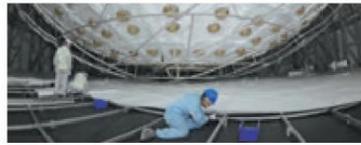


Neutrino quest

Study in darkness shedding light on cosmos

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Move to deduct common area from home space welcomed

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CHINA DAILY

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Corporations aim for more China presence

Opening-up expected to facilitate better business, shore up investors' confidence

By FAN FEIFEI
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Multinational corporations have vowed to deepen cooperation with their Chinese partners and seize the huge opportunities presented by China's sharpened focus on bolstering technological innovation and industrial upgrade, reaffirming their long-term confidence in the world's second-largest economy.

Highlighting China's pivotal position in global industrial and supply chains, top company executives noted that the country's unwavering commitment to advancing high-standard opening-up will contribute to a more favorable business environment, shore up the confidence of foreign investors and drive global economic growth despite mounting external challenges.

Their comments follow the tone-setting Central Economic Work Conference held earlier this month, which underlined efforts to expand high-standard opening-up and keep foreign trade and investment stable. The two-day meeting, which concluded on Dec 12, also listed driving the development of new quality productive forces through science and technology innovation as one of the priorities for economic work next year.

Tetsuro Homma, executive vice-president of Japanese tech company Panasonic Holdings Corp, said the measures taken by Chinese authorities to promote high-standard opening-up and achieve high-quality economic development will help foreign companies step up investment and strengthen their presence in the Chinese market.

"China is not only a manufacturing giant and a major consumer

country, but also an innovator with exceptional engineering talent. It boasts a strong ability to absorb new technologies," said Homma, emphasizing that Panasonic is drawing a wealth of young and high-caliber Chinese talent to its research and development team for bolstering its digital transformation.

The company's businesses in China mainly involve healthy and intelligent living spaces, new energy vehicle components and intelligent manufacturing.

"We have been expanding our investment in China since the COVID-19 pandemic, and have established 18 new facilities," he said, adding that the design, R&D, manufacturing, sales and customer services of Panasonic have been localized.

Ian Shih, president of Rockwell Automation China, said the United States-based industrial automation company is looking forward to helping Chinese enterprises accelerate digital and intelligent transformation by leveraging innovative technologies, including 5G, artificial intelligence and the industrial internet of things.

Shih said he appreciates China's various measures to boost opening-up, including the deepening of reforms in foreign investment, adding that "the supportive business environment has bolstered our confidence in our development within China, enabling us to better understand and address the unique needs of our local partners".

"We believe that cultivating new quality productive forces necessitates upgrading the quality and models of businesses in China," he said.

See *Market*, page 3

Supervisory bodies push for improving people's well-being

By CAO YIN
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Chinese supervisory authorities have stepped up efforts to combat misconduct and corruption in areas directly affecting people's daily lives, aiming to enhance their sense of public security, happiness and fulfillment, according to a report being reviewed by national lawmakers.

The report, delivered by Liu Jinguo, head of the National Commission of Supervision, was submitted on Sunday to the ongoing session of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, China's top legislative body.

Data released in the report showed that supervisory departments across the country have handled 768,000 cases of misconduct and corruption closely related to people's daily lives since the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2022, with 628,000 individuals disciplined.

In addition to constant efforts to advance the fight against misconduct and corruption, Liu noted that strong measures have particularly been taken since the beginning of this year in major fields such as health, education and rural affairs, in order to effectively curb improper practices that frequently bring public complaints.

Among the measures, supervisory organs nationwide have endeavored to fight corruption and misconduct in the medical industry, such as "red

envelopes", or cash gifts from patients to doctors, given that the practice puts a financial burden on people and harms the doctor-patient relationship, he reported.

Patients have provided such payments to doctors before surgeries despite Chinese law, which prohibits medical staff members from asking for or accepting gifts, cash or other benefits from patients. Some patients worry that failing to offer the informal payment could lead to subpar treatment.

Liu emphasized the importance of cracking down on such misconduct, adding that those who have embezzled medical insurance funds have also been targeted.

According to the data, around 40,000 individuals have faced disciplinary action for medical misconduct, with 2,634 cases that have involved serious violations being transferred to prosecutors for further investigation.

To address the safety of school meals, Liu said that the commission has urged supervisory departments to conduct an assessment of canteens and food in primary and secondary schools across the country.

He cited data showing that 23,000 individuals were disciplined after being found to have embezzled funds intended for student meals, interfered in the bidding for and procurement of food, and accepted kickbacks, among other irregularities.

See *Supervision*, page 3



Foreign tourists cheer during a visit to the Temple of Heaven in Beijing on Nov 3. In the first 11 months, China received 17.45 million visa-free entries made by foreign visitors, accounting for about 60 percent of all foreign entries. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Favorable measures propel surge of foreign tourists

By ZOU SHUO in Changsha, ZHU XINGXIN in Taiyuan and YANG JUN in Guiyang

Traveling to China is getting easier for foreign tourists, as new rules and procedures cover more regions and ports of entry. These include optimized visa-free policies, convenient access to currency exchange, expedited car rentals, quick purchase of cellphone cards and more signage in languages other than Chinese.

With the New Year and Spring Festival holidays approaching, there's no better time for travelers to arrive for a taste of traditional Chinese culture.

China has extended the duration of its visa-free transit policy to 10 days. The previous limit was 72 or 144 hours.

Eligible citizens from 54 countries, who are transiting to a third country or region, can enter at any one of 60 ports in 24 provincial-level regions, up from 39 ports in 19 regions. These include places with lots to see and do, such as Guizhou and Shanxi provinces and the city of Zhangjiajie in Hunan province.

Chen Shaoqing, former deputy

director of the Shanxi Department of Culture and Tourism, said the province's Taiyuan and Datong are among the newly added places. These are replete with traditional Chinese culture and dotted with ancient architecture.

Around 28,000 ancient structures stand in Shanxi, with some wooden buildings dating to the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) and before, Chen noted.

In the viral online game *Black Myth: Wukong*, which gained global popularity this year, most of the scenery is inspired by the grottoes, temples and ancient architecture of Shanxi.

Li Feng, deputy director of the Shanxi entry and exit inspection station, said the visa-free transit policy is expected to attract many more foreigners. The station has worked with international airports in the province to improve infrastructure at ports to ensure that foreign travelers have a smooth experience, he said.

Ma Xuefeng, deputy director of Datong's culture and tourism bureau, said the city will organize lantern shows and folk perfor-

mances during the holiday season to attract more foreign and domestic travelers.

At Guiyang Longdongbao International Airport in Guizhou province, a new service center for tourists provides currency exchange, car rentals and cellphone SIM cards that work across China. Major telecommunication enterprises have introduced seven-day, 15-day and 30-day phone cards for international travelers. Fourteen such centers have been set up at major travel destinations in the province.

Huang Yufei, a market manager for an international tourism company in Guizhou, said the company received more than 50 travel groups from the Asia-Pacific region in autumn and most of the travelers were from Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand.

Guiyang opened a direct flight to Singapore in November, and Huang said she expects there will be many more travelers coming from Southeast Asia.

Li Ping, deputy head of Zhangjiajie tourism guide association, said that Zhangjiajie has long been a hot travel destination for international

tourists. It's famous for the unusual mountains that inspired the Hollywood blockbuster film *Avatar*.

Zhangjiajie welcomed more than 1.29 million foreign tourists in the first three quarters, surging 255 percent year-on-year. The visitors came from 183 countries and regions.

Li said that under the visa-free transit policy, the tourism market for foreigners in the city next year looks "extremely bright".

"It's hard to believe that there are so many foreign tourists in Zhangjiajie now — in December — which is not considered a peak travel season," he said. "We are making efforts to improve the infrastructure, manpower and services in restaurants and hotels, and we are confident that we can leave international travelers with good impressions."

While the city is well-prepared to handle more travelers from South Korea — a steady source of foreign visitors — it is still lacking in tour guides fluent in languages other than Chinese. More are needed to handle the surge, he added.

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Rebuilding effort



A man looks out at destroyed buildings while clearing rubble from a house at the Yarmouk camp for Palestinian refugees outside Damascus, Syria, on Monday. Following the end of civil war in Syria, the camp's former occupants have started trickling back. MUHAMMAD HAJ KADOUR / AFP

INTIMATE, BUSY BISTROS BITE INTO NATION'S RESTAURANT INDUSTRY

Innovative takes on regional dishes inspire new dining trend

By LI YINGXUE
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Late one evening last month, after a high-energy Mayday rock concert at Shanghai Stadium, Yu Zhuo and her friends found themselves still buzzing with excitement. They weren't ready to end the night, so they headed to Cila, a cozy bistro tucked away in Shanghai's Xuhui district known for its inventive northwestern fare.

It was already past 11 pm, and the kitchen had closed, but a selection of appetizers and grilled skewers were still on offer. Yu, a 33-year-old publishing professional, who had traveled from Beijing for the band's 25th anniversary tour, ordered a drink and a few dishes to share.

"After the concert, I needed to unwind with friends and food," she said. "The energy from the



show could finally find its release."

In recent years, small bistros have become a new trend on China's dining scene, particularly in cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Guangdong province, and Chengdu, Sichuan province. They have captured the attention of young diners, offering a relaxed atmosphere and affordable prices for meals and social gatherings.

As the demand for more personalized dining experiences grows, bistros are embracing local flavors, with regional Chinese cuisines tweaked to create fresh, innovative dishes.

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Newsstand prices: US \$1, Canada C\$1, UK 1.5, 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

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PAGE TWO



Left: Bistro Strong opens a new branch in Beijing's Chaoyang district in July. Right: Italian chef Fabio Falanga prepares a dish in his kitchen of White Tiger Village in Beijing. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Bistros: Igniting growth of nighttime economy

From page 1

China's bistro industry reached a market size of 148.78 billion yuan (\$20.4 billion) in 2023 and is projected to exceed 180 billion yuan by 2027, according to a report on the development of China's bistro industry by iiMedia Research.

The growth is driven by the rise of the nighttime economy, the popularity of low-alcohol beverages, increasing social interaction, and supportive government policies, the report said. As of July 2024, there were 33,162 registered bistro-related businesses in China, with new enterprises entering the market and intensifying competition.

The report also found that 82.8 percent of bistro patrons visit at least once a month, with 77.5 percent spending between 101 and 300 yuan per visit. More than half of consumers go to bistros to relax, and 47.2 percent prefer a "light buzz" from alcohol while enjoying their time.

Local inspiration

In Beijing, bistros spotlighting regional Chinese cuisines have become popular with diners.

Different foods from Yunnan and Fujian provinces and the country's northwest, and more recently the northeast, are redefining local dining with thoughtful wine pairings and clever food presentations.

At the forefront is White Tiger Village, a Yunnan-inspired bistro in Chaoyang district. Opened in 2021 by Nathan Zhang, a restaurateur with over a decade of experience in the industry, the bistro marries the bold flavors of Yunnan cuisine with natural wines. The concept quickly struck a chord, and the intimate venue has become one of the city's most sought-after dining spots.

"I'm not a meticulous planner," Zhang, 52, admitted. "When we started White Tiger Village, it just felt right — our food, our taste in drinks, our attention to ambience. It all came together naturally."

Zhang, who lived in Canada for over 10 years, brought an international sensibility to his bistro, supported by a team of like-minded staff. Many of them studied abroad and have contributed to the fusion take on Yunnan cuisine that has captivated diners.

The bistro, known for being pet-friendly, recently expanded its offerings beyond natural wine to include craft beers, aiming to attract an even broader clientele. Regulars visit multiple times a month, while out-of-town guests — business travelers like Shanghai and Guangzhou, Guangdong — often make special trips to experience the restaurant.

Zhang also sees White Tiger Village as more than just a dining destination. He envisions it as a platform for creative exploration. The bistro has hosted film and art talks and even handed over its space to musicians for the day. Recently, Michelin-starred chef Talib Hudda took over the kitchen for a four-week-end pop-up brunch series.

"In China, we've always had our own version of bistros — think street-side barbecue spots where you can linger over skewers, edamame, and a bottle of beer," Zhang said.

"What we've created is simply a more refined space, with thoughtful dishes and a polished atmosphere. It's one more option, depending on the experience people are looking for."

Italian chef Fabio Falanga from Naples is also aiming for a relaxed atmosphere at his bistros. Arriving on Beijing's Western dining scene in 2009, the 39-year-old now oversees three venues in the city: Fresco, 024 Sea Strings, and Sediment Wine Bistro.

Sediment Wine Bistro opened two years on the cusp of Beijing's burgeoning bistro trend.



Top left and middle: People dine and drink at a bistro in Jinan, Shandong province in October. WANG JIAN / FOR CHINA DAILY
Top right and above: Guests dine at San Bai Bei, a Chinese-style bistro in Shanghai. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"I wanted to create a place where I'd enjoy myself, a spot that isn't fine dining but still offers quality food and a relaxed atmosphere," Falanga said.

His goal was to create a bistro that sits between the extremes of high-end Western cuisine and everyday dining — a welcoming space where guests can visit often without feeling pressured.

The menu at Sediment reflects Falanga's roots in Naples, blending traditional dishes with innovative twists. To keep things fresh, he revamps the menu every two to three months.

Domestic produce, wine

Four years ago, Jia Yukun opened a barbecue restaurant in Beijing, grilling premium goat from the Inner Mongolia autonomous region in traditional Japanese yakimiku style. Business was steady, but unremarkable.

Then, in 2021, he noticed a shift in Beijing's dining sector. White Tiger Village had taken the city by storm, by blending regional flavors with a modern, laid-back dining atmosphere.

For Jia, this was a revelation. "Seeing how local bistros elevated traditional dishes with refined presentations made me think we could do something similar," said Jia, 32.

"Inner Mongolia has incredible ingredients, and with a little creativity, we could offer something fresh."

Jia rebranded his restaurant as Bistro Strong, transforming it into a haven for northwest Chinese cuisine with a contempo-

rary twist. The change proved timely. As pandemic restrictions eased, the restaurant gained traction and opened a second eatery in Beijing this year.

Bistro Strong's menu is rooted in Inner Mongolia's culinary traditions, but is also inventive. Dishes include fresh milk skins, tender hand-grabbed goat, and Hohhot-style shumai, all crafted with meat sourced from four-year-old white cashmere goats raised in the rugged mountain areas in Inner Mongolia.

"Goats from that region, because of the harsh terrain, produce meat that's clean and uniquely flavorful," Jia said. "It's the best goat I've ever eaten — no gaminess, just a subtle aroma, and the fat has a creamy, almost milky quality."

Jia has also brought his own flair to traditional recipes, creating air-dried, aged marinated goat with Chinese spices and aged in-house.

Drinks are integral to the experience, accounting for a quarter of Bistro Strong's revenue. French wines dominate the drinks list, but Jia is also on a mission to showcase Chinese wines. "We want people to see that China produces some incredible wines," he said.

Despite steady business throughout the year, Jia has noticed an odd trend — holidays like Labor Day and National Day are often slower, as most of his patrons are Beijing locals who travel during these periods.

Jia, who trained in Western cuisine in

Switzerland, sees no hard boundary between Chinese and Western culinary philosophies. "Chinese cuisine already has world-class ingredients and techniques," he said. "It's just about presentation and creativity."

With two successful restaurants in Beijing, Jia is setting his sights on Shanghai, a city he describes as a natural home for sophisticated yet accessible dining. "There's an atmosphere of appreciation for elevated food experiences in Shanghai," he said.

Fresh interpretations

In October, A Big Bite food ranking unveiled its annual list of China's best bistros. The panel of judges — comprising sommeliers, food writers, and wine experts — evaluated the bistros on their cuisine, beverages, ambience, and originality.

Thirty-three bistros made the list, with nine from Beijing, including Bistro Strong, and thirteen from Shanghai, among them Cila and San Bai Bei. Other winners hailed from Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, and Chengdu.

Food writer and panelist Li Weihang said modern Chinese bistros are less about strict definitions and more about creative expression. "Initially, people thought of bistros as Western dining with wine," Li said. "But today, the concept has become more fluid, adapting to the diverse needs of diners from various backgrounds."

What remains consistent are low-alcohol

wines, appealing dishes, and a strong sense of individuality, she said.

The rise of bistros, Li suggested, reflects shifts in urban lifestyles. In cities like Shanghai, where workdays often stretch past 7:30 pm, bistros offer a relaxed space for social gatherings without the heaviness of a full meal.

Another driving force, she said, is the resurgence of Chinese flavors. The casual format of bistros has encouraged younger restaurateurs to reimagine traditional Chinese dishes. Li pointed to San Bai Bei in Shanghai as a prime example.

"Their menu updates frequently and their portions are intentionally small," Li said.

"It solves a long-standing problem with traditional Chinese dining — large servings that don't suit small groups."

The bistro's innovative takes on Ningbo cuisine have made it a popular choice for diners across different age groups and social circles.

The first San Bai Bei opened in Ningbo, Zhejiang, in 2019, and the restaurant quickly expanded to Shanghai, where it now operates two popular eateries.

Nod to tradition

Founded by 38-year-old Han Yuting, who has over a decade in the restaurant industry, including running a Japanese-style bistro, the idea for San Bai Bei emerged in response to the rising Guochao fashion trend in 2019 that mixed the traditional with the modern.

"I was inspired by the growing interest in Chinese traditions, especially in Zhejiang, where making rice wine and yellow wine is part of everyday life," Han said. "It was the perfect moment to open a Chinese-style bistro."

San Bai Bei is a reservation-only venue. Initially, customers had to make reservations by phone, but a mini-program was later introduced, allowing guests to book a week in advance.

Due to the restaurant's overwhelming popularity, a deposit system was implemented to prevent scalpers from reselling reservations. "We even introduced a 'queue-jumping' feature — if there's a gap between two reservations, guests can book that slot," Han explained.

To keep customers informed, Han created several WeChat groups where he posts updates on daily specials and ingredients. "We get our seafood fresh from Ningbo every morning, and after transporting it to Shanghai, we're ready to serve it that evening," Han shared.

San Bai Bei's menu is dynamic, changing daily based on the freshest available ingredients. There's no set menu; instead, dishes are listed on a blackboard, and guests write their orders down on small notebooks at each table.

"A bistro should feel personal, not just about ordering from a screen," Han said. "Sometimes we have dishes that aren't on the board but are available in the kitchen. If a guest sees a particular fish, they can just ask the chef how it's cooked — steamed or braised."

The restaurant's wine list is predominantly focused on traditional rice wine and yellow wine, but guests are welcome to bring their own bottles. There is no corkage fee.

The seating arrangement is intentionally intimate, with only a 10-centimeter gap between tables.

"You can't help but overhear what others are eating and drinking," Han said. "But that's the charm of it — guests often end up joining together, and a table for three can turn into a lively group of ten, all sharing drinks."

"It's a place for joy," Han said. "People are still seeking social connections, and we provide a space for that to happen naturally."

TOP NEWS

Role of BRI in developing nations hailed

Former foreign leader says initiative promotes modernization, growth

By SONG PING
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Had it not been for the Belt and Road Initiative, many countries would have had little to look forward to from the rest of the world, said Mladen Ivanic, a former member of the presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In an exclusive interview with China Daily, Ivanic, who was in China to attend the 30th anniversary of Beijing Art and Media Vocational College, said the BRI offers opportunities for developing countries to modernize and grow.

Comparing China's approach with that of traditional Western institutions, he said that in the West, "there is just a World Bank with some sort of investments, but it's relatively costly and always under political conditions. In the case of China, there is no political pressure. This is just cooperation of different countries".

He said that some Central Asian countries might still be struggling without the support of the China-proposed BRI. "I really believe this is a very good initiative. This is a real chance for development," Ivanic added. "Last year marked its 10th anniversary, and I hope it continues for many years."

According to Ivanic, the initiative involves much more than just building roads and railways, because it is also about creating lasting changes that help countries break free from poverty and isolation.

The results of China's cooperation with Bosnia and Herzegovina are already visible. Ivanic recalled that until 15 years ago, the country "didn't have a single kilometer of highway", noting the significance of China's involvement in addressing the country's infrastructure challenges.

