

Green power

CATL teams up with carmaker to build battery plant in Spain
BUSINESS, PAGE 10



Water diversion project hydrates parched north
CHINA, PAGE 5



Trek of courage

Filmmaker captures human spirit in quest of dramatic adventures
LIFE, PAGE 14

CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中國日報 THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2024

Brazilian friends encouraged to visit China often

In reply to letters, Xi expresses satisfaction over growing friendly exchanges between two nations

By ZHANG YUNBI
zhangyunbi@chinadaily.com.cn

On the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Brazil and China, over 100 friendly Brazilian personages, including politicians, scholars, university students and artists, wrote to President Xi Jinping.

The letter writers expressed their wholehearted support for the friendship between the two nations. They penned their appreciation for the Chinese government, enterprises and universities for their contributions toward friendly exchanges between the two countries and the improvement in the quality of life for local people.

Xi replied to these letters before his state visit to Brazil in November. In his reply, Xi welcomed Brazilian friends to "visit China more often and experience for themselves the myriad sights of Chinese modernization".

The state visit reaped a rich harvest as major progress in bilateral cooperation was achieved in a number of areas including the Belt and Road Initiative, trade, technology and ecology.

The friendly figures who wrote to Xi stated their great hope for the next "Golden 50 Years" of two-way ties.

Among the letter writers was Evandro Menezes de Carvalho, a specialist in Chinese law and international trade and a professor of international law and head of the Center for Brazil-China Studies at Getulio Vargas Foundation School of Law in Rio de Janeiro.

Carvalho is a recipient of last year's Chinese Government Friendship Award, the highest recognition for foreign experts who have made outstanding contributions to Chi-

na's modernization, reform and opening-up endeavors.

"President Xi's reply is a warm embrace for the Brazilian people, like an invitation to a good friend for tea or coffee," he told Chinese reporters recently.

Over the years, the Brazilian scholar has traveled frequently between his country and China, and he has been actively organizing and carrying out cultural and people-to-people exchanges in the hope of getting more Brazilians to know about China.

He said the friendship and cooperation between Brazil and China have expanded to cover various fields, and Xi's visit to Brazil "injects more vitality into the development of bilateral relations".

The Brazil-China Friendship Association is one of the Brazilian organizations that wrote to Xi.

Henrique Couto da Nobrega, president of the association, said that they are deeply honored by Xi's reply.

In October, Nobrega was at an event in Beijing where Xi met with a number of foreign guests attending the China International Friendship Conference and Events Marking the 70th Anniversary of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries.

The "extraordinary moment" is still fresh in his mind. He said the group meeting with Xi in October and Xi's reply letter underlined "the great importance that President Xi Jinping attaches to cultural exchanges".

He believes that Xi's visit to Brazil has encouraged the two countries to keep pursuing development and cooperation, and to build the next "Golden 50 Years" of bilateral relations.

See *Ties*, page 3

Conflict worsens



Smoke billows from Syrian Navy ships destroyed in an overnight Israeli attack in the port city of Latakia, Syria, on Tuesday. Following the change in regime in Syria, Israel launched a massive bombing operation targeting Syria's military capabilities. It also began a ground incursion along the border with Golan Heights. The United Nations special envoy for Syria on Tuesday called on Israel to halt its military movements and bombardments in the country. AAREF WATAD / AFP See more, pages 8, 11

Partnership with UK benefits both nations, world

I'm sure the people of Britain and China will join me in welcoming the recent steps taken by both countries to improve relations.

Foreign Secretary David Lammy met with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Beijing and with representatives of the business community in Shanghai in October. Then, at the G20 Summit in Brazil last month, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer met with Chinese President Xi Jinping. A news release from the British side talked of a shared pledge to "work together in pursuit of global stability, economic cooperation and the clean energy transition". And

WORLD WATCH By Chris Nash

China's Ambassador to the United Kingdom Zheng Zeguang said on Nov 21 at the seventh China-UK Economic and Trade Forum, "We stand ready to work with the UK side to follow up on the common understanding between the two leaders, and enhance dialogue, communication and collaboration wherever possible."

There have, of course, been predictable skeptical reactions from

some areas of the press in Britain. But let's not dwell on the negatives. There are overwhelming rational reasons why an improved relationship between Britain and China makes common sense. After 10 years of living in Beijing, my view is that if we can move past distrust, our two countries are uniquely placed to complement each other in significant cooperation.

This is a partnership that the world needs. It will, for example, take the closest possible green cooperation between our two countries to keep the world on track to net zero. In nothing are

the peoples of Britain and China so close as their shared love of nature and the environment. There is the potential to transform this grassroots sustainable thinking into climate change policies with global significance.

In emerging fields, such as green technologies and sustainable development, there is also enormous potential for collaboration between the two nations. As the world prioritizes the transition to a low-carbon economy, the UK and China both have much to gain from sharing their expertise.

See *Cooperation*, page 3

Yoon's office blocks police raid as investigation widens

By YANG HAN in Hong Kong
kelly@chinadailyapac.com

South Korean police failed to raid the presidential office on Wednesday as the presidential security service refused to cooperate with their investigation into President Yoon Suk-yeol's brief imposition of martial law last week.

Instead, Yoon's office voluntarily submitted "very limited" documents and materials to the police, Yonhap News Agency reported.

A team of 18 investigators arrived at the presidential office compound before noon to search for materials related to the martial law decree, including records of a Cabinet meeting held shortly before Yoon announced the order on Dec 3. The presidential staff members denied the team entry, and the two sides held talks for hours before Yoon's office voluntarily gave some documents to effectively block the raid. Investigators, however, successfully raided the offices of the National Police Agency and the Seoul Metropolitan Police Agency, among others, on Wednesday. The raids followed the emergency arrests of heads of the two agencies, Yonhap reported.

South Korea's Ministry of National Defense, anti-corruption investigation agency and police have launched a joint team to probe Yoon's alleged insurrection through imposition of the martial law.

Law enforcement officials have left open the possibility of placing Yoon under emergency arrest without a warrant given the gravity of the



Cabinet members bow in apology on Wednesday during the National Assembly's plenary session in Seoul, South Korea. YONHAP NEWS AGENCY

charges, as insurrection is a crime that carries a penalty of up to death in the country.

Amid widening investigations and growing political uncertainty, South Korea's former defense minister Kim Yong-hyun made an unsuccessful attempt to take his own life at a detention facility in Seoul late on Tuesday, shortly before a court issued a warrant to arrest him.

The former defense minister took office in September, but was compelled to resign last week following the botched attempt to impose martial law in the country.

Kim, who was questioned for five hours by prosecutors on Wednesday, testified that Yoon conducted a legal review of last week's martial law decree and they co-wrote the final draft, with Yoon editing a part of the content, Yonhap reported.

Meanwhile, the main opposition Democratic Party plans to introduce a new impeachment motion against Yoon in the National Assembly on Thursday, which is expected to be put to a vote on Saturday.

The previous impeachment vote failed as members of the ruling People Power Party, of which Yoon is a member, boycotted the session.

The Democratic Party and other small opposition parties together have 192 seats in the 300-member National Assembly.

At least eight votes from the ruling party are needed to reach the two-thirds majority required for impeachment. Five members of People Power Party have voiced their support for this week's vote.

Prime Minister Han Duck-soo will temporarily take over presidential responsibilities, if the second

impeachment motion is passed in the National Assembly.

At a parliamentary plenary session on Wednesday, Han told lawmakers that although he had attended an emergency closed-door Cabinet meeting on Dec 3, shortly before Yoon declared martial law, he had opposed the move out of concerns for South Korea's economy and image.

Han added that he had no prior knowledge of the move before the Cabinet meeting and regretted his failure to prevent it.

As South Korea reels from the aftermath of the short-lived martial law, concerns are growing about a "diplomatic vacuum" in the country.

United States Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin canceled his plans to visit the East Asian country, calling it an inappropriate time, while Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson's visit has been deferred, according to Reuters.

A trip by former Japanese prime minister Yoshihide Suga, which was scheduled for later this month, has also been canceled, while Japan News reported that a planned visit by Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba in January "has become almost impossible" to realize.

Mason Richey, a professor of international politics at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul, said that in the short term, most countries are going to adopt a wait-and-watch policy.

Richey added that Yoon is unlikely to resign, opting instead to take his chances that a presumed post-impeachment review by the Constitutional Court will go in his favor.

LIGHTER HUB SHINES AS GLOBAL LEADER IN PRODUCTION

Shaodong's pillar industry produces 15 billion items a year for 120 countries and regions, boosts innovation

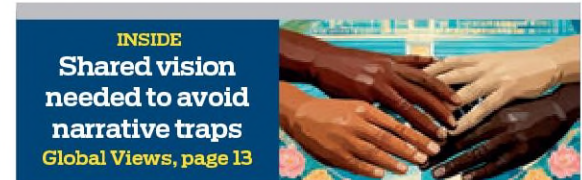
Editor's note: In a series of reports titled "Claims to Fame", China Daily looks at how some regions have earned wealth and recognition through specific products to advance economic development.

In-depth

Over the years, the lighter companies in Shaodong have grown bigger and more automated, with their products and the industry upgrading constantly.

However, what has remained unchanged for 20 years is the price of the disposable lighters. They are almost always sold at 1 yuan (\$0.14) each by retail stores, meaning the manufacturers can still make a profit despite inflation and rising costs.

See *Lighters*, page 2



INSIDE
Shared vision needed to avoid narrative traps
Global Views, page 13

Newsstand prices:
US \$1 Canada C\$1
UK £1 EU €1
Kenya 50 Kenya Shilling
Asia Pacific: Thailand 120
thb; Philippines 120 php; Myanmar 2000 kyat;
Japan 210 yen; Dubai 10 dirham; Pakistan 300 rupee

www.chinadailyglobal.com
A member of ANN
China Daily Global
©2024 All Rights Reserved

PAGE TWO

Lighters: Shaodong's sparkling story

From page 1

Shaodong is a hilly region with only around 10 percent of flat land. The lack of arable land prompted local people to find other ways to make a living.

After the reform and opening-up policy was introduced in 1978, Shaodong people ventured into trading businesses, selling different types of small merchandise to customers around the country.

In 2022, Shaodong was ranked 92 among more than 2,844 county-level regions in the country in terms of manufacturing prowess. Lighters are the pillar industry of Shaodong, employing more than 80,000 people, roughly 7.6 percent of the total local population.

Bai Jiabao, deputy general manager of Hunan Dongyi Electric Share Co, the largest lighter manufacturer in Shaodong, said the company started making lighters in 1994. Today, it can produce 12 to 13 million lighters per day of more than 200 types. The lighters are sold for prices ranging from 0.3 yuan to 30 yuan each.

More than 80 percent of its lighters are exported overseas to over 100 countries and regions, he said.

Although the profit made from each lighter is low, the company can still make money and stay competitive through investing in automation and upgrading the supply chain, he said.

While its cheapest lighters are sold for 0.3 yuan each, Bai said the company can make about 10 percent profit thanks to the use of automation.

The company started to invest in automation in 2013 and has spent around 60 to 70 million yuan in research and development in the sector.

The use of automation has helped Hunan Dongyi Electric Share increase its production capacity 20 fold, Bai said. While it used to employ more than 4,000 people to make around 1 million lighters a day, it now can produce more than 10 million with half the number of employees, he said.

"As a cheap and convenient source for fire, lighters cannot be replaced by any other tools and I am proud to work in this industry," Bai said.

Lighting the spark

Lighters were first manufactured in Zhejiang and Guangdong provinces in the 1980s, with Zhejiang's Wenzhou a major production hub.

However, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the production line was transferred to central regions due to the rising cost of labor in coastal areas, and Shaodong seized the opportunity to become a leading production base.

Fu Zaihua and her husband Yao Hanyun were among the first people in Shaodong to work in the industry.

In 1992, a friend told them that lighter manufacturing was a big business and the couple went to a factory in Guangdong province to try and learn the techniques. However, they were only given a limited time during the visit to observe the manufacturing process, and did not learn much.

"We bought 50 lighters and started to dismantle and reassemble them repeatedly, trying to learn the



skills by ourselves," Fu said.

Later, they bought 100,000 lighter parts and began their own business venture at home. Their company, Shunfa Manufacturing Corp, was also the first one in Shaodong to sell lighters to an overseas client who was from Indonesia.

While cheap disposable lighters are still one of the company's best-selling items, it has put great effort and innovation into producing more high-end products and diversifying its business portfolio.

Automation has also greatly improved efficiency, so that more lighters can be produced with fewer employees. Even though workers' salaries have increased, costs can remain low, so the company's products are still competitive.

Fu said they have been through much hardship in the expansion and running of the business. There were difficulties in almost every sector, from getting funds to finding the right staff and obtaining technology, she said.

However, they were determined, and persevered.

"I made a decision back then that I intended to follow through," she said. "Shaodong people are known to be hardworking and tenacious, that's the secret of our success."

Other locals were quick to follow their lead and numerous small lighter manufacturing factories opened in Shaodong.

To prevent hostile competition and boost cooperation, in 2002, the Shaodong Lighter Industry Association was established.

Ouyang Zhen, vice mayor of Shaodong, said the association publishes price guides for lighters and consolidates resources for the industry to avoid price wars among different enterprises, and to maintain sound market development.

The association also has a database on new products. When an enterprise makes a new product, it needs to provide samples to the association for its records. If the new product is similar to an existing one it will be sent back to the enterprise, he said.

There are 114 lighter companies in the county. Twenty-seven are lighter manufacturers while the remainder produce materials for lighter production.

Ouyang said the companies can produce more than 200 components for lighters and all their factories can be reached in a short time.

Diversifying products

To diversify Shaodong lighter products, the local government established a research institute in 2017.

The institute has conducted technological research on common issues, developed more than 30 new pieces of equipment and products,



Shaoyang Customs officials inspect lighters on May 22 made by Hunan Dongyi Electric Share Co. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Workers sort lighters for export at a factory in Shuangfeng, a county near Shaodong in Hunan province. NAI JIHUI / FOR CHINA DAILY

As a cheap and convenient source for fire, lighters cannot be replaced by any other tools and I am proud to work in this industry."

Bai Jiabao, deputy general manager of Hunan Dongyi Electric Share Co

and obtained 276 intellectual property and 47 invention property patents, according to the local government.

The county now has more than 1,000 researchers working in the lighter industry and spends around 200 million yuan in research and development annually, with 38 percent of its products updated every year, Ouyang said.

The development of the industry has also ensured that local people can find jobs near their homes without needing to migrate to big cities for work.

Wang Jianing, a sales representative for Dongyi, remembers clearly her first order 13 years ago when she sold 6.6 million lighters worth \$500,000 to Bangladesh clients.

Now she can sell more than 300 million lighters a year, an "enormous and daunting" number that she takes great pride in.

She graduated from a university in Guangzhou, Guangdong, after majoring in bioengineering, and returned to her hometown to work as a sales representative dealing with foreign clients.

At the start, her base salary was 1,800 yuan per month. She did not make any sales in the first three months and thought about quitting. But the Bangladesh deal, which landed her a 6,000 yuan bonus, gave her an incentive to stay.

After that, she rarely took a break from her job and even worked at the weekend. She paid close attention to her clients' needs and due to time zone differences often worked very late.

She quickly got better at her job, and in her third year became the company's best salesperson.

"Diligence is the key. I usually start working at 8 am and return to the dormitory around midnight," she said.

She learned sales skills from scratch and also worked hard to improve her English proficiency.

"Lighters are a necessity for people. Our products are sold all over the world," she said.

Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, the lighter business did not take a hit, as people stuck at home

tended to smoke more, she said.

The key to cultivating clients is to treat them with sincerity and respect. Salespeople need to choose the products best suited for their clients based on their conditions, personality, background and market, she said.

"You can be friends with your clients, talk with them regularly, bring the relationship closer, but the key is that it should be a love-hate relationship," she said. "Your clients need to feel they cannot leave, but they are also displeased they cannot get a better offer from you."

Exports growth

The large amount of exports has prompted customs authorities to keep a close eye on the quality of the products.

At Shaoyang Customs, inspections of lighters make up a large portion of officers' daily work.

At the customs office, an exhibition details the development of Shaodong's lighter industry and showcases different lighters made by local companies.

Since 2001, customs authorities have been required to conduct mandatory checks on all exported lighters to ensure their quality. Last year, Shaoyang Customs handled 3,500 batches of lighter exports. Shaodong is under the administration of Shaoyang.

The quality of lighters is tested and each batch goes through rigor-

ous checks, said Wang Peng, an official with Shaoyang Customs.

The checks include 12 steps to make sure the lighters function properly in different circumstances, Wang said.

A test lighter, for example, is dropped from a height of 1.5 meters in three different positions. To pass the inspection it must stay intact and have no gas leakage.

The lighters are also put in containers set at 65 C for four hours to make sure they are resistant to high temperatures.

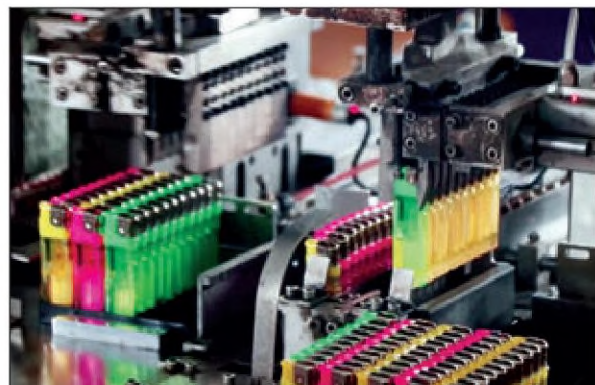
Last year, lighters worth 3.74 billion yuan in total were exported from Shaodong, accounting for half of China's lighter exports, according to Shaoyang Customs.

While the majority are budget-friendly disposable lighters, there is a growing portion of high-end ones.

Customs data shows that the total export volume to Europe and North America increased steadily from 290 million yuan in 2020 to more than 500 million yuan last year.

Ouyang said that international business and branding strategies have become competitive strengths for Shaodong lighter companies. It is also important to push for high-quality development of the enterprises.

In the future, the core competitive strength of lighter companies will grow and they will continue to make an impact in the international market, he added.



From left: Lighters are made at a factory in Shaodong, Hunan. XINHUA A worker makes lighters at a factory in Shaodong, Hunan. ZHANG PINGHUA / XINHUA Different types of lighters made in Shaodong are displayed at an exhibition hall of Shaoyang Customs. ZOU SHUO / CHINA DAILY

TOP NEWS

Macao to help boost nation's modernization

SAR should effectively utilize its unique strengths, says incoming chief executive

By ZHANG YI and WANG JING in Macao

Macao will further advance the practice of "one country, two systems" to achieve greater success in the special administrative region and contribute to the nation's modernization drive, said Sam Hou-fai, Macao's incoming chief executive.

The former president of Macao's Court of Final Appeal will start his five-year tenure on Dec 20, the day the SAR celebrates the 25th anniversary of its return to the motherland.

"This is a lifetime honor," the 62-year-old said in a recent interview with China Daily. "It's an important position, and the chief executive has chief responsibility for ensuring the stable and long-term implementation of 'one country, two systems' in Macao."

Sam, who graduated in 1985 from Peking University with a law degree, pursued further studies in Portuguese law at the University of Coimbra in Portugal. After that, he worked in Macao's legal system.

When Macao returned to the motherland in 1999, Sam was appointed president of the Court of Final Appeal. Since then, he has witnessed significant development in Macao.

Sam said that under the "one country, two systems" policy, Macao has developed for 25 years and Hong Kong for 27 years, and the practice proves that the policy suits the country and the two SARs, and is beneficial for national unity and security.

"To leverage the advantages of 'one country, two systems', the greatest priority is to safeguard the country's sovereignty, security and development interests, he said.

"The central leadership's support provides us with the confidence to achieve greater success in implementing 'one country, two systems' in Macao," Sam said.

At the same time, China is pushing forward with further comprehensive reforms and promoting Chinese-style modernization, creating broad space and opportunities for the future development of the SAR, he said.

"In this process, we should effectively utilize our unique strengths to contribute to the country's modernization efforts," he added.

Macao will continue to create a transparent and fair environment

to attract foreign investment in high technology, and to attract and retain advanced expertise and talent, Sam said.

