms race in space.

Belying their budget-badgering scare stories, China has advocated the peaceful use of space and opposed a space arms race. It has called on countries to work together to build a community of shared future in space and to carry out in-depth exchanges and cooperation for the mutually beneficial utilization of outer space. It has actively promoted talks on an arms control treaty on outer space, and cosponsored related United Nations General Assembly resolutions such as No First Placement of Weapons in Outer Space and Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space. Facts show that China has remained a stabilizing force, rather than a threat as claimed by the US, and it is the leading advocate for cooperative space utilization and exploration for the common security and well-being of humankind.

The US should abandon its Cold War mentality, follow the trend of the times, and join China and other countries in the efforts to preserve space as a global commons, where all countries share broad common interests. Space should be an exciting new frontier for cooperation rather than a battlefield for falsely fear-fueled confrontation.



Cai Meng



Opinion Line

China-Europe freight railway of great significance to global logistics stability

A Republic of Korea newspaper recently reported that the conflict in the Red Sea waterway has triggered a global logistics crisis, causing shipping freight charges from the ROK to the European Union to soar by 250 percent in four months. It also said that China won't feel the heat because of its China-Europe freight train channel.

The Red Sea is one of the key shipping routes for trade to Western Europe and the United States. Since November, to show their solidarity with Palestine, Yemen's Houthi militia have repeatedly been attacking vessels in the Red Sea waters, causing many shipping companies to suspend the Red Sea route through the Suez Canal, and take a detour via the Cape of Good Hope.

At a time when major sea lanes are disrupted and global supply chain security is facing challenges, the China-Europe freight railway, which was once attacked by the foreign media as more of a "symbolic" mode of

transport, is suddenly in everyone's focus.

Compared with sea transport, the most prominent advantage of the China-Europe freight train route is stability. Maersk's chief executive has warned of the widespread negative consequences of circumnavigating the Cape of Good Hope to global supply chains and the global economy. Whether it is because of the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, drought in the Panama Canal, or potential conflict near the Strait of Malacca, they all expose the vulnerability of sea lanes. In contrast, the trans-Eurasian railway transport is more reliable.

According to a report released by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in February, shipping fees from Shanghai to Europe via the Suez Canal have increased by about three times since November. Compared with China-Europe freight trains, the price advantage of sea freight is no longer obvious. CITIC Futures estimates that

compared with the Suez Canal, the Cape of Good Hope route will lead to a 26 percent and 51 percent increase in journey times from East Asia to Europe and from East Asia to the Mediterranean, respectively.

As a major artery for high-quality connectivity under the Belt and Road Initiative, China-Europe express trains have reached 219 cities in 25 European countries. It has opened up a new land transport corridor and a new bridge for economic and trade cooperation in Eurasia, and built a resilient international logistics supply chain, injecting new impetus into the development of the Eurasian continent. Under the current security situation, the emerging advantages of China-Europe freight trains fully demonstrate that the Belt and Road Initiative conforms to the historical trend of economic globalization, the call for the reform of the global governance system, and the interests of people around the world.

— CHINA MEDIA GROUP

Biden administration repeating 5G mistakes in 6G quest

The United States is developing 6G wireless communication systems with nine countries that are its military allies, exposing its intention of launching a tech race with China by applying its own standards and narrowing the opportunities for China. As Axios described it, "a battle is underway to influence the standards of 6G".

The US might want to maintain its technological hegemony, but such hegemonic thinking will only hurt its 6G industry as well as the world's. After all, like a majority of telecommunications technologies, 6G is based on tens of thousands of patents developed by scientists and engineers globally. According to IP solu-

tion provider LexisNexis, by July 2023, the number of declared 5G patent families stood at over 60,000, more than twice that of 4G. The number of 6G patents will only be higher; China has already outpaced the US in the number of filed 6G-related patents.

If the US continues with its uncooperative stance toward China in 6G, it will end up ignoring a number of patents from China and invest heavily in developing patents to realize similar functions. That is like reinventing the wheel, which is a waste of time, energy and precious human intelligence.

Actually, the US has already paid a huge price by adopting an antagonistic attitude in the 5G

sector and banning the sale of communications equipment made by Chinese companies Huawei and ZTE in 2022. This has also dragged the pace of its 5G network building. It will be repeating the mistake if it still wants to close the door tighter instead of opening it wider.

In the field of 6G, China's huge capabilities, borne out by its large number of related patents, huge market size and developed digital economy, make it a potential competitor to the US. But China has no intention of countering any nation or organization. Instead, China has been actively participating in international 6G cooperation.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Manila fears it's made a bad bet on Washington's geopolitical game

Philippine Ambassador to the United States Jose Manuel Romualdez's recent remarks related to the South China Sea and Sino-Philippine relations are contradictory, and telling signs of the troubles Manila has made for itself.

That Romualdez urged Washington to understand that the South China Sea is the real "flashpoint" rather than Taiwan and his quibbling that the US pledge more support to the Philippines by taking their treaties seriously and teaming up with the other allies expose the deep unease of Manila that having grabbed the coattails of the Joe Biden administration's "Indo-Pacific" strategy to stage provocative stunts in the South China Sea, it risks being left high and dry by Washington should its ill-considered gambits trigger an emergency.

That's why Romualdez called the message he obtained from his recent contact with one of Donald Trump's close advisors, former national security advisor Robert O'Brien, "consoling". He has received the message that the US "Indo-Pacific" strategy is unlikely to

change should Trump win the presidential election in November.

That means Manila is actually still not confident about betting the future of the Philippines on the US. That is true of Tokyo as well. The Fumio Kishida government has also been trying to get in touch with Trump's team to seek similar reassurance.

That means that having been marshaled to knavery by the US, neither the Philippines nor Japan wants to engage in such mischief alone, and they fear the consequences they might have to bear for the ugly roles they have been playing against China without the backing of the US. If there is a change of US administration that decides to mend ties with China rather than further straining them, then the Philippines and Japan worry they will be hoisted by their own petard.

Compared with Japan, a developed economy that occupies a place in the upper end of the global value chain, the Philippines relies more heavily on the Chinese market and Chinese investment, which explains why Romualdez expressed Manila's concern that Beijing might take advantage of the close Sino-Philippine economic ties to implement "economic coercion" against Manila. That remark originates from Manila's guilty conscience as it is aware that it is challenging China's sovereignty and territorial integrity by doing the US' bidding in the region.

To solicit Washington's support, Romualdez

tried to define the countermeasures Manila expects Beijing to take to safeguard China's legal rights and interests as "aggression".

All that being said, it is ridiculous for Romualdez to say that he is still pushing for diplomacy to ease the tensions between the Philippines and China. His true purpose is actually, as he confessed, to call on other Southeast Asian nations to pick the US' side along with Manila so they can contend with China together.

The questions the spokesperson for the Chinese embassy in the Philippines raised in response to these irresponsible remarks are pertinent for any country mulling acceptance of Romualdez's solicitation: Which country keeps stirring up the situation in the South China Sea? Which country is constantly spreading the "China threat theory"? Which country keeps forming gangs to cause trouble? Which country has a penchant for "economic coercion"?