"Now we are in a real effort to invest in that area," he said. "We don't have money. So cooperation with countries like China is very useful because Chinese companies can build the roads and they can also finance that."

In September, the Pocitelj-Zvirovic subsection of the pan-European Corridor Vc Highway was completed and opened. The China-built project marks Bosnia and Herzegovina's first north-south highway and is expected to significantly enhance connectivity, trade and regional economic growth.

In 2023, bilateral trade between China and Bosnia and Herzegovina hit \$362 million, up 17.6 percent year-on-year.

With the country continuing to



Mladen Ivanic

develop its infrastructure, Ivanic highlighted the importance of expanding cooperation with China in other sectors, particularly energy. Advocating

greener, more sustainable sources of energy, he emphasized the need to diversify the country's energy mix, especially given its abundant water resources.

Ivanic expressed the hope that Chinese investment and expertise in hydropower will help Bosnia and Herzegovina transition to cleaner energy sources.

He pointed to a thermal power plant built in collaboration with a private Chinese company, describing it as "a good example of private investment working alongside Chinese support, sending a strong signal for other countries in the region that this can be done".

He further emphasized that China can play a stabilizing role amid a divided world. "The modern world is multipolar," he said, stressing that cooperation among multiple nations is crucial for global stability.

Despite some tensions in global trade, particularly with the European Union raising tariffs on electric vehicles produced in China, Ivanic still sees opportunities for continued cooperation. "Bosnia and Herzegovina is a European country, but not an EU member," he said. As a result, the country's unique position allows it to act as a bridge between China and the European market, he said.

Looking back on his first trip to China 24 years ago, he said he was deeply impressed by the significant improvements in infrastructure quality. "I remember when I drove from Beijing to Hebei, the roads were terrible. Now, China's roads are state-of-the-art. The improvement in road quality is amazing, and that's a real success."

Ivanic said China's biggest achievement "is the fight against poverty". "The benefits of economic development are reaching ordinary citizens, not just a small group. China has succeeded in that, which is not easy, and it offers a lesson for other countries," he added.

He also commended China's efforts in promoting cultural exchange, especially through the Confucius Institutes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which help people learn about China and its culture.



Ma Ying-jeou (center), former chairman of the Chinese Kuomintang party, visits the Sanxingdui Museum in Deyang, Sichuan province, on Sunday. Ma is leading a delegation of young people from Taiwan to visit the Chinese mainland. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Chinese culture seen as 'root', 'soul' of mainland, Taiwan compatriots

By ZHANG YI in Chengdu
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Ma Ying-jeou, former chairman of the Chinese Kuomintang party, who is leading a group of Taiwan students on a journey to explore history and culture on the Chinese mainland, said that any attempts to sever the roots of Chinese culture in Taiwan are destined to fail.

Ma made the remarks on Monday while attending a symposium in Chengdu, Sichuan province, which brought together officials, scholars and students from both sides to discuss how to jointly promote Chinese culture.

"Both sides share the same roots and culture. People on both sides belong to the Chinese nation, descendants of Emperor Yan and the Yellow Emperor, sharing Chinese culture. We must not forget our ancestors," he said.

Ma emphasized his confidence in the presence of Chinese culture in Taiwan, saying that any attempts by the Democratic Progressive Party to promote "de-Sinicization" in Taiwan are bound to fail, because Chinese culture has deep roots and is ingrained in the bloodline of the people.

Song Tao, head of the Taiwan Work Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, said that the profound and vast Chinese culture is the common "root" and "soul" of compatriots on both sides, serving as their shared heritage.

Prior to the seminar, Song and Ma, along with over 20 Taiwan students, visited the venue of the meeting, the Du Fu Thatched Cottage Museum — where Du Fu (712-770), one of China's

most revered poets, lived for nearly four years and penned 240 of his 1,455 extant poems.

They entered the famous cottage, experiencing the patriotic poet's sentiments when he wrote his famous piece *My Cottage Unroofed By Autumn Gales*, and Ma even recited part of the poem.

The group also viewed a stone tablet in the cottage inscribed with lines from the poem *Nostalgia* by the renowned Taiwan poet Yu Guangzhong (1928-2017), learning about Yu's connection with Chengdu.

Lin Pei-chen, a student from the group, mentioned the similarities between the rainy weather in her city, Keelung in Taiwan, and the continuous drizzle in Chengdu, which reminded her of Du's poetry *Happy Rain on a Spring Night*.

"We believe in the sea goddess Mazu. We speak Chinese. We reunite during Spring Festival. Chinese culture has actually become part of our daily lives. These are our roots and our foundation," she said.

Kang Zhen, vice-president of Beijing Normal University, said that young people on both sides of the Strait have a strong affinity for traditional Chinese poetry and literature, which stems from a genuine sense of identification of Chinese culture.

Yang Du, a renowned Taiwan writer, said that young people in Taiwan who appreciate traditional Chinese culture, such as Kunqu Opera, are now actively participating in its creation. He suggested creating platforms for youths across the Strait to engage in collaborative endeavors in film and literature.

During the visit to Sichuan, Ma led the students in exploring Chinese history and traditional culture. On Sunday, they visited the Sanxingdui

Museum, where ancient bronze, jade and gold artifacts are on display.

While meeting with local leaders in Sichuan on Saturday, Ma delivered a speech in the Sichuan dialect, which he learned during his school years. He emphasized his personal connection with Sichuan, noting that both of his parents had studied in the province during the wartime period, and were fluent in the local dialect.

Ma also recalled the strong ties between Sichuan and Taiwan, including the 2008 gift of two pandas from Sichuan to Taiwan, which sparked a "panda craze" on the island. He also mentioned the outpouring of support from Taiwan following the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake in Sichuan, with Taiwan people actively contributing to the relief efforts.

The visit follows the group's participation in cross-Strait youth ice and snow activities in Harbin, Heilongjiang province. The group will leave for Taiwan on Thursday.

It's the third time that Ma has visited the mainland. He expressed his hope for the opportunity to bring Taiwan students to the mainland to participate in the Confucius ceremony in the future to experience the inheritance of Confucianism and Chinese civilization.

Over the past two years, Ma has organized exchanges of visits by young people between the two sides. His goal, he said, is to ease cross-Strait tensions and promote understanding and friendship between the younger generations of both sides.



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Political Lens

Xi presents order to promote military officer to general

Xi Jinping, chairman of the Central Military Commission, presented a certificate of order on Monday to promote a military officer to the rank of general.

The promoted officer is Political Commissar of the Army of the People's Liberation Army Chen Hui.

Zhang Youxia, vice-chairman of the CMC, announced the order of promotion, which was signed by Xi, at a ceremony held for the promotion in Beijing. He Weidong, another CMC vice-chairman, presided over the ceremony.

Xi extended his congratulations to the general.

General is the highest rank for officers in active service in China.

XINHUA

Harbin sets stage to host Asian Winter Games 2025

By SUN XIAOCHEN
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With half of the test events completed and all preparatory work advancing smoothly according to schedule, Harbin, the capital of Heilongjiang province, is primed to host the 9th Asian Winter Games in less than 50 days.

Known as an ice and snow wonderland in Northeast China, the city is buzzing with fresh excitement this year, with posters, mascots and countdown timers reminding residents and visitors of the return to Harbin of the continental winter sports gala after nearly three decades.

Harbin, which previously hosted the Games in 1996, will welcome Asia's best ice and snow sports talent from a record number of 34 National Olympic Committees to compete in 64 medal events from Feb 7 to 14, and organizers are beefing up efforts to promote winter sports participation and tourism in the region.

Seven of the 14 planned test events for the Games have been completed according to international standards, covering sports such as speed skating, figure skating, ice hockey and alpine skiing, as organizers continue to run security checks, emergency drills and staff training programs at all competition and noncompetition venues.

The competitions will be held at five ice sport venues in downtown Harbin and another eight venues for snow sports in Yabuli, a ski resort located about 200 kilometers from the provincial capital. All these venues are existing facilities and require only renovation and equipment upgrades to meet specified technical standards.

The two hosting areas are connected by a high-speed railway line, and the traveling time is only 50 minutes. The refurbishing of railway stations, streamlining of transportation hubs, and planning of shuttle services for athletes and accredited media staff have been completed, while a newly built second runway at Harbin's international airport will open on Jan 24, according to the organizing committee.

Thirty-one hospitals have been designated as medical service providers for the Games, while 550 medical personnel have been trained and deployed across all venues for administering first aid.

A total of over 700 dishes will be on the menus at official Games hotels to cater to the taste buds of international athletes and officials.

"With venue preparations progressing well and test events on track, we have shifted to the Games operation mode from the planning stage. We are confident that the Games will be a resounding success," Bai Zhiguo, a deputy secretary-general of the Games' organizing committee, said at a news conference on Monday.

Harbin's readiness and the committee's organizational expertise have impressed the Olympic Council of Asia.

"China has rich experience of organizing multisport events, and Harbin has seized international attention and praise for its professional and efficient preparatory work for the Games," said OCA President Raja Randhir Singh.

Big catch



A tourist takes photos of stacked and hanging fish at the launch of a winter fishing event in the Heishantou Port Scenic Zone in Ergune, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, on Sunday. The event has attracted nearly 1,000 participants from across the country and neighboring Russia. It will run through Feb 28. WANG ZHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Supervision: High-pressure stance to continue

From page 1

Liu also reported that a nationwide campaign to rectify corruption and misconduct in the funeral and burial sector was launched in November, with the initiative set to run for one year.

Supervisory authorities at all levels will continue to adopt a high-pressure stance on combating corruption in the areas that directly affect people's livelihood, he reported, adding that problems related to rural vitalization funds, medical insurance management and elderly

care services are also to be better addressed, in order to meet the public's needs.

Yang Weidong, a law professor at China University of Political Science and Law, praised the strong efforts to combat misconduct and corruption in major areas that

directly affect people's daily lives.

"The fields such as healthcare and education involve many families and the basic interests or even life safety of everyone, so strengthening supervisory investigation in these sectors is important and necessary," he said.

Using student meals as an example, he noted that supervisory investigation involved many departments, including schools,

food suppliers and healthcare regulators, so that the supervisory and anti-corruption actions have covered every part of the sector.

He suggested that supervisory authorities open more platforms, such as hotlines or online channels, to collect feedback from the public or tips about misconduct in livelihood-related areas, so that efforts to fight misconduct can be advanced more effectively.

CHINA

Report finds significant drop in PM2.5 level

By LI PEIXUAN
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A report that assessed the health effects of improved air quality in China highlighted a sharp reduction in PM2.5 — particulate matter with a diameter of 2.5 micrometers or less — exposure.

The national average PM2.5 concentration fell from 63 micrograms per cubic meter in 2013 to 33 micrograms in 2020, enabling more than half of the population to breathe air that meets national standards.

The report released on Thursday also found that China has reversed a 0.6-year decline in life expectancy from 2013 to 2020 thanks to significant air pollution control measures.

"The implementation of effective measures to reduce emissions was the leading factor in the decline of PM2.5 concentrations," said He Kebin, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering and a professor at Tsinghua University. "While meteorological conditions played a minor role, the improvements mainly relied on human efforts, particularly during the first round of pollution prevention and control actions."

Key measures included upgrading power industry standards, rectifying coal-fired boilers and promoting clean heating in residential areas, He said.

China invested hundreds of billions of yuan in air pollution control. From 2013 to 2017, the cost of reducing the national average PM2.5 concentration by 1 microgram per cubic meter was about 49 billion yuan (\$6.7 billion). That figure rose to 100 billion yuan

from 2018 to 2020 as emission reductions became more challenging.

Despite the steep costs, the benefits have been substantial. From 2013 to 2023, infant diseases linked to PM2.5 exposure fell by 83 percent, compared to a 33 percent reduction for adults. Infants face a higher risk of mortality from air pollution than adults, according to Xue Tao, the report's lead author and a researcher at Peking University's School of Public Health.

"Early-life exposure to air pollution has very long-term impacts," Xue said, adding that women are also at heightened risk, with air pollution contributing to infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth.

Globally, PM2.5 exposure is estimated to cause 7.83 million premature deaths annually, reducing the average life expectancy by nearly two years, according to the 2021 Global Burden of Disease Study.

Improved air quality can enhance cognitive function, physical activity and respiratory health while also reducing medical expenses, potentially saving 1 percent of GDP, Xue said.

With an aging population, the health benefits of cleaner air will become even more pronounced, He added.

China's Clean Air Actions have also driven energy transformation, replacing inefficient, high-carbon equipment with cleaner alternatives.

From 2013 to 2020, the measures saved 1.06 billion tons of standard coal and reduced carbon dioxide emissions by 2.43 billion tons, accounting for 3.1 percent of China's cumulative carbon emissions during the period.

Finding travel pals online risky affair, experts warn

By CHENG SI
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Seeking travel companions through social media is gaining popularity among Chinese youth, offering a novel way to explore destinations with companionship tailored to personal preferences. However, experts urge stricter regulation to address safety risks and prevent potential exploitation.

The trend, widely discussed on platforms like Xiaohongshu, a Chinese lifestyle-sharing app like Instagram, involves users posting their travel plans and specifying requirements for prospective "travel pals." These criteria often include gender, personality traits, or skills such as photography.

"I first learned about this type of travel arrangement through Xiaohongshu, a Chinese lifestyle-sharing platform where people post their travel plans and their requirements for a companion, including gender, personality traits and skills like photography," said Liu Chenmin, a 26-year-old from Beijing.

"Most posts I've seen involve females seeking female companions. They often specify qualities like a good temperament, patience for taking photos at tourist spots and knowledge of the destination's best restaurants and cafes."

"Some seekers offer service fees to their companions, while others mention covering food and transportation costs. From my perspective, these companions are like self-employed or flexible tour guides, but they provide more emotional value than professional guidance," she said, adding that while the idea is novel, she would hesitate to try it due to safety concerns.

Wang Wenda, director of psychological health education at Xinhua College of Ningxia University in northwestern China, said that this trend appeals to individuals who seek companionship but are not sociable or adept at maintaining close social relationships.

"Youths today prefer personalized trips, and travel companions can help create tailored travel plans based on specific needs. Moreover, many young people face increasing work and life pres-

ures and may experience greater loneliness due to a lack of close social connections," he said. "A random travel companion offers continuous companionship during the trip, with the advantage of requiring no ongoing commitment once the trip ends."

A recent survey by China Youth News revealed that over 70 percent of the 1,333 surveyed youths found it increasingly difficult to maintain close social relationships.

However, experts warn that this trendy travel method carries significant risks, including personal safety threats, financial loss and ambiguous expectations that could lead to inappropriate or even illegal activities, such as sexual services.

"It's understandable that youths want a better travel experience with a companion of similar age, interests and preferences. Traveling alone can be lonely and inconvenient," said Wei Changren, founder of btiii.com, a tourism-related financial news website.

"However, it's difficult to verify a companion's true intentions before meeting them offline. Social media platforms must tighten their management of such activities by reviewing the personal information of those offering or seeking companion services," he warned.

Wei recommended traveling with friends or familiar people rather than strangers from social media to avoid potential risks outweighing the benefits. "While the emotional value offered by companions is significant, their guiding services may not be as professional as those of trained tour guides. Additionally, registered tour guides usually operate through companies or agencies, offering a safer option for travelers," he said, noting that Chinese regulations require tour guides to hold official certifications.

Wang also emphasized the need to consider the psychological risks of these temporary relationships as they deviate from usual social norms.

He advised young travelers to remain cautious about their safety and avoid situations that could lead to exploitation or involvement in inappropriate activities.



Snake year arrival

Workers install a zodiac-themed snake lantern, with the help of cranes, at the old city wall in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, on Monday. The installation, measuring 22 meters wide and 14 meters high, will be unveiled to the public before the Chinese New Year.
SONG NING / FOR CHINA DAILY

NATIONAL VISION, LOCAL ACTION

Baicheng to widen new energy plans to achieve green transition

City focuses on integrating wind, solar resources, hydrogen and storage stations

By LIU MINGTAI in Changchun and ZHENG XIN

Baicheng, a pioneering hub for clean energy in Northeast China's Jilin province, is intensifying efforts to develop solar and wind resources alongside energy storage stations, aiming to leverage national opportunities created by the implementation of the "dual carbon" strategy, according to a senior government official.

As the country's only comprehensive demonstration zone for local wind power integration, focusing on the local consumption and efficient use of wind energy, Baicheng is dedicated to accelerating the development of a national-level clean energy base. It also aims to foster



Li Hongci

new productive forces through the complementary integration of wind, solar, thermal and storage energy, said Li Hongci, the city's Party secretary. Accelerating breakthroughs in new energy technologies, long-term energy storage and low-cost green hydrogen, ammonia and ethanol will help promote the deep integration of energy and digital technologies, Li said.

As the region with the most potential for wind and solar energy development in Northeast China, Baicheng has been focusing on the

entire new energy industry chain, including equipment for wind power, photovoltaics, and hydrogen energy production, to accelerate the localization of new energy equipment and foster industrial clustering.

The region also aims to build a complete industrial chain for hydrogen production, storage, transportation, and consumption, emphasizing hydrogen energy equipment and fuel cells. It has been expanding the use of green hydrogen and ammonia, which is crucial for reducing carbon emissions significantly while ensuring domestic energy security.

Industry experts note that China, as the world's largest producer and consumer of hydrogen and ammonia, holds strategic importance in advancing sustainable green hydrogen, ethanol and ammonia development.

Wu Mouyuan, vice-president of the China National Petroleum Corp Economics and Technology Research Institute, highlighted hydrogen's potential as a zero-carbon energy solution for decarbonizing challenging sectors such as heavy industry, aviation and long-haul transportation.

Li said Baicheng has been collaborating with numerous State-owned energy enterprises, including the State Power Investment Corporation and Shanghai Electric, to ensure the production of the province's first batch of green ammonia and the country's first large-scale green alcohol by next year.

With approximately 50 million kilowatts of wind and solar energy resources available for development — accounting for two-thirds of Jilin province's total — Baicheng has been vigorously coordinating

the large-scale development of new energy projects. The city is advancing 26 key projects with a total installed capacity of 14.28 million kilowatts, which is expected to exceed 16 million kilowatts by year-end, Li said.

The government is committed to pushing forward a power transmission project to transfer green energy-generated electricity from Jilin to Beijing. Plans include constructing two 660,000-kilowatt coal-fired supply guarantee units and two 500 kV substations, enabling the development of 3 million kilowatts of wind and solar resources annually, Li added.

This initiative aligns with the government's efforts to establish a national unified power market by 2029, which aims to further integrate renewable energy sources and optimize power distribution across the national grid.

To build a fully integrated new energy equipment industry cluster across the value chain, Baicheng has attracted 28 wind power equipment manufacturers, including Envision Group, Dongfang Electric Corp and Sany Heavy Industry, which produce 10 core technology products. This has led to the establishment of a localized, complete supply chain ranging from whole machines to key components. Notably, SANY's independently developed onshore wind turbines have set a new industry benchmark, Li said.

"We will accelerate the production of key components to address existing gaps while driving the equipment manufacturing industry toward higher-end, smarter and more clustered development," he added.

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A grassland wind farm of the China Huaneng Group in the Taobei district of Baicheng, Jilin province, in July. LI XIAOMING / FOR CHINA DAILY

University students urged to use scholarships 'wisely'

By CHINA DAILY

As students across China receive their annual State-level scholarships and financial aid, universities are urging them to use the funds responsibly and avoid excessive spending.

With the conclusion of the application and evaluation process for these financial aids, institutions are emphasizing the importance of managing the funds wisely.

Several universities, including Hunan University of Science and Technology, Henan Institute of Science and Technology and Baoding University of Technology, have issued public statements encouraging students to prioritize tuition, accommodation, textbooks and daily necessities over luxury goods or nonessential expenditures such as extravagant

travel or throwing parties.

On Friday, Hunan University of Science and Technology's financial aid management center posted on social media that scholarship funds should be used primarily for education-related expenses.