It can also leverage its connections with Portuguese-speaking countries to promote cooperation in areas such as technology, finance, trade and culture, said Sam, who is fluent in Portuguese, one of the SAR's official languages.

The new government is considering establishing a cultural hub that blends Eastern and Western cultures that will also include tourism projects to attract more tourists, according to Sam.

As a trade platform between China and Portuguese-speaking countries, Macao can also assist manufacturing companies, electronics enterprises and new energy companies in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area in expanding their presence internationally, he said.

Macao can also be a bridge for coastal provinces like Zhejiang that excel in fishing, since it could assist them in expanding their

reach to many Portuguese-speaking countries, most of which are coastal nations with rich fishery resources, to support their development, he added.

The need for Macao to make more efforts to diversify its industrial structure to reduce reliance on a single industry is a consensus among various sectors of society, and issues including improving the operating conditions of small and medium-sized enterprises are also of significant concern to residents, Sam said.

"We must further enhance the happiness and well-being of the Macao people by improving social security and welfare, with a focus on vulnerable and low-income groups," he said.

"Society has great expectations for the new SAR government, and in our interactions with them, we demonstrate our courage and responsibility to address their concerns. At the same time, Macao residents are providing us with confidence and support."

Contact the writers at zhangyi@chinadaily.com.cn

Online See more by scanning the code.



a short film documenting the story of Mudan, an 8-year-old girl from the Xibe ethnic group.

In June this year, he returned to Xinjiang for a reunion with Mudan, who is now 16, and used his camera to capture the grown up Mudan, the changes in her family and China's development. This led to his documentary film *Spring at Mudan's House*.

The experience has deepened his understanding of China, Nishi said.

Another organization that wrote to Xi, the Copacabana Fort Orchestra, took part in several events this year held to celebrate 50 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

"The growing cultural exchanges between Brazil and China are a vivid example of how the two countries are working hand in hand to drive their friendly relations toward a new future," said Marcia Melchior, coordinator and artistic director of the Copacabana Fort Orchestra.

The orchestra mainly comprises young people from underprivileged neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro, and its development has been supported by Chinese companies in Brazil.

This year, the orchestra was also recognized as an intangible cultural heritage of the state of Rio.

"Thanks to the Chinese support, we have expanded our social influence and brought hope to many young people," Melchior said.

Xinhua News Agency and China News Service contributed to this story.

Migratory flock



A staff member feeds whooper swans on Wednesday at the national nature reserve for swans at Rongcheng, Shandong province. Nearly 10,000 whooper swans have so far arrived at the reserve for winter. LI XINJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Former Slovenian president roots for more dialogue among countries

By ZHANG ZHOUXIANG zhangzhouxiang@chinadaily.com.cn

In 1996, Borut Pahor headed an official delegation from his country to China, four years after Slovenia was officially recognized by China. Since then, Pahor has visited China many times in various capacities, first as prime minister and then as president.

"Over the years you have done an amazing job — the development of the city, (and) the development of the country, is just amazing," Pahor, the former president of Slovenia, told China Daily in an exclusive interview, stressing that "I'm not telling you this because you're in front of me and I'm in China. I could observe from a very close perspective and I see that in the last 20 years, China has seen incredible economic development which has been recognized all over the world."

Pahor granted the interview while attending the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Art and Media Vocational College and co-signing an initiative in support of "a community with a shared future for

mankind". He agreed that the world has changed much in the past 30 years, and that the relationship between China and the West is now far different from what it used to be. His advice for countries with different political systems was to engage in dialogue.

"China and the West are the two most important figures for world peace and security; let us work together to see what should be done to secure peace and security in the world," he said. "There are huge potentials if we work together. For the West, China is a different country with a different political system. We will compete normally but I think it would be unwise to make the relations more difficult."

To promote positive collaboration between the West and China, Pahor proposed his long-held philosophy of dialogue — more communication, more exchanges among the leaders of the world's major nations, as well as forming of and abiding by internationally recognized rules



Borut Pahor

and mechanisms. For example, he advocated meetings between the leaders of China and the United States, emphasizing the importance of more frequent exchanges between major countries.

He expressed the hope that such dialogue would prevent countries from using force to implement policies. He also stressed the need for all sides to operate under the rules of the World Trade Organization, by which the West's concerns about investments in China could be addressed, and trust could be built through adherence to the rule of law.

A member of the European Parliament, Pahor is concerned with the ongoing conflicts in the world, the number of which he pegged at 55. "Being small, being big, we are all together in this world. Among us, if there would be open ears, open eyes, open doors and open hearts," he said, quoting President Xi Jinping's words that there is enough space for everyone if we would work together and there is

no space for nobody if we would not work together.

He is especially impressed by the initiative of "a community with a shared future for mankind," calling it a message for humanity. "We should recognize that we are at the moment, in one phase of development of the world, when it is the fact that the world has become a multipolar world," he said. In the current situation, he pins his hopes on creating dialogue, coming together and finding solutions to modernize international institutions like the United Nations Security Council, so that they could once again be productive in securing peace and security in the world.

He mentioned that Slovenia is currently a member of the UN Security Council, enabling it to play a bigger role. "I hope very much that there will be a peaceful transformation of international institutions, and that there will be no need for war to get there. I hope so, very much for the benefit of your child, my child, and the children of everyone," he said.

But he was clear that the world he was looking forward to might need time to become a reality, and his idea is to go step by step. "We just work together a little bit more intensively, that would be just an amazing step forward," he said.

Cooperation: Education, healthcare are key areas

From page 1

The UK's leadership in climate finance and environmental innovation, combined with China's massive scale in green technology manufacturing, presents opportunities for further cooperation.

Education is another area of potential growth. China is moving from a manufacturing to an innovation economy. I have seen a definite upward trend in students selecting arts and humanities courses in UK universities. I'm very proud that a student of mine has chosen Bournemouth University in my hometown to follow his passion for media and film. Much as I love my hometown, I can't claim that as a university it is a world-beater for academic research, but I know it will provide this young man with exactly the right mix of creative skills and knowledge to launch an excellent career in the burgeoning creative industries sector in China.

Lessons learned

However, in order to normalize ties and achieve the "consistent, durable, respectful" relationship talked of by Stamer, Britain is going to have to give up any thoughts of "exceptionalism" and "special relationships". We need to learn the lessons of history. In 1637, the first Englishman to reach China, Captain John Weddell, turned

up in Macao, demanding all sorts of concessions for the Courteen Association that he represented, only to be reduced to signing a declaration that he would not return to China for at least two years. And later of course, in 1793, Britain's Macartney Mission was dismissed by Emperor Qianlong, who declined all requests for preferential trading relationships.

Learning from these imperialistic mistakes, I hope that modern-day diplomats and negotiators understand that China is serious when it talks about a "multipolar" world. This has concrete expression in the Belt and Road Initiative. I see this project as a scaling-up of the initiatives that have lifted China out of relative poverty in the decades since the 1950s. All across China, physical infrastructure, in the form of transport links, and digital infrastructure, in the form

of internet technology, have empowered local communities to enrich themselves by being able to access wider and deeper markets.

The China-Europe Railway Express reduces transportation time from two months at sea to 25 days by train. The railway now connects 217 cities in 25 European countries directly to China, massively increasing export business opportunities in countries along its route.

Knowledge is also part of this multipolar infrastructure. Over the last three years, China has sent more than 500 scientific and agricultural experts to Africa and provided nearly 9,000 training opportunities to farmers there. In Morocco, Chinese companies have worked with local investors to open the Kenitra electric battery gigafactory, creating 2,300 new jobs.

Healthcare is another way in which China is sharing knowledge and expertise to empower economic activity around the world. In Peru, for example, cooperation between the two countries has just resulted in the opening of a new hospital, which has brought modern, comprehensive health services to a whole region of the country, which had previously lacked such infrastructure.

We know what the cynics will say, that this is just a way for China to exercise influence in the world. Threatened by changes to the world economy which previously worked exclusively in their favor,

some in the West fail to see the new opportunities here for all. If a train arrives in Europe full of lower-priced Chinese-made electric vehicles, then the opportunity is clearly there for the same train to go back to China laden with products from all over Europe to middle-class consumers across China, whose numbers continue to rise. The sobering fact is that attempts by London or Washington to cling on to a "special" position in the world's evolving economy will not work. Last year, just under 30 percent of China's exports went to the Group of Seven countries, down from 48 percent in 2000.

Since the end of World War II, most areas of the world have benefited from increased globalization, trade and cooperation. The key-stone of this progress has been free trade agreements and investment to open up new production sectors and markets. In the interests of both the British people, the Chinese people, and the people of the world, let's hope that the small seeds of better relationships between Britain and China can be sustained and brought to fruition in the future.

The author is chair of the Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding, which was founded in 1965 to promote understanding and friendship between the British and Chinese people. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Ties: Cultural exchanges an example of friendly relations

From page 1

The cooperation between Brazil and China not only benefits the people of the two countries, but also contributes to building "a golden future for the common homeland of mankind", he said.

Tia Ju, vice-president of the Legislative Assembly of the state of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, called Xi's visit to Brazil "a historic moment for deepening relations between the two countries".

She looks forward to joint efforts by Brazil and China — two important economies of the Global South — in making more contributions to the shared future of mankind.

In his reply, Xi said he was glad to see that the China-Brazil friendship has been passed on from generation to generation.

In their letter to President Xi, students from the University of Sao Paulo recounted their special experience of witnessing China's development and using cameras to record and spread the story of China.

Pedro Nishi, a young Brazilian director, is one of them.

He traveled to Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region in 2016 to shoot

CHINA

Top court raises concern over illegal surveillance

By CAO YIN
caoyin@chinadaily.com.cn

China's top court, the Supreme People's Court, on Wednesday instructed courts across the country to intensify efforts to combat crimes involving illegal production, sale and use of eavesdropping and surveillance devices to safeguard privacy and information security.

The directive was issued by the Supreme People's Court, China's top judicial body, following a series of cases that highlighted growing concerns about covert filming and unauthorized surveillance.

"Some individuals have installed eavesdropping and covert filming devices in hotels and homestays to invade people's privacy. Others have even provided real-time viewing or sold the content in the form of images, audio or video," the court stated.

Such devices have also been used in other criminal activities, including blackmail, gambling and exam cheating, causing significant harm to information security and public order, the court added.

In one disclosed case, two defendants installed hidden cameras purchased from e-commerce platforms in several rooms across three hotels in Linwu county, Hunan province, in March 2021. The cameras were connected to their mobile phones, enabling them to monitor and record activities in the rooms.

The pair saved videos and screenshots, including footage of individuals engaging in sexual activities, on their phones and laptops. Their actions went unnoticed until Oct 7, 2021, when a hotel guest discovered a camera in their room and alerted the police.

Following a trial, one defendant was sentenced to 15 months in prison, while the other received a 12-month sentence for the illegal use of hidden cameras.

"The defendants' actions seriously disrupted the lives and work of others, violated personal information rights and disturbed public order," the Supreme People's Court stated. It emphasized that the rulings reflect judicial determination to protect individuals' rights and enhance public security.

The court underscored the importance of privacy during travel and urged travelers to remain vigilant. It advised individuals to enhance their self-protection awareness and report suspected instances of covert surveillance to the police promptly.

Additionally, the court called on hotels, homestays and similar accommodations to fulfill their security obligations by conducting regular inspections and implementing measures to minimize risks.

The Supreme People's Court reiterated its commitment to protecting people's privacy and information security, ensuring a stronger sense of safety for the public.

New amusement



The Changchun Ice and Snow New World is under construction in Changchun, Jilin province, on Wednesday. The amusement park covers a total area of 1.56 million square meters, features 200 sets of ice and snow sculptures, the most in its history, as well as facilities including a 520-meter-long ice slide. The construction began in Nov 26 and is expected to open to the public on Dec 17. WANG QIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Museums' plush toys drive cute economy

By CHINA DAILY

Baby cabbage, broccoli and meatballs are placed in a pot while a shop staff member asks how spicy you'd like the dish. Though in a setting resembling a restaurant, these "ingredients" are actually plush toys designed by the Gansu Provincial Museum.

The museum introduced a series of food-inspired plush toys influenced by the growing popularity of local spicy hot pots. These lively representations of spicy hot pot ingredients have become a hit among visitors.

China's rich culinary heritage continues to inspire creative cultural products. With various expressions on their fluffy faces, plush toys based on local food traditions have gained nationwide popularity recently. People traveling to different regions not only indulge in local cuisines but also seek out plush toys representing these specialties.

A cultural product shop in Shaanxi province has introduced a plush version of the Chinese hamburger, or *roujiamo*, with meat sandwiched in a steamed bun. When a consumer purchases the toy, the packaging process mimics the real-life assembly of the burger — from selecting the bun and pouring sauce to adding the meat.

Videos of the packaging process for these food toys have garnered millions of views online, with comments like "so cute" and "full of emotional value". Some people even described the toy-purchasing experience as an adult version of playing house.

"The short interaction could immerse buyers in the experience. We are not just selling products, we are also selling culture and creating connections," Zhang Bo, co-founder of the Da Xiang Culture and Tech Company, the company behind the burger toy, was quoted by Guangming Daily newspaper as saying.

In Suzhou, Jiangsu province, consumers have lined up to buy plush toys inspired by the region's famous hairy crabs. Similarly, Changsha in Hunan province offers plush toys shaped like its iconic stinky tofu, while Tianjin has plush toys of Chinese crepes or *jianbing*.

Just as foodies have their own cuisine guide, toy fans are mapping out food toys across China on social media. Some even asked local gift shops to create plush toys of their favorite local dishes.

This growing trend aligns with the emerging "cute economy", which is especially popular among younger generations. A trending hashtag online reads, "Chinese have our own Jellycat," referring to the famous British toy brand known for its wide range of food-based plush toys.

In addition to food-themed toys, many museums in China have embraced the concept of transforming historical artifacts into plush toys, receiving positive responses from consumers.

The Hubei Provincial Museum offers a plush toy based on the Sword of Goujian, a key artifact from the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC). As the centerpiece of the museum's collection, the sword toy was one of the museum's top three best-selling products last year. People nicknamed it the "little chubby sword."

When centuries-old artifacts are redesigned as soft, cuddly toys, the contrast fascinates consumers. With their fluffy texture and adorable faces, these plush toys have become popular cultural products.

Whether representing regional cuisine or historical artifacts, these plush toys serve as tangible expressions of culture. "Traditional culture doesn't have to exist in the past," said Xu Zhe, a staff member from the cultural and creative department of the Suzhou Museum, in an interview with Guangming Daily. "It can connect with different generations and create new meanings through design."

Xu believes that cultural products, combined with contemporary trends and aesthetics, can convey traditional values in a way that resonates with the younger generation.

Li Shangji contributed to this story.

Viral fox feeding video prompts safety warning

By CHINA DAILY

A viral video showing a tourist feeding a wild fox in southwestern China has prompted warnings from experts about the ecological and safety risks of such behavior.

The video, which has attracted more than 40,000 comments, captures a tourist offering a Chinese flatbread to a fox near a plateau scenic spot in Sichuan province.

Initially, the fox attempted to swallow the bread with the tourist's finger, later bypassing the food to bite directly at the tourist's hand. The tourist managed to pull away without injury.

"It's obvious the fox doesn't want the bread but your fingers!" one commenter quipped.

Ni Qingyong, an associate professor at Sichuan Agricultural University, told local media outlet The Cover that feeding wild animals can pose risks to humans and wildlife.

"Wild animals may bite people, potentially spreading infectious diseases. Additionally, human food often contains substances harmful to wildlife, such as bacteria, viruses or artificial additives," Ni said.

Discarded food packaging can also enter the food chain, causing environmental and ecological damage, he added.

Feeding wildlife can alter animal behavior, encouraging them to rely on humans for food instead of foraging in their natural habitats. This change can weaken their predatory instincts, disrupt the evolution of their offspring, and

compromise their health and survival, according to Rigpo, head of a wildlife protection station in Qinghai province.

Human-wildlife interactions are becoming more common as conservation efforts increase wild animal sightings. In Hoh Xil Nature Reserve in Qinghai province, a wild wolf has gained online fame after regularly approaching highways to solicit food from tourists.

The wolf, once emaciated, has reportedly gained weight and learned to wag its tail and display submissive behavior to beg for food. The wolf's behavior has influenced others in the area, leading to the formation of roadside wolf packs, Rigpo said.

In July, Sanjiangyuan National Park, which encompasses the Hoh Xil reserve, banned feeding wildlife, warning that such practices disrupt natural survival instincts, harm ecosystems and jeopardize animal health. Human food, the park noted, often contains excessive sugar, salt, and fat, which can lead to obesity, organ failure and other health problems in animals.

"Wild wolves remain dangerous and unpredictable," Rigpo said. "Once they show aggression, ordinary people will be unable to defend themselves."

Experts emphasize the importance of keeping a safe distance from wildlife and avoiding interference unless an endangered species is at risk. "We must respect the natural laws of survival," Rigpo said.

Xu Nuo contributed to this story.

Ma Ying-jeou leads youth exchange visit

Taiwan delegation is scheduled to visit two provinces later this month

By JIANG CHENGLONG
jiangchenglong@chinadaily.com.cn

Ma Ying-jeou, former chairman of the Chinese Kuomintang party, will lead a group of Taiwan youth to the Chinese provinces of Heilongjiang and Sichuan later this month to participate in an ice-themed major event and engage in other exchange activities, a spokesperson from the Chinese mainland announced on Wednesday.

This will be Ma's second visit to the mainland this year, following an 11-day trip starting from the end of March, during which he led a Taiwan youth delegation to Guangdong, Shaanxi and Beijing. The visit concluded with a meeting between Ma and Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee.

Last week, a delegation of mainland college students, including Olympic table tennis champion Ma Long and shooting champion Yang Qian, completed a nine-day visit to Taiwan.

Zhu Fenglian, spokeswoman for the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, confirmed at a regular news briefing that Ma's upcoming visit will occur from Dec 18 to 26. She welcomed Ma's visit and assured that all activities would be well-arranged.

Zhu emphasized that China has a long history, rich culture, vast territory and magnificent landscapes, making it a shared homeland for compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. She added that the youth on both sides represent the future of cross-Strait relations.

"We hope that compatriots on both sides, especially young people, will frequently interact and visit each other, inherit and promote excellent traditional Chinese culture, enhance exchanges and cooperation in various fields, and contribute to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation," Zhu said.

Hsiao Hsu-tsen, executive director of the Ma Ying-jeou Foundation, said in a news release that, amid global tensions, cross-Strait relations are more important. He emphasized that, as Ma has said, the more exchanges and profound understanding there are between young people across the Strait, the fewer conflicts there will be in the future.

During this visit, Ma and the Taiwan youths will participate in an ice-themed event in Heilongjiang, China's northeasternmost province, which will be attended by young people from both sides of the Taiwan Strait.

Zhu said the event, taking place from Dec 18 to 24, will include activities such as a short video exhibition, an exchange seminar with cross-Strait youths, and a tour of venues for the 9th Asian Winter Games.

"Currently, it is expected that around 1,000 participants, mostly young people, will participate in the ice-themed activities," Zhu said.

Just days ago, from Nov 27 to Dec 5, a delegation of 40 teachers and students from seven mainland universities, including Tsinghua University, visited Taiwan. The group engaged in exchanges with their

Taiwan peers, visited universities, and toured historical and cultural sites, including the Taipei Confucius Temple.

Zhu noted that the visit was warmly welcomed and actively supported by various sectors in Taiwan. "The people of Taiwan have felt the youthful energy of mainland youths, represented by Olympic champions Ma Long and Yang Qian, and their sincerity and goodwill in understanding Taiwan," she said.

She cited several Taiwan children who expressed a desire to learn table tennis in the mainland after receiving signed paddles from Ma.

Meanwhile, the mainland delegation also experienced the warmth and friendliness of the Taiwan people and their genuine willingness to engage with the mainland, the spokeswoman said.

Zhu said that the mainland group members received many handwritten letters, postcards and well-prepared small gifts from Taiwan people.

"Many young people from Taiwan and mainland delegation members agreed to meet again next year, looking forward to more exchanges across the Strait," Zhu said. "Their actions and efforts have promoted cross-Strait exchanges and cooperation, brought compatriots closer and demonstrated deep affection."