Peace and development are the trend of the times and the common aspiration of countries in the region. What Manila has been doing with its adventurous games with Washington has only further complicated the regional situation, undermined regional peace and stability, and backed on its own security and interests.

It is suggested Manila correct its strategic misjudgment of the situation and stop making trouble in the South China Sea.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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COMMENT

Ong Tee Keat

China excels in pragmatic democracy

The annual sessions of the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference National Committee held in March every year remain a captivating event for China's friends and foes alike. They provide the international community with an insight into China's statecraft and hence its governance trajectory.

While the US-led West continues to make the Chinese polity a bone of contention through its own lens of "democracy", the self-proclaimed "free world" makes no bones about its interest in China's priorities as a rising global power, albeit not lack of ill-intentioned speculations rooted in ideological prejudices.

The "two sessions" — as the annual sessions of the NPC and the CPPCC National Committee are collectively called — remain the mainstay of Chinese democracy and are tasked to chart the way forward for the country with the people's aspirations and well-being taking the centre stage. This is in stark contrast to the normative template of the US, the self-proclaimed "beacon of democracy", where the enactment of extra-territorial legislation to target on adversaries by means of "long-arm jurisdiction" is allowed to dominate the legislative agenda even at the expense of coherent home governance.

Having vilified China's political system as "authoritarian" — an anathema to free trade and economic development — the state actors, alongside the military-industrial-media complex of the West, have indeed been baffled by the compatibility of the Chinese polity with that of the global free trade. The re-emergence of China as a global economic power has best disproved of such mutual-exclusivity.

Yet that does not deter them from incessantly repeating the doom saying of China's imminent economic collapse though China's real economic growth figures have time and again disproved it embarrassingly. Nobody has ever denied that the aspirations and priorities deliberated at the "two sessions" truly mirror the key concerns of China. Given the global relevance of contemporary China, it's no exaggeration that no other legislative body in the world has ever grabbed so much global limelight when it convenes.

Indeed, China's whole-process people's democracy and its people-centric development policies are best suited to fulfilling the aspirations of the Chinese people. The high approval rating — of more than 90 percent in favour of the Chinese leadership's governance — is enough to debunk any "authoritarian" portrayal of the Chinese polity. This is no in-house propaganda by China but a survey finding by Edward Cunningham of ASH Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, Harvard Kennedy School, in his opinion poll titled "Understanding

CCP Resilience — Chinese Opinion Survey Through Time" (July 2020).

The Harvard survey, which began in 2003, is a barometric measurement of the level of people's satisfaction with the Chinese leadership's governance. The survey encompasses multiple facets of governance, ranging from the election and selection of officials to policy formulation and their implementation, each of which involves people's participation through consultation.

This contrasts with the limited role of the electorate after election in the Western countries where the legislative process is very much attuned to party lines. This explains why winning an election at all cost is of utmost importance in the practice of Western parliamentary democracy. This provides fertile ground for breeding populism, in most cases punctuated with mere rhetoric and hubris but devoid of the necessary knowledge and experience of pub-

lic administration upon the onslaught of impromptu crisis.

The West has the liberty of choice to pursue such a mode of governance and development model, but it certainly has no right to shove it down the throat of other nations, which have their respective diverse cultures and trajectories of nation building that might appear alien to the West.

Similarly, the West has been taking pride of its inclusiveness and inherent checks-and-balances functionality in the practice of multi-party electoral democracy. Though, the norm of "majority rule" may ostensibly allow certain latitude for dissent, however the endgame of its decision-making is "winner takes all" regardless of the margin of majority.

In contrast, the element of consultation dedicated to accommodating minority

views in the practice of Chinese consultative democracy is undoubtedly more inclusive in its outlook. However, this does not give China a carte blanche to impose its brand of democracy worldwide.

All in all, democracy, a sacrosanct common value cherished by humanity, has no single template to emulate. Over the decades after World War II, nowhere across the world have we ever witnessed the success of democracy transplant under coercion or brutal "regime change" through military intervention. But instead, such hegemonic endeavors cloaked in the outfit of promoting democracy have only added more failed states and humanitarian disasters to the list.

The author is president of Belt and Road Initiative Caucus for Asia Pacific based in Malaysia. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

Nii Quaye-Kumah

Agriculture can help consolidate poverty reduction gains

China's journey toward eradicating absolute poverty has been monumental, and it is important to recognize the pivotal role that agriculture and rural development played in achieving this ambitious goal. The achievement has also brought China to the threshold of another important journey — sustaining the gains made over time and preventing the large-scale relapse of people into poverty, for which China needs to promote innovation.

As the representative of the International Fund for Agricultural Development in China, I advocate for a consolidated approach that harnesses the transformative power of agriculture and to step up investments in rural communities in order to prevent rural residents recently lifted out of rural poverty to slip into poverty again.

China's rural communities have long been the backbone of its economy, contributing significantly to national growth and prosperity. However, in the not so distant past, big challenges such as limited access to resources, inadequate infrastructure and the increasingly devastating impact of climate change-perpetuated poverty in rural areas. It was therefore important that the government embark on targeted interventions and comprehensively implement development policies to lift hundreds of millions of people out of absolute poverty by the end of 2020.

Central to these efforts has been the recognition of agriculture as a key driver for sustainable development. Agricul-

Sustainable rural development hinges on addressing the other aspects of the multifaceted challenges facing rural communities, including access to education, healthcare and social protection.

ture provides livelihoods for a significant percentage of the rural population and also serves as a catalyst for broader economic transformation. By investing in rural communities, agricultural productivity, infrastructure and market-access mechanisms, we can unlock the potential of rural areas to drive inclusive growth and prosperity. This is what the IFAD brings to the development efforts in China.

One of the cornerstones of the successful poverty alleviation work in China has been the prioritization of targeted intervention tailored to the specific needs of different rural communities. From the implementation of agricultural innovation programs to the expansion of rural financial services, concerted efforts were made to empower smallholder farmers and marginalized groups.

By equipping them with the tools and resources they need to thrive, we can ensure the gains made by eradicating absolute poverty are not only sustainable

but also transformative. Women and youth smallholder farmers are part of the marginalised groups the IFAD is working with in the era of digital innovation and market access for rural vitalization. For example, the Yunnan Rural Revitalization Demonstration Project introduced women entrepreneurs to share their experiences with classes of local women in agribusiness in Huaping county of Yunnan province, during which successful women entrepreneurs brought knowledge on procurement, sales and social media management.

Sustainable rural development hinges on addressing the other aspects of the multifaceted challenges facing rural communities, including access to education, healthcare and social protection. Investing in human capital and social infrastructure is essential for creating an enabling environment where rural residents can fully participate in, and benefit from, the broader development agenda.

As we look to the future, we eagerly await the report on the work of the government due to be released during the annual sessions of the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference National Committee, which will provide the direction for the work to be done. It is clear that the journey toward consolidating the gains of poverty alleviation requires steadfast commitment and collaboration.

In this regard, the focus on the "three rural" aspects must define this new jour-

ney and so must the government's people-centred philosophy — because it all comes down to the people. Also, strengthening the role of science, technology and innovation, the construction of agricultural infrastructure and the vitalization of rural industries will be key to promoting farmers' individual income and economic growth.