The message urged students to "resist lavish expenditures" and avoid spending money on "catch-up consumption," such as treating friends or indulging in nonessential items.

"Scholarships not only recognize students' academic achievements but also serve as vital support for those facing financial challenges," the university emphasized. "The funds should be valued and used responsibly."

Similarly, Henan Institute of Science and Technology warned students against spending aid on luxury goods or expensive elec-

tronics, while the Baoding university in Hebei province went a step further, warning that misuse of funds could result in the retrieval of financial aid.

The Ministry of Education noted that State-level financial aid, funded by central and local governments, is designed to help students with financial difficulties. Eligible students must demonstrate a frugal lifestyle alongside proving financial need.

The issue of financial aid misuse has sparked debate online. A recent case at Zhejiang University drew attention after a student who received financial assistance was found to have spent considerable funds on international travel. Critics questioned whether such expenses were consistent with the purpose of the aid. The student has since been disqualified from

receiving the scholarship.

One netizen shared, "I used to be a beneficiary of State-level financial aid. The primary purpose of the aid is to cover tuition and living expenses for students who cannot afford the cost of education and daily life."

In response to rising concerns over financial aid allocation, China increased the amount of scholarships and financial support available to students this October.

Under a new initiative by the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, students facing financial difficulties will now receive an average of 3,700 yuan (\$508) annually, up from 3,300 yuan (\$453) in previous years.

Li Shangyi contributed to this story.

CHINA

Beach visitors



Seagulls are seen foraging on a beach in Haigang district of Qinhuangdao, Hebei province, on Monday. Recently, a large influx of migratory seagulls has landed on the beach, where they can be observed foraging and playing by the sea, drawing numerous tourists who come to engage with them. CAO JIANXIONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Efforts to ensure conservation won't affect people, businesses

Second review of draft National Park Law requires more necessary measures

By YAN DONGJIE

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China plans to bolster support for national parks in an effort to balance conservation and development, according to a draft law presented to the country's top legislative body on Saturday.

The draft National Park Law, undergoing a second review by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, calls for measures to address the impact of conservation efforts on local residents and businesses. It also mandates assessments and solutions during the early stages of establishing national parks, according to the draft.

Wang Xiang, spokesman for the Legislative Affairs Commission of the NPC Standing Committee, said the initial draft, submitted in September, considered how ecological conservation could affect local livelihoods. Provisions included allowing necessary production activities within national parks and ensuring proper resettlement for relocated residents.

Additional measures in the first

draft supported local residents in providing ecological products and services, prioritizing their employment as conservation officers. Local governments were also tasked with compensating for wildlife damage within park areas. Building on these measures, the second draft requires provincial governments to assess and address the impact of park creation on residents and businesses during preliminary planning.

China began piloting its national park system in 2015, establishing its first five parks in October 2021. These include Sanjiangyuan (Three-River-Source) National Park in Qinghai province, Giant Panda National Park spanning Sichuan, Shaanxi and Gansu provinces, and Northeast China Tiger and Leopard National Park in Jilin and Heilongjiang provinces. Other parks include the Hainan Tropical Rainforest National Park and Wuyishan National Park in Jiangxi and Fujian provinces.

By the end of 2022, authorities selected 49 additional candidate areas as part of the "National Park Spatial Layout Plan," aiming to cre-

ate the world's largest national park system by 2035, according to the National Forestry and Grassland Administration.

Significant achievements have been made in ecological restoration and the protection of flora and fauna within the national parks. For example, the populations of tigers and leopards in the Northeast China Tiger and Leopard National Park have grown from the initial 27 and 42 at the pilot stage to around 70 and 80, respectively, said Zhang Liming, director of the National Forestry and Grassland Administration's nature reserve department, earlier this year in a news conference.

"By protecting the flagship species, the giant panda in the national park area, an 'umbrella effect' has been generated. Over 8,000 rare companion animal and plant species such as the golden snub-nosed monkey, snow leopard and Chinese fir have been well protected," said Chen Zongqian, deputy director of the Sichuan Forestry and Grassland Bureau.

The second draft states that the National Park Law is established "in accordance with the Constitution" to implement the constitutional requirements for ecological civilization construction and the

protection and improvement of the ecological environment.

"Ecological protection does not mean foregoing development; exploring sustainable utilization, guiding public participation and sharing the benefits of protection is also crucial," said Ouyang Zhijun, a researcher at the Research Center for Eco-Environmental Sciences of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the director of the National Park Research Institute, in an interview with CCTV.

The draft also proposes strengthening the overall coordination of national park construction, encouraging the national park supervisory department to coordinate with provincial governments regarding legislation and management.

It addresses the relationship between national parks and existing nature reserves, suggesting that parts of existing nature reserves that are not included in national parks can be retained, integrated, or revoked.

Furthermore, the draft suggests further enhancing support and guarantees for national park construction, including increasing professional talent development and granting legal protection to the national park emblem.

Survey reveals notable growth in farmland

By ZHAO YIMENG

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128.6 million hectares
China's total farmland area as of 2023

China has seen a significant shift in farmland distribution, with both northern and southern regions reporting growth after years of divergent trends, a national legislator said Sunday.

China's total farmland now spans 128.6 million hectares, with 50 percent dryland, 24.3 percent paddy fields and 25.6 percent irrigated land, according to the 2023 national land use survey.

Liu Guohong, vice-minister of natural resources, presented the findings during a session of the 14th National People's Congress Standing Committee, the country's top legislative body.

The survey revealed a net increase of 140,443 hectares of farmland south of the Qinling Mountains and Huaihe River, with a trend of farmland shifting from steep slopes to flatter terrains. Over 1,500 pilot projects covering 480,000 hectares have been implemented since 2019, resulting in 44,000 additional hectares of arable land and a reduction of 10,000 hectares of construction land.

Efforts to strengthen farmland conservation and improve productivity have bolstered food security, Liu said. High-quality farmland projects have been prioritized, with more than 66.7 million hectares upgraded by the end of 2022. These efforts have supported China's grain production, which has exceeded 650 million metric tons

annually for several years.

Regions such as the northeastern black soil area and irrigated plains have been targeted for upgrades to enhance soil fertility and output. The Central Rural Work Conference held last week reaffirmed the need for high-quality farmland construction and stricter oversight of funding and safety.

The central government has increased subsidies for high-quality farmland construction from 1,300 yuan (\$164.40) to 2,400 yuan per hectare this year, focusing on maintenance and management, said Liu Li, an associate researcher at the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences.

China is also combating farmland degradation, protecting over 20 million hectares of black soil in key counties. Since 2021, the government has supported more than 1,880 irrigation renovation projects and over 200 new irrigation initiatives.

Efforts to address heavy metal pollution on farmland are progressing, with national monitoring data indicating a decline in contamination at key sites. Additionally, the country is conducting its third national soil census to collect data on soil properties, soil types, and land use.

Harbin show



Visitors admire the snow sculpture *The Return of the Wu Kong* during the trial opening of the 37th Sun Island International Snow Sculpture Art Expo Park in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, on Monday. This year's event covers an area of 1.5 million square meters, which is estimated to have over 260 snow sculptures, requiring a total of 150,000 cubic meters of snow. ZHANG SHU / FOR CHINA DAILY

Suspended death sentence for driver in school attack

By ZOU SHUO in Changsha

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A man in Changde, Hunan province, was sentenced to death with two years' reprieve on Monday for committing the crime of using dangerous means to harm public security, according to Xinhua News Agency.

The Changde intermediate people's court also deprived Huang Wen, the defendant, of political rights for life.

On Nov 19 at 7:37 am, Huang ran over primary school students with his car. The car stopped due to mechanical failure, at which point he exited the vehicle and used an object to continue to harm people nearby. His behavior led to the injuries of 30 people, including 18

primary school students, and major losses of public and private property, the court said. He was captured at the scene.

Huang committed the crime to vent personal anger due to investment loss and conflicts with family, according to the court.

Huang chose to harm random and innocent primary school students with despicable and extremely vicious motives, the court said.

He also chose to commit the crime when the students arrived for the day, and there was a concentrated flow of people. His behavior led to the injuries of multiple people, major losses of public and private property, and psychological trauma among the witnesses, so the court decided to give him a harsh sentence, the court said.

Man given capital punishment for killing of a judge

By CAO YIN

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A man who fatally stabbed a judge over dissatisfaction with her ruling was sentenced to death by a court in China's Henan province, local authorities said Monday.

The Intermediate People's Court in Anyang found Dang Zhijun guilty of intentional homicide and also stripped him of his political rights for life.

According to the court, Dang initiated a civil lawsuit against an insurance company over a compensation dispute following a traf-

fic accident. He had demanded more than 18,000 yuan (\$2,465) for expenses and losses allegedly incurred during a hospital stay. However, an investigation revealed that Dang had submitted falsified evidence and was not actually hospitalized.

Judge Wang Jiajia ruled in April that the insurance company should pay Dang over 9,300 yuan in compensation based on verified evidence. Dissatisfied with the ruling, Dang sought revenge, the court said.

On Aug 7, Dang entered the residential complex where Wang lived,

carrying two knives. He stabbed her more than 20 times in the chest and other vital areas, killing her on the spot, according to the court. He fled the scene and later attempted suicide by ingesting poison but survived after receiving medical treatment.

The court described Dang's actions as "despicable" and noted his unwillingness to reflect on his submission of false evidence in court proceedings. It said the killing caused significant public outrage and severe social harm.

In sentencing him to death, the court cited the grave consequences

of the crime and its negative impact on society.

The killing, which occurred in the underground parking lot of Wang's residential building, drew widespread attention after it was disclosed by the Yancheng District People's Court in August. Wang, 37, was deputy chief judge of the district court's case filing division.

China's Supreme People's Court strongly condemned the attack, offering condolences to Wang's family and pledging to uphold justice.

Dang has said he plans to appeal the sentence.

Former senior official sentenced for multiple crimes

By CHINA DAILY

Liu Wenxin, a former senior official in Guizhou province's political and legal system, was sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve by a court in Guizhou province on Monday for multiple crimes, including bribery, money laundering and illegally carrying banned weapons.

All illicit gains will be confiscated

and turned over to the state treasury, according to the Intermediate People's Court of Qianxian Miao and Dong autonomous prefecture on Monday.

It was found that Liu abused his power during his tenure at various leading positions in the province, helping individuals and organizations with land transfers, construction projects and other ventures. He accepted more than 609 million

yuan (\$83.4 million) in bribes, some of which were not actually obtained.

"In 2020, Liu brought 25 prohibited knives onto a civilian aircraft, posing a grave threat to public safety," the court added.

From 2003 to 2022, Liu held various key positions, including mayor of Guiyang, party secretary of Qianxian prefecture and deputy secretary of the Commission for

Political and Legal Affairs of the Communist Party of China Guizhou Provincial Committee.

The court stated that Liu's crimes involved an extremely large sum of money, severe circumstances and serious harm to state and public interests, warranting the death penalty.

"Considering Liu's confession, attempted bribery and voluntary disclosure of facts unknown to

authorities, the court sentenced him to death with a two-year reprieve according to law, without commutation or parole," it added.

In China, death sentences with reprieves are often commuted to life imprisonment or further reduced if no additional crimes are committed during the reprieve period. The court, however, ruled that Liu would serve life in prison without the possibility of commutation or parole.

Public information shows that Liu, born in Jiangxi province in 1967, joined the Communist Party

of China in May 1995.

He was promoted to mayor of Guiyang in January 2014, later serving as Party secretary of Qianxian prefecture in August 2017.

By April 2022, he had been appointed deputy secretary of the Commission for Political and Legal Affairs of the Communist Party of China Guizhou Provincial Committee, a position he held until the investigation against him began in October of the same year.

Liu Boqian contributed to this story.

CHINA

Study in darkness shedding light on cosmos

Underground neutrino research facility aims to help solve cutting-edge physics problems

By YAN DONGJIE

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A 20,000-metric-ton sphere, filled with liquid and submerged in a 12-story-tall tank 700 meters below the ground in South China, is being used by scientists to study the mysteries of the universe and how our world first came into being.

The Jiangmen Underground Neutrino Observatory, known as JUNO for short, is located in Jiangmen, Guangdong province, and is tasked with detecting neutrinos, one of the fundamental particles that make up the universe and that are key to scientists understanding it.

Since they were first detected in 1956, neutrinos have been the most challenging particles to study, and significant breakthroughs in neutrino research have been associated with four Nobel Prizes in Physics.

As a neutral elementary particle, neutrinos hardly interact with other matter, making their detection extremely difficult, earning them the nickname "ghost particles".

Neutrinos are everywhere, however, with billions passing through our bodies every second. They move super fast, too, as scientists predict that even a massive entity like Earth can be traversed by neutrinos in just 0.04 seconds.

During the Big Bang, countless neutrinos were generated within the first second, carrying information about the universe earlier than light, scientists say.

"The primary scientific goal of JUNO is to measure the neutrino mass hierarchy and oscillation parameters, which will play a crucial role in testing supernova explosion mechanisms, exploring the origins and evolution of the universe, and discovering new physical phenomena," said Wang Yifang, former director of the Institute of High Energy Physics at the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Wang said the birth of neutrinos is often related to extreme events in the universe such as the Big Bang, supernova explosions, neutron star mergers and black hole eruptions, with high-energy neutrinos mainly originating from collisions between cosmic rays and dust or gas.

Although neutrinos have existed



Above: Workers cover the bottom of the sink with waterproof fibers at the Jiangmen Underground Neutrino Observatory in Jiangmen, Guangdong province, on Dec 12, as they prepare to inject liquids into the sphere. **Below:** A photomultiplier tube at the top of the sphere of JUNO. It transforms faint light signals generated by scintillators in the sink into electrical signals for further study. PHOTOS BY JIN LIWANG / XINHUA

since the early universe, it wasn't until 1930 that scientists proposed the hypothesis of their existence. It took another 26 years for physicists to experiment with a nuclear reactor and detect the presence of neutrinos.

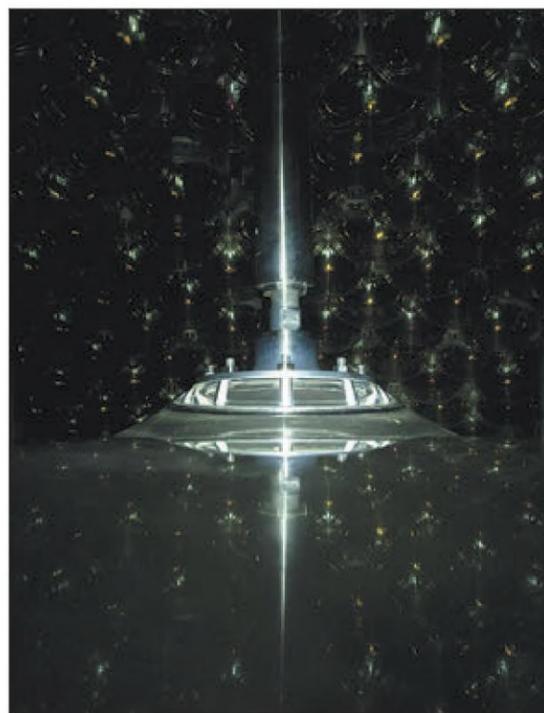
The plethora of neutrinos remains a mystery to this day. Whether they are massless or have mass directly impacts the evolution laws of the universe, scientists say.

In 2007, China began constructing the Daya Bay Reactor Neutrino Experiment. In 2012, the experiment discovered the third oscillation mode of neutrinos, praised by the international particle physics community as "opening the door to future neutrino physics research" and cementing China's important position in global neutrino research, Wang said.

Neutrino oscillation is a quantum mechanical phenomenon accompanying the generation of neutrinos and is a crucial basis for detecting neutrino mass.

In 2013, preparations began for JUNO, with full installation expected to be completed soon, data-taking to commence next year, and an anticipated operational life span of 30 years.

"The construction of the observ-



atory will bring about significant breakthroughs in neutrino research," Wang said.

The 35.4-meter acrylic sphere mentioned earlier is the crucial component of the core equipment of JUNO — the central detector, surrounded by a stainless steel structure and filled with 20,000 tons of liquid scintillator.

"The main component of the liquid scintillator is alkylbenzene, a raw material used in everyday detergents such as laundry powder and hand soap, posing no harm to humans," said Cao Jun, director of the Institute of High Energy Physics.

When a large number of neutrinos pass through the detector, they react with the liquid scintillator, emitting extremely faint light that is invisible to the naked eye but serves as an important parameter for measuring neutrinos, he explained.

The 45,000 "eyes" of the detector receive light signals, convert them into electrical signals, amplify them by a factor of 10 million, transmit them to a computer via an electronic system, and through data analysis, scientists can study the properties of neutrinos.

Cao explained that currently, the only other large-scale projects

with significant research capabilities in the global neutrino detection field are the Deep Underground Neutrino Experiment in the United States and the Hyper-Kamiokande experiment in Japan, which are under construction.

Over the past few decades, under the country's unified deployment of relevant departments, the layout of large scientific facilities in the country has gradually improved.

According to the CAS, large scientific facilities in China play a strategic role in achieving high-level technological self-reliance, driving the transformation and upgrading of the manufacturing industry, ensuring the security of industrial chains and supply chains, and promoting high-quality economic development.

Due to the research capabilities of the JUNO, more than 700 scientists and engineers from 74 research institutions in 17 countries and regions have participated in international cooperation.

"Our country's neutrino experiment has made new breakthroughs in design and experimental accuracy, overcoming various technological challenges," he said.

For instance, the team independently developed a new type of photomultiplier tubing, not only reducing costs but also enhancing the detection efficiency of high-intensity light.

"After nearly a decade of effort, the team finally obtained new sample tubes meeting the requirements, collaborated with manufacturers to achieve mass production, broke the international monopoly in this field, and obtained patent authorizations from the European Union, the US, Japan and others," Cao said.

The detection efficiency of domestically produced photomultiplier tubes currently stands at 30 percent, placing it at the forefront internationally, he added.

"Neutrino research belongs to fundamental research, helping us understand how the universe formed and evolved, what the laws governing our natural world are like, serving as the foundation for all possibilities. With these laws, we can gradually turn scientific discoveries into technologies, ultimately benefiting our lives," Cao said.

"In a few years, it may change the world, like Newton's discovery of universal gravitation, Faraday's discovery of electromagnetic induction, and Planck's discovery of quantum energy," he said.

Shi Yudie contributed to this story.

By YAN DONGJIE

During a business trip to Beijing, Tang Mengyue talks with his colleagues on the phone in Lijiang, Yunnan province, about how to address a sudden power outage at the satellite ground station.

As the head of the Lijiang Satellite Ground Station at the Chinese Academy of Sciences Aerospace Information Innovation Research Institute, Tang's primary responsibility is to ensure the equipment runs smoothly.

"The equipment is backed up by an uninterruptible power supply, so a power outage doesn't happen unless there is a short circuit, leakage or overload. However, after investigating over the past few days, we didn't find any of these issues," Tang said.

"So we suspected there might be a poor connection in a certain section of the wiring. Therefore, we decided to open the distribution box and indeed found a loose wire, resolving the issue," he added.

To ensure no electromagnetic interference in the vicinity, satellite data receiving stations are typically situated in remote areas. Since the establishment of the first ground station in Miyun district, Beijing, in 1986, the China Remote Sensing Satellite Ground Station has built a network of satellite receiving stations in Lijiang; Kashgar, West China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region; Sanya, South China's Hainan province; and Mohe, Northeast China's Heilongjiang province.

The satellite data receiving station network, composed of these five stations, boasts 38 large-diameter data

Satellite ground stations provide key link in stable data flow



A 12-meter dual-frequency antenna (left) and a 7.3-meter movable antenna (right) at Lijiang Satellite Ground Station of the Chinese Academy of Sciences Aerospace Information Innovation Research Institute greatly help the country receive stable satellite data transmission.