The mainland will continue to support and promote cross-Strait youth exchanges, providing more platforms and opportunities for mutual learning and interaction so that young people on both sides can make greater contributions to the peaceful and integrated development of cross-Strait relations, according to the mainland official.

Mainland dismisses DPP narratives

By ZHANG YI
zhangyi1@chinadaily.com.cn

The Chinese mainland on Wednesday dismissed allegations by Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party that it is using social media influencers from the island for "united front" tactics, calling the claims an attempt to manipulate public opinion and stoke cross-Strait tensions.

The allegations stem from a recent documentary featuring Taiwan rapper Chen Po-yuan, which accuses the mainland of covertly influencing Taiwan's public opinion. The documentary has sparked heated debate in Taiwan.

Zhu Fenglian, spokesperson for the Taiwan Affairs Office of the

State Council, said the accusations are "clumsy tactics" by the DPP to stage "cognitive warfare" and create fear.

"This is yet another orchestrated effort by the DPP to manipulate narratives and foster a climate of 'green terror,'" Zhu said at a press briefing.

She added that this year has seen an increasing number of Taiwan residents sharing their experiences traveling and interacting on the mainland via online platforms. These firsthand accounts, Zhu said, have challenged the "information cocoon" created by the DPP, prompting the DPP to intensify suppression and intimidation efforts.

Zhu cited examples such as

claims that mainland journalists interfere with Taiwan's media program production, accusations of inviting Taiwan celebrities to form political parties and allegations of recruiting influencers to promote the culture of the mainland.

"These baseless accusations have been met with strong opposition from netizens on both sides of the Strait," she said.

"We will continue to promote exchanges across all fields and welcome more Taiwan residents, particularly young people, to visit the mainland," Zhu said. "We encourage them to see the mainland firsthand, deepen their understanding and develop their own perspectives."

CHINA DAILY USA

NEW YORK HEADQUARTERS

1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,
New York, NY 10036

Telephone: 212-537-8888

Fax: 212-537-8998

editor@chinadailyusa.com
readers@chinadailyusa.com

Subscription: 212-537-8899

Advertising: 212-537-8916

Follow us on:

x.com/chinadaily

facebook.com/chinadaily

usa.chinadaily.com.cn

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

WASHINGTON

National Press Bldg, Suite 1108

529 14th Street NW

Washington, DC 20045

Tel: 202-662-7249

Fax: 202-662-7247

SAN FRANCISCO

235 Montgomery Street, Suite 900, San Francisco,
CA 94104

Tel: 415-348-8288

Fax: 415-348-8388

SEATTLE

800 Fifth Ave, Suite 4100

Seattle, WA 98104

Tel: 206-922-2868

HOUSTON

1001 South Dairy Ashford Suite 100

Houston, TX 77077

Tel: 713-595-7660

CANADA | TORONTO

471 Yonge Street, 10th Floor

Toronto, Ontario, M2N 6K8

Tel: 416-481-5706

CHINA DAILY (ISSN 0748-6154) is

published daily except weekends by China

Daily USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,

New York, NY 10036. Periodical postage

paid at New York, NY and additional

mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send

address changes to CHINA DAILY USA,

1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY

10036.

CHINA

By CHINA DAILY

The monumental challenge of shifting billions of cubic meters of water over a thousand kilometers from one end of the country to another, using only the power of gravity, would seem insurmountable to many, but the middle route of the South-to-North Water Diversion Project has done just that for a decade.

One of China's many megaprojects, the 1,432-kilometer route that takes water from Danjiangkou Reservoir, which sits across Hubei and Henan provinces, to Henan and Hebei, Tianjin and Beijing northward, was put into operation on Dec 12, 2014.

Historically, China's southern regions have been replete with water resources, while the north severely lacked them. The South-to-North Water Diversion Project goes some ways to address this imbalance, supplying safe, clean water to drier regions.

As well as the middle route, which slices through the center of the country, there are eastern and western routes.

To date, the middle route has delivered more than 68 billion cubic meters of water, benefiting nearly 114 million people, and earning a reputation for being a lifeline for the Chinese people.

As the source of the middle route, the Danjiangkou Reservoir is kept under strict observation to ensure water quality with an emphasis on pollution control, ecological restoration and water resource conservation.

A 10-year fishing ban has been put in place, and wastewater from homes and industries near the reservoir is contained in a centralized wastewater treatment system.

Apart from the mammoth engineering required to make the middle route a success, over the past 10 years, dedicated individuals along the route have played their part.

Li Darong, a 38-year-old volunteer, has been cleaning the water in and around the reservoir for four years. Employed by the local forestry station, she dedicates her spare time to volunteer work.

"The environment has improved, and the water is much cleaner now," Li said with a smile as she reflected on the changes over the past decade.

"I spent my childhood along the river, grazing cattle," she said. Her family relocated in the early 2010s to make way for the reservoir. "When I protect the water here, I feel like I am also guarding my homeland underneath."

Li's responsibilities include patrolling the reservoir, collecting garbage from the water and along the shore, and promoting public awareness about water conservation.

"We remove underwater fishing cages because fishing pollutes the water and harms the environment," she explained, standing on the boat where she and her fellow volunteers work daily.

Li works alongside a team of 12 environmental volunteers, some of whom are former fishermen, whose experience and intimate knowledge of the river basin make them highly skilled at operating boats and clearing fishing cages.

Their busiest time is the flood season when tree branches and debris from upstream clog the water.

"During those times, I worked day and night, so I sent my younger daughter to



Water diversion efforts hydrate parched north

Middle route of 1,432-km megaproject celebrates a decade since taps opened

The Danjiangkou Reservoir is the source of the middle route of the South-to-North Water diversion Project. TAO DEBIN / FOR CHINA DAILY



From left: Volunteers take samples from the Danjiangkou Reservoir in Hubei province to assess water quality in August 2022. Li Darong (front) leads fellow volunteers to patrol the surrounding areas of the Danjiangkou Reservoir. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



South-to-North Water Diversion Project



Source: The South-to-North Water Diversion Project CHINA DAILY

stay with her grandmother," Li recalled. "When she finally saw me after a week, instead of complaining, she told me she wanted to help clean the water with me. At

that moment, I felt my efforts as a volunteer were worth it."

More than 200,000 environmental volunteers like Li are registered with Danjiangkou's related volunteer organizations. Known as "Well Guardians", these volunteers play a crucial role in conserving water and ensuring the reservoir's water quality.

In August, President Xi Jinping replied to a letter from these environmental volunteers, expressing his appreciation for their efforts in protecting water resources and the environment.

The success of their efforts has resulted in the water quality of the reservoir being consistently maintained at Grade II or above over the past decade. In China's five-tier surface water quality classification system, Grade II water is

suitable for drinking water sources and can also serve as sanctuaries for rare fish species.

When the water flows from the reservoir, it passes through multiple gates and undergoes rigorous quality monitoring on its way to destinations. Gates equipped with automated control systems regulate the water volume diverted to each city along the channel.

The main sluice gate that unleashes water to start its journey northward is located in Taocha village in Nanyang, Henan province.

Jin Tao, a 30-year-old who works at this massive water dispatch center, was also relocated in 2010 to make way for the project. Some 345,000 people were resettled from around the reservoir and provided with new housing.

Jin said that he and his family are content with their new life and the government's support. Under local policies, relocated villagers are provided with land and an annual stipend, and are encouraged to develop rural businesses in their new communities.

When Jin graduated from university in 2014, he joined in the construction of the project and witnessed the completion of the aqueduct section of the Tuanhe River. Following the opening of the middle route, Jin worked at dispatch centers at different levels before settling into his current role.

Today, his responsibilities include verifying dispatch data and monitoring the channel via surveillance cameras.

For Jin, being a relocated resident to becoming a dispatcher for the project, his life has become deeply intertwined with its development. "I feel fortunate and honored to contribute as both a builder and an operator of this project," Jin said.

Thanks to dedicated efforts in water protection and precise gate control, clean water flows safely into Beijing through the channel. A 100-meter natural geographic drop enables the water to flow the entire almost 1,500-km length from the Danjiangkou Reservoir to Beijing without any additional energy inputs. From end to end, it takes 15 days for the water to travel this distance.

Since 2014, 10.6 billion cubic meters of water have been supplied to Beijing, accounting for nearly 80 percent of the water usage of the capital's residents. The introduction of southern water has increased Beijing's per capita water resources from 100 to 150 cubic meters, according to Zhang Guoyu, deputy director at the Tuanchenghu management office of the South-to-North Water Diversion Project in Beijing.

Despite the increase in water per capita, China's capital still remains fiercely scarce of water by global standards.

With 18 years of experience in water conservancy project construction and management, Zhang has witnessed the project's development and its transformative impact on Beijing's water supply.

"A 150-km-long underground water network is operating in Beijing to deliver southern water to residents' homes," Zhang said at the Tuanchenghu Regulating Reservoir, the Beijing terminus of the project. "Many residents found that the water even tasted better after the channel began supplying water to Beijing."

As a recipient city, Beijing has made significant efforts to conserve and manage its water resources, including implementing water-saving regulations and a tiered pricing system for water usage. The Miyun Reservoir in Beijing started to receive water from the project in 2015, helping Beijing store the southern water. Its water storage now exceeds 3.5 billion cubic meters.

"The reservoir construction in Beijing has been crucial for enhancing water storage capacity and ensuring diversified water sources for the capital," Zhang said.

Once faced with depleted groundwater, Beijing has seen its underground water levels rise by 13.41 meters, thanks to the project.

"People are usually unaware of the invisible cost behind the endless water supply. It is important to use water responsibly," Zhang said.

Li Shangyi contributed to this story.

Benefits of mass endeavor flow in many directions



From left: Thanks to the South-to-North Water Diversion Project, the Qilihe River in Xingtai, Hebei province, has been replenished and revamped. LI CHENGXING / FOR CHINA DAILY An open channel leads to Tuanchenghu Regulating Reservoir, the Beijing terminus of the project. WU ZHIZUN / XINHUA



While the water of the South-to-North Water Diversion Project flows in a single direction, its ecological and environmental benefits are widely distributed, impacting both upstream and downstream regions.

Over the past decade, the project has not only met the water needs of North China but has also replenished numerous rivers and lakes along its eastern and middle routes, contributing to greener and cleaner cities. Its focus on water quality has prompted cities along the routes to enhance their environmental standards, resulting in significant improvements.

The Hanshui River, a major tributary of the Yangtze River, serves as the source for the middle route of the South-to-North Water Diversion Project. In ancient China, its vastness and grandeur were often compared to the galaxy.

To protect water resources and ensure water quality, the Hanshui River has been revitalized with the construction of a wetland park along its banks. Completed in 2018, the Tianhan Wetland Park spans 7.5 square kilometers in Hanzhong, Shaanxi province. It functions as a natural filter, purifying urban tributaries before they flow into the river.

Cui Lifeng, a 50-year-old local and regular visitor to the park, said, "The environment has changed considerably, and more animals are coming here, such as red-billed gulls and egrets."

With the improved ecological conditions, the number of bird species in the area has risen from around 60 to over 90 in the past decade, and the diversity of fish species has also increased, according to Yan Xiaoming, deputy director of the One River and Two Banks scenic area.

"Using the wetland park to manage

water respects the original features of the river, striving to achieve harmony between water, people and the city," Yan said.

Water management in the region has evolved over the years, shifting its focus from artificial flood control to working in harmony with natural processes. Concrete riverbanks have given way to grasslands, and once-clear channels are now dotted with sand islands. These islands, planted with trees like Chinese wingnut and willow, not only serve as habitats for migratory birds but also help conserve soil and water.

Wang Xihong, 57, has dedicated 12 years to cleaning the Hanshui River. Working year-round, he is responsible for maintaining a 4.2-km stretch. "We collect plastic bags and bottles from the water, and I feel a sense of accomplishment seeing the Hanshui River become cleaner," he said.

The project's emphasis on water protection has driven economic transformation and industrial upgrading in upstream regions, with over 500 heavily polluting enterprises being shut down and more than 300 new projects being suspended,

according to the China South-to-North Water Diversion Middle Route Corporation.

In recipient regions, the introduction of southern water has directly and indirectly improved environmental conditions. It has replaced groundwater as a primary water source and replenished natural rivers and lakes, enhancing local ecosystems.

The project has contributed over 10 billion cubic meters of water to more than 50 rivers in northern China, revitalizing the region's waterways.

One of the recipient cities, Xingtai in Hebei province, is known historically for its springs. However, its natural springs ran dry 40 years ago. Since 2021, multiple springs have begun to recover, with water once again flowing from underground sources.

A continuous water stream now gushes from the well of the Huazhuang Spring, which came back to life last year. Residents frequently visit to fill bottles with fresh spring water for drinking.

The Qilihe River in Xingtai has also undergone a remarkable transformation, rejuvenated by replenishment from the project.

Liu Yanwei, a 63-year-old retiree who lives nearby and enjoys fishing, visits the river daily. "The view of the river is so comforting, and I often spend the whole day here," he said. "The project has truly changed the river."

As the project's final destination, Beijing has seen its ecological status improve from sub-healthy to healthy, with notable increases in biodiversity, according to Zhang Guoyu, deputy director at the Tuanchenghu management office of the South-to-North Water Diversion Project in Beijing.

"Water resources form the foundation of environmental and ecological protection," Zhang said.

In 2021, the project replenished the Yongding River for the first time, restoring full water flow to the 865-km waterway, which traverses Shanxi province, the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, Hebei province, Beijing and Tianjin. This marked the river's first complete water supply since 1996.

CHINA DAILY

WORLDUS

US inflation rises amid higher-tariff scenario

By HENG WEILI in New York
hengweili@chinadailyusa.com

Inflation in the US crept up in November — posing a challenge for the Federal Reserve in its efforts to continue trimming interest rates — while President-elect Donald Trump floats expanded tariffs.

In the 12 months through November, the Consumer Price Index — as reported on Wednesday by the US Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) — rose 2.7 percent, the most in seven months.

The Federal Reserve is still expected to cut interest rates for the third time in a row next week.

Trump generally favors lower interest rates, which can stoke demand but also lead to an overheated economy, with an accompanying increase in inflation.

He also has proposed tariffs of 60 percent or higher on all imports from China, and more recently of 25 percent on Canada and Mexico.

Canada's central bank lowered its key interest rate by a half-percentage point on Wednesday amid the tariff threats directed at the country and Mexico over securing their borders with the United States.

"The possibility the incoming US administration will impose new tariffs on Canadian exports to the United States has increased uncertainty and clouded the economic outlook," the bank's statement said.

In an interview broadcast on NBC on Sunday, Trump said that he could not "guarantee" consumer prices wouldn't rise under his proposed tariffs.

Diane Swonk, chief economist at KPMG Economics, told The Wall Street Journal that consumers appear to be buying big-ticket items such as cars in anticipation of price increases fueled by tariffs.

"Something like that never would have happened pre-pandemic, and the fact that we saw it, is just a red flag for the Fed to watch out for," she said.



A shopper looks over clothing on display in a Costco warehouse in Sheridan, Colorado, on Dec 4. DAVID ZALUBOWSKI/AP

Economists at Goldman Sachs have forecast that core inflation would sit at 2.7 percent by the end of 2025. Without tariffs, they estimated an increase of 2.4 percent.

US President Joe Biden, in a speech at the Brookings Institution in Washington on Tuesday said of Trump's tariff proposals: "He seems determined to impose steep, universal tariffs on all imported goods brought into this country on the mistaken belief that foreign countries will bear the cost of those tariffs, rather than the American consumer."

"Who do you think pays for this?" Biden said. "I believe this approach

is a major mistake. I believe we have proven that approach is a mistake over the past four years."

Biden, however, has kept in place the tariffs that Trump rolled out in 2018 in his first term. Earlier this year, Biden raised tariffs on Chinese imports such as electric vehicles to 100 percent and EV batteries to 25 percent.

The levies on the Chinese EVs were seen by some as an overture in a presidential election year to US automakers and autoworkers to shield the American automobile industry.

Wendy Cutler, vice-president of the Asia Society Policy Institute, said

removing tariffs is much more difficult than imposing them, partly due to domestic industries benefiting from them and resisting their removal.

"If Trump goes ahead, let's just say on day one, and announces tariff hikes of 60 percent ... these would be added tariffs; this would be added to the current, whatever, 25 percent tariff," she said Tuesday in remarks at the third annual Big Data China conference hosted online by the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"So, you're talking about tariffs that are getting close to 100 percent, and it's really hard to trade when the

cost is so high. ... With these added tariffs, it just makes the prospects to negotiate any deal with China ... extremely, extremely difficult," said Cutler, a former trade negotiator.

In the CPI report, US housing costs rose 0.3 percent in November, making up nearly 40 percent of the monthly all-items increase.

The food index also increased, rising 0.4 percent as the food-at-home index was up 0.5 percent and the food-away-from-home index rose 0.3 percent. The energy index also was up 0.2 percent; it was unchanged in October.

A bright spot was rent, which went

up 0.2 percent on average, the lowest rise since July 2021, after increasing 0.3 percent in October.

Scott Anderson, chief US economist at BMO Capital Markets, said: "Some Fed officials will likely take solace in the improvement in services and housing inflation. With that said, the Fed will need to see more improvement on the inflation front in the months ahead, if its plan for a steady pace of additional rate cuts next year is to be fulfilled."

The US inflation rate has abated substantially from a peak of 9.1 percent in June 2022, and the Fed's focus has shifted toward the labor market.

Though job growth accelerated in November after being hampered by strikes and hurricanes in October, the unemployment rate edged up to 4.2 percent after staying at 4.1 percent two months in a row.

Based on the CPI data, economists estimated that the core personal consumption expenditures (PCE) index, the Fed's preferred inflation gauge, rose 0.2 percent in November after increasing 0.3 percent in October.

Financial markets have mostly priced in a 0.25 percentage-point rate cut at the Fed's Dec 17-18 policy meeting, according to CME Group's FedWatch Tool.

The Fed started its monetary policy-easing cycle in September. Its benchmark overnight interest rate is now in the 4.50-4.75 percent range, after having been pushed up by 5.25 percentage points between March 2022 and July 2023 to tackle inflation.

But James Knightley, chief international economist at ING, said, "The lack of meaningful progress on inflation means that in their summary of economic projections, Fed officials are likely to signal just three rate cuts in 2025 versus the four they projected in September."

Linda Deng in Seattle and agencies contributed to this story.

CHINADAILY
中国日报

Achieving balance in our lives

As we embrace nature's revitalizing energy, let's also absorb and appreciate the majesty that surrounds us and nurtures our common desire to create an environment for the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature.

PUBLIC INTEREST AD- 0013

GLOBAL LENS



Students at the Mmopane Primary School in Mmopane, Kweneng District, Botswana, take part in lessons on Nov 4.



Students attend class at the Mmopane Primary School in Mmopane, Kweneng District, Botswana, on Nov 4.



Students pose for a photo at the Mmopane Primary School in Mmopane, Kweneng District, Botswana, on Nov 4.

Botswana received the fourth China-aided primary school in October, marking another step forward in the southern African country's educational development.

Ramaeba Primary School, in Kazungula village of northern Botswana, is designed to accommodate 560 students across 14 classrooms, spanning about 61,000 square meters.

The school's main facilities include 16 buildings, such as teaching and office blocks, a library, a dining hall, teachers' quarters and sports fields.

"China has taken to its notice that education is among the top priorities of Botswana's socio-economic development process," said Fan Yong, China's ambassador to Botswana.

The Ramaeba school follows three previous China-aided primary schools: Kubung Primary School in Maun, Dinokwane Primary School in Serowe and Mmopane Primary School near Gaborone, Botswana's capital.

Mokgweetsi Masisi, then Botswana's president, Slumber Tsogwane, then Botswana's vice-president and other senior officials attended the handover ceremony in October, unveiling the school's plaque and touring its facilities.

Tsogwane highlighted the achievement as a testament to the strong partnership between Botswana and China, noting that the project "has been made possible by our partnership with the People's Republic of China."

Positive case

The previously built China-aided primary schools have already brought benefits to local education. Since the opening of the primary school in 2021 in Mmopane village, the educational landscape has seen positive changes.