The IFAD will continue to be the partner of choice to China in advancing its rural development agenda, leveraging the IFAD's expertise and resources to support innovative approaches and inclusive growth policies. The journey toward sustainable poverty alleviation in China has only just begun, and with a renewed focus on agriculture and green and low-carbon rural development, China can prevent people recently lifted out of poverty from slipping back into poverty on a large scale.

By investing in the resilience and well-being of rural communities, we not only safeguard the progress made, but also lay the foundation for a more prosperous and inclusive society with better food security and build a community of shared prosperity. Let us seize this opportunity to build a future where no one is left behind, and all people have an equal opportunity to flourish. Working together, we can ensure a brighter tomorrow for China's rural communities.

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Kang Bing

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Education shouldn't just be about getting high exam scores

I was lying face down on a massage table, getting acupuncture and cupping therapy for my aching waist in a hospital in Beijing last week. In the room were a male doctor and two women patients.

By the time I walked into the treatment room, the two women patients were already talking with the doctor.

The doctor and one of the women patients, who had a shoulder problem, were talking about their children's scores in a recent examination. From their conversation, I learned their children, both boys, were first graders in the same junior high school.

The woman said she was proud of her son who had scored a high 85, the third-highest score in the class, in a mathematics exam, while the doctor said he was disappointed with his son's score of 65. The doctor then asked the woman how she had brought up such a "smart student".

Fixing a good study routine and inculcating in the child the value of education are necessary and so is sending him to an after-school institution, the woman said, revealing her son's "success recipe". After coming home from school late in the afternoon, her son takes a nap for less than an hour before doing his daily homework and solving question papers given by the after-school institution. "I make sure he goes to bed before 11 pm, though," the woman said.

But measures should be taken to ensure the younger generations' healthy growth, and for that their academic burden should be eased.

Their conversation then turned to their sons' planned weekend outing to Qufu in Shandong province, the hometown of Confucius (551-479 BC), the greatest educator in China. Both parents seemed to support the excursion organized by the school, though they were worried about their sons missing the weekend after-school classes. They agreed, however, that they would talk with the after-school tutors to see if their sons could make up for the missed classes.

"Do you make sure your children study the lessons before they are taught in class?" the other woman patient asked. "For years, I've sought the help of private tutors to teach the school lessons in advance to my son, who is now in senior high school. It is very helpful."

The hour-long treatment I had was a different sort of experience, as I got an insight into how parents today prepare their children to excel in exams. Before leaving the treatment room, however, they all agreed that the increase in the number of PE classes and exercise time is good for students' physical health, though the requirements are too taxing for their children who are either overweight or underweight.

Ensuring their children receive the best possible education is of the highest priority for Chinese parents. In urban areas, higher education has become a necessity for youths, for it helps them land well-paying jobs. Since having high scores in exams is the best way to get admission to good schools and universities and get good jobs, China's education system has become exam-oriented. This has increased the already heavy burden on students.

To end this unhealthy trend, the central education authorities have implemented a number of rules, requiring schools to allow students to go home before a fixed time so they can do their homework. Also, homework should not take up all of a child's free time, leaving no time for him or her for outdoor activities where he/she can get some physical exercise.

Besides, after-school institutions have been ordered to not teach students school lessons in advance, because that increases students' burden and interrupts their normal school education process. That measure has led many an after-school institution to go bankrupt and thousands of private tutors to lose their jobs. Some after-school institutions and teachers now offer classes for non-compulsory subjects such as painting, calligraphy, music and dancing.

As Rome was not built in a day, we should have patience for the new rules to yield results. But measures should be taken to ensure the younger generations' healthy growth, and for that their academic burden should be eased.

GLOBAL VIEWS

HANY BESADA

Shaping an inclusive digital economy

South-South cooperation represents a fundamental pillar in the modern architecture of international collaboration, reflecting the rising ability of the Global South to foster effective development strategies. Within this new paradigm, the burgeoning digital economy is a critical area where cooperative efforts can translate into significant strides toward inclusivity and balanced growth. China, with its rapid technological advancements and commitment to collaborative growth, stands central in discussions about leveraging South-South cooperation to build a more inclusive digital economy.

China's contribution to the digital economy, through South-South cooperation, becomes evident by examining the dramatic evolution within its borders. With over 989 million internet users as of 2021, China's digital economy generated approximately \$5.4 trillion, accounting for 36.2 percent of its GDP, in 2020, according to the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology. These figures not only encapsulate China's internal success but also its potential as a blueprint for developing countries aiming to digitalize their economies.

The Belt and Road Initiative showcases China's commitment to strengthening digital infrastructure globally. Through the BRI, China has been instrumental in building fiber-optic networks, e-commerce platforms and smart cities in partner countries, thereby laying the groundwork for a more connected digital landscape. According to the World Bank, BRI-related projects have the potential to lift 7.6 million people from extreme poverty in partner countries, with digital economy initiatives playing a significant role.

Moreover, the role of China in helping other Global South countries navigate the complex terrain of the World Trade Organization rules on digital trade is significant. By promoting a common stance on digital trade policies and rules, China and its South-South cooperation partners can ensure a regulatory environment that supports the growth of their digital economies and protects their interests.

China's influence in the global digital ecosystem extends to human capital development,

China, with its technological prowess, can play a major role in leveraging South-South digital cooperation for sustainable growth

development, a component critical to economic inclusivity. Chinese firms and educational institutions are active in technological knowledge transfer and the provision of digital skills training in countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America. Huawei's "Seeds for the Future" program, for instance, has been instrumental in providing information and communications technology training to students worldwide, fostering the next generation of digital experts.

Investment in digital startups propels innovation and ensures a more diversified and inclusive digital economy. China leads as a venture capital investor in many emerging economies, with its investments constituting a large share of the total foreign direct investment in many of these countries. A report by the China-Africa Research Initiative at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies found that Chinese investments in Africa, including tech start-ups, have increased dramatically, encompassing areas such as fintech, e-commerce and logistics.

China continues to play a crucial role in shaping the digital landscape of developing countries. The establishment of the Global Development and South-South Cooperation Fund is a testament to China's dedica-



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

Global South in developing their digital currencies, minimizing transaction costs and enhancing unbanked populations' access to financial services.

To further cement China's role in South-South cooperation within the digital economy, the country can consider creating more scalable and flexible models of collaboration, such as digital innovation hubs, co-development of open-source technologies, and cross-border incubation programs for tech startups.

The significance of environmental sustainability within the context of a digital economy should not be overlooked. China's push toward greener technology and standards, aligned with its 2060 climate-neutral goal, sends a powerful message on sustainable digital development practices — a crucial lesson for South-South cooperation.

However, data on South-South cooperation specific to the digital economy remains fragmented. Future coordinated efforts to systematically collect and analyze data will be pivotal to understanding and maximizing the benefits of such cooperation. Initiatives such as the Digital Development Partnership hosted by the World Bank aim to centralize knowledge sharing and capacity-building efforts in this vein.

As South-South cooperation continues to

expand, the international community must strive to create an environment conducive to the dissemination and equitable use of digital technologies. China's role in this ecosystem will undoubtedly be nuanced, reflecting its own development trajectory and economic strategies. The onus lies with participating countries to navigate these waters strategically, ensuring that technological transfer underscores inclusive growth and sustainable economic empowerment.