PHOTOS BY XINHUA

receiving antennas and over 10 high-speed optical fiber data transmission links, leading the world in scale and technical specifications, according to the Aerospace Information Research Institute under the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

In September, the Lijiang station, located at an altitude of 2,827 meters in Yulong Naxi autonomous county, was completed and put into operation, filling the gap in the real-time reception for satellites within 500 kilometers. As a result, China has achieved real-time reception of satellite data across all of its national territory and 70 percent of the land area in Asia.

"When a satellite passes over Chi-

na, the data it collects is received by the ground station and transmitted in real-time to the Beijing headquarters for distribution to relevant units or research departments, enabling them to access the data promptly," Tang explained.

Real-time data transmission holds significant importance. For instance, in the case of environmental disaster monitoring satellites, such as those that detect forest fires, earthquakes or oil spills, timely data allows relevant departments to make faster and more accurate assessments and decisions, allowing them to respond promptly and minimize the impact of disasters.

"These aspects may not be direct-

ly noticeable in our daily lives, but they are indispensable for the smooth functioning of society and our livelihoods," Tang said.

Equipped with remote sensing satellites carrying different payloads, these satellites can be used for various purposes such as resource exploration, urban planning, environmental monitoring, disaster mitigation and space exploration.

"Before 1986, scientists who needed to use remote sensing satellite data had to purchase it at a high cost from countries like the United States," Tang noted. "But now, China's satellite ground station receiving technology has full independent intellectual property rights."

At the Lijiang station, four researchers work in shifts. This newly operational receiving station with four receiving antennas undertakes the data reception tasks for 26 national satellites.

"Technically, the operation center in Beijing can monitor the Lijiang station in real-time. In case of errors or emergencies, Beijing can detect them promptly. This means we only need a few researchers stationed locally, which is the result of continuous development of ground stations over the years," Tang said.

Before coming to Lijiang, Tang was a technical staff member at the Miyun station in Beijing.

"The Miyun station's operations

are already quite mature. When I heard that building the Lijiang station required staff deployment, I volunteered eagerly. Because during the initial construction phase of a receiving station, there is more technical knowledge to be gained," Tang said.

Upon arriving in Lijiang, researchers started from scratch, selecting calibration points, conducting signal tests, and watching as the antennas were gradually erected. During the process, Tang and his colleagues lived in a village in Lijiang for over a year.

"I still remember during testing, we climbed to the opposite hill, manually transmitting signals to test various antenna parameters. Finally, witnessing the completion of the antennas, a significant project I was involved in from start to finish, was truly fulfilling," he said.

Today, the Lijiang station operates routinely, transmitting vast amounts of data to the Beijing headquarters daily. Tang and his team continue their daily maintenance of equipment to ensure the secure and reliable passage of this massive data flow.

"The discoveries and operational experiences in our daily work, each seemingly insignificant, accumulate and eventually lead to a qualitative change. This provides valuable insights for the construction of future satellite receiving stations," Tang said.

"This is the significant meaning I see in my daily work — experiences in operations feedback into engineering, facilitating the upgrade and iteration of major scientific research facilities, maintaining our advanced position internationally," he said.

CHINA



Editor's Note: Using a blend of words and visuals, this series explores unique communities and reveals the heart of China through food, architecture, craftsmanship, landscapes and traditions.

CHINESE STRINGS

The most common Chinese stringed instruments are the liuqin, yueqin, ruan, erhu, pipa and guzheng. They have a long history over thousands of years.



BEHIND THE ERHU

FIDDLE CAPITAL STRIKES CHORD

THE ERHU

Head
The head of the neck usually has a simple curve with a piece of bone or plastic at the end. It can have other more elaborate shapes such as a dragon's head.



Meicun crafts exquisite erhu instruments that resonate around the globe. **Tian Chi** and **Jorge Cortes** report from Wuxi, Jiangsu

HOW IT'S MADE

The experience and technical skills required are very high. The production process is manual, and every step is important.

Brushing the bar

Brushes are used for an important step called "centipede brushing". They are used to polish the erhu bar to achieve a smooth appearance and ensure the thickness is adequate.

Centipede brushing

Assembly

Embedding the neck in the soundboard involves polishing and constant testing until the precise fit is achieved.

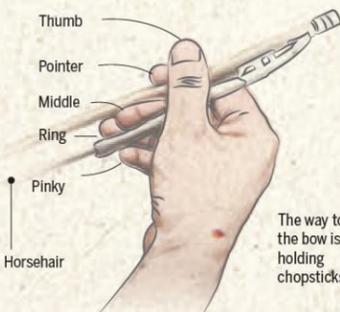
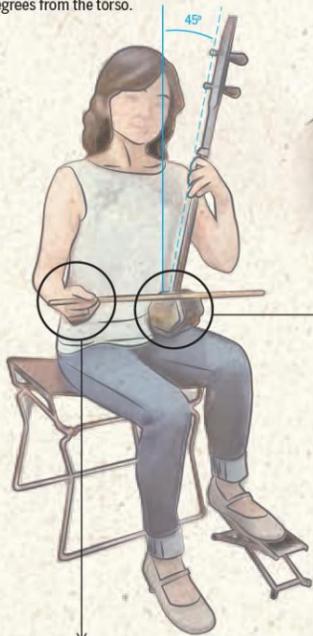
LAND OF THE ERHU

Wuxi, Jiangsu province, was recognized as "China's erhu capital" by the Chinese Musicians Association in 2011.



HOW TO PLAY THE ERHU

The erhu usually rests on the upper part of the left leg. The instrument should be about 45 degrees from the torso.



The way to grip the bow is like holding chopsticks

To touch the **outer string**, it's not necessary to press fingers against the bow hair



To touch the **inner string**, you must press middle and ring fingers against the bow hair



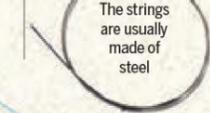
WOOD BODY

Red sandalwood and rosewood are preferred for the traditional Chinese erhu.



STRING

The strings are usually made of steel



The two-stringed erhu is an ancient upright fiddle that voices traditional Chinese sounds with rich emotions beyond time and space.

Meicun village in Wuxi, Jiangsu province, known as "China's erhu capital", established a folk music instrument factory and industry in 1965 with the aid of erhu masters.

The village has maintained the traditional method of hand-making middle- and high-end erhu, which involves more than 100 steps. The high-quality material and craft for its main components — including the handle, rest and resonator box — contribute to its popularity among erhu musicians for their stable and extraordinary sounds.

In September 2011, Meicun erhu craftsmanship was listed as the third

provincial-level cultural heritage, and the following month, the village was honored as the "cradle of Chinese erhu" by the Chinese Musicians Association.

Under the guidance of skilled craftsmen, the quality of the musical instrument produced in Meicun has continued to improve alongside the maturing industry. The complete industry chain integrates aspects of erhu production, exhibition, sales, training and performance, with annual output value of nearly 50 million yuan (\$6.85 million) and an export value of about 9 million yuan.

As a distinct intangible cultural heritage, Meicun erhu craftsmanship has been thriving with annual output steadily increasing. The erhu industrial park in Meicun has 20 production and supporting enterprises, boasting a vital industry base in China. Nearly 50,000

erhu of various types are produced in the park and then exported across the globe, accounting for a quarter of the middle- and high-end erhu market.

Guyueqinfang, the leading enterprise in Meicun, produces over 5,000 erhu every year for domestic and overseas markets such as Singapore and Japan.

Nowadays, the Meicun erhu is well-known as a collective brand, appearing at international instrument exhibitions in Beijing, Shanghai and other places. It also functions as a "cultural image ambassador" during exchange events, showcasing its unique charm to audiences in Germany, the United States, France, Cyprus, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom and other countries.

Xu Yan and Guo Yanqi contributed to this story.

Snakeskin

The resonator box is covered with python skin. Once the vibrations meet the snakeskin, it produces a distinct resonance and vibrato.



If the skin surface is too loose, the sound will be dull and powerless. The overall sound of the python skin will be dry, sharp, and bright, which will make the erhu unusable.

Elasticity



The elasticity of the python skin is particularly important. The tension on the surfaces must be even.



Skin alternatives

Due to the scarcity of python skin resources, professional institutes are researching alternatives, such as sheep skin, synthetic skin and other alternatives.

Sources: Xinwu District, "Erhu Introduction for beginners" Jiebing Chen Youtube Channel.

GRAPHIC BY JORGE CORTES AND TIAN CHI / CHINA DAILY

COMMENT

Editorials

TikTok comment offers glimmer of hope
transactional mindset will trump ideology

For his upcoming return to the White House, US president-elect Donald Trump has compiled a long and decisive to-do list, ranging from dramatic cost-cutting operations on bureaucratic institutions to immigration policy reform. But for those goals, and others, to be accomplished, and to truly advance US national interests, it would be wise for him to reflect on the past eight years.

Now that the dust has settled on the campaign trail promises, and real-world concerns have begun to factor in, Trump and his emerging Cabinet have time before his inauguration on Jan 20 to think through some of the outstanding challenges as well as divisive issues facing their country and how he can adjust his administration's policies in his second leap-year term in light of what has transpired since he last occupied the White House.

While many anticipate that he will follow through on what initiated during his first term in office, it would serve both his presidency and country better if he and his team took his inauguration on Jan 20 as a fresh starting point.

The successes and failures during his first presidency, as well as those of the incumbent Joe Biden administration, offer much food for thought if he is prepared to take nourishment from them, foregoing the misleading ideas presented by those around him, alien perspectives from an elite community, or lingering ideological fears rooted in Cold War dynamics.

To "Make America Great Again", Trump needs to jettison such malnourished thinking that has led to the country's sense of crisis amid the agencies of change beyond its control that are transforming the world.

In this vein, many in Beijing, and elsewhere, will concur with Chinese political scientist Yan Xuetong that Trump's pragmatism, which many regard as "transactional", may be conducive to getting rid of the ideological fetters that have plagued US-China policy and so help get bilateral relations back onto the real world track so they can get along.

As one of Trump's predecessors in office observed: The most important single ingredient in the formula of success is knowing how to get along with people. That applies to countries when it comes to success in international relations.

China has made it clear that it wants to get along with the US. Beijing has even provided a helpful etiquette guide so the administration can avoid any faux pas on such sensitivities as the Taiwan question.

If the trade war with China, which the first Trump administration launched in 2018, was driven primarily by concerns about trade "imbalances", its extension and escalation under the Biden government has largely been an outcome of a perceived ideological rivalry stoked by those framing China's development as a "national security threat". If trade issues are generally negotiable, subjects in the latter category seldom allow for compromise. That is why so many topics easily manageable in the past now seem anything but.

In his Sunday speech in Phoenix, Arizona, Trump again displayed a turn of mind that provides a glimmer of hope that he may by design or good fortune break the ideological fetters on Washington. Claiming that he had received billions of views on TikTok during his presidential campaign, Trump told his audience he was in favor of the social media platform continuing to operate in the US.

To really usher in the "golden age of America" Trump promised to his audience, the incoming administration has to seriously rethink the self-constraining obsession with ideological confrontation with China, and base US-China policy on reality, rather than Cold War-style hysteria.

This is not to say that Trump's predilection for tariffs as a tool of leverage is an appealing, or even workable, solution to get China-US relations out of their present quagmire. But at least it makes better sense to look at business as business.

At the end of the day, the two countries have to find solid ground on which to rebuild relations, and trust.

It had been said that there is a tide in the affairs of men, which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune; but if missed, for whatever reason, all that can be expected is misery.

For the world, it feels like one of those times.

Ottawa's human rights concerns hypocritical

China announced it was imposing sanctions on two Canadian organizations — the so-called Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project and Canada-Tibet Committee — as well as 20 personnel from these organizations on Saturday in accordance with the Anti-Foreign Sanctions Law for their secessionist moves related to the country's Xinjiang Uyghur and Xizang autonomous regions.

The move comes after the Justin Trudeau government announced sanctions on eight former or current senior Chinese officials involved in what it alleged were "grave human rights violations" in Xinjiang and Xizang.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning stated on Monday that the sanctions had been imposed in order to safeguard the nation's sovereignty, security, and development interests, as well as to protect the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese citizens and organizations.

Instead of providing any evidence to back up its claims, the Dec 10 readout of the Canadian government's announcement of the sanctions only serves to prove how deep-rooted Ottawa's hypocrisy and bias are when it comes to "human rights issues" related to China.

Instead of offering solid support for the sanctions, the Trudeau government simply hyped up "reports" about "forced labor camps" in Xinjiang and "endured human rights violations" in Xizang.

The Xinjiang and Xizang human rights smears are nothing but an ugly invention of some China hawks, who, to add credibility to their lies, collude with a handful of self-professed "victims", "survivors" and "witnesses" of "China's human rights violations", who are actually paid by the United States for their ready-made "testimony", as well as researchers, experts and reporters on Washington's payroll for that purpose.

The defamation flies in the face of the truth on the ground: Both Xinjiang and Xizang have experienced their fastest socioeconomic development in history in recent years thanks to the stability, solidarity and prosperity they have enjoyed with the full support of the central authorities.

Interestingly, on the same day that Canada announced the sanctions, US ambassador to China Nicholas Burns expressed the US "deep concern" about China's "failure to live up to its international commitments to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms" in Xinjiang, Xizang, and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

That Canada chose to announce its let-me-do-the-dirty-work sanctions that day largely stems from the Trudeau government's desperate desire to curry favor with Washington in fear of the incoming US administration making good on its tariff threats.

If the Trudeau government had any genuine concerns about human rights violations, it should be condemning the US' unwarranted sanctions on Xinjiang and Hong Kong that have affected local people's livelihoods and economy.

The secessionist institutions related to Xinjiang, Xizang and Hong Kong that the US and Canada have funded, whether respectively or collectively, have proved to be the instigators of the chaos and social turmoil that have plagued these regions in the past few years.

China's sanctions on these Canadian institutions and individuals are justified and necessary to protect its core interest and territorial and sovereign integrity, while the Canadian sanctions on the Chinese individuals constitute grave violations of China's internal affairs.

Weaponizing human rights issues for geopolitical purposes is fundamentally against the principles of the global human rights cause. That the Trudeau government is resorting to it to appease the incoming US administration is another sign of its weakness.

As the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman said, Canada should stop interfering in China's internal affairs in any way and cease its political manipulation of human rights issues.

Cai Meng



Opinion Line

EU's economic recovery hinges largely on new drivers of growth

The recovery of the eurozone economy has been weaker than expected, with manufacturing still shrinking, growth in services decelerating, and businesses holding back investment spending in the face of weak demand and a highly uncertain outlook.

The International Monetary Fund pointed out in its European economic outlook in October that technology productivity in Europe has almost stagnated since 2005, while that in the United States has increased by almost 40 percent, a major factor behind the lack of business dynamism in Europe. Some analysts believe that the three key external conditions that have long supported Europe's prosperity — open markets, cheap energy and a stable geopolitical environment — no longer exist, and Europe must turn to large-scale

investment and policy innovation to maintain its long-term competitiveness.

Faced with the reality of a growing recession, decision-making institutions in the European Union have taken a number of internal and external measures to try to enhance the bloc's overall competitiveness. The European Central Bank has cut interest rates multiple times this year, gradually lowering borrowing costs for companies and households, in an effort to stimulate market activity. The ECB is expected to further reduce borrowing costs in 2025.

The EU also plans to invest heavily every year in technological innovation, green energy and digital transformation to ensure that Europe has a place in global competition. The bloc is also devoted to streamlining

regulations and eliminating overlaps and differences across its whole legislative chain to improve its lengthy and inefficient decision-making mechanism.

However, lingering geopolitical risks, fragile energy supply security, and the rising sovereign debt risks in eurozone countries still threaten the EU's stability. In addition to natural disasters, the rise of protectionism around the world will put particular pressure on the EU's export-oriented economy. For example, potential new tariffs by the new US administration will pose multiple challenges for European exporters and exacerbate volatility in EU business and consumer confidence. To sustain its recovery, the EU economy badly needs new drivers of growth.

— ECONOMIC DAILY

Patience until low-altitude economy takes off

The year 2024 is being hailed as the inaugural year of China's low-altitude economy, as the concept appeared in this year's Government Work Report as a new growth engine, while temporary regulation on flights of unmanned aerial vehicles came into effect in January.

It is predicted that the market size of the national low-altitude economy will reach 1.5 trillion yuan (\$205.5 billion) next year. The success of the low-altitude economy cannot be delinked from China's new energy

vehicle and aviation industry chains.

However, the low-altitude economy is not an industry that can quickly show returns from investment. In the early stages of development, heavy investment is required for research and development, materials, production, certification, and other aspects. For example, the electric vertical take-off and landing vehicle is a hot concept that's attracting investment, but the enterprise that manufactures them needs to obtain the type, production and air-

worthiness certificates issued by the civil aviation administration, and apply for flying routes. It takes time, complicated procedures and investment in the whole chain.

A latest quarterly report shows that more than half of listed companies in the low-altitude economy have not registered profitable growth yet. The enterprises must focus on technological innovation and persist until the low-altitude economy yields large-scale returns.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Opportunity knocks for UK to reset relations

Most of the pledges the United Kingdom's Labour Party made in its manifesto before its victory in the general election in July, including enhancing the National Health Service, social care, education and child care pensions, depend on a resilient economy.

However, the British economy grew just 0.1 percent in the third quarter compared to the previous quarter. That's below the 0.2 percent growth expected by economists and follows an expansion of 0.5 percent in the second quarter of the year. And the UK economy shrank for the second month in a row in October as concerns about the Budget continued to weigh on confidence. Official figures showed a 0.1 percent drop, despite expectations that the economy would return to growth after a fall in September. Yet prices in the UK went up by 2.6 percent in the 12 months to November, the highest level for eight months.

That has apparently served to end Labour's honeymoon period earlier than expected, especially after a wave of far-right, anti-immigration protests and riots occurred in England and Northern Ireland from July 30 to Aug 4. The aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the post-Brexit repercussions, and the impacts of the volatile world situation have all weighed heavily on the UK's economy, prompting the Keir Starmer government to reach

out to the world's second-largest economy, laying aside the UK's concerns about the country in other fields.

In 2022, then prime minister Rishi Sunak, the Conservative leader, declared the end of a "golden era" of relations with China. Despite this, trade and other economic engagement between the UK and China are still sizable. China bought £32 billion (\$40 billion) worth of UK goods in the year to the end of June, UK government data show. Chinese inward foreign direct investment stocks in the UK are worth £4.3 billion.

Although the UK is largely exempted from the European Union's close following of the Joe Biden administration's call for de-risking against China, bilateral relations suffered substantially as a result of the Sunak government's one-sided pro-US policy.

That explains the haste with which the Starmer government has tried to repair ties with China. After UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy's visit to Beijing in October and Starmer's in-person meeting with the top Chinese leader on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro last month, during which Starmer pledged to be "a predictable and pragmatic partner", Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves will reportedly visit China next month, leading a large delegation, which looks set to add meat to the bones in that regard.

According to multiple media reports, the two sides are expected to reinstall the China-UK Economic and Financial Dialogue that has been suspended for more than five years, and hold a financial services meeting attended by UK and Chinese companies.

Previously, such talks resulted in the London-Shanghai stock connect scheme, the UK joining the Beijing-based Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and joint investment in green technologies, including the UK's Hinkley Point C nuclear power plant.

Reeves said after the Labour Party's election victory: "We are a small open trading economy and we benefit from those trade links with countries around the world, both for exports and imports, but also for foreign direct investment ... We benefit from those trade links around the world, including with China."

If the desired results from Reeves's visit materialize, which is highly likely given the Chinese side's readiness to open up to developed economies, her visit will play an important role in putting the otherwise sound Sino-UK ties back on the right track of development. The two countries have broad space for mutually beneficial cooperation in trade and investment, clean energy, financial services, medical care and people's livelihoods.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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VIEWS

Nii Quay-Kumah

Smallholders have big role to play

Smallholder farmers are the bedrock of rural economies, be it in China or globally. Operating on limited land and resources, their combined contributions to food security, economic growth, and environmental sustainability are significant. Smallholder farms account for over 90 percent of agricultural production in China, while providing employment to hundreds of millions of rural workers. Their success is pivotal to improving local livelihoods and achieving broader national objectives such as rural revitalization and food sovereignty.