"This school has come at the right time for the Mmopane community," said Gagoitsiwe Marata, the headmistress of Mmopane Primary School.

"It has really helped the community because initially there was only one school that was serving the whole of the village."

Marata said that before Mmopane Primary School was established, students had to walk long distances to other schools in nearby villages or commute to Gaborone. Some parents were less privileged and could not afford to pay for transportation for their children.

Tlotlo Seloke, 10, was one of the students who faced this challenge. She had to wake up at 5 am every day to take public transport to school.



Students exit Mmopane Primary School in Mmopane, Kweneng District, Botswana, after their classes on Nov 4. The school opened in 2021 and it is one of four China-aided schools in the country in southern Africa. PHOTOS BY HAN XU / XINHUA



This school has come at the right time for the Mmopane community. It has really helped the community because initially there was only one school that was serving the whole of the village."

Gagoitsiwe Marata, headmistress of Mmopane Primary School

98.3 percent

of 118 Mmopane students passed their school's first national primary school leaving exam in 2023, topping Kweneng District of Botswana, with 46 students getting top grades.

Concerned about potential kidnappings and robberies, she transferred to the Mmopane Primary School when it opened.

"This school is completely fabulous because now it takes me 10 minutes to walk from home to school," Seloke said, adding that she always shares with the neighborhood what the students are learning and the activities they are participating in at school.

Boikano Rantshesane, 13, enrolled at Mmopane Primary School in 2021. She told reporters that she was not performing well academically at her previous school. However, since transferring to the school, her grades have improved significantly.

Last year, the school achieved a pass rate of 98.3 percent in its first national primary school leaving examination, topping Kweneng district. Of the 118 students, 116 passed the exams with 46 obtaining top grades.

Marata attributed their success to the firm relationships with teachers, students and parents who provide emotional support, as well as strong staff welfare and assistance from the Chinese Embassy in Botswana.

The school is set to welcome students for enrollment in January next year.

XINHUA

Learning advantage

China-aided schools enhance access to education for Botswana students



Students pose for a group photo in front of the China-aided Mmopane Primary School in Kweneng District, Botswana, on Nov 4.



Students play soccer at the Mmopane Primary School in Kweneng District, Botswana, on Nov 4.



Students take a break between classes at the Mmopane Primary School in Kweneng District, Botswana, on Nov 4.



Students learn about field management practices at the Mmopane Primary School in Kweneng District, Botswana, on Nov 4.

WORLD

Israeli strikes on Syria decried

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong
jan@chinadaily.com

The United Nations said on Tuesday that it rejects any aggression against Syrian sovereignty and violations of its territorial integrity, while Israel said it was establishing a "sterile defense zone" in southern Syria after carrying out more than 350 strikes in 48 hours.

Stephane Dujarric, spokesman for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, said at a news conference that Syria's "turning point" should not be used by its neighbors to encroach upon its territory, and should instead be used by all those in the region to support the Syrian people.

Dujarric said they were very clear about the violation of the 1974 disengagement agreement following the Israel Defense Forces' occupation of the buffer zone. In 1967, Israel occupied most of the Golan Heights during the Middle East war and later annexed the territory. This was never recognized by the international community.

Meanwhile, Geir Pedersen, the UN special envoy for Syria, told journalists in Geneva on Tuesday that the conflict in northeastern Syria is not over as there have been clashes between the Syrian National Army, the opposition groups and the Syrian Democratic Forces.

"We are calling obviously for calm also in this area," Pedersen said.

In addition, Israeli troop movements into the occupied Golan Heights and bombardments "need to stop," he said. "The message from New York is just the same — that what we are seeing is a violation of the disengagement agreement in 1974."

In a post on X, the Israel Defense Forces reported striking most of what it claimed were the strategic weapons stockpiles in Syria in 48 hours "to prevent them from falling into the hands of terrorist elements".

Among the actions were more than 350 airstrikes. A "wide range of targets" included anti-aircraft batteries, Syrian Air Force airfields and dozens of alleged weapons production sites in Damascus, Homs, Tartus, Latakia and Palmyra.

Syria's naval operations were

also targeted, including the Al-Bayda port and the Latakia port, where 15 Syrian naval vessels were hit.

Pedersen said Syria is still in a very "fluid" period, adding that there is a real opportunity for change, but it needs to be grasped by the Syrians themselves and supported by the UN and the international community.

Abu Mohammad Al-Jolani, leader of the opposition group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham that led the rebel offensive and wrested control of Syria, told CNN that their goal had been to overthrow Syria's longtime president Bashar al-Assad.

Syria's caretaker Prime Minister Mohamed al-Bashir called for stability and calm amid a leadership change.

On Wednesday, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said the toppling of Assad was the result of a plan by the United States and Israel.

"What happened in Syria was mainly planned in the command rooms of America and Israel. We have evidence of this. A neighboring government of Syria was also involved," Khamenei said in a speech reported by state media, without naming the neighboring country in question.

Dina Yulianti Sulaeman, director of the Indonesia Center for Middle East Studies, told China Daily that Israel, which is "most invested in weakening Syria" because of the latter's historically hostile stance toward it, will not allow Syria to become stable and secure.

"In recent days, Israel has bombarded Syria, destroying nearly all of Syria's military facilities, effectively leaving the country with no capacity to defend its sovereignty," she said.

"The accumulation of Israeli attacks, the collapse of infrastructure safeguarding territorial sovereignty, economic hardships, and internal chaos bring the potential for Syria's balkanization, as long envisioned in Israel's Oded Yinon Plan."

The Oded Yinon Plan refers to a strategy, outlined in a 1982 article by a former Israeli official and scholar, for Israel's expansion in the Middle East and North Africa region.

Reuters contributed to this story.

Macron races to choose new PM to address crisis

By MOHAMMAD ARIF ULLAH in Paris
For China Daily

French President Emmanuel Macron raced to meet a self-imposed 48-hour deadline to name a new prime minister on Wednesday, following the resignation of Michel Barnier's government last week.

This promise came after a three-hour meeting at the Elysee Palace on Tuesday, with leaders from several major political parties, excluding the hard-left France Unbowed party, or LFI, and the far-right National Rally, or RN. Macron's goal is to address the ongoing political crisis and stabilize governance.

At the meeting, Macron proposed three frameworks for collaboration: a "government pact" for parties willing to join his cabinet, a "legislative pact" to ensure parliamentary support for key laws, and a "non-censure pact" where opposition parties agree not to censure the government. The move is seen as an attempt to navigate a fragmented political landscape.

Laurent Wauquiez, leader of the conservative The Republicans party, or LR, acknowledged the importance of stability during the talks but rejected partnerships with the hard-left LFI or the New Popular Front, or NFP.

The French Socialist Party, or PS, the Greens, and the conservatives presented different demands for the new government, highlighting the divisions Macron must address to secure a working coalition.

Meanwhile, RN leader Marine Le Pen advocated for future leaders to engage with all political blocs, including her party. "The prime minister must obviously talk to the RN," Le Pen stated on France 2 TV on Tuesday.

Challenges ahead

Whoever Macron appoints as the next prime minister will face significant challenges, including resolving sharp political divisions and preventing further governmental instability.

Many parties have rejected the idea of a unity government outright. "It's unrealistic to form a government with parties holding fundamentally opposing views," said Wauquiez of the LR party.

A potential solution lies in a non-censure agreement, which could help maintain stability without formal coalitions. Under such an agreement, the government would refrain from using Article 49.3, which allows the government to force the passage of a law without a vote, while opposition parties would agree not to censure the administration.

However, some parties remain skeptical about Macron's ability to deliver a meaningful compromise. "The president's strategy is unclear, and there are no guarantees this approach will succeed," Olivier Faure, leader of the PS, remarked after Tuesday's meeting.

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.



A resident opens a window to his house as he stands in floodwaters from an overflowing river following torrential rain in Mojokerto, East Java Province, Indonesia, on Monday. JUNI KRISWANTO / AFP

Extreme weather grips Southeast Asian nations

Intensified typhoons, flash floods raise need for mitigation measures: Experts

By PRIME SARMIENTO in Hong Kong
prime@chinadaily.com

Southeast Asia is ending the year facing heavy flooding and landslides that risk displacing people, damaging crops and threatening the economic outlook.

While the La Nina weather system usually brings heavy rains to the region during the fourth quarter, climate change has intensified typhoons and flash floods this year.

Experts said the harsh impact of extreme weather events raises the need for members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to implement climate adaptation and mitigation measures.

The ASEAN Specialized Meteorological Centre has forecast a wet season in the months ahead, with "an increased chance of above-normal rainfall" from December to February.

Last week, the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance, or AHA Centre, said floods, landslides, and storms have hit Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand.

On Wednesday, the Asian Development Bank's latest outlook said Southeast Asia's GDP would expand by 4.7 percent this year. However, geopolitical tensions, trade fragmentation and severe weather events — such as Typhoon Yagi and Tropical Storm Trami — pose risks to growth, particularly in agriculture and infrastructure.

Southeast Asia is not expected to

see any respite soon. The Malaysian Meteorological Department has forecast heavy rains to continue in the states of Johor, Kelantan, Pahang, Terengganu, Sabah, and Sarawak in the next few months.

Royboon Rassameethes, director of Thailand's Hydro-Informatics Institute, told the Thai Public Broadcasting Service that flooding in southern Thai provinces may last into the new year before the situation improves.

Elyssa Kaur Ludher, a visiting fellow for the Climate Change in Southeast Asia Program at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore, said monsoon season in the region usually occurs during the fourth quarter, so heavy rains at the tail end of the year are a normal event.

Warmer oceans

"However, the severity has increased due to our oceans becoming warmer, bringing more moist air to our region, which is a result of climate change," Ludher said.

Khor Yu Leng, director of Singapore-based consultancy Segi Enam Advisors, said climate change is influencing global rainfall variability and cyclonic patterns, leading to an increase in monsoon-related flooding.

Khor, a veteran commodities trade analyst, said the current flooding in southern Thailand and northern Malaysia was worsened by high population density in flood-prone areas, vulnerable river systems, coastal exposure, and inadequate flood defenses.

Malaysian palm oil exports are expected to decline, which rallied palm oil futures early this week. The Rubber Authority of Thailand said the heavy flooding in the country damaged roughly 800,000 hectares and would lead to 20 billion baht (\$591 million) in lost revenues as farmers will not be able to tap their rubber trees for another six weeks.

In Indonesia's West Java and Banten, which are among the country's most populous provinces, flooding, landslides and storms have displaced over 6,000 people and damaged buildings, roads, and farmlands.

Amien Widodo, a senior researcher at the Disaster Mitigation and Climate Change Research Center at the Sepuluh Nopember Institute of Technology in East Java, warned of the impact of La Nina.

He said heavy rains in the next two months will mean farmers have to postpone rice planting in West Java, a key rice-producing region.

He noted that regulating property development projects is one way to reduce the impact of extreme weather events.

Ludher of the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute said in the past, the increased rainfall brought by La Nina was a boon to Southeast Asian farmers as more than half of agricultural lands were rain-fed.

However, she said prolonged flooding results in waterlogged soil, contamination, and the proliferation of pests, which in turn reduces yields. She added that severe flooding can also affect crop storage and supply chains.

Leonardus Jegho in Jakarta contributed to this story.

Africa CDC, WHO probe 'Disease X' in DR Congo

By EDITH MUTETHYA in Nairobi, Kenya
edithmutethya@chinadaily.com.cn

The Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, in partnership with the World Health Organization, the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Health Ministry and other partners, is investigating the unknown "Disease X" that has been reported in the central African country.

Disease X refers to an unknown pathogen with the potential to cause severe illness and widespread public health impacts, hence early detection, investigation and coordinated responses are critical to mitigating its potential effects.

The disease, which presents symptoms such as fever, headache and a high mortality rate among children, has so far affected 376 and killed 79. It was first identified on Oct 24 and reported to national authorities in early December.

The Africa CDC said limited laboratory capacity in the Panzi health zone, the epicenter of the outbreak, required samples to be transported to the national reference laboratory in the capital Kinshasa, highlighting the urgent need for decentralized laboratory infrastructure.

"Africa CDC is fully committed to supporting member states in safeguarding public health," Jean Kaseya, director-general of Africa CDC, said.

He said the Africa CDC has deployed a multidisciplinary team to support the DR Congo Ministry of Health in the investigation of the disease.

The team, which includes epidemiologists, laboratory scientists, infection prevention and control experts, and other specialists, is collaborating with national and international partners, including the WHO, to assess the situation, accelerate diagnostic testing and implement control measures.

Main symptoms

The WHO said all the severe cases of the disease that have been reported are severely malnourished with difficulty in breathing, anemia and signs of acute malnutrition, the main symptoms associated with death.

Given the clinical presentation and symptoms reported and the associated deaths, the WHO said acute pneumonia, influenza, COVID-19, measles and malaria are being considered as potential causal factors with malnutrition as a contributing factor.

"Laboratory tests are underway to determine the exact cause. At this stage, it is also possible that more than one disease is contributing to the cases and deaths," it said.

Forum highlights inspiring legacy of the Flying Tigers

By RENA LI in Los Angeles
renali@chinadaily.com

Amid a tumultuous global landscape 82 years ago, members of a courageous World War II military alliance soared over the "Roof of the World" to beat the odds.

The Hump Airlift, a perilous wartime route carved through the Himalayas, not only delivered critical supplies but also cemented an enduring bond between China and the United States.

Blending history, heroism and hope for a peaceful future, "Flying Over the Top of the World — Forum in Commemorating the 82nd Anniversary of the Hump Airlift in WWII" was hosted by the Flying Tigers Communication Association on Sunday in Los Angeles.

"This forum aims to promote the study and preservation of the history and spirit of the Hump Route, ensuring that more people understand its significance in fostering peace and development," said Yu Qing, president of the association. Flying Tigers veterans and their descendants took center stage at the event. Among them was 99-year-old veteran Mel McMullen, while fellow



Veterans, descendants and historians gather for a forum to discuss the history and spirit of the Flying Tigers in Los Angeles on Sunday. RENA LI / CHINA DAILY

veterans Jack Goodrich and Robert Moore recounted their heroic missions in video messages.

Their tales of bravery resonated deeply with attendees, including US Representative Judy Chu of California, who reflected on 45 years of US-China diplomatic relations.

"It is better to choose diplomacy, with cooperation benefiting both nations and the world. And the best example of that is indeed the inspir-

ing legacy of the Flying Tigers," Chu told the gathering.

The Hump Route, forged through the determination of Chinese and US aviators, became a crucial lifeline during Japan's blockade of China. Navigating the dangerous Himalayan terrain, the route not only transported Chinese soldiers to the South Asian front but also delivered essential supplies from Allied forces.

The extraordinary mission, how-

ever, came at a steep cost. The US military's 10th Air Force of the Army Air Forces alone lost more than 1,500 aircraft and nearly 3,000 personnel, with an 80 percent loss rate. Chinese airlines faced similarly devastating losses, with 50 percent of their pilots and aircraft lost in the effort.

California State Senator Bob Archuleta highlighted the profound sacrifices and their lasting significance. "Their sacrifice lives on every single day in our history books, but it is vital that we also carry it in our hearts," Archuleta said.

Marina Tse, former deputy assistant secretary of the US Department of Education, recounted the historical context of the Japanese invasion of China and the US volunteers who joined the Chinese Army to fight for justice. "We need to continue that kind of spirit to help other people," Tse told China Daily.

"I think it's important for us to not only memorialize their contributions and their sacrifices, but it also showcases the longest and most cherished part of the friendship between China and the US," said Huang Hongjiang, vice-consul-general at the Chinese Consulate General in Los Angeles.

BUSINESS

MORE NEWS WHENEVER YOU WANT IT · CHINADAILY.COM.CN/BUSINESS

Chinese flock to Laos to beat cold

Railway greatly enhancing regional connectivity, facilitating exchanges

By WANG KEJU
wangkeju@chinadaily.com.cn

As chilly weather blankets China, a growing number of senior residents are traveling to Laos via the China-Laos Railway, due to the smooth and comfortable train ride, favorable weather and affordability of the neighboring country.

It has become common practice over the years for some silver-haired residents to trade frigid temperatures for the balmy climes of Southwest China's Yunnan province during winter.

However, thanks to the China-Laos Railway, an increasing number of people are venturing beyond the borders of Yunnan and exploring the neighboring country, since there is a convenient train that connects them and because what was once an arduous journey can now be completed in a matter of hours.

As a flagship project under the framework of the China-proposed

Belt and Road Initiative, the 1,035-km railway, linking Kunming in Yunnan and the Laotian capital of Vientiane, has greatly enhanced regional connectivity, and facilitated people-to-people exchanges since it began operating in December 2021.

"The train ride is so smooth and comfortable, and it's really a good way to travel," said 72-year-old Zhang Mei from Beijing, who recently returned from a weeklong stay in Laos' Luang Prabang to Xishuangbanna in Yunnan.

Laos is just beautiful at this time of the year — the weather is perfect, the scenery is gorgeous, and everything is so much more affordable compared to traveling domestically, Zhang said.

Zhang is just one of the growing legions of elderly Chinese tourists flocking across the border via the China-Laos Railway.

According to data from the Mohan frontier checkpoint, between Oct 1 and Nov 25, the bor-



Passengers get off a train along the China-Laos Railway. CHEN XINBO / XINHUA

der crossing recorded over 20,000 outbound Chinese tourist trips — a 195 percent increase compared to the same period last year.

Notably, nearly 60 percent of these travelers were aged 60 and above, with the oldest passenger clocking in at 82 years old.

With spacious seating and ample legroom, the railway's coaches provide a far more relaxing travel experience for senior citizens compared with other transportation means, said Wang Qiang, director of the Mohan frontier checkpoint.

To further cater to the needs of elderly passengers, the Mohan frontier checkpoint has rolled out

a suite of special services. These include dedicated channels for assisting the elderly with luggage, wheelchair support and coordination with tour operators to streamline the entry and exit process.

"Our top priority is ensuring the travel experience is as smooth and stress-free as possible for our senior citizens," Wang said. "Whether it's expedited Customs clearance or onboard concierge services, we're committed to making their journeys as comfortable and enjoyable as possible."

For many elderly Chinese, cross-border travel is about far more than

just sightseeing — it's a chance to rejuvenate both body and mind. The China-Laos Railway has made this type of travel more accessible and enjoyable, said Zhou Mingbo, deputy general manager of online travel platform Fliggy's holiday business department.

This, in turn, has unlocked new opportunities for China's growing silver-haired demographic to explore their southeastern neighbor. No longer burdened by the physical demands and logistical challenges of long-haul bus or car journeys, they can now focus on the relaxing experience, Zhou added.

Turning silver into gold through an aging population

At a recent concert in Chengdu, in Southwest China's Sichuan province, which featured electrifying music, dazzling lights and a dopamine-charged atmosphere, one unexpected moment stole the show.

Within the pulsating wave of energy, the camera found an elderly woman with graying hair. Her face was streaked with tears of excitement and nostalgia as her favorite star returned to the stage after a decade-long hiatus. The image quickly went viral on Weibo, capturing many hearts across the microblogging site.

Shui Shuzhang, 87, is a fan of Dao Lang, a pop singer who rose to stardom roughly two decades ago. "I don't know how much longer I'll live," she said. "So while I can still get around, I'll go to every single one of his concerts."

Shui's story epitomizes a growing trend in China — seniors embracing more vibrant lifestyles, to the extent that the hashtag "grandma at a concert, mentally 30 years ahead of me" recently trended on Weibo.

With approximately 217 million people aged 65 and above, China is home to the world's largest elderly population, and roughly one in every four seniors globally. While some view this demographic shift as a burden, many economists highlight the consumption power of this group and the tremendous opportunities this presents for economic growth.

The China Research Center on Aging predicts that the silver econo-



Senior citizens learn about a smart door lock at the Shenzhen International Intelligent Elderly Care Industry Expo held in October in Shenzhen, Guangdong province. LIANG XU / XINHUA

my could grow from its current value of 7 trillion yuan (\$965 billion) to 30 trillion yuan by 2035. By 2050, elderly consumption is expected to reach 40 to 69 trillion yuan — accounting for up to 20.7 percent of the country's GDP, according to economist Ren Zeping.