China's participation in South-South cooperation signifies a promising doorway to bridging the digital divide and accelerating economic growth and development within the Global South. The digital economy, while posing certain challenges, remains a fertile ground for cooperative initiatives that can lead to shared prosperity and accelerated progress toward achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. As the landscape evolves, it will be important for China to remain cognizant of the broader implications of their policies and practices, to foster a transparent, fair and mutually beneficial model of South-South cooperation in the digital era.

In conclusion, South-South cooperation holds the promise of weaving a more inclusive digital tapestry for economies of the Global South, provided the pillars of sustainable growth, equity and mutual benefit are upheld. China, with its technological prowess and outreach, is poised to play a central role in this transformative process, provided that partnering nations ensure cooperation aligns with their developmental goals. By learning from China's digital economy journey and adapting strategies to local contexts, the Global South can leverage technological advancements to carve paths toward inclusive prosperity.

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DENG YANTING

Greening Africa

China's green cooperation with the continent will help address climate change and contribute to the construction of a high-quality community with a shared future

With the highest concentration of developing countries, Africa is the continent that is most visibly affected by climate change, although African countries account for only about 4 percent of total global carbon emissions, the lowest total and per capita emissions in the world.

According to a report by the World Meteorological Organization, the State of Climate in Africa 2022, over 110 million people in Africa were affected by climate-related disasters in the past year, which resulted in economic losses exceeding \$8.5 billion. In 2023, Africa was hit by several extreme weather events, including the longest-lasting intense tropical storm Freddy, which resulted in severe disasters in Malawi, Mozambique and Madagascar. The secondary impacts of climate change are also accelerating, especially in social, economic and security areas.

Frequent extreme weather events have caused a 34-percent decline in current agricultural production growth rates in Africa compared to 1961, with the entire continent's GDP potentially shrinking by 15 percent by 2030. Furthermore, with the increasing number of displaced populations due to climate disasters, the risks of humanitarian crises erupting in the Horn of Africa, the Sahel region and the African Great Lakes region are steadily increasing. Therefore, it is imperative for Africa to explore resilient climate governance approaches to achieve its inclusive and sustainable development, as depicted in the African Union's Agenda 2063.

In recent years, under the leadership of the Committee of African Heads of State and Government on Climate Change, African countries have not only unified their voices on global climate governance issues but also stepped up green development, focusing on implementing climate mitigation and adaptation. Guided by development plans such as the AU Green Recovery Action Plan (2021-27) and the AU Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan (2022-32), African countries have developed their road maps for

energy structure transformation and agricultural modernization based on their nationally determined contributions. For example, South Africa has set a target to reduce its reliance on coal power from the current approximately 80 percent to 59 percent by 2030. Kenya has committed to increasing its clean energy usage to 100 percent by 2030.

However, effective climate governance in Africa still faces significant funding gaps. Due to the procrastination by developed countries, global climate financing plans formulated at the United Nations' climate change conferences such as COP16 and COP21 have not been effectively implemented. As the continent with the highest poverty rates, Africa is currently facing a more severe climate financing gap. According to statistics from the African Development Bank, Africa's climate financing demand is estimated to reach a staggering \$2.8 trillion from 2020 to 2030, with an additional \$1.3 trillion needed annually to advance sustainable development goals. According to statistics from the High-Level Forum on Financing Energy Transition in Africa held at the Sharm el-Sheikh Climate Change Conference, or COP27, Africa can only access about 3 percent of global climate financing, with only 14 percent coming from the private sector. The continent is facing an annual funding gap of up to \$90 billion. Additionally, according to estimates by the ECDPM, an independent think tank in Europe, if the progress of climate financing implementation remains slow and the problem of uneven distribution is not fundamentally addressed, Africa's annual climate financing gap could reach \$200-400 billion by 2030, becoming one of the major obstacles to social and economic development in Africa.

Furthermore, measures such as the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism and the bloc's imposing of carbon taxes essentially serve as trade barriers under the guise of green development, which worsens Africa's disadvantaged position in trade with Europe. Even the United States, by tying "value-based

diplomacy" to climate issues, advocates mini-multilateralism in climate governance in Africa.

Therefore, strengthening cooperation among African countries is becoming a top priority for Africa's participation in multilateral cooperation on global climate governance. In September 2023, Africa held its first climate summit and issued the Nairobi Declaration, which called for increased financing and technical assistance for Africa's climate change adaptation efforts. It emphasized the importance of broad participation and enhanced adaptability in the African region for building mutual trust between the Global North and the Global South and global cooperation in crisis response.

In September 2023, following South Africa, the AU was formally admitted as the second African member of the G20, further expanding the representation and discourse power of developing countries in global governance. The AU's accession to the G20, backed by the Global South, will drive the African climate governance vision to become a key agenda for promoting the construction of a more reasonable global climate governance order.

As the world's largest developing country, China has always seen supporting Africa's response to climate change as an important part of China-Africa cooperation. Under the framework of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, China has made green development a focal point of its 10 cooperation plans and eight major initiatives for cooperation with Africa. China was the first major economy to formulate a framework for climate cooperation with Africa through the release of the Declaration on China-Africa Cooperation on Combating Climate Change. Taking Africa's low overall carbon emissions as a starting point, China priori-

tized the energy transformation in Africa and the development of the continent's modern agriculture to enhance its capacity for climate risk and disaster management. China has implemented hundreds of clean energy generation and power grid projects in Africa, such as the De Aar Wind Farm in South Africa, the Garissa Solar Power Station in Kenya and the Nyabarongo II Hydropower Plant in Rwanda. In the field of agricultural modernization, China actively participates in the construction of the Common African Agro-Parks, coordinating aid to African agricultural demonstration centers, and assisting African countries in cultivating characteristic agricultural industries in a market-oriented manner. Key efforts include promoting the production and storage of staple food products such as hybrid rice, cassava, and soybeans, which has led to agricultural cooperation demonstration projects such as the Wanbao Agricultural Park in

Mozambique and the hybrid rice planting demonstration program in Kihanga, Burundi. These efforts enhance Africa's agricultural resilience to natural disasters and contribute to food security for African populations.

In the context of the accelerated integration of the Belt and Road Initiative with the AU's Agenda 2063, China-Africa green cooperation will serve as a vivid interpretation of the Global Development Initiative, promoting joint efforts between China and Africa to address climate change and contribute to the construction of a high-quality China-Africa community with a shared future.

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WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

LIFE

A tomb offering of a bronze chariot and horse from the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220) has been the center of attention since it was unveiled in February at the Guizhou Provincial Museum in the provincial capital of Guiyang. Known as the Zi Chariot, it is 1.12 meters in length and 0.88 meters in height.

"It is made of bronze, and shows exquisite craftsmanship," says He Jiaojiao, a guide at the museum, adding that the find demonstrates the strength and organization of the ancient kingdom's armed forces.

The artifact includes a horse with the carriage, and consists of more than 200 components.

"The horse is made up of 11 sections, including head, tail, neck, legs, body and ears, and is posed tail arched with its head held high, and standing on three legs with one lifted as if ready to gallop," He says.