In 2024, China made significant strides in advancing rural revitalization. Efforts to modernize agriculture, enhance rural infrastructure and improve farmers' livelihoods have helped reduce the urban-rural divide and bolster food security. These transformations include the integration of innovative technologies, the expansion of rural industries and increased market access for smallholder farmers. Despite the progress that has been made, however, some challenges persist. For instance, climate change and natural disasters pose significant risks to China's food systems. The growing frequency of extreme weather events — such as droughts, floods, and heatwaves — continues to threaten agricultural productivity and rural incomes, highlighting the urgent need for stronger climate resilience measures and targeted investments to safeguard rural communities.

It is also important to note that intensive agricultural production has had a negative impact on natural resources and environmental management. As smallholders are included into agricultural value chains through the cooperative model, there is need to better harness institutional and technical innovations for the desired green transition.

The empowerment of smallholders is central to these transformations. When equipped with the right tools and opportunities, smallholders drive economic activity, ensure the judicious use of natural resources and ensure food security for growing populations. By placing smallholders at the center of its rural development agenda, China is demonstrating how inclusive growth can address systemic challenges while creating sustainable and resilient rural economies. These efforts underscore the pivotal role smallholders play in bridging the gap between innovation and grassroots transformation.

Over the past four decades, the partnership between the International Fund for Agricultural Development and China has shown what can be achieved when resources, innovation, and shared expertise come together. IFAD-supported initiatives in China's rural areas have empowered smallholders, delivering higher incomes,

stronger rural communities, and a more resilient agricultural sector. China's sustained commitment to uplift its rural areas combined with the IFAD's global experience and technical know-how provides a blueprint for success that can inspire other nations.

This enduring partnership will not stop here; it will continue to deepen and expand in the years to come. The newly approved Country Strategic Opportunities Programme for 2025-2030 marks the next chapter in this collaboration. Developed in close partnership with the government of China and in consultation with key in-country development partners, the COSOP is aligned to the government's development agenda and outlines strategic pathways to unlock the untapped potential of rural areas to sustain the gains of eradicating extreme poverty in the country. It focuses on enhancing rural livelihoods, advancing climate-resilient agriculture and strengthening rural institutions and systems. Through these targeted investments, the IFAD and China are showcasing a replicable and scalable model for sustainable rural development that has global significance.

The foundation of rural revitalization rests on fostering inclusive growth and improving livelihoods. Indeed, a key pillar of the strategy is to achieve fully rejuvenated rural areas with well-off farmers and strong agricultural sectors through policies that encourage small-scale farmers to adopt modern farming and agricultural practices. Raising smallholder incomes is a crucial aspect of this transformation because only by raising incomes, creating jobs and strengthening value chains can rural communities prosper. For example, in Yunnan and Hunan provinces, IFAD-supported projects have empowered rural cooperatives to help farmers achieve economies of scale, access better markets, and secure fair prices for their produce.

Simultaneously, climate-smart approaches — including sustainable farming techniques, climate-resilient infrastructure and drought-tolerant crops — are enabling farmers to adapt to the growing risks posed by climate change. These efforts enhance resilience and support long-term environmental sustainability.

The new program will also place greater emphasis on South-South and Triangular Cooperation as a means to accel-

erate progress in rural transformation and the eradication of poverty globally. By facilitating the exchange of expertise, technologies and innovations among countries of the Global South, the IFAD and China are fostering partnerships that deliver shared solutions to common challenges.

China's achievements in rural revitalization and poverty reduction offer valuable insights for replication. By placing smallholder farmers at the center of its development agenda, China demonstrates that economic growth and social equity can be advanced in tandem. Investing in rural areas does more than lift local livelihoods — it strengthens food security, drives climate action and fosters economic stability at both the national and global levels.

Rural revitalization is not merely a national priority in China; it makes a huge

contribution to the global rural transformation dynamics. By investing in smallholder farmers, we are laying the foundation for a more equitable, resilient and prosperous world. The IFAD-China partnership exemplifies what can be accomplished through sustained collaboration, innovation, and investment. Together, we can demonstrate that rural areas are vibrant engines of opportunity, benefiting farmers, economies, and societies at large. Now is the time to act — to empower smallholders, transform rural communities and build a future where no one is left behind.

The author is IFAD's representative in China and head of Asia and the Pacific Regional Centre for South-South and Triangular Cooperation.

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



Kang Bing

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East to west industry shift boon for nation

There has been significant online discourse surrounding the central government's decision to relocate numerous industries from the eastern coastal regions to the central and western parts of the country. Most have given a thumbs-up to the decision, though some have been skeptical, doubting the decision can be fully implemented.

Recently in a document to boost high-quality employment, the central authorities revealed their intention to facilitate the transfer of funds, technologies, and labor-intensive industries from the more developed eastern regions of the country to the underdeveloped western areas. This guidance is widely perceived as being strategically significant, given the existing economic imbalance within the nation, rising labor costs along the coast, and the global geopolitical uncertainties.

This forthcoming shift would be the third instance of a government-driven east-to-west industry transfer in the past century.

The two previous transitions were prompted by wartime circumstances or the fear of imminent conflict. The first occurred in the 1930s and 1940s when Japan invaded and occupied the eastern and central regions of China. The second shift took place during the 1960s and 1970s, driven by concerns of potential attacks from the north and the east. During this period, China relocated many key industries, particularly military-related ones, to regions about 2,000 kilometers away from the coast or the northern border.

This relocation will inject substantial funds, advanced technologies, and millions of job opportunities into the expansive western territories.

Nevertheless, I believe that this time the central government's initiative to incentivize industries to transition to the underdeveloped western regions primarily aims to achieve more balanced national economic development between the eastern and western parts of the country, ultimately enhancing the quality of life for the entire population.

The eastern coastal areas have historically enjoyed economic advantages due to their accessible harbors and favorable conditions for foreign investments, particularly since the initiation of China's reform and opening-up policies over four decades ago. Despite less than 40 percent of the population residing on about 40 percent of the country's landmass, the eastern region has consistently contributed over 50 percent of the national GDP over the past three decades.

Escalating labor and raw material costs, sourced predominantly from the resource-rich western regions, have prompted labor-intensive enterprises in the east to proactively shift their production to western China or other nations to reduce expenses in recent years. Labor costs in western areas typically amount to less than two-thirds of those in the east, with even lower costs prevalent in various Asian and African countries.

The ongoing government-led industry transfer is poised to benefit factory owners, ensuring their legal interests will be better protected. This relocation will inject substantial funds, advanced technologies, and millions of job opportunities into the expansive western territories. If the plan is effectively implemented, it should alleviate challenges faced by certain eastern enterprises grappling with labor shortages and high production costs, while also catalyzing economic growth in the under-invested western regions.

In contrast to the State-directed factory relocations of the past, which were facilitated by the State-owned enterprises, the forthcoming transfer will rely heavily on preferential policies to encourage private enterprises and publicly traded companies to voluntarily shift operations westward.

While specific guiding policies are yet to be disclosed, I anticipate they will encompass preferential measures related to taxation, administrative fees, real estate pricing, streamlined registration processes, talent acquisition, and competitive labor costs.

I interpret this transfer as a pivotal stride in China's deepening reform and opening-up endeavors, with the potential to yield enduring benefits for the nation at large.



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

Chen Siyang

China, CEE need to tap more potential in 2025

China proposed the high-quality Belt and Road Initiative for tangible win-win cooperation between participants and to face challenges together at a time when the world was undergoing drastic changes and facing major challenges. Central and Eastern European countries, lying between Asia and Europe, are important participants in this initiative.

The CEE countries have set models of hard connectivity of infrastructure, soft connectivity of institutions and rules, and people-to-people bonds in the BRI, and act as a lever of stability in China-Europe relations.

An important factor in China-CEE cooperation is to recognize the differences between the two sides. Differences exist among countries in Eastern and Western Europe, in old and new Europe, as well as among the CEE countries.

At the 10th high-level symposium of Think Tanks of China and CEE countries in Beijing on Nov 29, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's political director Balazs Orban said that the "16 plus 1" cooperation framework between China and CEE countries has changed into "7 plus 7 plus 1", with some countries viewing deepening of relations with China as a risk and others seeing in it opportunities.

European Union countries, including CEE countries, have varied economic goals and geopolitical positions because of which they hold different attitudes toward China. For instance, Poland supports the tariffs that the European Union has imposed on Chinese electric vehicles in order to safeguard its traditional auto industry and auto part producers, while

Hungary and Serbia see deeper cooperation with China on EVs as beneficial for their countries and clean energy transition.

Additionally, CEE countries that rely heavily on the US for security, are limiting cooperation with China in high-tech, infrastructure and cultural exchanges. Understanding the internal complexity will help China better cooperate with CEE countries.

China and CEE countries can avoid and address misunderstandings through active dialogue and deepened mutual understanding.

European countries' perception of China has been increasingly influenced by the US-led West. When media outlets in CEE countries were privatized, they received foreign capital, in which the US had a dominant role. Therefore, people in CEE countries are fed misinformation through media reports and stereotyped opinion pieces that portray China negatively. Besides, the West's Eurocentric and civilization conflict theory hinder people from understanding or communicating with China.

The Global Civilization Initiative that China has proposed highlights respect for diverse civilizations and promotes cultural exchanges. Face-to-face dialogue and more mutual understanding can help China and CEE countries take the first step to dispel misconceptions.

Although the two sides have seen significant hard connectivity of infrastructure such as the Hungary-Serbia railway and the Peljesac Bridge in Croatia, differences in standards and market access with the EU, and the impacts of the Rus-

sia-Ukraine conflict have caused hindrances for hard connectivity cooperation in the region.

In the future, soft connectivity of institutions and rules, and people-to-people bonds may become a major driver of China-CEE cooperation based on growing consensus on economic cooperation, cultural exchanges and multilateralism.

To enhance soft connectivity, China and CEE countries need to find solutions to cope with political impacts and seek common interests.

The CEE countries need a more consistent China policy as the EU defines China as a "partner, competitor, and systemic rival". It is difficult to make a partner a competitor and rival at the same time. To promote cooperation, China should cooperate with CEE countries in multilateral frameworks, and the CEE countries should treat China as a partner rather than a rival.

Incoming US president-elect Donald Trump is likely to pull the US out of multilateral mechanisms, particularly climate forums. However, addressing climate change is a global concern. If the US withdraws from global climate governance, China and the CEE countries can continue cooperation and find new common ground.

The high tariff policies Trump has threatened — 60 percent on Chinese imports and 10-20 percent on imports from the EU — will lead to global economic slowdown and inflation irrespective of whether or not they solve the US' economic problems.

Seeking investment and project cooperation is important for CEE countries, especially when many of them are facing

similar energy crises and high inflation while their economic development lags behind that of Western European countries. Since China has the willingness to expand openness and international cooperation, strengthening economic ties between China and CEE countries can help counter economic downturns.

Sustainable people-to-people exchanges and intellectual dialogue can help lay a solid foundation for cooperation. The year 2024 marks the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the CEE countries, Bulgaria, Romania, and Albania. The long-term relationship highlights the potential for people-to-people cooperation.

There have been many instances of communication and exchanges between Chinese and European civilizations in history, which play a role in shaping China-Europe relations today. The emphasis on virtues that great philosophers on both sides, such as Confucius and Aristotle, put forward still influence contemporary society. The call for peace, mutual learning, coexistence, and equal dialogue are still necessary for today's world.

Enhancing mutual understanding and trust should be the cornerstone of China-CEE cooperation. The two sides can strengthen friendship through improving tourism, educational cooperation, think tank dialogue, and sports exchanges.

The author is a research fellow at the Institute of European Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

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

WORLD IN FOCUS



Aerial views of Rahmatullah mosque in Lhoknga of Indonesia's Aceh Province, on Jan 14, 2005, following the Dec 26, 2004 tsunami, and on Nov 27 two decades later amid greenery. AFP



Above: A motorist looks at boats on a street in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, on Jan 8, 2005, and a view of the same street on Nov 25. AFP

Left: Views of a tsunami-hit beach in Chennai, India, on Dec 26, 2004, and on Nov 9 with residents in the area. AFP

BEING PREPARED

Indonesia better able to deal with disasters 20 years after devastating tsunami

When Ahmadi, a resident of the Indonesian island of Simeulue, sings a lullaby to his 1-year-old grandson, the song is not one about fairies and angels but rather about the precautions to take for a potential tsunami. The lyrics include references to an earthquake, a massive wave, and land submerged under water. "When there is an earthquake and a tsunami, you are in panic, you cannot be expected to think. This is why the emergency drill must be ingrained and be second nature. This has to start from an early age," Ahmadi said as quoted by UN News. Tsunami-hit nations began commemorating the victims, about

220,000 people, who perished on Dec 26, 2004, after a 9.3-magnitude earthquake off Indonesia's western tip generated a series of massive waves that devastated coastlines from Indonesia and Thailand to Sri Lanka and Somalia. Indonesia is one of the most disaster-prone areas. The archipelago nation lies on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", where tectonic plates collide and many of the world's volcanic eruptions and earthquakes occur. UNESCO experts say the world is much safer today from the threat of tsunamis due to early warning systems that were lacking in 2004. But the agency has also warned coastal communities to stay alert. "While we have made significant

strides, the nature of this hazard requires us to remain vigilant," said Vidar Helgesen, executive secretary of UNESCO's intergovernmental oceanographic commission. **Knowing the drill** Hundreds of Indonesians fled for higher ground in November as they ran through disaster drills in the region worst hit by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami ahead of its 20th anniversary. Children ran down the stairs in a rush for safety from the second floor of a school near Aceh's provincial capital Banda Aceh, where more than 60,000 were killed in the tsunami. As school bells rang, dozens of

children ran to the road covering their heads, following marked escape routes as volunteers shouted "evacuate". "With exercises, we can prevent, rather than cure," said 34-year-old participant and local village official Rizky Firmansyah. "It's better like that I think, because it's better for us to anticipate than to have things that we don't want to happen." Indonesia's meteorology, climatology and geophysics agency also took part in the exercises meant to test operating procedures, communications and evacuation preparations. AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



Above: Aerial views of tsunami-hit buildings at Koh Phi Phi, Thailand, on Dec 28, 2004, and on Nov 22 two decades after the disaster. AFP

Left: A resident walks past a tsunami-hit railway track in Seenigama, Sri Lanka, on Dec 29, 2004; boys walk in the same area on Dec 1. AFP



Tsunami survivors walk along a road amid debris in Aceh, Indonesia, on Jan 9, 2005; the same location on Nov 15. AFP



People walk past cleanup efforts on a street in tsunami-hit Phuket, Thailand, on Dec 28, 2004; the same street on Nov 18. AFP

WORLD

Israel vows response to Houthis

Strikes escalate tensions as Gaza hospital forced to close after shelling

By MIKE GU in Hong Kong
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Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday that Israel would "act with force" against the Houthis in Yemen and called on Israelis to be steadfast.

"Just as we acted with force against Iran's (other) allies, we will act against the Houthis," Netanyahu said in a video statement, a day after a missile fired from Yemen fell in the Tel Aviv area, causing mild injuries to a number of people.

The Houthi attack followed a series of Israeli airstrikes on Thursday, which targeted Yemen's capital Sanaa as well as the ports of Hodeidah, As-Salif and Ras Issa. The strikes, which the Israeli military said were aimed at Houthi infrastructure, killed at least nine people.

Netanyahu, strengthened at home by the Israeli military's campaign against Hezbollah forces in southern Lebanon and by its destruction of most of the Syrian army's strategic weapons, said Israel would act with the United States.

The Houthis have launched repeated attacks on international shipping in waters near Yemen since November last year in support of Palestinians over Israel's military campaign in Gaza.

On Sunday, Israel ordered the closure and evacuation of one of the last hospitals still partly functioning in a besieged area on the northern edge of the Gaza Strip, forcing medics to search for a way to take hundreds of patients and staff members to safety.

The head of the Kamal Adwan Hospital in Beit Lahija, Husam Abu Safiya, told Reuters via text message that obeying the order to shut down was "next to impossible" because there were not enough ambulances to get the patients out.

"We currently have nearly 400 civilians inside the hospital, including babies in the neonatal unit, whose lives depend on oxygen and



People wait in line outside a reconciliation center in Damascus, Syria, on Sunday. Such centers have opened across the country, providing former soldiers and police officers of the Bashar al-Assad government a chance to obtain new identification and sever ties with it. CHRIS MCGRATH VIA GETTY IMAGES

incubators. We cannot evacuate these patients safely without assistance, equipment and time," said Abu Safiya.

"We are sending this message under heavy bombardment and direct targeting of the fuel tanks, which if hit will cause a large explosion and mass casualties of the civilians inside."

Meanwhile, Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei said on Sunday that the country neither has nor needs any proxy in the Middle East.

"Some constantly say that the Islamic Republic (of Iran) has lost its proxy forces in the region. This is yet another incorrect statement. The Islamic Republic does not have proxy forces," Khamenei said at a meeting in Teheran.

Resistance forces in the region have been fighting for their own beliefs and faith, not on behalf of Iran, he said.

"If one day we decide to take action, we do not need proxy forces," he said, highlighting the country's capability of acting independently if necessary.

Regarding the recent develop-

ments in Syria, Khamenei said Syria was "thrown into chaos" by groups backed by "(certain) foreign governments", exploiting Syria's "internal weaknesses".

He denounced Israeli occupation in Syrian territories, saying he expects resistance from "zealous and brave Syrian youths" against Israeli advances.

A militant alliance led by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group waged a major military operation from northern Syria on Nov 27. It swept southward, captured the capital Damascus and overthrew former president Bashar al-Assad's government within 12 days.

Diplomacy in Syria

In Damascus, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham commander Ahmed al-Sharaa and visiting Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan held talks on Sunday, during which both sides vowed to strengthen bilateral relations.

Speaking at a joint news conference, Fidan expressed optimism for a "brighter future" for Syria and promised Turkey's support in

rebuilding Syria's infrastructure, restructuring its institutions and returning displaced Syrians.

"Terrorist organizations have no place in Syria's future," he said, taking aim at the Kurdistan Workers' Party and its alleged affiliates in Syria, a party designated as a terrorist organization by Turkey.

He urged Israel to stop its military actions in Syria and respect the country's sovereignty and called for an end to international sanctions against Syria.

Al-Sharaa called Turkey "a friend of the Syrian people", saying both sides aim to build "strategic relations befitting the future of the region".

"It's unacceptable for any group in Syria to possess weapons," he said, stressing the need to disarm all factions across Syria.

Also on Sunday, a Saudi Arabian delegation led by a royal court adviser met with al-Sharaa at the presidential palace in Damascus, according to Al-Arabiya TV.

Xinhua and agencies contributed to this story.

Editor's note: China Daily presents the series Friends Afar to tell the stories of people-to-people exchanges between China and other countries. Through the vivid narration of the people in the stories, readers can get a better understanding of a country that is boosting openness.

FRIENDS AFAR

Thai scientist's heartfelt homecoming in Yunnan

By YANG WANLI in Chiang Mai, Thailand
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For Terd Disayathanoowat, a 39-year-old researcher from Chiang Mai Province in northern Thailand, Yunnan is the one place in China that makes him feel "at home". It is also the Chinese province bordering three Southeast Asian countries — Laos, Vietnam and Myanmar.

An associate professor specializing in microbial ecology and bee science at Chiang Mai University, Terd first visited Southwest China's Yunnan in 2018 through a program for talented young scientists. He developed a deep affection for the province during his yearlong stay, calling the experience "like returning home".

"My great-grandfather was born in Yunnan and he migrated to Thailand for his business a century ago and eventually decided to live here. I have felt a deep connection with China since my childhood," he said.

"Like many Chinese parents, my father believes in 'no pain no gain'. He was always strict with me. Without his guidance, I would not have been a university scholar," said Terd, adding that his father continues to follow news about China.

Terd had never been to China until a study trip to Beijing 10 years ago. However, it was not until he visited Yunnan that he truly felt at home as the province shares much in common with Chiang Mai.