Ren, chief economist at Zhengzhou-based Zhongyuan Bank, was previously an economist at the Development Research Center, a key think tank affiliated with the State Council.

China's silver economy is not just a domestic opportunity — it's a global one. While it is only beginning to take root in China, this concept has already come of age in Japan and parts of Europe. Entrepreneurs from these regions have set their sights on the burgeoning Chinese market.

Japan became an aged society in 1994 and entered the super-aged phase in the early 2000s. It has a thriving silver economy that spans sectors such as healthcare, tourism and financial consultancy. According to Mizuho Corporate Bank, this economy is expected to exceed 100 trillion yen (\$659 billion) by 2025.

A society is considered "aged" when those aged 65 and above account for 14 percent of the total population, and "super-aged" when

the proportion exceeds 20 percent, according to the WHO. The figure stood at 15.4 percent in China in 2023.

At the second China International Supply Chain Expo, held in Beijing in November, Panasonic showcased innovations like a bed with a back-pressure-relief system and a senior-friendly shower room.

These products are already in use at the Yada Panasonic Community in Yixing, East China's Jiangsu province — Panasonic's largest smart retirement project in China.

The Chinese government has increasingly recognized the economic opportunities presented by an aging population. It introduced the idea of developing a silver economy in 2020 and mapped out strategies and key industries in a policy document in January 2024. More recently, it has further opened the elderly care, medical and health sectors to foreign investment, reinforcing its dedication to this market.

As aging reshapes global economic and social realities, experts say the key lies in proactive adaptation. With the right strategies, challenges can transform into catalysts for growth — turning silver into gold as the population grays.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

Shanghai pushes M&As for high-quality growth

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

Shanghai's emphasis on the development of pioneering industries, which can be seen in the latest policies to facilitate industry consolidation, can further boost innovation and advance the city's high-quality economic growth, said experts.

The Shanghai municipal government released on Tuesday an action plan to advance the restructuring of listed companies in the city from 2025 to 2027. Consisting of 12 measures, the plan said that Shanghai will support mergers and acquisitions among listed firms from the three industries of integrated circuits, biomedicine and new materials.

By 2027, about 300 billion yuan (\$41 billion) in M&A deals should be signed in the above three sectors so as to form about 10 internationally competitive industry leaders. Over 2 trillion yuan of assets should be activated upon these deals, said the plan.

More M&A activity will be encouraged in Shanghai with the government's latest attempt. Listed companies, especially those focused on technological innovation, will benefit. Private equity and venture capital institutions in Shanghai will also be able to pursue substantial growth in the city, said Huang Yan, vice-chairman of the Shanghai Private Equity Association.

The action plan addresses the six measures released by the China Securities Regulatory Commission in late September to boost development of new quality productive forces.

Buoyed by various supportive measures, M&As will become a major theme in the capital market in the coming months, said experts from Haitong Securities. It is likely that listed semiconductor companies will actively carry out M&As to strengthen the synergy of the industrial chain and promote the rapid growth of platform-based enterprises, experts said.

Data from market tracker Wind Info show that Shanghai is home to 444 listed companies, with their combined market value standing at 9.38 trillion yuan.

The city has 34 listed IC companies, with their total market cap reaching 1.68 trillion yuan,

and 52 Shanghai-based public biomedical firms, with a combined market value of about 651.7 billion yuan.

In July, Shanghai launched a fund of funds (FOF) covering three industries — IC, biomedicine and artificial intelligence. The FOF's total value is about 89 billion yuan.

According to the plan released on Tuesday, the FOF should be given full play while more market-based M&A funds should be introduced and established. The government's investment funds can participate in these M&A funds in the form of common shares, preferred shares and convertible bonds.

Tu Guangshao, founding chair of the board of the Shanghai Advanced Institute of Finance at Shanghai Jiao Tong University, said that M&A funds help optimize resource distribution. The size of M&A funds in China is still relatively small at present. Local governments should play a bigger role in supporting their development, Tu said.

The transformation of traditional industries via M&As should also be advanced in Shanghai, said the action plan. In specific, modern services and professional service providers — such as financial and logistics firms — are encouraged to pursue M&As so that more quality assets can be injected into these companies, thus elevating their investment value, according to the plan.

The merger between two Shanghai-based securities firms — Guotai Junan Securities and Haitong Securities — was approved by the municipal State-owned assets supervision and administration commission in early November.

Inferred from 2023 public domain data, the combined assets of the two brokerages stood at 1.68 trillion yuan. CITIC Securities, China's largest securities firm, saw its asset value exceed 1.45 trillion yuan at the end of last year.

Wang Kai, chief strategist at Guosen Securities, said that room for further development of certain traditional industries is quite limited at present. Instead of passively waiting for market changes, including elimination from the market, it is a better option for companies to seek further industrial consolidation, he said.

HK's IPO market to keep top 5 ranking in 2025

By WU MENGLEI in Hong Kong
thor_wu@chinadailyhk.com

International accounting firm KPMG foresees improved investor confidence in Hong Kong's IPO market and expects it to maintain its position among the global top five in 2025, as its financial funding sector shows robust resilience.

As of Dec 8, the Hong Kong stock exchange ranked 4th in the 2024 global IPO rankings, with total funds raised reaching HK\$82.9 billion (\$10.66 billion) from 63 completed IPOs, according to the latest report released by KPMG on Wednesday.

China Securities Regulatory Commission's measures to encourage leading Chinese mainland enterprises to list in Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland's plan to adopt a more relaxed monetary policy in the coming year will continue to bolster the city's IPO pipeline, as 90 percent of Hong Kong's IPOs are from the Chinese mainland, said Louis Lau, partner, head of Hong Kong capital markets group, KPMG China.

Lau said that Chinese mainland regulators such as the CSRC are positively engaged with the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) government and are facilitating quality companies to list in Hong Kong.

"The regulators are trying to figure out a proper way to cut the time for applying listing overseas," Lau said. "We hold an optimistic attitude toward Hong Kong's IPO market. As Hong Kong is a bridge for Chinese mainland companies and foreign investors, if more mainland companies list in Hong Kong, the overseas investor will have more investment choices."

He also noted that the mainland's support of innovation, technology and biomedicine sectors will bolster the city's IPO volume and anticipated that large listings will even exceed HK\$100 billion in the coming years.

The top two funds raised in Hong Kong's IPO market this year were from Chinese mainland home-appliance maker Midea Group and Chinese express company SF Holding, which were \$4.6 billion and \$749 million, respectively.

In addition to the mainland, the Hong Kong stock exchange is also exploring other markets. In the past two years, it has added three exchanges in the Middle East to its list of recognized stock exchanges, allowing secondary listings from the region.

Irene Chu, partner, head of new economy and life sciences, Hong Kong, KPMG China, said: "Currently, more than 100 listed companies in the Middle East meet the requirements to go public in Hong Kong, mainly from the financial and energy sectors."

"With the increasing connection between Hong Kong and the Middle East, they will foster stronger interest in Hong Kong, but it does not mean that they will seek a listing in Hong Kong in the near future," Chu added.

Data from KPMG show global IPO markets raised a total of \$119.1 billion across 1,159 deals in 2024, marking declines of 9 percent in funds raised and 15 percent in deal volume compared to 2023. India is expected to lead global stock exchanges in terms of both funds raised and deal volume, with US stock exchanges following closely. Hong Kong and Shanghai will likely end the year in fourth and fifth place, respectively.

EY Greater China, another global advisory services provider, also pointed out in its report earlier this month that Hong Kong's IPO activities may regain momentum in 2025, with a chance to return to the forefront in global rankings.

The report said improving market conditions and a backlog of exit demand from private equity are supporting the 2025 equity capital markets, with IPOs likely to pick up across regions.

Briefly

Auto sector posts strong growth in Nov

China's auto production rose 11.1 percent year-on-year in November, while sales climbed 11.7 percent from a year earlier, data showed on Wednesday. In the first 11 months of 2024, auto production exceeded 27.9 million units, up 2.9 percent year-on-year, while sales expanded 3.7 percent to 27.94 million units,

said the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers.

Yuan strengthens against greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, strengthened 53 pips to 7.1843 against the US dollar on Wednesday, according to the China Foreign Exchange Trade System. In

China's spot foreign exchange market, the yuan is allowed to rise or fall by 2 percent from the central parity rate each trading day. The central parity rate of the yuan against the dollar is based on a weighted average of prices offered by market makers before the opening of the interbank market each business day.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

BUSINESS



Visitors gather at Contemporary Amperex Technology's booth during an auto expo in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, in November.
DENG HUA / XINHUA

CATL, Stellantis team up to tap EV battery market

With a planned investment of \$4.3b, plant in Spain to start operations in '26

By CHENG YU
chengyu@chinadaily.com.cn

Franco-Italian automaker Stellantis and Chinese battery giant Contemporary Amperex Technology Co Ltd announced on Tuesday an investment of 4.1 billion euros (\$4.3 billion) to form a joint venture that will build a large-scale lithium iron phosphate (LFP) battery plant in Zaragoza, Spain.

The move marks another major step by CATL — the world's largest electric vehicle battery maker — in overseas expansion, after it brought its battery manufacturing technology to Europe through its two plants in Germany and Hungary, which are already operational.

The facility, which is expected to start production by end-2026, could reach up to 50 gigawatt-hours capacity by then. This, according to industry experts, can power an average of 700,000 cars a day.

“This important joint venture with our partner CATL will bring innovative battery production to a manufacturing site that is already a leader in clean and renewable energy ...”

John Elkann, chairman of Stellantis

The 50-50 joint venture between CATL and Stellantis will boost the latter's LFP portfolio in Europe, enabling the automaker to offer more affordable battery-electric passenger cars.

“Stellantis is committed to a

decarbonized future, embracing all available advanced battery technologies to bring competitive EV products to our customers,” said Stellantis Chairman John Elkann.

“This important joint venture with our partner CATL will bring innovative battery production to a manufacturing site that is already a leader in clean and renewable energy, helping drive a 360-degree sustainable approach,” Elkann said.

In November 2023, Stellantis and CATL signed a nonbinding deal for the local supply of LFP battery cells and modules for EV production in Europe and established a long-term collaboration on creating a bold technology roadmap to support Stellantis' advanced battery EVs and identifying opportunities to further strengthen the battery value chain.

“The new joint venture has taken our cooperation with Stellantis to new heights, and our cutting-edge battery technology and outstanding operation know-how combined with Stellantis' decadeslong experience in running business locally in Zaragoza will ensure a major success story in the industry,” said

Robin Zeng, chairman and CEO of CATL.

According to market consultancy SNE Research, Chinese battery makers have made 65.5 percent of the total global EV battery installations in the first 10 months. CATL took the crown with 36.8 percent.

Pan Helin, a member of the Expert Committee for Information and Communication Economy, which is part of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, said that as domestic competition becomes increasingly fierce, it is an inevitable trend for power battery companies to go overseas.

“If they don't expand the overseas market, they will not be able to obtain the scale effect of power battery manufacturing. At present, there is still a lot of room, as overseas battery markets are expected to grow several times in the coming years.”

On the other hand, Pan said that amid geopolitical tensions, Chinese battery companies continue to offer more high-quality, affordable technologies and products for the global market.

Seniors jumping aboard livestreaming bandwagon

By ZHAO RUINAN and GUO JUN in Nanjing

When 73-year-old Gu Linshan first started livestreaming, he was bashful and had no idea what to say or do.

However, he soon became a well-known “silver-haired” anchor in Chenbian village, Xinghua, Jiangsu province.

On Nov 5, at 2:30 pm, Gu went live with just a mobile phone, a stand and two illumination lights.

He enthusiastically promoted local agricultural specialties such as hairy crabs and taro.

His mentor, Liu Tao, who is also Party secretary of Chenbian, joined him during the livestreaming sessions. Together, they sold over 22 orders in just half an hour, totaling more than 500 yuan (\$68.80) in sales.

“At the beginning of my livestreaming journey, I didn't know when to speak or what to say, which made me quite nervous. Liu interacts with me during the streams, asking about planting and breeding — topics I am familiar with — allowing me to talk about them more naturally,” Gu said.

Over the past five months, Liu has guided silver-haired anchors in producing short videos and assisting with agricultural livestreams. They managed to sell agricultural products worth over 200,000 yuan and distributed around 5,000 yuan in rewards to participants.

Xinghua is a major agricultural hub in the province, known for products like scallions, taro and hairy crabs, which are recognized as national geographical indication products or have registered geographical indication trademarks.

In 2023, the organizational department of the Xinghua Party committee launched its own brand, implemented a “red anchor cultivation plan”, and organized grassroots Party members to help farmers stimulate sales.

This initiative is aimed at supporting comprehensive rural revitalization.

Under the initiative, Liu quickly distinguished himself by helping farmers sell agricultural products worth over 1 million yuan, amassing over 10 million views for the

short videos he produced.

In June, he issued a recruitment notice for senior anchors, and Gu was the first to sign up.

Liu passed on his knowledge to other older anchors in the village, teaching them camera skills, how to interact with online viewers and how to share rural stories.

In recent years, the village has also conducted smartphone training to help elderly residents bridge the “digital divide”.

Initially, many elderly individuals were nervous in front of the camera.

Liu said: “I guide the conversation during livestreams by discussing familiar topics such as planting techniques and how to consume agricultural products. This helps them speak more naturally. Before each livestream, we hold meetings to understand the features of the agricultural products and plan the overall content flow. Silver-haired anchors understand local agricultural products well and often share unique insights, such as cultivation tips and special consumption methods.”

“This content really captivates the audience.”

The village boasts many elderly anchors like Gu.

After retiring, Chen Tianchang returned to his hometown and initially faced boredom. However, he actively participated once the village began producing short videos and livestreaming.

“I feel happy and joyful when I introduce our village's agricultural products during livestreams, especially when the audience shows an interest,” he said.

“I explain every detail to them, helping them understand and appreciate our offerings.”

Now in Chenbian, a team of five livestreaming senior anchors has been formed, with six more undergoing training to join them.

In Daduo town, where Chenbian is located, nearly 40 “silver-haired anchors” are active in the field.

“We reward participants based on their sales from livestreaming, typically around 50 yuan per session,” Liu said.

Contact the writers at zhaoruinan@chinadaily.com.cn



Liu Tao (right), Party secretary of Chenbian village, Xinghua, Jiangsu province, promotes agri-products via livestreaming.
PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



The Belt and Road Initiative PEACE AND COOPERATION

The Belt and Road Initiative, reflecting common ideals and the pursuit of fairer, more connected human societies, endeavors to seek new models of international cooperation and inject a new sense of positivity into efforts aimed at promoting world peace and development.

COMMENT

Editorials

Israel and its allies should not aggravate the tumultuous state of affairs in Syria

Taking advantage of the downfall of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's government, Israel has lost no time in conducting air strikes against targets across Syria, carrying out significant ground operations there and seizing control of a demilitarized buffer zone in the Golan Heights. Such behavior is tantamount to looting a neighbor's house when it is on fire.

Israel's military said on Tuesday that it had carried out 350 air strikes targeting "most" of Syria's advanced weapons, including in Damascus, in a span of 48 hours. Though it had denied any troop movement beyond the demilitarized zone, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported Israeli armored units were positioned roughly 25 kilometers from Damascus on Tuesday morning.

The purpose of Israel's offensive on Syria, as clearly stated by Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz, was to establish a "sterile defense zone" in southern Syria to prevent hostile forces from approaching its borders. Claiming that in order to safeguard its security, Israel has to set up a buffer zone inside its neighbor's territory is gangster logic.

No wonder the incursion immediately drew criticism from regional countries, including Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, and prompted calls from the international community that Syria's sovereignty be respected. Israel's reckless attacks in Syria must be condemned and brought to an end.

Israel's aggression has already played a significant, if not decisive, role in triggering what is now happening in Syria, and elsewhere in the region. Its attacks on Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran, since the onset of its conflict with Hamas more than a year ago have dramatically changed the power balance in the Middle East and even broken the region's strategic equilibrium.

Given that both Israel and its close ally the United States have for years sought the end of Assad's rule in Syria, his downfall will have been greeted with glee in Tel Aviv and Washington.

Many in Washington have long lamented the waning of US clout in the Middle East following the US withdrawal from Iraq, they will be overjoyed at the downfall of Assad, which has weakened the influence of Iran in the region, another of the US' bêtes noires, helping to bolster the US' influence in the Middle East.

But for Syria and its people, it is too early to say the situation will get better, not worse. The United Nations has repeatedly raised concerns about the grave humanitarian situation in the country. Israel's incursion also points to the challenge for both Syria and the world community to maintain the territorial integrity of Syria. Not to mention that the complicated backgrounds of Syrian rebel coalition forces and some of the forces' roots in terrorism and extremism do not augur well: There is no guarantee that Syria will not become another Libya or a venue for different players to pursue selfish gains, or even worse, a hotbed for some diehard terrorists to regroup.

Hence, for the world community to prevent another Middle East country from falling into endless violence and chaos and for a peaceful future for the Syrian people, this is no time for calculating who wins or loses in Syria but the time for concerted international efforts to find a peaceful way out for Syrians.

As China has stressed, Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity must be respected, and Syria's future should be determined by the Syrian people. All influential players in the conflict should act in the best interests of the Syrian people, and any political solution to restore stability in Syria as soon as possible should be welcomed and supported.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said China hopes that the relevant parties will reach a political settlement as soon as possible, bearing in mind the fundamental interest of the Syrian people.

China promptly serves US what it ordered

In recent years, the United States has unilaterally provoked a trade war with China and launched a campaign to challenge the country's high-tech industries. But instead of being crushed, China has been spurred to more firmly follow the path of endogenous innovation and the Chinese economy has entered a new stage of high-quality development. Nor have the US' intimidation tactics and various blockades against China prompted the return of manufacturing and a reduction of the trade deficit. Instead, it has caused the US to lose important overseas markets and weakened its credibility.

But although it is the US that has taken the initiative to attack China's tech development, China will by no means allow the US to hurt its core development interests without consequences.

Thanks to the Joe Biden administration's desperate attempts to patch up its "chip iron curtain" against China, whose harming of relations has been compounded as the moves came shortly after the outgoing US president's third "candid, constructive" in-person meeting with his Chinese counterpart last month, the dance between the world's two largest economies has become more intense.

While the US targets advanced chips and high tech, the top links of the value chain, China has put crucial mineral materials in its crosshairs in the same manner. These minerals are the foundation for the chip chain the US has targeted, and in doing so China is ensuring the US is served what it has ordered.

After the Biden administration's latest measures to tighten exports of semiconductor manufacturing equipment, storage chips and other items that contain US know-how to China, Beijing has finally made up its mind to upgrade its countermeasures by paying back the United States in kind, tightening its control over exports of gallium, germanium, antimony and superhard materials.

Unlike its previous moves in this regard since 2019, the latest export controls, introduced by China on Tuesday last week, entail stricter examinations of the end-users and end-use purposes of exports of relevant dual-use items that might be used by the United States' military or for military purposes.

That means, unlike previous actions that did not single out the US and mainly applied to Chinese export companies, under the latest policy, any organization or individual from any country or region that, in violation of the above provisions, transfers or provides relevant dual-use items originating in China to the US will be held legally responsible, according to a statement of the Chinese Ministry of Commerce.

Singling out the US-related end-users and end-use purposes undoubtedly makes the export restrictions more focused. Yet, more enterprises from third-party countries involved in the US-related transactions of these China-sourced materials will unavoidably be implicated, pressuring them to relocate their supply chains to other end markets of developed economies.

Now that China has chosen to defend its legal rights and interests by reciprocating the US' approach, the tech conflict between China and the US is effectively squeezing out third-party entities taking part in transactions between the two. Though at the high end and lowest raw material end only, that tendency, if not checked, has the potential to gradually hollow out the economic and trade relations between the two countries by driving out the ballast-like third-party entities from their economic ties.

But it must be pointed out that China's countermeasures are of a different purpose from those of the US. The US' moves are coercive and bullying in intent, aimed at containing China's development by overstressing the concept of national security, politicizing and weaponizing economic and technological issues. China's new regulations aim to create a cohesive legal framework to resolve issues stemming from the previously fragmented regulatory environment so as to better manage technologies that can be used for civilian and military purposes.