The carriage consists of the driver's seat, wheels and axles, and a carriage box with a canopy. "The canopy curls into a U shape, and the back of the carriage is decorated with hollowed-out floral patterns. Not only are there patterns of mats on the carriage, there are also cloud patterns," she adds.

According to the experts, the chariot and horse is significant for being one of the most complete of its kind and offers insights into the study of transportation, as well as the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) bronze casting process.

It is one of the highlights of *The Exhibition of Colorful History and Cultures in Guizhou - Landscapes Carry Rich Humanities, Mountains Carry Lengthy Time*, which systematically presents a comprehensive history of Guizhou's 300,000 years of heritage.

"It's a heavyweight exhibition meticulously put together over a period of three years," says Li Fei, curator of the Guizhou museum.

The exhibition covers 6,000 square meters, with a visitor route of approximately 2 kilometers. There are around 3,500 cultural relics on display, about 80 percent of which are being shown to the public for the first time, Li says.

Right next to the Zi Chariot is the Yao Chariot, which is also from the Eastern Han Dynasty and which was unearthed in Xingren city in 1987.

Also cast in bronze, it was made using a variety of techniques including inlay work and interlocking joints.

Most scholars believe that the chariot was used by ordinary officials, and was usually pulled by a single horse.

The chariots speak to the flourishing of Han Dynasty transportation in Guizhou and enable museumgoers to see the diversity in form and function of bronze carriages and horses in ancient times, Li says.

Other precious items include an Eastern Han Dynasty celadon jar, as well as batik clothes and skirts with egret patterns and a gold crown inlaid with gemstones and featuring five phoenix panels from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

The fully glazed celadon jar has a small rim and bears an inscription indicating that it was made in AD 104. The jar, with its value inscribed

Bronze chariots take visitors on epic historical ride

Guizhou exhibition provides a tantalizing glimpse into an ancient culture, Yang Feiyue and Yang Jun report in Guiyang.



Visitors admire color-glazed pottery figurines from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) at Guizhou Provincial Museum. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Clockwise from left: Among the highlights of the exhibition are a gold crown with inlaid gemstones from the Ming Dynasty; batik clothes and skirts with an egret pattern, also from the Ming Dynasty; a female pottery figurine touching her ear from the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220); a celadon jar also from the Eastern Han Dynasty; and a carriage and horse from the same era.

on its surface, was used to hold sacrificial wine and is the first of its kind found in Guizhou that has an inscription.

"In addition to the introductory and concluding halls, the exhibition is divided into six parts according to the chronological order," Li says.

It presents Guizhou from the pre-historic through to the pre-Qin period (pre-221 BC), the Qin (221-206 BC) and Han eras, and then in stages all the way to the Ming and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties.

Visitors can walk down through history and experience the way Guizhou gradually integrated itself into the core of Chinese culture, Li says.



Well-known experts in the fields of history, archaeology and museum studies were invited to consult to enhance the exhibition and ensure its accuracy, Li adds.

He says that a variety of display methods including re-creations of scenes, sculpture, historical miniature landscapes, interactive multimedia, graphic panels and 3D printing are combined with physical exhibits to create a profound sense of historical immersion and help museumgoers assimilate the latest archaeological findings in Guizhou.

Fan Tongshou, a senior local historian, who helped write the introductory texts

for the exhibition, says the design outline was meticulously devised and vividly reflects Guizhou's historical context while highlighting its cultural essence.

The goal is to enable museumgoers to understand Guizhou and how historically its various ethnic groups lived, as well as the path it traversed in history, Fan says, adding that the exhibition is an overview of Guizhou's historical and cultural timeline, and documents the cultural heritage of the prehistoric era and 5,000 years of civilization.

Gu Jiu, former president of the provincial cultural and history research institute, says the exhibition marks "a solid step forward in Guizhou's cultural development".

He says the exhibition has achieved the goal of providing newcomers with an overview of Guizhou and gives those who return a deeper appreciation of the province.

However, he stresses that the exhibition demonstrates that there are still many stories hidden in history that require further exploration.

Meng Aijun, vice-curator of Guizhou's provincial institute of cultural and historical research, and member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, says the exhibition serves important educational purposes. Since the start of the 21st century, archaeological discoveries have been taking place across the country, and these findings and sites preserve the historical and cultural memories of various regions and eras, Meng says.

Interdisciplinary research institutions and expert groups, Meng suggests, should collaborate and conduct in-depth studies on the history of the formation of the Chinese nation in archaeological sites across the country, providing a systematic interpretation of the development trend of the nation.

Lu Yongzheng, head of the province's publicity department, says the exhibition vividly presents significant historical events in multiethnic interaction, exchange and integration that occurred in Guizhou.

"It successfully presents a historical and cultural scroll of Guizhou that demonstrates the formation and development of China, proving that Chinese civilization is diverse yet integrated," Lu says.

He says he hopes that all cultural and tourism institutions in the province, as well as its museum staff, will use the exhibition as an opportunity to upgrade exhibitions to better meet public cultural needs.

One museumgoer, Zhang Aimeng, was impressed by the display of the two chariots facing each other during his visit in February.

"This arrangement is special, and it's also the first time I've seen two sets of chariots and horses facing each other in the same environment," Zhang says.

"If you understand the stories behind them and trace back the memories of the era, it's as if you can also see some parts of the dynasties."

Zhao Yandi and Gan Meizhi contributed to this story.

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Hakka cuisine dishes up delights in tasty presentation of food

By HU MEIDONG in Fuzhou and ZHANG XIAOMIN
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Hakka cuisine was on the menu at an event in Longyan, Fujian province, to mark the Year of the Dragon. Eight master chef teams from Longyan and Sanming in Fujian, Meizhou in Guangdong province, and Ganzhou in Jiangxi province, competed at the "Longyan welcomes the Year of the Loong" (as the dragon is called in Chinese) Hakka cuisine exchange. Each team presented 10 dishes that offered a glimpse into the rich and diverse culinary heritage of the Hakka people.

Chef Huang Chonghui from Longyan presented a platter of western Fujian Hakka snacks made from ingredients like Chinese mugwort leaves and chestnut.

The chef was quick to highlight the historical significance of the cuisine. "Hakka cuisine emphasizes the use of ample oil and salt, which was essential during migration, thus giving Hakka dishes a rich, salty and fragrant characteristic," Huang says.

Chen Zehuan, who represented Meizhou, pointed out the tradition's resourcefulness and adaptability, which incorporates a wide variety of

ingredients and cooking techniques passed down through generations.

"Poultry and meats were usually processed and preserved in salt, making them easier to store and transport," Chen says, reflecting on the historical challenges the Hakka people faced during their migration from Central China to the south.

One of Chen's specialties, salt-baked chicken, embodies traditional cooking methods and is known for its rich flavor, tender meat and appetizing golden hue.

Chen says his involvement in the three-day event reinforced his commitment to promoting Hakka cuisine as a formidable culinary tradition, and will encourage him to develop more signature dishes.

Longyan, which is known as one of the ancestral Hakka lands and a cradle of its cuisine, has been making significant efforts in recent years to develop and promote Hakka dishes.