From Yunnan's spicy cuisine and ethnic diversity to its rich biodiversity, seasonal weather and even the language, everything felt familiar to him.

"In southern Yunnan, the local dialect sounds nearly 80 percent like Thai. People from both Yunnan and Chiang Mai love dry food, meat and vegetables in particular. In addition, we both enjoy a relaxing life," Terd said.

"We even look like each other. When I was in Yunnan, many local people talked to me in dialects and they believed I was from one of the province's ethnic groups," he recalled with a laugh.

"All in all, I found it easy to blend into Yunnan's society as a Thai."

Strong connection

Having studied bees for years, Terd said his strong connection with Yunnan began through his Chinese friend Guo Jun, an associate professor at the Faculty of Life Science and Technology at Kunming University of Science and Technology. Guo also studies bees and agriculture.

The two met in Beijing and it was Guo who introduced Terd to the talented young scientist program.

"I never felt like a foreigner in Yunnan, thanks not only to Guo's hospitality but also to the many people I met there," Terd said.

"The locals are not only culturally rich but also friendly and open-minded. The friendships I made in Yunnan have endured, and we still keep in touch and visit each other regularly.

"I've been to other countries, such as the United Kingdom, Japan and Germany. I think Chinese people are the most easygoing."

In Yunnan, Terd learned a great deal about China. In his research field, Terd gained insights into the

latest technologies and trends in the bee industry, which inspired him to further develop bee products in northern Thailand.

"I visited several bee product companies in China and their modern technologies and large-scale, diversified products were impressive," he said.

"This knowledge will help us guide local farmers to improve their skills and enhance the quality of bee products."

Because of Thailand's smaller market and production volume, the country should find its own path, focusing on features such as organic products or developing bee farm tourism, he added.

Tea culture

Thanks to his experiences in China, Terd learned Mandarin and developed a deep interest in calligraphy and Chinese tea culture. After returning to Thailand in 2019, he set up a tea room in his house as a tribute to his time in China. Even at his university office, he keeps a small tea set for his daily tea time.

"Both Thais and Chinese love tea," Terd said.

"Similar to the well-known black tea and Pu'er in Yunnan, northern Thailand also has its unique local varieties.

"Currently, I'm working with my friend in Chiang Mai to produce a unique Thai tea fermented through a special process, aiming to establish the first Thai fermentative tea brand."

Since his return, Terd has revisited Yunnan several times. In addition to the provincial capital Kunming, he has explored areas such as the Dali Bai autonomous prefecture, which is famous for its natural landscapes. It is also the workplace of one of his close Chinese friends.

"Every time I felt homesick during my year in Kunming, I would take a bullet train to Dali. The railway construction in China is unbelievable. Dali is a fantastic place where people can refresh their souls with tea or coffee anywhere, anytime. Such a lifestyle is quite similar to my hometown Chiang Mai," he said.

Like Terd, about 200 Thai students study at Kunming University of Science and Technology each year. Similar education programs are conducted in many other colleges and universities in Yunnan and other provinces across China.

Official statistics showed that over the past decade, more than 20,000 Chinese students have taken study tours to Thailand annually. At Chiang Mai University's Department of Biology, where Terd now works, there are several Chinese students as well.

Since March, China and Thailand have permanently waived visa requirements, a move that Terd believes will strengthen the bond between the two countries, fostering more people-to-people exchanges.

"I'm planning to visit the old tea forests of Mount Jingmai in southern Yunnan and the province's border areas with Southeast Asia," he said.

"Chinese people always say that 'seeing is believing'. I want to explore China more and feel the cultural connection it shares with Thailand."

Panama reaffirms sovereignty over canal

PANAMA CITY — Panama's President Jose Raul Mulino said on Sunday that the Panama Canal will "continue to be in Panamanian hands", after US President-elect Donald Trump threatened to retake it.

Every square meter of the canal and its adjacent area belong to Panama and "will remain so", Mulino said on social media, adding "the sovereignty and independence of our country are not negotiable".

Trump on Saturday called the Panama Canal a "vital national asset" for the United States and threatened to retake it, citing "exorbitant prices" on US ships.

According to the Torrijos-Carter Treaties signed in 1977 by Panama's president Omar Torrijos and US president Jimmy Carter, Panamanians recovered their sovereignty over the canal on Dec 31, 1999.

Mulino said the treaties established the permanent neutrality of the Panama Canal, "guaranteeing its open and safe operation for all nations" and that "any position to the contrary is invalid".

"(The tariffs) are established based on an open hearing, considering market conditions, international competition, operating costs and the maintenance and modernization needs of the inter-oceanic waterway," he said.

"The canal will continue to be in Panamanian hands as an inalienable patrimony of our nation and guaranteeing its use for the peaceful and uninterrupted transit of ships of all nations."

XINHUA

Metro milestone

Passengers ride the new Line 1 of the Ho Chi Minh City Metro in Vietnam on Sunday. Thousands of residents flocked to experience the long-awaited metro line, taking selfies and enjoying the ride as the city marked the opening of its first metro line after years of delays.

NHAC NGUYEN / AFP



Chile's 'seed guardians' protect biodiversity

By JIMENA ESTERAN in Buenos Aires, Argentina
For China Daily

A group of farmers in Chile, called "seed guardians", are working to preserve and distribute crop varieties that have cultural or biodiversity significance and may be in danger of disappearing. Others in Latin America may follow with varied goals, but overall they aim to improve the environment and agricultural diversity.

Some of these seed guardians are private companies while others are nonprofit organizations. One example is the Chilean supplier of native seeds and plants called Chileflora, which lists 241 seed varieties and 2,202 plants in its catalog — varieties such as Chilean palm, which remains endangered because of factors such as the limited availability of seeds, according to the Chilean National Forest Corporation.

Another group, Semilla Austral, consisting of 40 farming families in Chile, is working to address the disappearance of agricultural and food biodiversity.

"We have come to realize that agricultural and food biodiversity is disappearing from the planet," said Valentina Vives Granella, Semilla

Austral's manager and an environmental chemist. "We are increasingly consuming a reduced variety of crops."

Semilla Austral began its efforts to strengthen local seed systems in 2010 and formalized them in 2014. The farmers "manage seeds, including production, selection, improvement, conservation, commercialization, exchange and other practices for recirculation", Granella said.

The group receives seed lots from members and distributes them across the country. In 2020, it began exporting, with the first international shipment heading to France.

Variety of techniques

It uses a variety of techniques to preserve seeds, such as planting, cultivation, harvesting and all aspects of seed handling.

"We want to stop depending on foreign seeds and cultivate a territorial connection through food and agro-food systems," Granella said. "When we care for it, Mother Earth is generous."

Another Chilean group working to protect seeds is Anamuri, an association of rural and indigenous women. It uses traditional techniques to protect seeds, such as the indigenous Mapuche approach to hang seeds

near hearths to preserve them for planting in the following year.

"These ancestral methods ensure the survival of seeds and nutritious food, connecting them with nature, the Earth, the sun's energy and clean water," said Rosa Guzman Sazo, national director of Anamuri.

Rural women use these techniques to protect hundreds of crop varieties that may not be available in commercial markets, Sazo said.

Sazo is worried that some international agreements Chile has signed may pose a severe threat to food sovereignty. "If we lose control over our seeds, we lose control over our food," Sazo added.

Also in Latin America, Brazil has 420 seed guardians who work to conserve biodiversity by collecting local species resistant to climate change. They aim to enhance food security in a country where biodiversity is threatened by slash-and-burn agriculture methods and uncontrolled demand for lumber.

"Global geopolitics impacts people's lives locally, and we must start by caring for the seeds that nourish us," Granella said. "This is all for future generations"

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.



Terd Disayathanoowat demonstrates a tea ceremony at his office in Chiang Mai Province, Thailand, in April. YANG WANLI / CHINA DAILY

WORLD

Luigi Mangione pleads not guilty in CEO's slaying

The man accused of fatally shooting the CEO of United-Healthcare pleaded not guilty on Monday to state murder and terror charges while his attorney complained that comments coming from New York's mayor would make it tough to receive a fair trial.

Luigi Mangione, 26, was shackled and seated in a Manhattan court when he leaned over to a microphone to enter his plea. The Manhattan district attorney charged him last week with multiple counts of murder, including murder as an act of terrorism.

Mangione's initial appearance in New York's state trial court was preempted by federal prosecutors bringing their own charges over the shooting. The federal charges could carry the possibility of the death penalty, while the maximum sentence for the state charges is life in prison without parole.

Prosecutors have said the two cases will proceed on parallel tracks, with the state charges expected to go to trial first.

One of Mangione's attorneys told a judge that the "warring jurisdictions" had turned Mangione into a "human ping-pong ball" and that New York City Mayor Eric Adams and other government officials had made him a political pawn, robbing him of his rights as a defendant and tainting the jury pool.

"I am very concerned about my client's right to a fair trial," lawyer Karen Friedman Agnifilo said.

Adams and Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch stood among a throng of heavily armed officers last Thursday when Mangione was flown to a Manhattan heliport and escorted up a pier after being extradited from Pennsylvania.

Friedman Agnifilo said police turned Mangione's return to New York into a choreographed spectacle. She called out Adams' comment to a local TV station that he wanted to be there to look "him in the eye and say, 'you carried out this terroristic act in my city.'"

"He was on display for everyone to see in the biggest stage perp walk I've ever seen in my career. It was absolutely unnecessary," she said.

She also accused federal and state prosecutors of advancing conflicting legal theories, calling their approach confusing and highly unusual.

In a statement, Adams spokesperson Kayla Mamelak Altus wrote: "Critics can say all they

want, but showing up to support our law enforcement and sending the message to New Yorkers that violence and vitriol have no place in our city is who Mayor Eric Adams is to his core."

"The cold-blooded assassination of Brian Thompson — a father of two — and the terror it infused on the streets of New York City for days since been sickeningly glorified, shining a spotlight on the darkest corners of the internet," Mamelak Altus said.

State trial court Judge Gregory Carro said he has little control over what happens outside the courtroom, but can guarantee Mangione will receive a fair trial.

Authorities say Mangione gunned down Thompson as he was walking to an investor conference in midtown Manhattan on the morning of Dec 4.

Mangione was arrested in a Pennsylvania McDonald's after a five-day search, carrying a gun that matched the one used in the shooting and a fake ID, police said. He also was carrying a notebook expressing hostility toward the health insurance industry and especially wealthy executives, according to federal prosecutors.

At a news conference last week, Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg said the application of the terrorism law reflected the severity of a "frightening, well-planned, targeted murder that was intended to cause shock and attention and intimidation."

"In its most basic terms, this was a killing that was intended to evoke terror," he added.

Mangione is being held in a Brooklyn federal jail alongside several other high-profile defendants, including Sean "Diddy" Combs and Sam Bankman-Fried.

During his court appearance Monday, he smiled at times when talking with his attorneys and stretched his right hand after an officer removed his cuffs.

Outside the courthouse, a few dozen supporters chanted, "Free Luigi," over the blare of a trumpet.

Natalie Monarrez, a 55-year-old Staten Island resident, said she joined the demonstration because she lost both her mother and her life savings as a result of denied insurance claims.

"As extreme as it was, it jolted the conversation that we need to deal with this issue," she said of the shooting. "Enough is enough, people are fed up."

Just for laughs



Japanese visitors burst into laughter during a ritual event called Shimekake Shinji in the city of Higashiosaka in Osaka Prefecture on Monday. The ritual of laughing is an annual event where people laugh off the matters of this year and pray for good fortune in the new year. Thousands of participants laughed for 20 minutes. THE YOMIURI SHIMBUN VIA AP

Group members call for support for peaceful resolution of Ukraine crisis

By WANG QINGYUN
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China hopes to work with other members of the "Friends for Peace" group toward the peaceful resolution of the Ukraine crisis, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said on Monday, days after the group members convened in New York.

Introducing the outcomes of the meeting attended by representatives of 17 countries from the Global South, including China, Brazil, Algeria, South Africa and Türkiye, Mao said the participants called for support for a comprehensive and lasting settlement of the crisis through diplomatic means.

The meeting on Wednesday was the first gathering of the group

members in almost three months.

In a news release issued after the gathering, the participants said they were concerned at the ongoing hostilities and reiterated the need to observe principles for de-escalation and the importance of non-expansion of the battlefield and non-intensification of fighting.

Political solution

The international community, including countries from the Global South and the United Nations, can play a constructive role in advocating for peace and expressing wide support for a political and peaceful solution, according to the news release.

The group of "Friends for Peace" was established in September,

when a ministerial meeting was held on the sidelines of the General Debate of the 79th session of the UN General Assembly to seek a peaceful end to the Ukraine crisis through building solidarity among the Global South.

The ministerial meeting was followed by a joint communique, which called for respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states and respecting the legitimate concerns of states, among other principles.

The communique was the first time that countries predominantly representing the Global South and some countries from the region collectively voiced their concerns about the Ukraine crisis, the news release said.

Rescue mission



This handout photo released by the fire department shows firefighters during a rescue operation after the Juscelino Kubitschek de Oliveira bridge fell on Sunday over the Tocantins River in the city of Aguiarnópolis, Tocantins state, Brazil. The collapse killed two people and left many others injured.

CYNTHIA LIUTKUS-PIERCE / AFP

Briefly

SOUTH KOREA Court to hold Yoon's 1st pretrial hearing

South Korea's Constitutional Court said on Monday that it will hold the first pretrial hearing over President Yoon Suk-yeol's impeachment on Friday as scheduled. A court official told a televised news conference that the first preliminary hearing would be held on Dec 27 as planned as the

court deemed the impeachment notice delivered to Yoon, who repeatedly defied the delivery. The official said the delivery was already effective on Friday when all relevant documents arrived.

RUSSIA Putin meets prime minister of Slovakia

Russian President Vladimir Putin

met with Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico, who was on a working visit in Moscow, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Sunday. The meeting was planned several days ago, and the two leaders held talks in a one-on-one meeting, Peskov said during an interview with Pavel Zarubin, a journalist of Russia's state TV and radio company VGTRK, adding the two sides were expected to discuss international issues and the

transit of Russian gas. On Thursday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that Kyiv will not extend its five-year gas transportation deal with Russia, which expires at the end of 2024.

BRAZIL Plane crash kills 10 members of family

Ten members of a family died early

Sunday when their small plane slammed into a commercial district in the city of Gramado in southern Brazil, the civil defense authorities said. The plane, a Piper Cheyenne 400 turboprop, was being flown by a businessman named Luiz Claudio Salgueiro Galeazzi, police confirmed to AFP, and the passengers were all his family members.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

Trump says may keep TikTok around 'for a little while'

WASHINGTON — US President-elect Donald Trump on Sunday suggested that he may allow TikTok to continue operations in the United States.

At an event hosted by the conservative organization Turning Point USA in Phoenix, Arizona, Trump said that the popular video-sharing app may have helped reach some key voters in the presidential election and expressed the possibility of keeping TikTok around "for a little while".

"We did go on TikTok, and we had a great response. We had billions and billions of views," said the president-elect, adding that he was shown a chart highlighting the views his campaign had received on the app.

Trump's comments before a crowd of conservative supporters in Phoenix were one of the strongest signals yet that he opposes a potential exit of TikTok from the US market.

"They brought me a chart, and it was a record, and it was so beautiful to see, and as I looked at it, I said, 'Maybe we gotta keep this ... around for a little while,'" he said.

On Wednesday, the US Supreme Court agreed to review a request from TikTok and its Chinese parent company, ByteDance, to block a law that would require the sale of the popular video-sharing app by Jan 19, or face a ban.

The nation's top court is set to hear arguments on Jan 10 regarding

whether the law unconstitutionally limits freedom of speech, in breach of the First Amendment.

The court's ruling was issued two days after TikTok's petition for an injunction against the law. TikTok argued that the potential ban would shutter one of the most popular speech platforms in the US the day before a presidential inauguration, and "silence the speech of Applicants and the many Americans who use the platform to communicate about politics, commerce, arts, and other matters of public concern."

In April, US President Joe Biden enacted the law that gives ByteDance 270 days to sell TikTok, citing unfounded national security

concerns. If the company fails to comply, the law will require app store operators such as Apple and Google to remove TikTok from their platforms.

In May, TikTok sued the US government to block the potential ban, which has drawn widespread criticism.

In another development, Trump's transition team is pushing to pull the United States out of the World Health Organization on the first day of the new administration, according to experts who warn of the "catastrophic" impact it would have on global health, the Financial Times reported on Sunday.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

Nissan, Honda to start talks for merger

By JIANG XUEQING in Tokyo
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Nissan Motor and Honda Motor announced on Monday they have formally agreed to begin discussions on a merger, with both boards approving a basic agreement.

Mitsubishi Motors has also signed a basic agreement to explore participating in the integration, with a decision on its involvement expected by the end of January 2025, said Honda Motor CEO Toshihiro Mibe at a news conference.

Nissan and Honda aim to finalize the formal agreement by June 2025. The merger, if realized, will establish a joint holding company via a stock transfer, making Nissan and Honda wholly-owned subsidiaries while retaining their brand identities. The holding company is expected to be listed on the Tokyo Stock Exchange's Prime Market by August 2026, Mibe said.

He highlighted the potential to transform the companies into a global leader with annual sales exceeding 30 trillion yen (\$191 billion) and operating profits surpassing 3 trillion yen. "Amid rapid global changes in the automotive industry, we see immense synergy potential that exceeds our expectations," Mibe said.

Makoto Uchida, Nissan Motor CEO, said: "We have decided to take a significant step toward the future, moving beyond collaboration to begin discussions on a management integration."

He emphasized that the combined annual vehicle production of Nissan and Honda totaled 7.5 million units. If realized, the integration would create the world's third-largest automobile group by sales, according to Nikkei.

Uchida emphasized the rapidly changing automotive landscape, saying, "In this era, even large companies cannot secure their future if they cling to conventional wisdom, delay decisions, or resist change."

To advance vehicle electrification and intelligentization, Uchida stressed the need for significant investments. He noted that the emergence of new players has intensified competition.

Nissan and Honda began exploring collaboration in March, evolving into a formal partnership in August.

Takao Kato, CEO of Mitsubishi Motors, highlighted the challenges facing the automotive industry during its transformation, emphasizing the demand for advanced technologies in electrification and intelligentization.

"Securing the necessary investments and resources is beyond the reach of any single company. Collaboration with Nissan and Honda is crucial for our future competitiveness," Kato said.

Masakazu Tokura, chairman of the Japan Business Federation, expressed his support for the discussions on management integration between Honda and Nissan at another news conference on Monday. He noted the critical role of the automotive industry as a driver of Japan's economy.

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BUSINESS

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Relaxed visa policy spurs travel to Australia

By ZHU WENQIAN
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Chinese travelers are expected to show greater interest in visiting Australia during the upcoming Spring Festival break, encouraged by the recent announcement of a 10-year multiple entry visa for tourists from China as well as the warm weather in the Southern Hemisphere, industry players said.

For the Lunar New Year holiday that runs from Jan 28 to Feb 4, Chinese tourists have already booked hotels in over 1,300 cities of 96 countries globally. Australia is one of the 10 most popular overseas destinations for Chinese tourists, according to data from Qunar, a Beijing-based online travel agency.

"China was the number one inbound tourist source market to Australia before the COVID-19 pandemic. At the moment, it is running second behind New Zealand in terms of the number of tourists visiting Australia," said Brian Tyson, chairman of SEC Newgate Australia, the country's largest full-service strategic communications firm.

"The recently announced 10-year multiple entry visa is going to have a significant impact on the tourism market," Tyson said.

Domestic carriers have introduced more flights or increased flight frequencies to satisfy growing demand from passengers. In mid-December, Shanghai-based private carrier Juneyao Air became the ninth Chinese airline to connect China with Australia after it launched flights between Shanghai and Sydney.

Meanwhile, Guangzhou-based China Southern Airlines launched flights earlier this month connecting Beijing Daxing International Airport with Sydney and Melbourne, becoming the first direct routes connecting Beijing Daxing and Australia. In December, China Southern also resumed flights between Guangzhou, Guangdong province and Adelaide.