Gallium, germanium, antimony and other relevant materials that China is restricting exports of to the US are key materials for semiconductors, infrared technology, optical fiber cables, photovoltaics and other industries. By streamlining processes and enhancing the effectiveness of control measures, the new regulations position China to better navigate international trade complexities while ensuring its national security interests are upheld.

Notably, Beijing has reiterated its openness to strengthening dialogue on export controls with relevant countries and regions to jointly promote the security and stability of the global industry and supply chains while announcing its countermeasures.

With a new US administration due to take office next month, it is to be hoped that it will take note of this and make concerted efforts to appropriately resolve the differences between the two countries and put their relations back on the right track of healthy cooperation rather than carrying on cruising for a bruising.

CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

Contact us at

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

China Daily UK
90 Cannon St, London EC4N 6HA, UK
+44 (0) 207 398 8270
editor@chinadailyuk.com

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

China Daily USA
1500 Broadway, Suite 2600,
New York, NY 10036
+1 212 537 8888
editor@chinadailyusa.com

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

Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Moderately loose monetary policy a timely and fit answer to the call

At a top-level meeting on Monday it was decided that China will adopt a moderately loose monetary policy next year. China has maintained a prudent monetary policy for many years, and the adjustment to "moderately loose" is related to the overall economic situation at home and abroad.

At present, China's internal and external environment have undergone great changes, with insufficient domestic demand and growing pressures on businesses. At the same time, the United States and other developed economies have turned to a looser monetary policy. The change to China's monetary policy is being made based on the changed situation, while continuing with the previous requirement that "strong interest rate cuts" should be made.

The last time China used "moderately loose" to describe its monetary policy was around 2008-2010, and since then "prudent" has dominated. The new adjustment is aimed at fur-

ther strengthening the management of expectations and sending a clear monetary policy signal to the market. When the transparency of monetary policy improves, its comprehensibility and authority will be enhanced, leading the market to form stable expectations on the trend of monetary policy and rationally optimize its decision-making.

China's central bank has intensified the implementation of its monetary policy since the beginning of this year, cutting banks' reserve requirement ratio twice by a total of 1 percentage point, and releasing huge liquidity into the market, which has promoted a significant reduction in the comprehensive financing cost of society, and further improved the quality and effectiveness of financial support for the real economy. At the same time, the loan prime rates have been cut three times, with the one-year LPR lowered by 35 basis points, and five-year LPR lowered by 60 basis points.

The central bank has also adjusted real estate financial policies and created the tools to support the stable development of the capital market.

While meeting the financing needs of the real economy, these policies have continuously lowered the comprehensive financing cost of society, boosted market confidence and expectations, stimulated enterprises' willingness to invest, and increased people's spending power, effectively supporting economic recovery and high-quality development. In the first 11 months of this year, China's trade in goods increased by 4.9 percent year-on-year.

The latest monetary policy will further facilitate the transformation and upgrading of China's economic structure, and support entities to increase investment in green finance, innovation, and research and development, which will consolidate the foundation for the country's stable economic growth and high-quality development.

- ECONOMIC DAILY

A footnote of country's catch-up in science and tech

Two Chinese scientists — Li Chunlai, deputy chief designer for China's Chang'e 6 mission, and Xu Huiji, a physician at the Naval Medical University — have been included on Nature's annual list of 10 people "who have shaped science".

The Chang'e 6 mission has not only set a precedent by being the first to collect samples from the far side of the moon, but also for land-

ing on the moon's South Pole-Aitken basin. And Xu is the first physician to apply the "revolutionary therapy" of using allogeneic universal CAR-T to treat immune system disorders, for which Nature hailed him as "the daring doctor behind a world-first treatment for autoimmune disease".

Behind Li and Xu's achievements is the progress of China's scientific

research sector.

The two scientists' achievements also demonstrate China's open attitude. Chang'e 6 carries four foreign payloads from France, the European Space Agency, Italy and Pakistan, while the medicine and therapy developed by Xu and his team will benefit hundreds of millions of autoimmune patients worldwide.

- ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

'Ancient towns' aggravating local debt and graft

Some "ancient town" tourism projects featuring pseudo-classical architectural style buildings funded by local governments can hardly make ends meet with the economy experiencing a cold winter.

Dayong town located in Zhangjiajie, Hunan province, is one of them. With a total investment of 2.5 billion yuan (\$344.7 million), the town, which covers an area of 21.67 hectares, was rebuilt as it was believed to be like during the early Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) to attract tourists.

Yet, in the first half of this year, the town attracted only 2,300 tourists. Some of the visitors used such words as "desolate", "deserted" and "not worth recommending" to describe the current situation of the town, which started losing money since it commenced trial operations in 2021.

Worse, there are many such projects still being built in the country, as local governments believe they can become the next cornucopia. Statistics show that there are more than 2,800 such "ancient towns" finished and being built in China now. But many of them have run into revenue

difficulties or even been left unfinished due to problems with planning, funding, construction or management.

The natural, historical and cultural resources vary from place to place. The planning and development of "ancient town" projects should be adapted to local conditions, fully tapping and utilizing local natural landscape and cultural resources. More importantly, the investors should have done enough market research before making the decision.

Since 2014, due to the policy support for the development of the cultural and tourism industry, many counties and cities have launched such projects in a short time, resulting in the current "oversupply". Most aborted projects have failed because they didn't respect market law, as their investors blindly believed they would become popular the moment they were opened. But they indeed became a part of the law at last, though as a debt burden to local governments.

In order to compete for limited customers, the surviving projects

have engaged in price wars, lowering the standards of services, management and maintenance and leading the industry to unsustainable "involutionary" competition.

In addition, many investigations into corrupt officials have demonstrated that blindly carrying out large-scale infrastructure projects that are not directly related to people's livelihoods in a short period of time often involves a lot of investment and bidding that create opportunities for power-for-cash exchanges.

In other words, many such "ghost towns" have actually been vanity projects from the very beginning or used as white gloves to turn government borrowing and investment into a cash cow for corrupt officials.

With moderately loose monetary policies being implemented to stimulate domestic demand, the already debt-ridden local governments should avoid the "ancient town" pitfalls, and refrain from simply using rash investment to spur a flash-in-the-pan growth.

- LIYANG, CHINA DAILY

COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | China's Economy

Editor's note: This year is crucial for China to achieve the objectives and tasks in the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25). Faced with challenges and a complex external environment, China has sufficient policy space and abundant policy reserves to promote high-quality economic development. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Ding Shuang

Pragmatic stimulus need of the hour

With US President-elect Donald Trump announcing higher tariffs on Mexico, Canada and China even before his inauguration, it is now unrealistic for China to continue to count on external demand to ride out the housing market correction.

While China's export performance has remained robust in 2024, it is expected that net exports will contribute less to GDP growth in 2025. Therefore, a broader shift toward domestic demand will be essential to maintain economic momentum.

The December Central Economic Work Conference (CEWC) will likely set a pro-growth policy tone. An ambitious growth target is likely to be adopted to anchor market expectations and change the deflationary mindset. The shift from "prudent" to "appropriately loose" monetary policy stance suggests the central bank is prepared to inject sufficient liquidity to absorb the expected surge in government bond supply, and moderately cut policy rates to prevent a rise in real interest rates.

We expect the government to introduce more measures to boost housing demand and contain supply, including deploying additional resources to support "whitelist" projects and curtail housing inventory.

In light of the trade challenges, the Chinese government is expected to implement stronger fiscal policy to bolster domestic demand. China is likely to keep its 2025 GDP growth target at around 5 percent, with an emphasis on sustaining job creation and avoiding social instability. In order to achieve this, the government is likely to widen the fiscal deficit to 3.5 percent of GDP, up from 3.0 percent in 2024, signaling its commitment to supporting growth in a more challenging global environment.

Fiscal policy is expected to be the key lever in 2025. A combination of higher special bond issuance, targeted fiscal spending, and government-backed initiatives will help stimulate the economy. The central government is likely to increase spending on infrastructure projects financed by local government bond issuance, while also focusing on

initiatives such as local debt swaps and bank recapitalization. These measures are expected to have a positive impact on growth, potentially boosting GDP by 0.3 to 0.5 percentage points.

Among the most pressing domestic concerns is the ongoing slowdown in the real estate sector, which has been a significant drag on the economy. The housing market has faced significant headwinds, with declines in property sales and investment. However, there are signs that policy measures to stabilize the market are beginning to take effect. The government has already introduced a series of supportive measures, including relaxing home purchase restrictions, lowering mortgage rates and transaction taxes, and ramping up financial support for key property development projects.



The author is chief economist for Greater China and North Asia, Standard Chartered Bank.

Looking ahead, further support for the housing market will likely be a priority in 2025, with expectations of continued intervention to stabilize both supply and demand in order to prevent a further decline in the housing market. Property investment is forecasted to decline at a slower pace, which could help reduce the overall drag on growth by approximately 0.3 percentage points.

Beyond fiscal and monetary measures, there is growing consensus within China's policy circles that consumption must take on a larger role in driving economic growth. Household savings have surged in recent years, driven by the economic uncertainties brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, and consumption has struggled to recover to pre-pandemic levels. To address this, the government is expected to introduce targeted policies to encourage consumption and reduce precautionary savings.

Several measures are being discussed to unlock the potential of Chinese consumers. These include expanding the "trade-in" program for consumer goods, offering subsidies to low-income groups, providing tax

benefits to encourage family growth, and broadening the social safety net to reduce the need for precautionary savings. Additionally, further opening up the service sector to private and foreign investment — especially in areas such as telecommunications, healthcare, and education — could foster greater economic dynamism and increase household spending.

The push for consumption-driven growth reflects a broader strategic shift to a more sustainable and balanced growth model in the face of global uncertainties.

In response to the risk of further trade tensions and potential tariff hikes, the Chinese government is unlikely to resort to aggressive currency devaluation. Although the yuan may experience some depreciation under market pressure, a large-scale devaluation is seen as counterproductive. Such a move could trigger capital outflows and exacerbate trade frictions with other countries, particularly in the context of China's strong trade surplus in 2024.

Instead, policymakers will likely focus on using the fiscal and monetary policy tools at their disposal to cushion the impact of external challenges, strengthening "extraordinary countercyclical adjustment" where necessary. With the US expected to maintain its aggressive stance on tariffs, China will likely prioritize domestic growth strategies while managing its exchange rate policy carefully to avoid unnecessary volatility.

Looking ahead to 2025, China's economic trajectory will hinge on its ability to navigate external trade conflicts and domestic imbalances. The government's focus on expanding fiscal space, stimulating domestic demand, and stabilizing key sectors such as housing will be vital for sustainable growth. By adopting a balanced approach to short-term challenges and long-term structural adjustments, China is expected to sustain stability, resilience, and growth in an increasingly complex global environment.

The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

Sun Yi

More IoT connections, more 'data factors'

According to Internet of Things analytics, the global number of IoT devices is expected to reach 18.8 billion by 2024, registering a 13 percent year-on-year increase. By 2030, this number is projected to grow to 41 billion. As a critical component of the infrastructure enabling the digital, networked, and intelligent transformation of economies and societies, IoT is of significant importance for driving economic growth. McKinsey estimates that by 2030, IoT technologies could contribute \$12.6 trillion to the global economy. IoT is clearly going to reshape traditional industries, drive innovation in business models, and advance sustainable, green development. That apart, a new perspective has emerged: IoT can play a crucial role in expanding the supply of high-quality data factors.

In 2019, China became the first country to officially recognize data as a key production factor, laying the groundwork for the theory of data factors. This was followed by a series of policy documents focused on data ownership, market transactions, rights distribution and protection of interests. The goal is to build a national integrated data market and promote the market-oriented allocation of data factors. In October 2023, China established a national data bureau to oversee the development of data infrastructure, integrate data resources and promote data usage. In December 2023, the bureau released its first strategic plan for the next three years, which highlights the unique characteristics of data as a production factor — such as increasing returns and low-cost reusability — and its potential to drive economic growth through a "multiplier effect".

By enabling the real-time collection and transmission of multidimensional data from production, daily life, economic activities, and social governance, IoT serves as the foundational technology for generating data factors. In 2023, the total number of mobile network connections in China reached over 4 billion, with over 2 billion IoT devices connected. These devices are applied across various sectors, including public services, connected vehicles, smart retail, and smart homes, with 799 million, 454 million, 335 million, and 265 million users, respectively. The number of 5G use cases exceeded 94,000, covering 71 of the 97 major sectors of China's economy, with a particular focus on industries such as mining, power, and ports. This data illustrates that, as IoT applications deepen, an increasing volume of data containing valuable information and knowledge is being generated across various contexts. This data is generating a "multiplier effect" through three key mechanisms.

Data can significantly reduce information asymmetry, improve coordination between stakeholders, and optimize resource allocation, enhancing market efficiency. For instance, Shein, a cross-border e-commerce retailer, leverages data to integrate its entire value chain, including research and development, marketing, warehousing, logistics, and after-sales services. This enables seamless coordination between product development, smart recommendations and market demand, dramatically improving the efficiency of new product design and supporting small-batch, high-frequency personalized production. This model allows Shein to react to market changes much faster than established global fast-fashion giants like Zara and H&M. Data also facilitates coordinated transformation across entire industrial supply chains. For example, Haier's COSMOPlat connects over 900,000 upstream and downstream enterprises and serves 160,000 businesses, enabling the creation of 11 "light-house factories" and promoting a fundamental transformation in production organization.

As IoT technologies integrate deeply with production, daily life, economic activities and social governance, vast amounts of knowledge and expertise are encoded as data. The datafication of knowledge and skills allows for their low-cost, large-scale reuse across different organizations and scenarios. For example, large AI models, through interactions with skilled employees, can "extract" and encode expertise into data, which can then be reused by others to improve overall productivity. By accelerating knowledge spillovers and technology diffusion, the low-cost reuse of data can significantly shorten innovation cycles and drive macroeconomic growth.

When data factors converge with specialized knowledge, they help reveal new patterns, develop new theories, and create new knowledge or technologies. For example, DeepMind's AlphaFold has made groundbreaking advances in the field of protein folding — the physical process by which a polypeptide chain crumples, rotates, and twists into its functional and lowest energy structure, a process crucial for proteins to exert their biological functions — by using statistical analysis of biological data and deep learning.

Data factors, through sharing and circulation, also promote resource sharing and technological integration across industries. Tesla, for example, collects and analyzes vast amounts of driving data, using Full Self-Driving technology and AI developed with Dojo supercomputers, to continuously improve vehicle safety and efficiency.

Viewing the development and application of IoT technologies from the perspective of "data factors" provides a new lens through which to understand the relationship between technological innovation and economic growth. "Connectivity" is the foundational characteristic of IoT technology, while "circulation" is the prerequisite for realizing the multiplier effect of data factors. To fully unlock the value of IoT technologies and maximize the multiplier effect of data factors, closer international cooperation is required in technological research, data governance, and standard-setting.

Currently, China is actively engaging in cross-border digital infrastructure projects, promoting international cooperation on data interoperability, and aligning with global frameworks such as DEPA and the CPTPP. Through high-level international collaboration, China aims to establish a new, open, and mutually beneficial framework for the development of the global digital economy.

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



The author is a professor and deputy director of the Department of Digital Economy and Virtual Business, School of Economics and Management, University of Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Liu Dongmei

A landmark innovation with Chinese characteristics

Science and technology have been playing increasingly important roles in boosting quality growth.

The science and technology commissioner system, launched in the city of Nanping, Fujian province, in 1999, has grown into a nationwide initiative, significantly contributing to China's rural development and technological advancement. Initially designed to address the country's "three rural issues" (agriculture, rural areas, and farmers), it is driving the transformation and application of innovations, thus supporting rural revitalization and poverty alleviation.

Over the past 25 years, the system has expanded to all administrative counties in China, training nearly one million sci-tech commissioners. It has evolved from technological dissemination to linking technological innovation with market demand.

The system plays a critical role in China's broader strategic goals, particularly in the context of the technological blockades and trade restrictions from the United States and other Western countries. As China pursues technological self-reliance, the science and technology commissioner system offers a valuable mechanism for accelerating domestic innovation, enhancing resilience and reducing dependence on foreign technologies. This is particularly crucial as China confronts the challenges of external economic and technological containment.

In the late 1990s, Nanping, Fujian province, faced serious agricultural challenges: outdated technology, low productivity, and unsold agricultural goods. In 1999, 225 sci-tech experts were dispatched to its rural areas where, through field demonstrations, seminars, and hands-on training, they helped farmers improve their skills and provided a new model for agricultural technology dissemination.

The science and technology commissioner system's success lies in its ability to adapt the existing institutional framework to address the "three rural issues".

The system has since evolved in tandem with the changing relationship between the government and market forces. However, with the rise of the market economy, it became evident that a single, government-controlled model could no longer meet the dynamic needs of rural development. The new system addressed this gap by combining the guidance of government with market-driven forces.

Sci-tech commissioners also invest in rural enterprises through equity participation and risk-sharing, fostering a mutually beneficial model that aligns the interests of farmers, enterprises, and research institutions.

Starting in 2002, the Ministry of Science and Technology launched regional pilot programs to test and develop the system. Key policy decisions over time have reinforced the role of the science and technology commissioner system as a central component of China's agricultural innovation strategy.

The science and technology commissioner system is not only a means of promoting agricultural technology, but also represents an institutional innovation driven by China's unique rural development needs. It reflects the inevitable convergence of govern-



The author is the secretary of the Party Committee and a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Science and Technology for Development.

ment policy, market forces, and farmers' needs.

The systemic approach emphasizes understanding the interconnected nature of agricultural development. Technological needs in agriculture have expanded beyond basic farming techniques to encompass the entire value chain — seedling cultivation, supply of agricultural materials, processing, and distribution. The science and technology commissioner system was designed with this broader perspective in mind, incorporating reforms in rural credit, market expansion, and enterprise-driven development.

The science and technology commissioner system plays a crucial role in overcoming the barriers to resource flow between urban and rural areas. By pairing sci-tech professionals with farmers, the system helps improve farming practices while creating sustainable models for rural technological development. This collaboration also nurtures local talent.

The science and technology commissioner system optimizes the use of existing resources. The sci-tech commissioner group consists of officials, researchers, university staff, and retired experts. This approach has facilitated the transition from a centrally planned agricultural support system to one driven by market dynamics, without requiring significant additional funding, yet significantly improving the efficiency of resource allocation. This system can play a significant role in the ongoing process of Chinese modernization.

At its core, the science and technology commissioner system is designed to promote common prosperity and address regional, urban-rural, and industrial-agricultural disparities. Though it began in agriculture, it can drive agricultural innovation while fostering industrial transformation and deeper integration of science and

technology across sectors.

To further advance the science and technology commissioner system, it is essential to establish a coordinated cross-departmental framework, integrate resources, allocate targeted financial support, and strengthen policy guidance. In particular, there should be a concerted effort to accelerate the integration of the system with the emerging fields of the digital economy and smart agriculture to build more comprehensive technology service networks.

Science and technology commissioners should be clearly classified according to their origin and service model. For example, sci-tech commissioners with a background in civil services could be given the option to retain their positions. Short-term participants could use their service experience as a stepping stone for career advancement. Research staff can integrate their studies with technology services to bridge the gap between innovation and practical implementation.

The government must enhance coordination among various departments to avoid fragmentation and inefficiencies. Additionally, diverse benefit-sharing mechanisms should be explored to help sci-tech commissioners and service recipients establish long-term, stable partnerships, providing robust policy support for their ongoing development.

The science and technology commissioner system is a cornerstone of China's rural revitalization and regional development strategy. By optimizing existing resources and deepening the integration of technology with market needs, the system has become a powerful engine for transforming and upgrading the rural economy.

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

GLOBAL VIEWS

ANTOINE ROGER LOKONGO

Practical application

African countries are pursuing win-win cooperation with China despite the attempts of the West to derail the partnerships

Africa's relationship with Western powers remains ambiguous. The latter's post-colonial approach in Africa is utterly patronizing. In fact, Western powers are reasserting their domination of the African continent under the pretext of



defending it against effective cooperation undertaken by emerging powers, notably China. But at the same time, Western powers are not helping Africa develop in its own way. Their approach in Africa remains militarist: Provoke proxy wars in countries rich in natural resources based on geopolitical and geostrategic competition. During these wars, millions of Africans are killed while Western powers and their multinational corporations reap the benefits in terms of the exploitation of natural and mineral resources on the African continent. What's more, the West often provokes wars in countries of the Global South where China has invested heavily.

The most acute challenges the Global South in general, and Africa in particular, face are developmental in nature, including the lack of capacity building to mitigate these challenges. China therefore brings a developmental approach to Africa. The Chinese path to modernization is a path of peaceful development and common prosperity and is seen by Africans as a better alternative to that of the West.

Generally, the Chinese path to modernization is understood as being based on domestic reform and opening-up to the rest of the world. This is conducive to promoting high-quality development that focuses on boosting domestic demand, technologically advanced industries, ecological protection, and creating a more equitable society. The Chinese path to modernization challenges the notion of modernization being akin to Westernization and offers an alternative to the developing world.

The 2024 Summit of the

Forum on China-Africa Cooperation has proved that China is ready to help Africa explore its own modernization path as an equal partner. This resonates well with the national development priorities of many African countries which reckon that China simply seeks the development of Africa without the conditions that are typically attached to Western aid.

Since the inaugural summit of the FOCAC in 2000, China has committed to constructing infrastructure projects such as highways, ports and railways to African countries. In addition, as of September, 52 of 54 African countries had signed on to the Belt and Road Initiative. It is estimated that through this initiative, China has invested 2.5 times more in African infrastructure development than all the Western countries combined.

According to China's General Administration of Customs, China is the African continent's largest bilateral trade partner, and the trade volumes are on a rising trend, reaching a historic high of \$282.1 billion in 2023. China has particularly been the largest trading partner and largest source of foreign investment for the Democratic Republic of Congo for several consecutive years.

What's more, research conducted by the Institute for Security Studies suggests that the FOCAC's institutional mechanisms have been conducive to project implementation, with \$155 billion of the \$191 billion total promised loans between 2006 and 2021.

China is not seeking to saddle Africa with the burden of debt to subtly control Africa in a neo-colonial way as the West alleges with its allegations of so-called debt-trap diplomacy.

The fact that China uses models such as "engineer-procure-construct" (EPC), or "build-operate-transfer" (BOT) in themselves debunk the "debt-trap diplomacy" narrative because these models are meant to leave African countries with no debts. The Western conspiracy like the narrative of "debt-trap diplomacy" will not therefore deter African countries from pursuing their win-

win cooperation and their strategic partnership with China.

China remains a source of inspiration for the Global South in general and Africa in particular, as far as sustainable development is concerned. How beautiful it was for me recently to breathe once again the air of progress and modernization of China, when I attended a seminar on Chinese modernization and African development.

And my visits to China's emerging industries have left a deep impression on me, including a factory of new electric and intelligent cars, an artificial intelligence center, a dam, an agricultural biotechnology corporation, modern villages with all the integrated services, and new innovative companies at the provincial level. This is a country that has made remarkable development achievements in a short period of time.

Besides, through platforms such as the BRI, the FOCAC and BRICS, China is also helping countries develop and assume their due role on the world stage.

African countries and other Global South countries are prioritizing their win-win cooperation with China to emerge from years of poverty and political instability.

On the occasion of the holding of the next FOCAC meeting, we may talk about the construction of infrastructure that connect our countries in Africa, the electrification of our countries which can guarantee our industrialization; we may talk about food security and new technologies to transform our resources on the spot to create jobs and markets for the benefit of our peoples. In short, we may talk about win-win cooperation and development.

The author is a professor of international politics and strategies at Joseph Kasa Vubu University in the Democratic Republic of Congo and a senior visiting research fellow at Peking University's Institute for Global Cooperation and Understanding. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

ZHAO JIANWEI

Pull focus

China needs to establish a shared vision with the Global South so it can safely navigate the narrative traps set by the US

The Ukraine crisis that erupted in February 2022, and the strategic autonomy demonstrated by many countries in the Global South, sparked a wave of reflection among strategists of the United States regarding the status of the Global South and the future of the world order. As a result, there was a marked increase in seminars hosted by US think tanks, as well as a surge in analytical articles published in prominent international relations journals. At the same time, the US government has heightened its focus on the Global South.

Opinions among US strategists regarding the renewed focus on the Global South vary widely. Critics call for a cautious approach, pointing out that the term is inherently vague and more politically symbolic than practically meaningful, thus barely reflecting the complex realities of global power dynamics. They also emphasize that grouping diverse countries under a single label neglects the vast differences among them, potentially leading to a misplaced emphasis on common interests while ignoring significant essential distinctions.

In contrast, proponents advocate for a more strategic use of the concept, arguing that one of the most consequential impacts of the Ukraine crisis may be splitting the world into three — the Global West, the Global East and the Global South. In this context, the Global West and Global East are not only vying for dominance but also fiercely competing for the favor of the Global South.

US strategists analyze the Global South through multiple interconnected frameworks. When it comes to traditional security, the emphasis is on the Global South's growing strategic autonomy. When discussing non-traditional security, the Global South has long seen its interests overlooked and undermined by major powers, but its influence is now gradually increasing. At the regional level, the Global South is often framed as a battleground where China and India vie for regional dominance. On the global stage, the Global South stands at the heart of the strategic rivalry between what the US strategic experts refer to as the China-Russia bloc and the Western powers led by the United States. Geopolitically and economically, swing states, such as Brazil and Indonesia in the Global South, are seen as pivotal players that can influence the international balance of power. Finally, in terms of ideology and political systems, the Global South is recognized

for its diversity and complex political landscape.

The perspectives within the US strategists on the resurgence of the Global South highlight notable trends.

First, many US strategists are in favor of employing the term Global South as a framework for shaping US strategies. While some criticize the term for its ambiguity, others argue that this ambiguity provides flexibility, allowing the US to redefine the Global South to fit its strategic objectives. For example, some influential analyses either exclude China from the Global South or include it, depending largely on US strategic and political interests. Many US strategists envision employing a combination of strategies — such as engaging, dividing, confronting and weakening the Global South — tailored to different scenarios as part of a broader effort to sustain the US hegemony.

Second, US strategic experts exhibit a range of diverse perspectives in their understanding of the Global South. They acknowledge the complexity and diversity, and also recognize the diplomatic independence and proactive strategies demonstrated by many developing countries on the global stage.

Nevertheless, their views are marked by certain limitations, frequently influenced by a Western-centric perspective. One major shortcoming is an excessive focus on geopolitical rivalry, which leads to policy recommendations centered on dividing and exploiting the Global South, while portraying China as both a competitor to the Global West and an outsider to the Global South. This approach risks deepening global fragmentation. Moreover, there is a tendency to overestimate the capacity of the Global South to act collectively.

Third, US strategists' advocating for deeper engagement and enhancing cooperation with the Global South has been reflected in the foreign policy and actions of the Joe Biden administration. Since late 2022, the Biden administration has renewed the US-Africa Leaders' Summit and invested in new forms to engage partners from the Asia-Pacific, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. In addition, senior officials have conducted a series of high-level visits to Global South nations. In October, the International Monetary Fund added sub-Saharan Africa as the 25th chair to its executive board. Through these initiatives, the Biden administration aimed not only to strengthen its engagement with the Global South but also to demonstrate its commitment to improving global governance. Last, debates on the Global South

continue to evolve within the US strategists, indicating that more challenging ideas may emerge in the future. In November, Donald Trump was re-elected US president, a shift that could lead to adjustments in the US' foreign policy approach. Given Trump's limited support for the development needs of the Global South in his first term, this trend is expected to continue in his second term. If the Trump administration persists with a strategy of global retrenchment, it will inevitably affect US engagement on global issues and its policies toward the Global South.

The recent BRICS summit, APEC meeting and the G20 summit once again highlighted the growing influence of Global South countries in international affairs. In 2026, under Trump's leadership, the US will assume the G20 presidency, providing Washington a platform to showcase its achievements in cooperating with the Global South and to rebuild its relations with these countries. Some strategists have referred to this as "the US' last chance with the Global South" and urged the president-elect to engineer a Global South strategy with the G20 at its center.

For now, Trump's second-term priorities are likely to focus on domestic issues such as the economy and immigration, leaving topics such as fostering a more equitable North-South relationship lower on the agenda. Many of the ideas proposed by US strategists regarding the Global South are likely to face significant challenges during Trump's second term.

The world is undergoing accelerated changes and the collective rise of the Global South is a distinctive feature of the great transformation. Amid the Biden administration's new strategic offensive toward the Global South and the uncertainties surrounding Trump's second term, China must deepen its understanding of the diverse dynamics within Global South countries. It should reassess the evolving geopolitical roles of the Global South and establish a shared strategic vision that transcends commercial interests. Furthermore, China must further clarify its international positioning and articulate its stance on Global South issues to avoid falling into narrative traps set by the US, while continuously injecting momentum into the development and cooperation within the Global South.

The author is a postdoctoral fellow at the School of International Studies at Peking University. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

LIFE



From left: Precarious mountains, treacherous forests and raging rivers are among challenges the *Secret Land* crew had to endure during the filmmaking.

Trek into courage

Filmmaker captures the human spirit as it experiences nature at its most dramatic, **Yang Feiyue** reports.

Yang Liusong has had firsthand experience of Mother Nature's wrath. In his 40s, Yang danced with death many times when he ventured through the treacherous terrain of the vast, uninhabited Changtang region in the early 2010s, and crossed the Yarlung Tsangpo Grand Canyon, the world's largest of its kind, during the rainy season, amid floods and landslides.

Both destinations sit in Southwest China's Xizang autonomous region and, at times, seem to ridicule human presence.

Yang's experiences have since inspired films, while tales of his adventures in the form of books have sparked waves of inspiration among various generations, encouraging them to explore and experience the wilderness.

"People asked me, 'Why venture alone into the depths of the wilderness?' but I don't have a clear answer. Perhaps it's the same as those captivated by a certain mountain or enchanted by a particular river. I am obsessed with barely touched lands," Yang says.

He maintains that this is an era with few outdoor adventures, but it cannot be an era without exploration of nature and oneself.

This belief had him spending the past five years struggling to deliver his debut movie, *Secret Land*, which premiered nationwide on Friday.

Set against the backdrop of Yarlung Tsangpo Grand Canyon, the movie he independently directed presents breathtaking mountains, tranquil forests and vast grasslands, offering audiences an authentic and awe-inspiring experience of the mysterious Yarlung Tsangpo region.

Over 80 percent of the movie's scenes take place in untouched, pristine forests. The cliffs, glaciers and waterfalls depicted on screen were captured on location, Yang notes.

He says he wants to present the thrills and spills of a mountain adventure while hammering home the majestic harmony between humanity and nature.

Yang hopes the film can inspire a sense of reverence for nature while offering insights to those feeling trapped in society.

"No matter how dire our circumstances, there's always a way out. The world remains full of endless possibilities," he says.

The film follows four strangers of different backgrounds who meet at a youth hostel and embark on a journey deep into the Yarlung Tsangpo forest in search of a beautiful butterfly. Along this butterfly-



The crew members show their relief after enduring a difficult time as they emerge from a fog-enshrouded forest. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



A poster for the movie.

seeking journey, they face numerous challenges posed by nature, overcoming crises one by one. Through mutual understanding and collaboration, they forge a priceless friendship and, with unwavering determination, overcome all obstacles to complete their quest.

The actors and actresses had no prior outdoor experience and pulled off their own stunts without any understudies.

"The outdoors is not a competitive game; it's an extension of one's

inner longing for the distant. The characters in the movie are just like people in our lives, the ones around us. Their adventures into uncharted territories should resonate deeply with everyone," Yang says.

The crew traveled across Minya Konka, also known as Gongga Mountain, with the highest peak at more than 7,500 meters above sea level in the Hengduan Mountains spanning the vast plateau of western Sichuan province, and shot scenes from southeastern Xizang.

They crossed glaciers, climbed cliffs and even endured leech bites for the sake of authenticity.

Dangerous moments were inevitable and unpredictable, often sending chills down Yang's spine.

"I was under tremendous pressure. After all, a movie isn't worth much if someone gets hurt in the process," Yang says, adding that the crew had to adapt throughout filming.

He recalls the final day when they had to shoot a cliff scene and the entire team was close to their physical limit.

"Everyone summoned their strength to climb the mountain. After much effort, the cameras and actors were finally in position only for a torrential downpour and thunderstorm to strike. Everyone scrambled madly to a nearby cave to take shelter," he says.

However, what surprised him the most was that no one left the team, but pulled through without faltering.

He admits there is a reflection of himself in the characters and the movie is inevitably a projection of his inner values.

"This film stemmed from my passion for adventure and reflections on the relationship between humans and society. It is ultimately a state of mind, not just about nature but how we can better understand and interpret the connection between humans and society through the lens of the natural world," he says.

Yang had multiple near-misses during his traverse of the Changtang region, which has now become a national nature reserve covering a total area of 298,000 square kilometers, making it one of the highest-altitude and largest natural reserves in China.

The reserve has no human inhabitants in its core area and has served as a sanctuary for a unique high-altitude ecosystem and a variety of large, hoofed animals.

In 2017, Changtang, along with the national nature reserves of Hoh Xil in Qinghai province and Altun Mountains in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, jointly issued an announcement prohibiting all organizations or individuals from engaging in unauthorized and ille-

gal crossing activities within the protected areas.

At its worst, Yang didn't get access to water resources in the wilderness.

"I was in an endless expanse of salt marshes with no drinkable water to be found. By the end of the day, my mouth was completely ulcerated, stuck together, and it felt like my throat was closing up, making it hard to breathe," he recalls.

"I began to experience confusion and auditory hallucinations. At night, I worried that I wouldn't be able to open my mouth in the morning, so I used a binder clip to keep it open," he adds.

Fortunately, it snowed later and pulled him back from the brink of death.

However, Yang says that his love for the distant and unknown nature helped him overcome the terrible conditions that he would not have been able to tolerate otherwise and acquire toughness and confidence throughout the journey.

Xiao Han, who works for an outdoor lifestyle media organization in Beijing, says that he was moved after watching the actors shout in triumph on top of the mountain.

"There was huge applause when the film ended," Xiao says, adding that the movie made him realize that travel is a form of self-cultivation, and so is life.

“The characters in the movie are just like people in our lives, the ones around us. Their adventures into uncharted territories should resonate deeply with everyone.”

Yang Liusong, director



"This is precisely like *Journey to the West* (a classic novel by Wu Cheng'en during the 16th century) — enduring trials of life and death, obtaining the true scriptures and ultimately achieving enlightenment," Xiao says.

Guo Yingqian, from the Chinese National Geography, says that she feels like the information from the movie is overwhelming and needs follow-up research to fully take it in.

She considers the movie a window to carry people's passion for nature and provide spiritual solace in their journey of self-discovery.

Yang says that the movie presents all relationships for him, encompassing connections between people and between humans and nature.

"Relationships between people are additive, while those between humans and nature are subtractive, requiring a delicate balance," he says.

He points out that the former often dominates daily life, making it essential to deepen one's connection with nature. This connection fosters inner tranquility and harmony, representing a return to one's essence.

Yang emphasizes that cities and wilderness are not opposite, and his movie seeks to portray their intrinsic relationship.

"The journey of four companions venturing deep into the grand canyon is also a process of shutting out the world's complexities. They must not only overcome the harsh natural environment but also break through the barriers within their hearts," he says.

"When all challenges are surmounted, the real test begins: finding and understanding themselves."

Contact the writer at yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn

Spices bring scent of prosperity and tasty flavor to South China

NANNING — Sandeep Bhura, a trader from Seeds & Grains India Pvt Ltd, proudly holds up a pinch of turmeric for a curious buyer to smell at a spice fair in Yulin city, South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region.

"Yulin is our gateway to China's vast markets, where the appetite for spices is on the rise, especially with the boom in barbecue and hotpot culture," Bhura says.

The city is famed for its spice production and is the epicenter of China's spice trade, managing a staggering 80 percent of domestic spice commerce and nearly two-thirds of the global total. Yulin's geographical location, coupled with its dynamic industry,

has positioned it as a key player in the domestic and international spice markets.

Star anise, a culinary treasure, is the beating heart of Yulin's spice industry. The region's favorable climate, abundant rainfall and aerated soil make it a suitable environment for the cultivation of this aromatic spice.

On Liuwan forest farm in Yulin's Fumian district, star anise trees thrive under meticulous care. As winter settles in and the harvest season winds down, the trees remain dotted with young, green star anise fruits, which will reach full maturity in the spring.

The towering star anise trees,

which stretch to over 10 meters in height, once presented formidable harvesting challenges. However, technological innovations, such as the introduction of crown-grafting techniques, have revolutionized the process.

"The dwarf varieties have boosted our yield by over 50 percent," says Wei Guobin, deputy general manager of a local forestry tech firm. "Their fruits are juicier and more resilient to disease."

Once harvested, sorted and dried, the star anise and other spices are transported to the city's spice market, where fragrances flood the air as sacks of spices are unloaded from trucks and prepared for buyers from

near and far. The products are carefully arranged for selection, ready to be dispatched to destinations across China and beyond.

Yulin's trade hub status positions it as an ideal base for the conversion of raw spices into finished products.

One company engaged in this work is Shanghai Bolex Food Technology, which opened a spice processing factory in Yulin earlier this year. Inside its production facility, spices undergo sorting, crushing, dust removal and sieving before becoming aromatic spice powders.

"Yulin's unparalleled access to a wealth of high-quality raw materials was our deciding factor," says Zhou Shuangqiao, who manages a

company subsidiary.

Just a stone's throw away, one of the company's suppliers, Xiangweining, sources raw materials directly from local farms and processes them to meet specific client needs. This proximity fosters seamless cooperation between the two enterprises, reducing operational costs and forming a tightly integrated supply chain.

The business cluster in Yulin not only draws downstream enterprises but also lures spice traders from afar. A company specializing in amomum tsao-ko fruits from Southwest China's Yunnan province recently opened a sales outlet in the city, keen to leverage the region's thriving spice industry to boost its

brand visibility and expand its market presence.

Yulin's spice industry is booming, with over 233,000 hectares of land dedicated to spice cultivation. In the first 10 months of 2024, its spice trade volume exceeded 30 billion yuan (\$4.18 billion), according to local authorities.

Moving forward, Wang Chen, secretary of Yulin's municipal Party committee, says that the city will continue to prioritize the development of its spice industry, aiming for integrated growth across production, distribution, exhibition and processing to cement its status as a global spice nexus.

XINHUA

LIFE

Pipa player breathes new life into ancient Dunhuang scores

After deep research into decoded music pieces, Wu Man releases album in hope of preserving ancient tunes, **Chen Nan** reports.



With the delicate touch of her fingers, Wu Man carefully unravels the threads of a distant past.

When the internationally celebrated *pipa* (a four-stringed Chinese lute) virtuoso took the stage at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing on Dec 3, she performed music pieces based on ancient scores from the Mogao Caves, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Dunhuang, Gansu province, transcending the boundaries of time and space.

With the *pipa*, Wu doesn't just re-create history — she channels it, breathing life into ancient melodies preserved in the cave walls for over a millennium.

On the same day, Wu announced the release of her new album *Music From the Dunhuang Caves*, released under NCPA Classics.

The album draws upon various scholarly translations of the 25 Dunhuang *pipa* scores, particularly the work of Chen Yingshi, along with contributions from prominent scholars such as Ye Dong and Xi Zhenguan. Wu's rendition not only stays true to these interpretations but also integrates her unique artistic expression, breathing new life into the ancient music.

The album also includes seven improvisational *pipa* solos inspired by the Dunhuang scores, showcasing Wu's ability to blend tradition with contemporary sensibilities.

Dunhuang, in northwest China's Gansu province, is known for the Mogao Caves, which house the finest Buddha art in China dating back to the 4th century. It was a key stop on the Silk Road in the past.

The discovery of the 25 *pipa* scores in the Mogao Caves is part of the historical findings of a vast collection of ancient manuscripts, paintings and artifacts uncovered in 1900 in the famous Library Cave, or Cave 17.

According to musicologist Xia Yanzhou from the Zhejiang Conservatory of Music, these scores represent some of

the oldest known surviving examples of "written music for the *pipa*", one of China's most iconic traditional instruments. The music dates back to the Tang Dynasty (618-907), a period that was considered the golden age of Chinese culture, including its music.

Xia also notes that the notations used for *pipa* music were different from the modern system. The scores were written in "graphical notation" form, often using symbols or calligraphic marks that indicated how the instrument should be played. Decoding these ancient pieces requires a deep understanding of traditional Chinese musical theory and the historical context of the time.

According to Wu, the idea of recording the album started in 2021 when she was invited to join a documentary about Dunhuang.

"When I visited the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang, where the ancient *pipa* manuscripts were discovered, I was like a child full of curiosity. I was deeply moved when I saw the historical site," she recalls. "I felt a strong responsibility to preserve and bring attention to this invaluable cultural heritage. This experience laid the foundation for this album, which is not just a performance of ancient music but a personal and artistic journey that seeks to reconcile the ancient with the contemporary."

"For me, the *pipa* is an integral part of my life and this album feels like a vital chapter in my artistic career. It is also a significant step in preserving *pipa* art," she notes, adding that the album took her three years to complete and was a deeply personal endeavor.

International acclaim

A child prodigy who began learning at 9, Wu, born in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, was accepted into the conservatory at 13 and became the first recipient of a master's degree in *pipa* in the country.

Known for its distinctive pear-shaped body, the *pipa* typically has four strings and is played either with the fingers or a



Top: Renowned *pipa* player Wu Man performs at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing on Dec 3. **Above:** For the past three years, Wu has traveled to Dunhuang, Gansu province, which is known for the Mogao Caves, to seek inspiration from the ancient scores. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

plectrum. It is known for its versatility and expressive range and is capable of producing both melodious and percussive sounds, playing a significant role in Chinese musical heritage.

Wu, who lives in California, is considered an ambassador for the *pipa* and has brought the instrument international acclaim.

Wu recalls that, as early as the 1980s during her student days, she was aware of these valuable Dunhuang *pipa* scores, which received worldwide attention and attracted many experts to decode. As a student, she was curious about the notation and musical sound of the Dunhuang *pipa* scores, how they were deciphered and what the music sounded like.

"I have explored *pipa* ensemble performances, blending Chinese and Western elements through collaborations with string quartets and *pipa* concertos. Given the *pipa*'s profound impact on my life, performing the Dunhuang scores has become an essential goal in my artistic journey. It is a long-held aspiration

that I must fulfill," she says. "I believe that the history of the *pipa* and its music represents Chinese history, particularly the evolution of Chinese music."

"It is a process of cultural development. Traveling along the Silk Road from Central Asia, it's interesting because you'll find that the Dunhuang *pipa* scores sound like a mixed style," she continues. "Over the years, I have collaborated with Central Asian musicians and worked extensively with European musicians. These experiences have enriched my musical vocabulary and informed my approach to the Dunhuang *pipa* scores."

Exploring interpretations

For this album, Wu chose different versions of translated scores to fill a significant void in *pipa* performance history.

"While numerous Dunhuang *pipa* score translations exist, their musical interpretations remain largely unexplored. Existing orchestral performances of the scores do not fully capture the essence of the solo pieces. I intend to

record all 25 Dunhuang *pipa* scores on a single *pipa*, inviting listeners to experience and imagine their sound," she says.

Performing ancient scores is undoubtedly complex, demanding a delicate balance between honoring the original scores and the performer's interpretive abilities. Wu strives to adhere to the rhythmic indications provided by the scholars with the constraints of the *pipa* and her own understanding. For instance, differentiating between the piece *Ji Quzi* (fast composition) and the piece *Man Quzi* (slow composition) is clear, but determining precise tempos remains elusive due to the absence of explicit tempo markings in the scores or translator guidelines.

"The people who wrote the scores left space for the *pipa* players to use imagination. The tempo, for instance, is determined by the player through personal experience, intuition and imagination," says Wu.

"Each generation has its own 'decoding' and no single version can be considered exactly what it was in the scores. Therefore, there will always be discoveries and new understandings in transcription and performance."

With its deep scholarly research, stunning performances and imaginative improvisations, Wu's album represents a significant contribution to the world of classical Chinese music.

"This album takes the listeners on a powerful journey through time, as well as a dialogue between ancient and contemporary music. It is a tribute to the enduring legacy of Dunhuang's musical heritage," says Zhang Meng, deputy editor-in-chief of People's Music magazine. "Its release is a timely reminder of the rich cultural history that we must preserve and innovate for future generations, all while continuing to honor the traditions that have shaped our artistic identities."

Contact the writer at chenan@chinadaily.com.cn

Ceramic culture fires up touring American artisan

SHIJIAZHUANG — Enchanted by the beauty of white Chinese porcelain, Marc Leuthold has spent the past two months creating contemporary artworks using the local clay and firing methods of Quyang, a county in Hebei province, with over a thousand years of ceramic-making history.

Leuthold, an elected lifetime member of the International Academy of Ceramics and a retired professor from the State University of New York, has been invited to around 20 Chinese cities to exhibit, lecture and exchange ideas. He also worked full-time at an art institute in Shanghai from 2018 to 2023.

"When I came to China for the first time in 2007, I saw how everything was booming. There were opportunities everywhere and people wanted me to do all sorts of exciting things. If I had been younger, I'm sure I would have stayed," recalls the 62-year-old.

Upon his arrival in Quyang this

September, the American ceramist felt thrilled.

The county is home to the Ding kiln, one of the five most famous ancient ceramic kilns that flourished in the Song Dynasty (960-1279). Quality white ceramics produced by the Ding kiln enjoyed fame for being "white as jade, thin as paper and sounding like a bell".

"My first experience with Ding porcelain was as a child. My father collected a very beautiful Ding bowl and I never will forget it," he says. "Ding ware is the most refined and elegant of the Song Dynasty ceramic cultures."

Since ancient times, Chinese artisans have been using turntables to shape and polish wet clay — hoping to produce delicate ceramic ware like vases, bottles and bowls.

Although made of Ding clay and featuring the same ivory-white glaze, Leuthold's creations are unique among rows of works because their shapes are completely



American ceramist Marc Leuthold is traveling to kilns in China to seek inspiration, including one in Quyang, Hebei province. XINHUA

different from traditional Ding porcelain items.

"The artistry in his works inspires us a lot," says Pang Yonghui, a Chinese arts and crafts master and rep-

resentative inheritor of the Ding porcelain firing technique, an intangible cultural heritage.

According to Pang, Leuthold's way of handling wet clay is much

bolder. Leuthold takes a lump of clay, throws it on the ground until it becomes a sheet about 5 mm thick and then uses a utility knife to draw the base before printing patterns and forming a symbolic shape such as a mountain, river or sun through folding, tearing and laminating.

"By inviting foreign ceramists with multicultural backgrounds to express themselves through traditional Ding clay and firing methods, we hope to embrace the ancient art with modern aesthetics," Pang adds.

So far, Pang's company has invited nearly 50 artists from Japan, the Republic of Korea, the United States, Canada and other countries to create art in Quyang.

"One thing I admire about China is that there's a balance," notes Leuthold, pointing out that both contemporary and traditional cultures are supported and considered essential.

As Leuthold says, "art and culture have the potential to create a bridge

of understanding which may help people from different cultures work together," with his cultural journey to Quyang benefiting both China and the US.

The local porcelain industry has drawn new inspiration from this Western way of thinking and doing things. Leuthold, meanwhile, has continuously innovated with the help of traditional Chinese culture.

Leuthold plans to stay in Quyang until mid-December. However, his exploration of ancient Chinese porcelain culture will not stop wherever he is.

In February, he is scheduled to travel to Longquan in East China's Zhejiang province, where another famous ancient kiln produces green-glazed porcelain.

"I've studied that ceramic culture a lot. Their materials and glazes are different, so I can make something completely different. That's interesting to me," says Leuthold.

XINHUA

LIFE

A deep dive into the art of song

Composer's new album draws on influences from distant past and modern day, **Chen Nan** reports.

Set to poetry, and typically performed by a classically trained vocalist accompanied by a pianist, art song occupies a distinct place in the musical world for its intimacy and ability to connect deeply with listeners.

As a child, Li Yanbing was intrigued by the genre. After learning to play the piano and graduating from the composition department at the China Conservatory of Music, Li now teaches in the art education department at the Teachers' College of Beijing Union University, and recently announced the release of an album of art songs called *Cong Cong* (In Haste). The album seamlessly weaves poetry with evocative melody, and re-imagines Chinese art songs for contemporary listeners.

It features collaborations with soprano Wang Zhe, and pianist Huang Ruoyu. Each track is a tapestry of text and music, designed to draw listeners into a world of emotional depth and nuanced storytelling.

"I've always been inspired by the way art songs convey profound emotion in such a short time," says Li. "With *Cong Cong*, I wanted to honor the genre's traditions while also infusing it with my own interpretations. These songs reflect my understanding of art songs and poems that have deeply moved me. By blending literature and music, I want to give the timeless resonance of poems and the transformative power of art songs new dimensions of meaning."

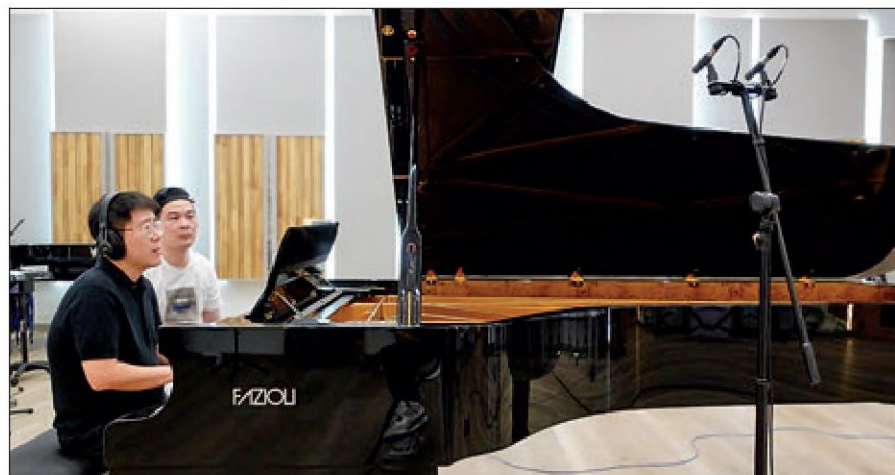
Drawing lyrical inspiration from Chinese literature, Li named the album after *Cong Cong*, a well-known piece of prose by modern essayist and poet Zhu Ziqing (1898-1948). With its powerful themes, heartfelt emotions, poetic expression, intricate structure, and enduring impact, the emotional piece written in 1922 has become a classic of modern Chinese literature.

In 2013, inspired by a fresh reading of *Cong Cong*, lyricist Wu Honglan turned it into a poem and gave it to her friend and colleague, Li, who wrote an initial melodic framework. The piece was set aside due to challenges Li faced in finding harmonic language that aligned with the feel of Wu's poem. In November 2021, she resumed work, completing it as an art song and in January, *Cong Cong* premiered as the first song in a cycle of poetry art songs, composed and performed by Wang.

"I tried to add renewed vitality to this well-known piece, to convey a deep appreciation for time and a love of life," says Li, who built the composition around a singing quality that unifies the musical narrative.

"What makes art songs truly special is their power to tell stories, and reflect universal human experiences in a concise, poetic form. To listeners, each one feels like a private conversation, or a glimpse into the artist's inner world."

In April 2012 and then pursuing her master's degree in composition, Li stumbled upon the poem *You Are the April of This World*, which Lin Huiyin (1904-55), one of China's most celebrated architects, who was also a writer and poet, wrote for her son. She was immediately captivated by her life and work and as a mother, found herself moved by the poem. The initial draft of Li's



Top: Composer Li Yanbing (left) and soprano Wang Zhe pose in a studio in Beijing on Dec 5 after recording music from Li's new album, *Cong Cong*. **Above:** Huang Ruoyu (front) and his fellow pianist friend Feng Qitu during the recording of the album *Cong Cong* in Beijing on Sept 19.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

adaptation was completed on her son's fifth birthday, and reflects her personal connection to the poem's themes. It is also on the album.

"Overflowing with warmth, vitality, and a celebration of love and life, the poem captures a sense of beauty and renewal," Li says.

Li's adaptation of the poem *Private Whispers*, written by Xu Zhi-

mo (1897-1931) in 1922, has a particular history. Originally composed in the autumn of 1995 as a student piece during her second year at the China Conservatory of Music, it was first played at a concert the following year. Nearly three decades later, she revisited it, infusing the piece with reflections on life and nostalgia. The result, a

total re-imagining, was finished in November last year.

"The poem is a lyrical masterpiece of delicate emotion, vivid language, rhythmic beauty, and philosophical undertones. By blending imagery with introspection, Xu Zhimo crafted a poignant meditation on time, life, and emotion," Li says. "I made adjustments

“What makes art songs truly special is their power to tell stories, and reflect universal human experiences in a concise, poetic form.”

Li Yanbing, teacher in the art education department at the Teachers' College of Beijing Union University

to enhance its lyrical qualities, such as rhythmic fluidity, and recomposed the piano accompaniment. "The revised version is very special to me since it bridges my past and present, a demonstration of my own evolution that still honors the poetic and musical essence of the original."

Snow Returning to the Homeland, written by Song Qingsong in 1998, is a simple, moving poem that embodies a wanderer's yearning for home. Inspired by a snowy return to Mudanjiang in Heilongjiang province, Song reflects on the emotional power of a homecoming. The sight of falling snowflakes covering the land in a wintry embrace sparked the realization that he too was returning to the embrace of his home.

This sentiment resonated with Li, herself a native of Heilongjiang, but who has lived elsewhere since she was 13, first in Xi'an in Shaanxi province and later in Beijing.

"*Snow Returning to the Homeland* awakened long-buried emotions and memories of snowy landscapes and a feeling of homesickness," Li says, adding that she channeled these emotions into an art song that brought the poem to life in October 2021. Through it, the composer not only pays tribute to the poignant narrative, but also expresses her own bittersweet nostalgia as someone who is longing for her roots.

Huang, who is also an associate professor in the piano department at Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music, says: "Li's compositions lend time a tangible presence, rendering it singable, audible, and deeply felt. Performing her work brings me immense joy."

"The album exemplifies this fusion of tradition and modernity. It draws on elements of Chinese and Western musical traditions that enrich the genre with layered textures and storytelling. For listeners, it is an immersive experience that transcends time and culture," says Wang, a vocal professor at the Central Conservatory of Music.

She adds that she enjoys *You Are the April of This World* in particular because when she recorded the song early this month, her son turned 2.

"As a result, the song is special to both of us, and the recording process went smoothly," Wang says.

Other highlights of *Cong Cong* include a musical re-imagining of *Ruan Lang Gui: Early Summer*, by Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127) poet Su Shi, which Li has transformed into a poetic and musical tableau, brimming with life's simple pleasures and the beauty of early summer.

Contact the writer at chennan@chinadaily.com.cn

Bulgarians keen on China's culture

SOFIA — It is hard to imagine that someone living on the other side of the world could be interested in your culture as the result of just a handful of encounters. However, *The Story of China — How and Why*, a series of activities in Bulgaria, is proving this possible.

The recent program sought to enhance understanding of traditional Chinese culture and strengthen ties between the two nations. Eleven prominent experts visited cities like Sofia, Veliko Tarnovo and Plovdiv to share insights into Chinese civilization through philosophy, history, literature and art.

Public seminars explored the evolution of Chinese culture and compared Chinese and European traditions. Topics included philosophy, traditional medicine, ancient architecture and classical poetry, all of which drew significant interest from the audience.

One highlight was a lecture given by Zhang Peng and Chen Pingyi titled *What Is the Quintessence of Chinese Culture — On the Charm of Peking Opera*. Attendees even tried playing the *jinghu*, a traditional Peking Opera instrument. Zhang, who is a seasoned performer and researcher, said he was thrilled by the enthusiasm. "Things here exceeded my expectations," he said.

Audience member Miglena Tzenova, who tried the *jinghu*, called the experience "beyond description". Despite her background as a pianist, she was playing a string instrument for the first time. "I really like Chinese music, culture and especially traditional opera," she said.

Chen, a well-known *jinghu* teacher, highlighted an audience question about whether children still study Peking Opera. He explained that specialized schools in Beijing and Shanghai begin training students as young as 11.

Gong Baorong, another expert, was surprised by the general knowledge of Chinese opera. "I didn't realize so many Bulgarians are interested in Chinese culture," he said.

University students Kalina Gerginova and Mihaela Parvanova, both of whom have study experience in China, said the events deepened their understanding. Parvanova, who found Chinese opera incomprehensible at first, said meeting performers in person made it more accessible. "It's one thing to see it onstage, but another to engage directly with practitioners," she explained.

Beyond Peking Opera, other events included a meeting with poet Yu Jian, where attendees discussed his work and explored new perspectives on his poetry. In Targovishte, lectures about Chinese philosophy and medicine were also well-received, with the audience showing interest in healthcare methods.

Sponsored by the Ministry of Commerce and organized by the Shandong Foreign Trade Vocational College, the program successfully bridged cultures, sparking deeper interest and understanding among Bulgarians.

XINHUA

A glimpse of the hidden from the comfort of Dandong

Darjeeling, a mountain city in the foothills of the Himalayas in the Indian state of West Bengal, is a popular tourist destination known for its panoramic view of Mount Kanchenjunga. It is also a place from where Indian tourists (other nationalities excluded) are able to cross the border to Nepal to visit the bustling market in the town of Pashupati Nagar.



Manjunath R. Setty
Second Thoughts

Pashupati Market is a bustling place with rows of shops selling

cheap, imported electronic goods, clothes, jackets, and perfumes.

Keeping that in mind, I scoured the internet. That's when I discovered Dandong, a city in Liaoning province that borders the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. I had finalized my holiday destination for the Mid-Autumn Festival.

A river separates the two nations, and across it lies the country that many people are curious to learn about. I chose Dandong because of the element of adventure involved. And, it's nice to brag to friends that I got close to the DPRK.

The three-day holiday was quite

a packed one.

Day 1 was spent in Shenyang, the capital of Liaoning province, where I arrived by noon, and began to explore the city, while hurriedly making arrangements for next day's trip.

Day 2 was the most eventful. No seats were available on the high-speed train to Dandong, but I didn't mind the 1 hour, 30 minutes ride standing, and sometimes sitting on the floor, by the door, which brought back memories of my travels back home.

As the train came to a halt at Dandong station, I hurriedly got off and made my way to the exit. The temperature outside was

warm — better than in Shenyang, which had been a bit nippy. I quickly booked a Didi, headed to the hotel, checked in, and rushed out to see the city's most happening place — the Yalu River Broken Bridge — before dusk.

A picturesque sight greeted me as I arrived at the waterfront near the bridge: a river in full flow, and a row of buildings on the far side. A huge, pink-colored building with big letters in Korean caught my eye. I was indeed looking at the city of Sinuiju in the DPRK.

It was time to take a closer look. All I had to do was buy a ticket — it costs 30 yuan (\$4.14) — at a designated counter at the waterfront,

and get onto the bridge, a steel marvel built by the Japanese in 1911. During the Korean War, the US forces bombed it. It wasn't repaired after that, and has now been turned into a tourist site.

I stepped on the bridge, which was teeming with tourists trying to capture a slice of history on their cameras or mobiles, or to get a closer view of Sinuiju.

I kept walking along the bridge until I reached a point where barricades had been placed. Visitors weren't allowed any farther. I moved over to the side where I got a better view of the buildings, and a Ferris wheel inside what seemed like an amusement park, across

the river, while capturing them on my mobile.

A rail-and-road bridge, also called the Sino-Korean Friendship Bridge, runs parallel to the broken bridge. It connects Dandong and Sinuiju, and serves as a key link between the two countries.

With the bridge tour having been completed, it was time for some coffee. The street across the waterfront is lined with several restaurants and coffee shops, where I energized myself with a latte. It was time to bid adieu. Bye, Dandong!

Contact the writer at manjunath@chinadaily.com.cn