Salt-baked chicken is one signature dish, as are stuffed tofu, pork with preserved vegetable, and Poon Choi, which means "basin dish", in which meat, seafood and vegetables are piled up in a basin.

"We aim to establish Hakka cuisine as the ninth major Chinese culi-

sine, and to position Longyan as a renowned city for Hakka cuisine," says Shen Dexing, deputy director of the city's culture and tourism bureau.

Centering on these two goals, Longyan is working to create a brand identity, on publicity and promotion of Hakka cuisine, and on the development of convenient ready-to-cook dishes.

The city has hosted several of the competitions since 2022.

This year's event was organized by the Fujian provincial department of culture and tourism and the government of Longyan, with the support of tourism departments from Meizhou, Ganzhou and Sanming.

During the first Hakka intangible heritage food culture academic exchange meeting on Jan 16 in Longyan, experts discussed the potential for the cuisine to be recognized as the ninth major Chinese

cuisine alongside Anhui, Cantonese, Fujian, Hunan, Jiangsu, Shandong, Sichuan and Zhejiang cuisines.

Chen Xuanzhang, head of the Fujian-Taiwan Hakka Research Institute, Longyan University, emphasized the tradition's unique nature, noting that it retained traditional cooking techniques and flavors while integrating the ingredients from areas of Hakka migration and incorporating inno-

vative culinary theories.

"Hakka cuisine is usually regarded as a branch of existing traditions rather than as an independent entity," Chen Xuanzhang says.

He says that Hakka dishes are currently made in many provinces, such as Fujian, Guangdong, Jiangxi and Zhejiang, as well as in Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, and in places the Hakka have migrated to.

"Overall, Hakka cuisine seeks to preserve the original flavor, with unique techniques to preserve the nutrition and original taste of the food that emphasize freshness, authenticity and richness," he says.

Chen Wen, chairman of the western Fujian Hakka cuisine culture and industry promotion association, stresses the importance of clarifying definitions and descriptions to support the spread of the Hakka cuisine, such as what Hakka cuisine is, what its basic characteristics are, and how it differs in various regions.

"Hakka dishes have different characteristics in different regions, but the culture behind them is the same," he says.

"We can emphasize the underlying cultural unity and allow the world to fall in love with Hakka taste," he says.



Left: A table of Hakka dishes presented by one of the eight master chef teams during the "Longyan welcomes the Year of the Loong" Hakka cuisine exchange held in Longyan, Fujian province, on Jan 17. Right: Chef Chen Zehuan. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



LIFE

Exquisite pieces of glassware from the Palace Museum's collection, dating back to the 17th century and embodying the creativity born of cooperation between artisans from the East and the West, go on display in Beijing, **Lin Qi** reports.



A glass apart

Of the European missionaries serving at the court of Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) Emperor Kangxi, Bernard-Kilian Stumpf (1655-1720), from Wurzburg, in what is now Germany, was a notable figure. His wide-ranging knowledge and versatility impressed the emperor — he was good at maths, astronomy and machinery fabrication.

What Kangxi appreciated most, though, was Stumpf's gift in mastering glassmaking techniques. The emperor, who had a keen interest in Western arts, crafts and science, designated the German missionary to head his glassworks, situated in an alley not far from the Forbidden City, and to innovate the presentation of glass art.

In the years he dedicated to technical progress at Kangxi's workshop, Stumpf achieved success in propelling the artistry of imperial glassware to a new height. Meanwhile, he helped train Chinese glass artisans who, after his death, continued to develop new methods in the field and create beautiful objects.

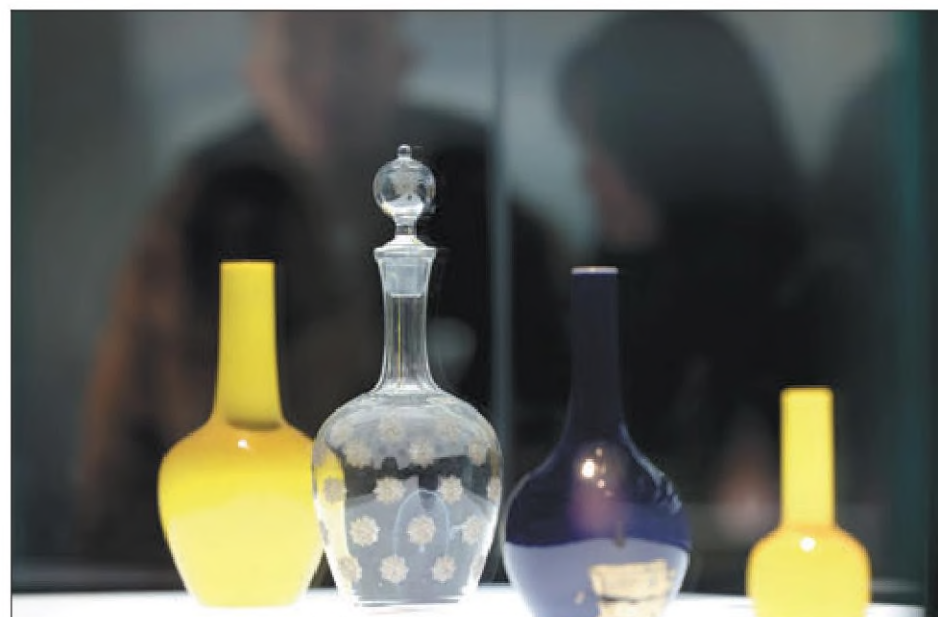
Today, fine examples of glassware once made under the watchful eye of Stumpf, or by his Chinese proteges, have left their home at the Palace Museum and are on show a mere kilometer away in an ongoing exhibition, *Crystal and Majesty*, at Guardian Art Center in Beijing, which runs through to Sunday.

The exhibition shows more than 120 glass objects, dating from the 17th to 20th centuries, from the collection of Palace Museum, demonstrating the variety of colors, shapes and techniques of glassmaking in China and Europe, and in what ways these glittering objects enriched the living spaces of the imperial palace. It is the fifth collaboration between Guardian Art Center and the Palace Museum to showcase part of the latter's immense collection of imperial art.

According to Zhang Rong, a researcher at the Palace Museum with expertise in glassware, the museum has in its collection more than 4,000 glass objects, over 90 percent of which formerly ornamented the living space of the Qing rulers.

Also the exhibition's academic consultant, Zhang says "the exhibition shows three major sources of the glassware once housed at the Forbidden City: *zaobanchu*, or the imperial workshop (to which the glassworks affiliated), tributes to the royal family from outside the imperial palace and exports from abroad."

The history of glassmaking in China can be traced to the Western Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century-771 BC). The establishment of glassworks in 1696, ordered by Kangxi himself, opened up a new chapter, in which the glass art was leveraged to its peak,



Top: A set of three glass vases.
Middle: Glass containers, dated between the 17th and 20th centuries, in the collection of the Palace Museum, are on display.
Clockwise from above: Objects show the varieties of color, shape and technique of glassmaking in China and Europe, as shown in floral details used for decoration; a vase featuring unique spiral patterns; gold inlays decorate a long-necked vase; intertwining texture gives a jug special character; a vase depicts the style of ancient bronze ware.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

technically and aesthetically.