In addition, Tyson said the company has observed a growing trend of Chinese travelers taking luxury trips in Australia, which include travelers taking part in activities such as helicopter rides, staying in high-end lodging and exploring remote areas like the island state of Tasmania.

With enhanced diplomatic relations between China and Australia in the past two years, the strong bilateral ties have played a positive role in promoting trade growth between the two countries.

China has been Australia's largest trading partner for 15 consecutive years. In 2023, the bilateral trade value between the two countries reached a historic high of 1.61 trillion yuan (\$220.5 billion), up 9.8 percent year-on-year, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

Tyson said that the global economy is not as strong as it was, which has had a bit of an impact on investment appetite, but the company is still seeing strong investment demand from China.

"There has been a drop in mining and real estate. But the investment is still very strong in food and agriculture. I think it's about 40 percent of our deals done in the last financial year," he said.

"The Chinese economy has been extraordinarily remarkable, and it's remarkably resilient by getting through the pandemic. The key resources that China buys from Australia, like iron ore and others, are lower than they have been. But in terms of economic growth numbers, it is still higher than a lot of our other trading partners," Tyson said.

"So, we are optimistic and hopeful that the economic growth is strong and the miracle growth story of China continues," he added.



Employees work on the production line of a foreign-funded enterprise in Beijing. SHAN YUQI / XINHUA

FDI to stay in recovery mode next year

By ZHONG NAN
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Driven by improvements in sectors such as high-tech manufacturing, green energy and digital industries, the flow of foreign direct investment (FDI) is expected to continue recovering in China in 2025, market watchers and foreign business executives said on Monday.

From January to November, the actual use of FDI stood at 749.7 billion yuan (\$103 billion), down 27.9 percent year-on-year. This fall narrowed by 1.9 percentage points compared to the January-October period, marking the third consecutive month of narrowing declines, latest data from the Ministry of Commerce showed.

Despite challenges such as rising geopolitical tensions and disruption of global supply chains in international business, many multinational corporations' "wait-and-see" attitude toward cross-border investment as well as a slow economic recovery in many parts of the world, China saw its actual utilized FDI grow by 6 percent year-on-year in November.

As many foreign companies, particularly labor-intensive ones, that were once competitive have become unsuitable for China's domestic economic development needs over time, a growing number of global firms have adjusted their investment strategies in the country, said Gao Lingyun, a researcher at the Institute of World Economics and Politics, which is affiliated with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing.

They are capitalizing on the

country's strengths in opening-up policies, advanced supply chains, including its robust logistics infrastructure, large-scale production capabilities and competitive pricing strategies, Gao said.

"This trend is particularly evident in sectors like research and development, trade in services, new materials, chemicals and tech-intensive green products manufacturing," said Luo Yuze, deputy head of the department of foreign economic relations, which is part of the Development Research Center of the State Council.

For efficiency-driven multinational companies, regions with the most concentrated networks are becoming key priorities for strategic expansion. This focus is closely linked to factors such as industry connectivity, complementarity and accessibility, said Luo.

Agreeing with this view, Jeff Losch, vice-president and business manager for coating additives business at Milliken & Company, a United States-based specialty chemical and performance materials company, said China is a key market for Milliken, not only because of its vast scale but also due to its forward-thinking approach to sustainability.

"We have observed a strong demand in the electric vehicle (EV) and industrial coating businesses. China's EV industry is extremely strong and has led the global market this year, with Chinese EV manufacturers making their presence felt in markets across many countries," said Losch.

He said that the quick growth of China's EV market has clearly cre-

ated significant opportunities for the coatings industry. EV manufacturing requires coatings with high durability and environmental standards, which align closely with Milliken's innovation goals.

Eager to seize more market share, the US company plans to continue investing in its innovation unit, expand sales networks and enhance supply chain operations within China.

In the first 11 months, investments from certain developed economies have continued to grow, with actual investment from Germany rising 10.9 percent year-on-year, up 4.8 percent from Singapore and 4 percent higher from Switzerland, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

Upbeat about the Chinese market, Swiss instrument manufacturer Endress + Hauser Group is currently expanding two of its plants in Suzhou, Jiangsu province.

Matthias Altendorf, the company's president of the supervisory board, said these expansion measures, along with a planned investment of 2 billion yuan over the next three to five years, are a key part of the group's long-term strategy in China.

"The growing maturity of China's high-tech industry has created significant market opportunities for us," said Altendorf.

Emerging sectors such as semiconductors and EV manufacturing are flourishing, driving a continuous rise in demand for high-precision measurement technologies. This growing demand has become a key impetus for foreign businesses to further increase their investments, he added.

Panda bonds roar back to life in China

Market saw 109 issuances this year worth 194.8b yuan, yuan status boost

By ZHOU LANXU
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The panda bond market, in which overseas institutions issue renminbi bonds in China's onshore market, posted record-high issuances by value this year and is poised to attract new issuers, including those from the Middle East and Latin America, in 2025, market mavens said.

Foreign issuers' growing interest in panda bonds reflects the rising competitiveness of the renminbi as an alternative international financing currency, bolstering the internationalization of China's currency despite uncertainties posed by the incoming US administration, they added.

The panda bond market saw 109 issuances this year worth 194.8 billion yuan (\$26.7 billion) as of Friday. The issuance total, according to market tracker Wind Info, was up 26 percent year-on-year, a record high.

The growth was driven by growing participation of purely foreign issuers — or overseas issuers without affiliations with Hong Kong-based institutions.

Issuances by purely foreign issuers nearly tripled from about 27 billion yuan in 2023 to more than 75 billion yuan in 2024. Their proportion in total panda bond issuances rose from about 17 percent to almost 40 percent, said Deutsche Bank, a panda bond underwriter.

Germany has emerged as the largest issuer region outside Hong Kong, issuing about 22 billion yuan in panda bonds this year. Panda bond issuances from corporate entities in France, Singapore and Canada also rose sharply this year.

"Panda bond issuers are expected to become more diversified (in 2025)," said Samuel Fischer, head of China onshore debt capital markets at Deutsche Bank.

"In addition to an increase of issuers from developed markets, new issuers from the Middle East and Latin America are expected to enter the (panda bond) market." Fischer attributed this trend to the growing use of the renminbi in these regions, increased cross-border economic cooperation, and the renminbi's favorable yield advantage — the average coupon rate of

panda bonds issued this year dropped to 2.5 percent from 3.1 percent in 2023.

While China cut interest rates to stabilize economic growth, interest rates have stayed elevated in the United States this year following efforts to curb inflation, sending the difference between the 10-year treasury yields of the US and China as high as 283 basis points as of Monday, said Wind Info.

Ming Ming, chief economist at CITIC Securities, said that underpinning foreign issuers' growing appetites also includes China's regulatory changes in 2022 deepening financial opening-up, which allowed funds raised via panda bonds to be remitted abroad.

Pan Gongsheng, governor of the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, said at a meeting in November with foreign financial institutions that the country will expand connectivity between domestic and international markets and promote institutional opening-up of both the financial services sector as well as financial markets.

The growing appeal of panda bonds reflects the rising role of the renminbi for international financing, a trend that is expected to continue into 2025, Fischer said, as China maintains an accommodative monetary policy while foreign enterprises continue to increase investments in China, driving renminbi financing needs.

"The renminbi financing environment remains competitive and appealing," he said, adding that Deutsche Bank itself has used up an 8-billion-yuan panda bond issuance quota in June, with plans to apply for more, "subject to regulatory approval and favorable market conditions".

The panda bond market is also expected to see both larger sizes and longer maturities of issuances, Fischer said, further strengthening the panda markets' global status as a key option for issuers.

Thanks to improved liquidity conditions, the panda bond market has seen several issuances at a size of about 5 billion yuan this year, he added, which represents a significant increase from previous years and is comparable to issuances in the Europe and US markets.

Briefly

Distribution integration center sees progress

The country's first warehouse and distribution integration center, used for both daily and emergency operations, has finished construction on the first single high-rise in eastern Hangzhou, capital of Zhejiang province. The center, built by State-owned China Railway No 4 Engineering Group Co Ltd, is one of Zhejiang's major construction undertakings, covering an area of 119,400 square meters. Consisting of 14 single structures, roads and other ancillary works, the project started construction on July 2 and took 171 days to usher in the topping-out of its first single building on Friday. It aims to become a backbone cold chain logistics base and a benchmark nationally.

Yuan strengthens to 7.187 against greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, strengthened 31 pips to 7.187 against the US dollar on Monday, said 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.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

Steel sector undergoing structural adjustments

By LIU YUKUN
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China's steel companies are increasingly embracing greener and higher-quality practices, driven by the rapidly growing demand for low-carbon products from downstream industries like electric vehicles, said experts.

The shift is also propelled by increased global demand for lower carbon footprints, exemplified by the impending inclusion of the steel industry in China's carbon market and the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism.

"As the steel industry gears up to enter the domestic carbon trading market, there will be growing demand for environmentally friendly steel products in the near future to avoid extra payment charged from emissions. The move also helps steel companies to better integrate into the global market as more economies are starting to place a price on emissions," Guan Zhijie, deputy chief engineer of the China Metallurgical Industry Planning and Research Institute, said.

Despite the accompanying cost increases for green production, Xiao Bangguo, deputy head of the institute, emphasizes the necessity for steel enterprises to navigate

through uncertainties in both domestic and global economic spheres. "By elevating product standards and refining operational strategies, these enterprises can fortify their competitive edge," Xiao said.

Currently, the steel sector is undergoing structural adjustments, with a clear shift toward environmentally friendly and high-quality transformations. A recent report by the institute highlights a rise in steel consumption in sectors such as machinery, automobiles, energy and shipbuilding this year, while industries like construction and railways are experiencing a decline.

This trend is projected to continue into next year, with a potential decrease in steel usage in segments like containers and hardware, which saw a growth in steel use this year, said the institute.

The progress of high-tech industries may also drive demand for premium steel products.

"To address the evolving requirements of downstream industries such as aerospace, marine equipment, new energy and electric vehicles, steel companies need to ramp up supply of high-end products, accelerating improvements in product stability and reliability," said Guan.



Workers seen at a production line of steel products in Maanshan, Anhui province. LUO JISHENG / XINHUA

The institute said that China's steel demand may see a slight decrease of 1.5 percent to 850 million metric tons next year.

In 2025, supported by trade-in policies, the automotive sector is expected to maintain its growth momentum, with an estimated steel demand of about 59.8 million tons, representing a 4 percent year-over-year increase.

The institute's projections suggest that in 2025, the energy indus-

try's steel demand will reach approximately 49.5 million tons, a 1.9 percent year-over-year increase. The shipbuilding sector is expected to use around 16.7 million tons of steel, a 5.7 percent yearly growth.

With policy incentives designed to boost consumption and facilitate the trade-in program, it is expected that in 2025, steel demand in China's home appliance sector will grow 8.4 percent to 19.4 million tons.

BUSINESS



Potential homebuyers check out a housing project at a real estate agency in Taiyuan, Shanxi province, in November.

WEI LIANG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Redefining publicly shared space seen as a boost to realty

Experts read the move as sector's transformation into new pattern

By WANG YING in Shanghai
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Decisions by some Chinese cities to repeal publicly shared spaces is one of the latest efforts by local governments to boost the residential property sector by benefiting homebuyers, which suggests the real estate market is transforming to a new development pattern, said industry experts on Thursday.

Zhangjiakou, North China's Hebei province, announced it would lift price caps on commercial housing, encourage home transactions after construction completion, and gradually scrap the convention of counting publicly shared spaces into buyers' housing space during transactions, according to a notice published on the city's housing and urban-rural development bureau on Tuesday.

"The move will benefit consumers for sure, as publicly shared spaces in some cities won't be counted into overall home spaces, and publicly shared spaces in residential property development won't be

"The move will benefit consumers for sure, as publicly shared spaces in some cities won't be counted into overall home spaces ..."

Yan Yuejin, deputy head of the Shanghai-based E-House China R&D Institute

anceled," said Yan Yuejin, deputy head of the Shanghai-based E-House China R&D Institute.

"In this regard, Zhangjiakou is attempting to explore demand among homebuyers for better-quality homes, which is expected to enhance homebuyers' well-being and improve overall market sentiment," Yan said.

Some other cities also announced similar measures to expand home-

buyers' actual living spaces. Earlier this month, Hengyang in Hunan province announced that commercial housing sold in the city will be simply calculated by floor area beginning Jan 1.

Likewise, Zhaoqing, Guangdong province and Xiangtan, Hunan proposed in September and May, respectively, that homes can be priced and sold without taking publicly shared spaces into account. Cities including Guangzhou, Guangdong; Hangzhou, Zhejiang province; Changsha, Hunan; and Xiamen, Fujian province have also introduced measures to optimize space calculations in home-

"Excluding publicly shared spaces from the personal living space of an apartment will make home prices look more reasonable and transparent. Under such a market situation, property developers are expected to mark down selling prices. In short, such space calculations can better protect homebuyers' rights and interests, because you will get exactly what you pay for," Yan said.

Zhang Dawei, chief analyst at Centaline Property Agency, said there is some misunderstanding

regarding publicly shared spaces, which in fact is closely related to the quality of life issues.

"Many developers may design the apartment with much smaller publicly shared spaces than what is delivered, and the lack of transparency in measuring shared areas is one of the biggest concerns for homebuyers," said Zhang.

Song Hongwei, research director of Shanghai-based property consultancy Tospur, said the space calculations of a specific apartment may lead developers to building more high-quality homes.

"The cancellation of publicly shared areas is in line with the interests of homebuyers, and as buying demand is unleashed, competition among developers will woo consumers with more premium products," Song was quoted as saying by National Business Daily.

Publicly shared space refers to the gross floor area of the whole building's shared area, which includes the space of elevator shafts, pipe shafts, stairwells, garbage chutes, equipment rooms and corridors, among others. Publicly shared spaces are essential to the quality of a residential community, Yan said.

Major green hydrogen project completed in Shandong

By ZHENG XIN
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The nation's first factory-based seawater hydrogen production research project was completed in Qingdao, East China's Shandong province, on Wednesday, said its operator China Petroleum and Chemical Corp.

This is a significant step by the country toward advancing clean energy technology and sustainable resource utilization.

The project, combining direct seawater hydrogen production with green electricity, is capable of producing 20 cubic meters of green hydrogen per hour.

It provides a new solution for utilizing renewable energy in coastal areas while offering a pathway for recycling high-salinity industrial wastewater, said the company, also known as Sinopec.

The project uses green electricity generated by a floating photovoltaic power station of the company's Qingdao refinery to electrolyze seawater into hydrogen and oxygen. The produced hydrogen is integrated into the refinery's pipeline network for refining operations or fueling hydrogen-powered vehicles, with the entire production process carried out within the factory, it said. With China positioning itself as

20 cubic meters per hour

production capacity of the nation's first factory-based seawater hydrogen production research project in Qingdao, Shandong province

a global leader in the production and utilization of green hydrogen, industry experts expect a transformative leap in the nation's hydrogen sector, driven by declining costs, policy support and technological innovation, especially green hydrogen.

Green hydrogen is produced using renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power and generates minimal greenhouse gas emissions during production.

Green hydrogen is forecast to dominate China's hydrogen supply in the coming decades, accounting for 90 percent by 2060 from the current negligible 0.2 percent of total production, said Liu Shiyu, vice-president of the China Electric Power Planning and Engineering Institute.

An analyst said the project demonstrates the potential of direct seawater electrolysis for producing green hydrogen, reducing reliance on freshwater resources

while utilizing abundant coastal renewable energy, such as solar and wind power.

China's coastal regions boast abundant wind, solar and seawater resources, offering a clear advantage for producing green hydrogen using renewable electricity, said Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University.

Direct seawater electrolysis can convert intermittent and hard-to-store green power into hydrogen, which is easier to store and utilize, while conserving valuable freshwater resources. This opens new pathways for the development of the hydrogen energy industry, he said.

China, already the world's largest producer and consumer of hydrogen, accounted for over one-third of global output in 2023, with its production reaching 35 million metric tons and expected to nearly triple to 100 million tons by midcentury.

Global consultancy Rystad Energy expects China's share of green hydrogen to further accelerate in the coming years, especially since it is installing new electrolyzer capacity at a world-leading pace every year.

Despite its advantages, the complex composition of seawater, which contains more than 90 chemical elements and a large number of microorganisms and

suspended particles, brings corrosion and toxicity issues, catalyst inactivation, low electrolytic efficiency and other technical bottlenecks and challenges.

The roughly 3 percent salt content in seawater and chloride ions among impurities can corrode electrolyzer electrodes, reducing efficiency or even damaging the devices, said Sinopec.

The company tackled these issues by developing specialized key equipment and unique process technologies. It has overcome challenges such as chlorine-resistant electrode technology, high-performance electrode plate design, and seawater circulation systems, achieving a seamless integration of research and practical application.

As technology matures and costs decline, seawater hydrogen production is expected to achieve large-scale industrial application in the future. China is currently accelerating research into seawater hydrogen production, with domestic universities and research institutions actively working to overcome technical challenges in the field.

Sinopec has been accelerating its efforts in recent years to become China's leading hydrogen energy company by advancing research and application across the entire hydrogen value chain and building platforms for key technologies.

Entrepreneurs bullish on business prospects

By ZHENG ZHENG in Shanghai
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Nearly nine out of 10 Chinese entrepreneurs surveyed are optimistic about their business prospects over the next year, according to a new report released by HSBC Global Private Banking.

The Global Entrepreneurial Wealth Report 2024 found that 89 percent of entrepreneurs in the Chinese mainland have a positive outlook for business development in the coming year, with technological advancements, business opportunities and growing consumer trends cited as the top three reasons underpinning their optimism.

The story of the optimistic entrepreneur comes to the fore in this year's report, said Annabel Spring, CEO of HSBC Global Private Banking.

Spring said the research builds on insights from last year's inaugural study and helps bring to life the traits, characteristics and motivations of today's business owners.

Improving economic fundamentals overall are also a key factor contributing to the upbeat sentiment, according to the survey of over 200 entrepreneurs from the Chinese mainland.

In terms of international expansion plans, Hong Kong (32 percent) and Singapore (18 percent) were identified as the top markets Chinese mainland entrepreneurs aim to prioritize over the next year.

The report also examined business succession planning across different markets globally. Three-quarters of first-generation entrepreneurs in the Chinese mainland have not yet put a succession plan in place, while 74

percent have not begun the process of passing on their wealth and assets.

Finding a suitable successor was cited as the primary concern by 40 percent of Chinese entrepreneurs polled. Meanwhile, nearly 60 percent of non-first generation entrepreneurs felt an obligation to take over their family business — far exceeding the 22 percent global average.

"While facing challenges from global economic uncertainty, entrepreneurs in the Chinese mainland remain optimistic about growth prospects for 2025 and will continue to drive investment and international expansion plans," according to Jackie Mau, head of HSBC Global Private Banking in the Chinese mainland.

However, in terms of long-term wealth planning, Chinese entrepreneurs still need more comprehensive preparation for the future direction of their family businesses and generational succession, he added.

The survey also highlighted Chinese entrepreneurs' strong desire to create a positive societal impact, at 84 percent overall and 91 percent among female entrepreneurs. Six in 10 feel their social value is not limited to the companies they run.

Around 73 percent expressed a willingness to pursue new opportunities after exiting their businesses, rather than viewing it as the end of their careers — exceeding the 60 percent global average.

Conducted for HSBC Global Private Banking by Ipsos, a global leader in market research, across 10 markets including Asia, the Middle East, Europe and the United States, the survey polled 1,798 high-net-worth entrepreneurs with at least \$2 million in investable assets.

Nestled among mountains



An aerial image captures the topping-out ceremony of Yunxi railway station in Shiyan, Hubei province, on Friday. Situated among mountains with abundant tourist attractions in Yunxi county, the station stands as a vital infrastructure project aimed at enhancing regional tourism, said the project contractor China Railway Construction Corp's 24th bureau. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Power supplier ramps up smart tech applications

By ZHUANG QIANG and PANG BO

State Grid Corp of China is focusing on building a new power system and launching smart transformations to usher in safer, more reliable, efficient and economical power supply and consumption models.