The imperial workshops became a melting pot of the East and the West: New technologies were introduced by European missionaries, while home-grown artisans from long-standing glassmaking hubs, such as Boshan in Shandong province, were motivated to develop new combinations of color and motif.

The objects on show demonstrate well this exchange between two cultures. Products from the reigns of Kangxi, his son Yongzheng and grandson Qianlong — all avid patrons of art and crafts — present the same majestic beauty and imposing dignity as other artworks of the time; they were also the fruits of the cooperation between European and Chinese technicians to invent new styles.

One of the highlights at the exhibition, Zhang says, is a red and white brush-pen holder which employs the cased-glass technique. Such glass has two or more layers of different colors.

Zhang says the holder is actually half done, for the outer layer of glass, according to documents kept at the *zaobanchu* workshop, should be further carved with relief details, done in the same way as the traditional jade carving. Examples of the same kind of glass with the reliefs can be found in the collections of institutions such as the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Among the many delicate works of art invented during the time of Emperor Qianlong, what prized above all others was arguably the "gold star glass", as it was highly appreciated by Qianlong who, on occasion, personally supervised its production.

The name was derived from the process, through which metal powders were added and the finished glass yielded shimmering, reflective properties. The technical difficulty makes this type of glass a rarity — there are no more than 40 examples of it in Palace Museum's collection.

Glass artisans working at the imperial workshop were also ordered to make utensils that resemble the shapes, color arrangements and motifs of a particular porcelain or bronze ware. The current exhibition also juxtaposes glassware and its model ceramics or bronzes, giving the audience a vivid insight into the excellent craftsmanship.

Ren Waping, deputy director of the Palace Museum, says that many glass items at the exhibition are being shown for the first time, and that it is an opportunity for people to feel the cultural traditions embodied in the various colors and shine of the glassware, as well as the eruption of creativity resulting from exchanges between the East and the West.

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Cluster of magnificent buildings over 2,500 years old found in Zhejiang

HANGZHOU — Chinese archaeologists have released details of a cluster of ruins in East China's Zhejiang province, believed to be buildings related to the ancient capital of the Yue state, which preceded the Qin Dynasty (221-207 BC).

The experts have been conducting excavations at 10 large-scale sites in Shaoxing city of Zhejiang since 2020, unearthing the remains of large buildings and various ancient artifacts of great significance for future research.

The cluster covers a total area of around seven square kilometers, and includes the three main sites of Tingshan, Nanshan and Nanshan-

tou. They are located close to the mausoleum of Yu, a legendary ruler who was believed to establish the Xia Dynasty (c. 21st century-16th century BC).

Among the most significant finds was a 180-centimeter-thick layer of building remains located at the top of Tingshan Mountain, at the core of the cluster, according to Xu Xinmin, researcher from the provincial institute of cultural relics and archaeology, who is in charge of the overall excavation project.

Some ruins of what appears to be a quay, and pits for ritual ceremonies containing the remains of sacrificial offerings, were also found at

the Tingshan Site, says Xu.

In the southern part of the Tingshan Site, the foundation of a massive building was unearthed, with delicate lacquer decorations painted on the remains of the pillars. Xu explains the building is believed to have been a high-grade public ritual space.

Meanwhile, some platform-like foundations were unearthed at the Nanshan Site, containing abundant pottery, primitive porcelain, metal artifacts, bamboo and wooden items, as well as animal and plant remains.

Notably, multiple items of bronze ware, including a spear and a dagger-axe, both with character

inscriptions indicating royalty, as well as seven swords, were also discovered at the Nanshan Site.

The bones of cattle, pigs, deer and freshwater fish were also found at the site. Surprisingly, rare bones of horses from the Yue state and tuna bones, which can only be found in the deep sea, were among the remains. The remains of crops, vegetables and fruits have also been found, according to Xu.

At the Nanshan Site, researchers found a huge tile, 48 cm in length and 36 cm in width. The tile illustrates the magnificent scale of the building at the site, Xu adds.

Based on the new findings, the

researchers have come to a preliminary conclusion that the main three sites — namely Tingshan, Nanshan and Nanshan — are interlinked to form a functional area for the core region of the Yue state, and may have belonged to its capital.

Known collectively as the Tingshan complex, the sites are expected to reveal the social organization structure, a subsistence economy, transportation, trade and other social conditions before and after the establishment of Yue state, taking into account the swampy environment at that time, with mountains facing the sea and rivers crisscross-

ing its territory, according to Xu.

Luo Rupeng, a researcher with the same institute as Xu, says the discovery of the Tingshan complex is very important for the archaeological study of the Shang and Zhou dynasties (c. 16th century-256 BC) in Zhejiang.

Local archaeological research authorities, including the Zhejiang provincial institute of cultural relics and archaeology, have been conducting excavation work at the sites since 2020, with an accumulative excavation area of more than 20,000 sq m so far.

XINHUA

CULTURE



The ivory keys to success

Pianist recounts famous performances as he continues to enthrall audiences, **Chen Nan** reports.

Pianist Yin Chengzong cannot remember how many times he has played *The Yellow River*, which is considered the first Chinese piano concerto, and which he co-arranged on the cantata of the same name by famous composer Xian Xinghai (1905-1945) in 1969, before premiering it in 1970.

But he is aware of the fact that the concerto, which made him a household name in China, has accompanied him for the last five decades and reflects the highs and lows of his life.

On Wednesday, a day before his concert at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing, the 83-year-old appeared at the iconic venue. He was ready to talk about *The Yellow River* again since he was going to play the piece during the concert alongside the Xiamen Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of conductor Yin Jong-jie.

"I have played the concerto thousands of times but my story with it has not finished yet," says Yin Chengzong. "The young conductor (Yin Jong-jie) is 60 years younger than me, but we have a great time doing rehearsals and performing together. He inspired me to improve the concerto in a great way."

On Feb 26, Yin Chengzong, along with Yin Jong-jie and the Xiamen Philharmonic Orchestra, performed together in Xiamen, Fujian province, kicking off a national tour. For this ongoing tour, the pianist added the traditional Chinese musical instrument, the *erhu* (a traditional two-stringed bowed instrument), into the first movement, the *Yellow River Boatman's Song*, for the first time.

"The sound of the *erhu* goes straight to the hearts of Chinese audiences, a feeling that cannot be obtained with the sound of a violin, which we usually used in the first movement. We also have a *pipa* (a four-stringed Chinese lute) and a bamboo flute in the third and fourth movements, which portray the scenes of the sunrise at Yan'an (revolutionary base of the Communist Party of China) and the scene of the battlefield," says Yin Chengzong, adding that the *pipa* and bamboo flute appeared in early versions of the concerto, and were replaced by the trumpet and violin later.

"I have listened to the piano concerto many times by different pianists, but it feels right only when he (Yin Chengzong) plays it," says Yin Jong-jie.

Born in 1941 on Gulangyu Island in Xiamen, Yin Chengzong is one of nine children in his family, and learned to play the piano as a child. It was natural for him to fall in love with music, as he says, because the island where he was born and grew up is also called the "island of music" or the "island of piano".

This is because Gulangyu was one of the first places in China where Western classical music was heard. Westerners lived and worked on the island, and they also



Top: Pianist Yin Chengzong (front), 83, accompanied by the Xiamen Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of conductor Yin Jong-jie, performs his most famous piano concerto *The Yellow River*, at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing on Thursday. **Above:** Yin Chengzong will give more concerts with the orchestra this year with new arrangements, incorporating the *erhu* and *pipa*.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

I have played the concerto thousands of times but my story with it has not finished yet ...
Till now, whenever I play the concerto, the audience can still feel its cheerful spirit."

Yin Chengzong, pianist

brought their music. It is also known for being the home to the Gulangyu Piano Museum, which has the world's largest collection of pianos. Listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2017, the island attracts many tourists from around the world.

Giving his first piano recital at the age of 9, Yin Chengzong can still recall vividly that he played pieces by Chopin and Schubert, as well as music he arranged and based on Chinese songs.

"I have a good memory. I could play the songs I listened to on the piano without reading the musical scores," he says.

At 12, with a suitcase, an umbrella and 25 yuan (\$3.5), Yin Chengzong left his hometown and went to study piano at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, sponsored by the Xiamen Musicians Association.

The book, *The Art of Piano Playing*, written by piano teacher Heinrich Neuhaus, which was brought to China by He Lutong (1903-99), who was the dean of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, deeply influenced Yin Chengzong when he was a student in Shanghai.

"The book talks about the importance of technique in piano performance. However, it also says that without personal emotion, music is meaningless. It was very inspiring to me," he says.

Later, he transferred to study at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. At 20, he claimed second place at the 1962 International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow.

"It seems to me that everything just happened yesterday," Yin Chengzong says, recalling the birth of the piano concerto.

When he worked with the Central Philharmonic Society, today's China National Symphony Orchestra, as a soloist, during the 1960s, Yin Chengzong and musicians, including Chu Wanghua, Sheng Lihong and Liu Zhuang, arranged *The Yellow River*. Under the baton of conductor Li Delun (1917-2001), Yin Chengzong premiered the concerto with the Central Philharmonic Society in Beijing in 1970, and quickly achieved success.

"Back then, piano was not as popular as it is today with the Chinese audience. Our goal was to let them enjoy the instrument,

so we wanted to perform a piece that they were familiar with and loved," recalls Yin Chengzong.

In 1939, Xian composed the legendary *Yellow River Cantata*, which fueled patriotism during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45).

"When we decided to turn it into a piano concerto, we also wanted to present music that brings people power and strength. Till now, whenever I play the concerto, the audience can still feel its cheerful spirit," says the pianist.

"We went to the Hukou Waterfall on the Yellow River in Jixian county in Shanxi province, and we went to Yan'an, Shaanxi province, where the *Yellow River Cantata* was premiered," says Yin Chengzong.

Of all the performances of the concerto that the pianist has given, he remembers one in particular. It was in 1973 when under the direction of Eugene Ormandy, the Philadelphia Orchestra became the first orchestra from the United States to perform in China since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Yin Chengzong played the concerto during the concerts that the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Central Philharmonic Society gave together.

"Though it's a Chinese composition, I could feel that the American musicians were also connected. Music is better than words and helps people communicate," the pianist says.

To get more people interested in the piano, Yin Chengzong also adapted ancient Chinese music, such as the classic *pipa* pieces, *Ambush From All Sides*, and *Spring Moonlight on the Flowers by the River*. He also learned Peking Opera when he adapted the contemporary Peking Opera piece, *Legend of the Red Lantern* (Hong Deng Ji).

At 41, Yin Chengzong moved to the US and launched his career abroad. He made his debut in New York's Carnegie Hall in 1983 and has returned five times as a soloist. In 2021, he moved back to his hometown, Gulangyu Island, to live in the old house where he was born.

During the ongoing tour, he also performs Rachmaninoff's *Piano Concerto No 2 in C Minor, Op 18*, the piece that he played during the International Tchaikovsky Competition in 1962. "There is a sense of homesickness expressed in that piece, which I feel connected to," he adds.

Yin Chengzong practices the piano for five hours a day, which is a way, he says, to stay healthy.

"I am glad to see that many children learn to play piano nowadays. I also want to encourage senior people to learn the instrument, which benefits their health, such as by boosting concentration, memory, self-discipline and confidence," he says.

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Museums in rural areas keep culture relevant

CHANGCHUN—Museums are usually associated with gigantic buildings, eye-catching highlights and massive collections in bustling downtown areas. However, many museums dedicated to unique local culture can now be found in China's vast rural areas.

Located near a wide stretch of cornfields in Xinjia village is a museum focusing on Mahu Opera, a traditional art of the Manchu ethnic group in Northeast China.

Developed on a site formerly used as a primary school, this museum has five exhibition rooms with nearly 2,000 objects on display, including manuscripts, masks, costumes, instruments and books, most of which were donated by Wang Songlin, a local inheritor of intangible cultural heritage.

"By exhibiting them in the village, I hope that more people will get to know about this fading ancient form of art that originated in the region, while also helping boost the aesthetic interest of more farmers," says Wang.

Besides artifacts related to Mahu Opera, other old objects in the museum collected from local people, such as traditional farming implements, also reflect the history of this village in Shuangyang district in the city of Changchun, Northeast China's Jilin province.

"I never thought these obsolete items could be used. If they weren't in the museum, they might have been discarded already," says a villager.

In Xinjia village, which has a population of only about 2,800, there are now five museums built near local dwellings.

Museums not only function as cultural centers for villagers in rural regions, helping them learn more about the past and record local history, but can also encourage tourists from cities to visit.

"Through the construction of museums, we hope to promote the development of cultural tourism in our village. We aim to deliver a better living environment and also higher incomes to villagers," says Sun Ying, Party chief of Xinjia village.

Shuangyang district, which has a 300-year history of deer breeding, has a sika deer museum. Wandering through the 7,200-square-meter building, people can learn in detail about the local history and tradition of raising deer, and its development.

"We intend to preserve the cultural roots of Shuangyang and let people know about its splendid culture. People here have gone through hardships in developing the deer industry, and we need to pass on this spirit to future generations through the museum," says Lu Junsen, a founder of the museum.

The Mahu Opera and sika deer museums are among the achievements of a rural museum construction project in Jilin province, which was initiated in 2016. So far, 91 museums have been built in rural areas in the province.

In 2021, China started to develop Jilin, Zhejiang and Shandong into pilot provinces for constructing rural museums.

East China's Zhejiang province issued a guideline for the construction of rural museums in April 2022. It provides standards for construction, operation and management, and also calls for cultural heritage administrative departments and State-owned museums to strengthen management and support the construction of rural museums.

According to the guideline, Zhejiang plans to build 1,000 rural museums from 2021 to 2025. As of Sept 30, 2023, a total of 692 rural museums had been built in the province, according to the provincial cultural heritage administration.

While modernizing its rural regions, China is also seeking solutions to preserve the distinct history and vibrant culture of different regions, with the building of rural museums being an important part of this strategy.

Rural museums, integrated into the daily lives of residents, provide a space for leisure and entertainment, and can help enhance understanding of local history and identity, says Hao Dayong, director of Shuangyang district's cultural heritage administration.

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