The aim is to let these new models gradually become a reality within the world's largest and most complex power system, said State Grid.

Zhang Yanyan, director of the Jiangbei centralized control station under State Grid Xiangyang Power Supply Co, said the smart transformation of Niushou substation was successfully completed last month, making it the first smart substation in northern Hubei province.

By creating a three-dimensional intelligent inspection network of drones, simplified robots and high-definition cameras, the project ensures seamless coverage for indoor and outdoor inspections of primary and secondary equipment at the substation, Zhang said.

She added that the transformation to integrated remote controls, intelligent auxiliary systems and intelligent inspection systems helps ensure energy security in northern Hubei in a smart, flexible, economical and efficient manner, and epitomizes the steady progress in building a new power system.

On Dec 3, maintenance personnel at Jiangbei station used an intelligent inspection system to

send routine inspection commands to the 220 kilovolt Niushou substation located dozens of kilometers away.

"With inspection terminals, digital meters and environmental sensors, maintenance personnel can monitor equipment appearance, status parameters and dynamic environments without leaving their desks," Zhang said.

The Niushou substation, a critical node for integrating and consuming renewable energy in the Xiangyang-Niushou area, was chosen as a key breakthrough for the pilot project.

Adopting a "pilot-first, comprehensive rollout later" strategy for smart station construction, State Grid Xiangyang intends to let its 90 substations achieve full intelligent inspections by the end of 2026, saving 6,212 annual man-hours and approximately 1,200 hours of inspection time.

Zhang said that from "manned operations" to "unmanned management", and from comprehensive automated substations to today's smart substations, each iteration of China's power system reflects advancements in industrial technology and innovation.

The intelligent transformation of Xiangyang's Niushou substation is both a microcosm and a typical example of the country's drive to advance safer, more reliable, efficient and economical power supply and consumption models, she added.

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BUSINESSFOCUS

CHINA UP-CLOSE

Solar power installations hit new highs

Despite challenges in photovoltaic industry, demand remains strong

By ZHENG XIN
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China is on track to set a new record for solar power installations in 2024, driven by falling production costs and increased global interest in renewable energy, said industry experts and company executives.

With the world's largest, most complete new-energy industry chain, China is expected to install 230 to 260 gigawatts of solar capacity this year, topping the record of 217 GW set last year, according to the China Photovoltaic Industry Association.

This is mainly driven by lower module prices, a robust rooftop PV market and the commissioning of the country's energy megabases, which aim to develop large-scale wind and solar installations mainly in desert areas, it said.

Accelerated grid construction across the nation, which allows solar energy to be transmitted to demand centers further afield, has also helped push installations higher than previously thought, it added.

Despite ongoing challenges in the photovoltaic industry, including significant price reductions and reduced profit margins, demand for solar energy remains strong, both domestically and internationally, said Wang Bohua, honorary chairman of the China Photovoltaic Industry Association.

China's new photovoltaic installations reached 181 GW during the first 10 months, a 27 percent year-on-year increase, while the country's exports of solar cells and modules grew by more than 40 percent and 15 percent year-on-year respectively, he said during the 2024 annual conference of the photovoltaic industry held in Sichuan province earlier this month.

India, Türkiye and Cambodia are the top three export markets for batteries, with exports to India remaining at a high level. Europe remains the largest export market for modules, though its market share has significantly declined, said Wang.

Outside of Europe, South Asia, Latin America and the Middle East have relatively large market shares, indicating a notable trend toward diversification in module export markets, with other markets outside of the top 10 showing substantial growth, he said.

Wang Hongzhi, head of the National Energy Administration, said during the recently held national energy work conference that China has continued accelerating the construction of large-scale wind and solar power bases in the Gobi Desert and other arid regions in 2024 amid efforts to boost renewable power.

By the end of 2024, China has

installed about 510 million kilowatts of wind power and 840 million kW of photovoltaic power, with the utilization rate remaining above 95 percent, driving rapid growth in both sectors, he said.

One of the drivers of China's rapid advancements in solar power development is a series of breakthroughs in solar cell technology, including the continuous improvement in the efficiency of crystalline silicon cells and the rise of emerging technologies like perovskite solar cells, which have enabled Chinese manufacturers to produce more energy-efficient panels at a lower cost.

Longi Green Energy Technology Co, the world's biggest PV panel maker, saw its Jiaying production base included in the global light-house network by the World Economic Forum in 2023, the world's first lighthouse factory in the PV industry.

In the past three years, Longi has broken the cell efficiency record 18 times in a row. Today, the company holds two cell efficiency world records, 34.6 percent for crystalline silicon-perovskite tandem solar cells, and 27.30 percent for crystalline silicon heterojunction back contact solar cells.

BloombergNEF said earlier that it expected module prices to remain low at around 9 US cents per watt on the free market for the rest of 2024. Prices could hit new lows, staying around 8 to 9 US cents per watt throughout 2025 due to further cost reductions and efficiency improvements in TOPCon technology, it said.

An international team led by scientists from the Institute of Chemistry under the Chinese Academy of Sciences developed earlier this year a new type of high-efficiency solar cell capable of achieving a photoelectric conversion efficiency of 26.4 percent, the highest efficiency for such solar cells to date.

Perovskite-organic tandem solar cells can achieve higher efficiency than traditional crystalline silicon cells by combining the light-absorbing properties of perovskite with the flexibility of organic materials. They are also cheaper to produce and more versatile, with potential for use in a wider range of applications, said Li Yongfang, an academician and a researcher at the institute, who is involved with the development.

Tan Youru, a solar analyst at BloombergNEF, said China's photovoltaic industry is currently grappling with demand-side challenges, particularly issues related to capacity absorption, which are expected to slow long-term growth.

"On the supply side, as financial barriers increase and technological bottlenecks emerge, the sector is entering a period of intense competition,



Above: A worker inspects solar photovoltaic panels in Huaibei, Anhui province, on Dec 16.

LI XIN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Left: An employee works at the site of a photovoltaic power project in Lianyungang, Jiangsu province, on Dec 14.

GENG YUHE / FOR CHINA DAILY

Sungrow Power Supply and president of the CPIA, emphasized the need for innovation and continued investment in research and development to overcome current challenges and ensure sustained growth in the renewable energy sector.

It's essential to focus on diversified overseas layout, avoid concentrating efforts in the same overseas markets and carefully navigate the direction of expansion abroad, Cao said.

With clear advantages in Chinese solar products and technologies, we must proactively address international trade challenges and work together to navigate trade frictions, he added.

Strengthening international communication and cooperation is essential to promote the open, fair and orderly development of the global photovoltaic market, he said.

Global consultancy Rystad Energy expects 255 GW new solar PV installation from China in 2024, which is at the same level as the forecast after adjustment. Another surge in installation toward the end of the year is also expected, of around 20 GW from November and 50 GW from December, it said.

"Solar PV installations have maintained a quite high pace this year, and we had seen an average of over 18 GW of monthly installations this year in China till October," said Zhu Yicong, vice-president of renewables and power research at global consultancy Rystad Energy. "Renewable installations have surged since last year and the momentum has not been slowing down. China has shown its clear leadership in global solar PV installations and we are expecting close to 60 percent of global solar PV installations from China this year."

panies should strengthen capacity adjustment by quickly focusing on optimizing existing capacity, controlling expansion and improving quality.

The photovoltaic industry has continued to make steady progress in 2024, contributing to the acceleration of China's green and low-carbon transformation and the development of a green, low-carbon and circular economy, he said.

Thanks to the collective efforts of the entire industry, by the end of September, China's total wind and solar power installations reached 1.25 billion kW, achieving the 2030 target for total wind and solar power capacity six years ahead of schedule, he added.

New products such as electric vehicles, lithium batteries and photovoltaic cells are increasingly becoming powerful drivers of China's development of new quality productive forces. While these products have shown strong export performance, they are also facing the pressure of foreign trade and investment restrictions, said Gu.

Even with these headwinds, industry leaders are optimistic about the long-term prospects of solar energy.

Cao Renxian, chairman of new energy power equipment maker

industry is expected to face fewer additional risks in the US market," said Tan. "The upcoming launch of overseas polysilicon manufacturing in the Middle East also offers significant cost advantages, providing a solid foundation for establishing a localized photovoltaic supply chain in the region."

Tan added that Europe's solar market is slowing due to lower power prices and market saturation, but there is still strong growth in other markets including the US, China and Saudi Arabia.

Despite the technological advances leading to price declines for key components such as solar panels and batteries, it is also putting pressure on manufacturers, with many facing squeezed margins. The increased competition in the global market has only compounded these difficulties.

In turn, industry experts call for Chinese manufacturers to work together to maintain their competitive edge, amid a backdrop of the declining prices for key components, which in turn lead to increased competition and squeezed margins.

Gu Yu, deputy director-general of the trade remedy and investigation bureau of China's Ministry of Commerce, said photovoltaic com-

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petition, with companies likely to face greater competition and potential market exit," Tan said. "While the rapidly changing global trade environment presents significant challenges for the industry as it navigates these shifting dynamics, leading solar companies with continuous technological investment and business model renovation are expected to rise through it."

While Chinese solar companies are readjusting and accelerating their global capacity expansion beyond Southeast Asia in response to new trade barriers and local manufacturing incentives, the US remains one of the most profitable and promising markets, with relatively low risk for manufacturing plants being set up locally, especially with the push for renewable energy manufacturing to return, he said.

"With the upcoming shift toward greater localized production, the

Growing focus on intelligent, green mining tech

By ZHENG XIN

China has continued to prioritize stable coal production and supply throughout this year, with the proportion of intelligent coal capacity rising to over 50 percent of total capacity, latest figures released by the National Energy Administration show.

The country had transformed and upgraded 180 million kilowatts of coal-fired power units in 2024, while eliminating more than 8 million kW of outdated capacity, said the administration during a national energy work conference held earlier this month in Beijing.

China has further enhanced its energy self-sufficiency while expanding its renewable energy

dominance, with the country's energy self-sufficiency rate now above 80 percent in 2024, said Wang Hongzhi, head of the NEA.

Zhang Hong, deputy secretary-general of the China National Coal Association, forecasts that coal consumption will see steady growth in 2025, with total consumption slightly higher than in 2024.

Many coal-rich provinces are also intensifying efforts to upgrade and transform coal-fired power units, with a growing focus on incorporating intelligent mining technologies, accelerating intelligent coal mine construction and the development of a coal industry internet platform. These initiatives aim to improve efficiency, reduce emissions and modernize the coal industry in line

with the country's green energy goals.

Shanxi, for example, has been steadily transitioning its coal sector during its energy reform process toward more sustainable and intelligent practices.

As of now, over 50 percent of the coal production capacity in Shanxi, one of China's coal-rich provinces, is achieved by intelligent mining, with 30 pilot and demonstration coal mines using green mining practices established across the province.

In 2023, the province established 118 intelligent coal mines and introduced smart technology to 1,491 mining faces. The figures climbed further to 134 intelligent coal mines covering 1,564 mining

faces as of August, said Yan Zhongli, head of Shanxi's data bureau.

In 2023, the coal-rich region produced over 1.37 billion metric tons of coal, and it has set a production target of about 1.3 billion tons for this year.

According to Lu Junling, chief economist of the NEA, more than 95 percent of coal-fired power units across the country have now met ultra-low emission standards.

Over the past 10 years, China has decommissioned over 100 million kW of outdated coal power capacity, resulting in a reduction of pollutant emissions from the power sector by more than 90 percent, he said.



Trucks carry coal in Lianyungang, Jiangsu province, on Dec 8.

WANG CHUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

LIFE

New era for Chinese classical music

Highly acclaimed conductor wins recognition for his global contribution, **Wang Xin** reports in Shanghai.



Recently turning 60, Yu Long has conducted many of the world's top orchestras and established China as a leading classical force. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Chinese classical maestro and renowned conductor Yu Long received a special present to mark his 60th birthday — a complete collection of his recordings on the world's top classical music label Deutsche Grammophon.

Released on Dec 16, the box collection comprises six albums recording Yu's collaboration with the label over the past 25 years, mapping the conductor's footprints as a towering figure steering China's growing connection to classical music on both domestic and international stages.

"It has been 25 years since the first time I worked with DG. China's classical music scene has been through a 'golden' period of development and witnessed dramatic changes during the 25 years. Chinese music has become so close with the world, and has been presented so frequently with Chinese culture on the global stage. I am very fortunate to have been part of this remarkable historical process," said Yu at a news conference in Shanghai on the same day.

Born in 1964 into a Shanghai musical family, Yu was hailed by The New York Times as "the most powerful figure in China's classical music scene," who has been consistently introducing the world's leading classical music and orchestras to China while familiarizing global audiences with the country's most eminent musicians and composers.

Globally, Yu has conducted many highly acclaimed orchestras across the world, including the New York Philharmonic, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestre de Paris, the Munich Philharmonic, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the Tokyo Philharmonic and the Singapore Symphony Orchestra.

Currently, Yu serves as the artistic director and principal conductor of the China Philharmonic Orchestra, music director of the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra and the lifetime honorary music director of the Guangzhou Symphony Orchestra, as well as the principal guest conductor of the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra. He is also the codirector of Shanghai's Music in the Summer Air festival and chair of the artistic committee of the Beijing Music Festival, an annual autumn event that he founded in 1998 and served as artistic director until 2017. Moreover, he holds the positions of vice-president of the China Musicians Association and chairman of the



Top: Yu Long and the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra.

Above: A complete recording collection of Yu Long on Deutsche Grammophon. Left: Yu receives a special award for his contributions at a Shanghai event on Dec 16.

League of China Orchestras.

"Yu Long, leading the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra and the China Philharmonic Orchestra, has created an extraordinary series of live performances and recordings, covering a wide range of repertoire by composers from both the East and the West, from the classical masters to contemporary composers. We are delighted that Universal Music China and DG are able to document these works of art. The release of this box set not only documents the great recordings, but also celebrates maestro Yu's momentous 60th birthday," said DG's president Clemens Trautmann.

Kleopatra Sofroniou, DG's general manager classics, was present at the news conference to celebrate the special occasion, along with Timothy Xu, chairman and chief executive officer of Universal Music Greater

China. They awarded the maestro for his outstanding contributions to the global classical music industry during the event.

Yu's collaboration with DG dates back to before 2000. With Yu as the artistic director and principal conductor, the China Philharmonic Orchestra was launched in May 2000 and soon captured DG's attention. The two sides decided to record two albums as the newborn orchestra's greetings to the

world. It was the first time that the top classical label worked with a Chinese orchestra, becoming a milestone in the development of Chinese orchestras.

"With his vision, deep insights and serious artistic attitude in these two recordings, Yu showed the direction and laid the foundation for the future development of the China Philharmonic Orchestra. That is, to interpret global classics with exquisite skills on one hand, and to discover and create orchestral music with traditional Chinese cultural and musical elements on the other. In the following two decades, dozens of Chinese orchestras were established in a spurt, and almost all of them followed this direction and won respect worldwide," says Li Nan, president of the China Philharmonic Orchestra.

Taking the reins of the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra in 2009, Yu became the first Chinese conductor to sign an exclusive relationship with DG in 2018, offering the orchestra a global release and distribution partnership. This milestone partnership has seen the coproduction of highly acclaimed albums from 2018 to 2024, including *Gateways*, *Orff: Carmina Burana — Live from the Forbidden City*, *The Song of the Earth*, and *Emigre*, all of which are included in the box set.

"This year marks the 145th anniversary of the establishment of the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra. We have been committed to communicating with the world through music, which means not only bringing more international elements to Shanghai, but also showcasing Chinese music and culture to the whole world ... We are expecting deeper and further cooperation with DG in the future," said Zhou Ping, president of the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra, during the news conference.

Sofroniou spoke highly of Yu's efforts and the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra, saying she was greatly honored and deeply impressed during their partnership.

"Particularly, we much respect Yu's outstanding achievements in shaping his orchestras. He is a storyteller, bringing stories to us and music projects combining the West and the East, which is so original that we have never heard before and belongs to the future of classical (music). We are creating new heritage of classical music together," she says.

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Phantom's haunting beauty continues to thrill audiences

By CHEN NAN
chenan@chinadaily.com.cn

Imagine the hauntingly beautiful organ music resonating through the theater, the stage dimly lit as the audience waits in eager silence. Suddenly, the massive chandelier begins its slow ascent, casting an eerie glow over the theater.

The music swells into the iconic theme song, *The Phantom of the Opera*, and the tension builds as Christine Daae, the beautiful young soprano, steps into the spotlight. This breathtaking moment is one of many that defines the allure of this legendary musical, as the audience is transported to the heart of the Paris Opera House — a place where secrets lurk in the shadows and passion ignites amid the drama.

When the Beijing Tianqiao Performing Arts Center opened in 2015, Andrew Lloyd Webber's iconic musical *The Phantom of the Opera* came to the capital for the first time as the opening show. Since then, the venue has

become a key player in Beijing's cultural landscape, breaking box-office records and solidifying its place as a hub for international theater.

After a nine-year absence, the musical returns to the venue with 32 performances running from Dec 3 to 29, captivating audiences with its timeless tale of love, obsession and mystery. According to the venue, the tickets for all the shows have been sold out.

Since its debut in London in 1986, *The Phantom of the Opera* has been widely considered one of the most beautiful and spectacular productions in history, having been performed for over 160 million people in 46 countries and 195 cities. Webber's romantic, haunting, and soaring score includes *Music of the Night*, *All I Ask of You*, *Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again*, and the iconic title song. The show's global reach, with productions in 21 languages and tours across the world, has helped cement its status as a cultural touchstone.

The musical made its debut on the Chinese

mainland in Shanghai in 2004.

At the heart of *The Phantom of the Opera* is a compelling love triangle between Daae, Raoul, the nobleman who loves her, and the Phantom, a mysterious and tortured figure living beneath the Paris Opera House.

"We are thrilled to bring this global phenomenon to a new generation of theatergoers in Beijing," says Jonathan Roxmouth, an actor from South Africa, who portrays the enigmatic Phantom. Along with four other main stars of the English-language production, he met fans in Beijing on Dec 18.

"When I first played the role, I was only 23 years old, and I was very nervous. It was challenging, yet it was my dream role," says Roxmouth, who calls it "the best job in the world".

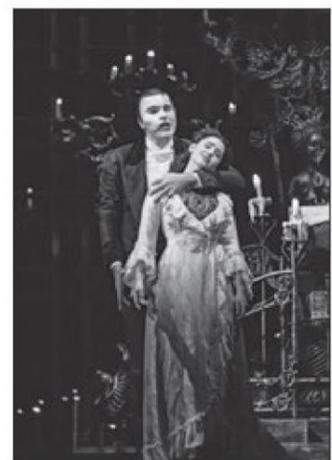
"By far, it is the most intense roller coaster of my musical theater career," he says.

American actress Grace Roberts plays the role of Daae. "I go to the gym six times a week to make sure that I have enough energy for the show, which requires me to be onstage

for two hours, acting and singing," she says.

The show features a massive team of 130 people, including the cast, crew and live orchestra, with more than 230 lavish costumes and 22 scene changes that provide a visual feast. The show's intricate set design is a highlight, with each scene change occurring roughly every five minutes. The production features meticulously designed props reflecting the 19th-century Parisian setting, and a crystal chandelier made of 6,000 beads.

According to the Beijing Tianqiao Performing Arts Center, with a ticket-sale share of over 64 percent, musicals have become a dominant genre at the venue, reflecting the growing enthusiasm for live theater in Beijing. The success of *The Phantom of the Opera* at the center marks a major achievement in the city's vibrant cultural scene, and the ongoing success of this production proves that Beijing's audiences are both sophisticated and passionate about musical theater.



A scene from the musical *The Phantom of the Opera*, which is being staged at the Beijing Tianqiao Performing Arts Center until Sunday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY