

Joining the club

Romania, Bulgaria are now fully part of Schengen zone

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C919 starts flying on Shanghai to Hong Kong route

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Spices of life

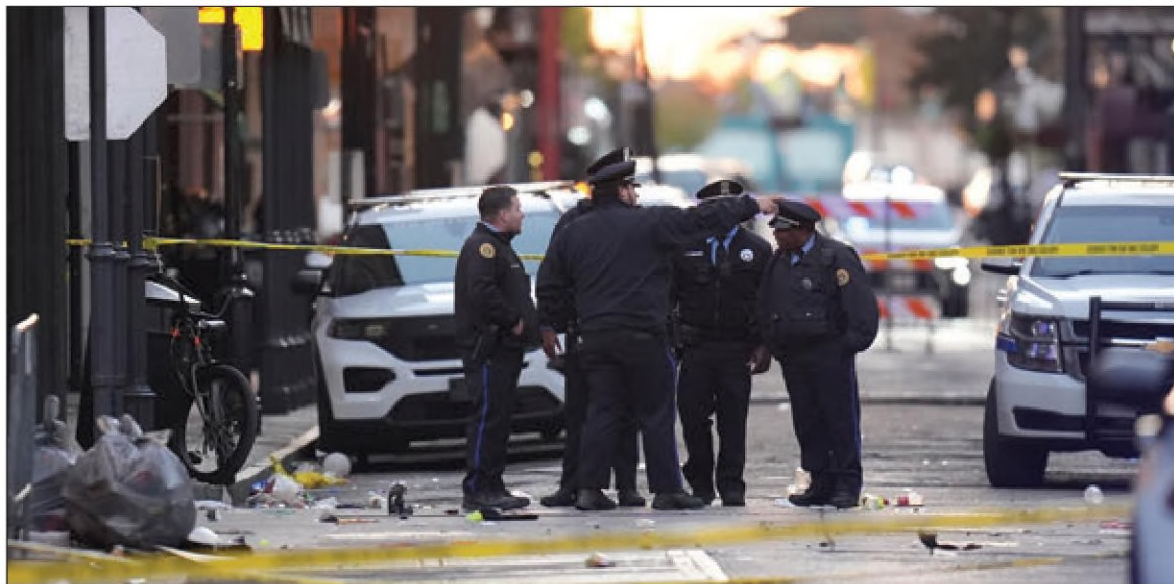
Spotlight put on often-overlooked heroes that shape flavor of cuisines

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CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中國日報 THURSDAY, JANUARY 2, 2025

Carnage in New Orleans; explosion in Las Vegas



Top: Security personnel gather at the scene on Bourbon Street after a man drove a pickup truck into a crowd on New Orleans' Canal and Bourbon Street on Wednesday, killing at least 15 people. The driver was shot and killed. GERALD HERBERT / AP
Left: Matthias Hauswirth of New Orleans prays on the street near the scene where a vehicle was driven into a crowd on New Orleans' Canal and Bourbon streets, Wednesday. GEORGE WALKER IV / AP
Right: Flames rise from a Tesla Cybertruck after it exploded outside the Trump International Hotel Las Vegas, in Las Vegas, Nevada, on Wednesday in this screen grab taken from a social media video. ALCIDES ANTUNES / VIA REUTERS See story, page 9

Xi's New Year message hailed overseas as being 'deeply encouraging'

By XING YI in London, LINDA DENG in Seattle and REN QI in Moscow

President Xi Jinping's New Year address, which highlighted China's achievements in the past year and its commitment to contributing to world peace and growth, was insightful and encouraging, global experts have said.

In his message delivered on Tuesday to ring in 2025, Xi focused on high-quality development and people's livelihoods, and underscored China's vision to promote global governance reform.

Xi did not shy away from mentioning the challenges facing the Chinese economy and called on everyone to remain confident.

Jack Perry, chairman of the 48 Group in London, called the address "insightful", and said it offers profound lessons not only for China but also for the global community, including businesses and organizations in the United Kingdom.

"The emphasis on high-quality development and the shift from old growth drivers to innovative technologies is particularly noteworthy," Perry said. "President Xi's remarks deeply aligned with our mission to foster collaboration, understanding and mutual prosperity."

The achievements in new energy vehicles, integrated circuit, artificial intelligence and quantum communications demonstrate "China's commitment to advancing technological frontiers", which are directly relevant to UK businesses, particularly in sectors such as smart infrastructure, AI-led net-zero projects and medical technology enhancements, Perry said.

"I see immense potential in the lessons outlined in President Xi's message. By embracing these values and fostering deeper UK-China collaboration, we can create a future that benefits businesses, communities and the world at large," he said.

Keith Bennett, co-editor of the London-based Friends of Socialist China platform, said that Xi's message "embodies confidence combined with realism". It outlines the current situation in China without seeking to obscure difficulties and challenges, whether domestic or global, objective or subjective, and "it points the way forward", he said.

President Xi's address emphasized that "challenges and pressures need to be overcome through hard work", Bennett said, adding that it is a message that people in every country should take seriously.

In identifying current objective and subjective problems and issues that require resolution, Xi's speech "shows how the new is being born in

the course of tackling old and new challenges; for example, in the fostering and development of new quality productive forces", he said.

Ron Chow, co-chairman of the US-China Youth and Student Exchange Association, called Xi's New Year address "truly inspiring".

The speech, which highlighted advancements in technological innovation, improvements in people's livelihoods and the progress made in international cooperation, was "deeply encouraging", he said.

Chow said what touched him the most was the emphasis on China's advocacy for cooperation and mutual benefit, with its commitment to building a community with a shared future for mankind.

President Xi's remarks deeply aligned with our mission to foster collaboration, understanding and mutual prosperity."

Jack Perry, chairman of the 48 Group in London

"The firm stand for peace and opposition to division and conflict are not only China's voice, but also the shared aspiration of all peace-loving people. ... China shoulders its responsibilities with dignity, making overseas Chinese proud and eager to contribute," he said.

Chow added that he is confident that China will overcome all challenges and become even more strong and prosperous, with its people leading more harmonious and fulfilling lives.

Oleg Timofeev, an associate professor at RUDN University in Russia, said that Xi's speech reflected China's economic and high-tech development.

The world has recognized China's remarkable achievements across various fields over the past year, including the semiconductor sector, Timofeev said.

"The development of China's homegrown silicon capabilities is crucial for advancing modern technology across a wide range of industries, positioning China as a high-tech powerhouse," he added.

Shao Xinying in Beijing contributed to this story.

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Legacy set to give fresh impetus to Sino-US ties

WWII commemorations expected to boost exchanges between nations

By ZHANG YUNBI zhangyunbi@chinadaily.com.cn

Wednesday, the first day of 2025, marked not only the 46th anniversary of the establishment of China-US diplomatic ties, but also the start of a year that will see celebrations of the 80th anniversary of the victory in the World Anti-Fascist War, which ended in 1945.

Friendly people from all walks of life in China and the US told China Daily that through the flames of World War II, the militaries and civilians of these two victorious countries, including US Flying

Tigers aviation veterans, formed a deep bond, and that it is imperative to carry on their great legacy.

In addition, they said, it is necessary to further sow the seeds of friendship among the younger generations of both nations this year and expand cultural exchanges.

Lu Kang, vice-minister of the International Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, mentioned a World War II concentration camp that had been run by the Japanese military in China, saying that it stood as testimony to "the history of the Chinese and American people sharing weal and woes and helping each other".

At a forum in Beijing last month,

Lu recalled that more than three months before, he was in Weifang, Shandong province, with foreign friends, and they visited the Weihai West Civilians Concentration Camp Site Museum.

In World War II, Japanese invaders used the camp to detain more than 2,000 expatriates, including more than 300 children, from countries such as the US, Britain and Canada.

"During that time, the local Chinese residents risked their lives to bring food and medicine to the detained expatriates, relayed messages to them and helped them try to escape," Lu said.

Among the expatriates was a young American in his 20s who

managed to escape with the help of local guerrillas and joined the Chinese armed forces in the fight against Japanese fascism.

"This young man's name was Arthur William Hummel. Forty years later, he became the second US ambassador to the People's Republic of China," Lu said.

It was during Hummel's ambassadorship that the two governments reached and issued their third joint communique in 1982, he noted.

That part of history about the camp "has become a vivid portrayal of the deep friendship between the Chinese and American people", he said.

"China-US relations are standing at a new crossroads, but no matter how the situation changes, China's wish to carry forward the friendship between the peoples of China and the US has never changed, and will never change," Lu added.

Jeffrey Greene, chairman of the Sino-American Aviation Heritage Foundation, is another keen supporter of subnational friendship and youth exchanges between the two nations.

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GCI reawakens prosperity in Global South

Existing relations between many countries from the North and the South have been characterized by a lack of openness and inclusivity. Narratives such as clash of civilizations, end of history, the coming anarchy, the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human governance, and the divisive classification of societies as Orient and Occident, center and periphery, rich and poor, developed and underdeveloped, have all posed a threat to the quest for a just, open and inclusive multi-civilizational world.

The retrogressive politics of violence and divisiveness have been directed at countries of the Global South. The aim is to keep the Global South countries in a pro-

WORLD WATCH By Dennis Munene

longed state of instability, where humiliation and exploitation of natural resources prevail.

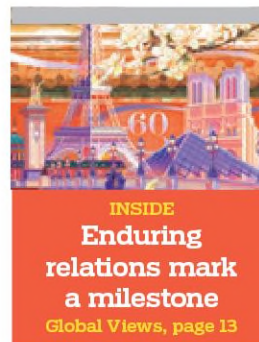
Against this backdrop, the first Global South Media and Think Tank Forum, which was held in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in November, reawakened the spirit of the historic Asian-African Conference, also known as the Bandung Conference, held 70 years ago. Organized by Xinhua News Agency and Brazil Communication Company, the forum was attended by around 350 representatives of 170 media outlets, think

tanks, government agencies, enterprises and other institutions from over 70 countries and regions.

Themed "Development and Revitalization: A New Journey for the Global South", the forum happened at a time when the world is facing unprecedented challenges emanating from the changing international governance system perpetuated by politics of anti-globalization.

Knowing the injustices endured by the Global South countries for far too long, the forum served as a vital platform for fostering friendship, deepening cooperation and facilitating mutual learning, while amplifying the collective voice of the Global South.

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CHINA'S SUCCESS CAN LEAD CLIMATE BATTLE, SAY EXPERTS

With consensus fracturing, time is ticking on temperature targets

By YANG RAN yangran1@chinadaily.com.cn

The year 2024 was marked by unprecedented climate challenges, with record-breaking heat and increasingly severe weather events becoming the new norm. Climate change, a topic that has dominated global headlines for years, has become more of a reality, rather than an impending crisis.

In early December, the Copernicus Climate Change Service announced that 2024 was almost certain to be the hottest year on record, surpassing records dating back to 1940. Last year was also set to be the first



one in which the global average temperature exceeded the 1.5 C limit above preindustrial levels, a critical threshold established by the Paris Agreement.

The agreement aims for "keeping a global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius".

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PAGE TWO



LIMIN / CHINA DAILY

Climate: Actions gaining momentum

From page 1

Teng Fei, deputy director of Tsinghua University's Institute of Energy, Environment, and Economy, said that while this does not indicate a breach of the Paris Agreement — since the temperature target is based on a long-term average — it does highlight a worrying warming trend. "From now on, each year might be the hottest on record, but also the coolest we'll see in the future," Teng said.

This year has also seen a series of devastating extreme weather events, including wildfires in Canada and the Amazon, heat waves in France, Mali, and Mexico, fatal floods in Spain, Nepal, and Sudan, and destructive cyclones in the United States and Southeast Asia.

According to a study published in November by Carbon Brief, a United Kingdom-based climate website, 74 percent of nearly 750 extreme weather events and trends were made more likely or severe due to climate change. Some events were deemed virtually impossible without human influence on global temperatures.

Studies on attributing extreme weather events confirm that human-caused climate change significantly impacts the frequency, severity, and likelihood of these events.

"More than half the weather and climate disaster losses in China can be attributed to climate change," Teng said.

"As temperatures rise, human-induced climate change will increasingly contribute to extreme weather. Both the frequency and intensity of these events will grow as climate change worsens."

Despite the growing evidence of climate change's impact, global efforts to combat it remain insufficient. Ma Jun, director of the Beijing-based Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs, said despite a controlled growth rate, global emissions are still rising.

According to the 2024 Global Carbon Budget report by the Global Carbon Project, a UK-based science team, carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuels and cement were projected to increase by 0.8 percent last year, reaching a record 37.4 billion metric tons. At this rate, the remaining carbon

budget to limit warming to 1.5 C will be exhausted in six years.

Fractured consensus

The need for more ambitious and swift climate action is clear, yet global efforts to unite for the health of the planet are faltering.

At the COP29 conference, in Baku, Azerbaijan, in November, a contentious climate finance deal was reached, with wealthy nations agreeing to provide at least \$300 billion annually by 2035 to help poorer countries transition to clean energy and prepare for severe climate impacts. However, many developing countries expressed deep disappointment with the deal, arguing the funding falls far short of the \$1.3 trillion that experts believe is needed.

Taking the floor just after the deal was approved, Nigeria's representative Nkiruka Maduekwé dismissed the funding on offer as a "joke", suggesting it would undermine national climate plans due in February.

According to Article 9 of the Paris Agreement, developed countries are obligated to provide financial resources to assist developing countries. As the primary contributors to historical carbon emissions, developed countries have both a moral responsibility and an international duty under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement to help developing countries address climate change.

"The Paris Agreement established a political balance in which developing countries committed to more ambitious emission reduction targets, while developed countries would support them due to their limited resources and development needs. Research shows that trillions of dollars are needed globally to meet the 1.5 C or 2 C climate goals. In this context, the \$300 billion pledged by developed countries is highly inadequate," Teng said.

"The \$300 billion proposed by developed countries, far below the necessary amount, effectively shifts the burden cost of emission reductions and transition onto developing countries. Consequently, developing countries reject this deal as it is unfair," he said.

The track record of developed countries

2024
year in
Review

in fulfilling their financial commitments is shaky. In 2009 at COP 15 in Copenhagen, developed nations pledged \$100 billion a year by 2020 for climate action in developing countries, a promise only fulfilled in 2022. This history casts doubt on the achievability of the new \$300 billion goal.

Teng also pointed out that much of the previous \$100 billion came from multilateral development banks, with only about 30 percent being grants, and the rest loans. Developing countries, already burdened with debt issues, are wary of increasing their financial liabilities.

Frustrated by the stuttering progress made at global negotiations, some developing nations have turned to legal action as an alternative to tackle the climate crisis.

In December, the International Court of Justice held a series of historic hearings to form a legal framework on the responsibilities of countries in addressing climate change and the consequences for those damaging the environment.

From Dec 2 to 13, the ICJ heard views from 99 countries and over a dozen inter-governmental organizations, making it the largest case the court has accepted in its nearly 80-year history.

"We find ourselves on the front lines of a crisis we did not create, a crisis that threatens our very existence," Ralph Regenvanu, Vanuatu's special envoy for climate change and the environment, told the court. He said that there is an urgent need for a response to climate change rooted in international law, rather than politics.

Vanuatu is one of the small island states that have spearheaded the effort to get the court to give an advisory opinion, which is expected to be delivered in 2025.

The ICJ's advisory opinions will be crucial for future global litigation, said Ma from the Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs.

"Although the ICJ's advisory opinions are not legally binding and cannot directly compel wealthy countries to act, the ICJ can lay down a legal precedent that could be cited in future climate-related legislation and litigation," he said.

"In the future, we may see more climate change-driven lawsuits as climate change worsens, and the differences between developed and developing countries, as well as among various interest groups, become more pronounced.

"Negotiations have been tough, with some countries even withdrawing to avoid responsibility. Given this, some nations, especially island states, are looking for new ways to push forward on climate action by clarifying legal responsibilities for addressing climate change," Ma added.

Overall, global climate governance is now at a crisis point, said Teng. "The political compromise achieved in the Paris Agreement is facing significant challenges due to the higher-than-expected difficulties and funding needs. The global economic downturn and shifting political climates further complicate the situation, with green transitions disrupting existing economic, and social structures."

Li Shuo, director of the China Climate Hub at the Asia Society Policy Institute, echoed Teng's concerns, noting that the return of Donald Trump to the White House could make global climate governance more challenging than in recent years. Trump, who has repeatedly called climate change a "hoax" may weaken the climate commitments of the world's largest economy and potentially withdraw the US from the Paris Agreement again.

The potential withdrawal of the US poses a significant challenge to other developed nations, said Ma. "If the US, as the largest historical emitter, pulls out and sidesteps the agreement's commitments, other developed nations might have to step up with additional funding, which would be quite a tough task considering their current economic situation."

Finding a solution

Despite the grim outlook, experts believe there is still a way out of the crisis.

Teng emphasized that the key to tackling climate change is to further lower the costs of renewable energy technologies through global cooperation, making them bankable for commercial investors.

A white paper titled "China's Energy Transition" released in August by China's State Council Information Office cited data from the International Renewable Energy Agency saying that over the past decade, the average cost per kilowatt-hour of global wind power projects has decreased by more than 60 percent, and photovoltaic power projects by more than 80 percent.

The reductions are largely attributable to China's efforts, the white paper said. China-made PV modules and wind power equipment have enabled the widespread economic use of renewable energy in an increasing number of countries, it said.

To truly address climate change, this trend needs to continue, ensuring that renewable energy is affordable and profitable for developing countries, Teng said.

"Trade wars and tariffs initiated by the EU (European Union) and the US actually hinder global efforts to reduce emissions — such approaches disrupt the global industrial chain and may even increase the global cost of renewable energy," he said.

Li said the economic benefits of a green economy can be the key driver for countries to advance their climate agendas.

"Balancing economic development and climate action is a challenge faced by both developing and developed countries. Particularly for developing nations, it's essential for them to identify economic growth opportunities in the green transition," said Li.

"China serves as a successful example in this aspect. The growth of China's renewable energy and low-carbon industries in recent years has significantly boosted its macroeconomic development. This demonstrates that climate action can benefit a country's economic interests, a reality China has effectively shown in recent years."

The future of global climate efforts depends on finding this balance and fostering international cooperation to achieve sustainable progress, he concluded.

Agencies contributed to the story.

By YANG RAN

As green transformation and climate adaptation become more urgent, officials and experts have praised China for its pivotal role in building global climate resilience through South-South cooperation.

During his visit to China in December, Ahsan Iqbal, Pakistan's Minister for Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives, expressed his appreciation for China's partnership in tackling climate change. He said Pakistan has greatly benefited from this collaboration, particularly in developing renewable energy capabilities.

"Thanks to our collaboration with China, Pakistan has, for the first time, developed renewable energy capabilities that are crucial for scaling up green energy in our country," Iqbal told China Daily.

According to the official website of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Secretariat Office, China has completed several renewable energy projects in Pakistan, including a solar park, four wind farms, and two hydropower projects.

Nation's renewables know-how crucial to Global South

"Pakistan is one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change. We want to use China's help to prepare for climate challenges," Iqbal said. "We hope this collaboration will help make our energy sector more efficient, affordable, and green. China has already provided us with the know-how in renewable energies by helping build these projects."

Beijing has also helped enhance Pakistan's ability to prevent and mitigate meteorological disasters. At the third China-Indian Ocean Region Forum on Blue Economy Development Cooperation in December, China signed an agreement on building projects for early warning and response to climate-induced disasters in Pakistan.

This cooperation is vital for Pakistan's northern areas, where glaciers are at risk of melting and generating fatal floods, Iqbal said. The early warning system will be useful in preparing for and mitigating the

effects of climate disasters, he added.

Iqbal said South-South cooperation in sharing experiences is important, as many countries facing climate disasters are in the Global South. "China has been at the forefront of helping its partners develop their capacity to face climate challenges, particularly in relief, rescue, and early warning systems," he said.

By October, China had signed 53 memoranda of understanding for South-South cooperation on climate change with 42 developing countries, and conducted nearly 100 climate change mitigation and adaptation projects.

Zhang Jianyu, chief development officer of the BRI International Green Development Coalition, said Global South nations make relatively low contributions to global emissions. However, they are still in the process of industrializing and have the right to further development, which sug-

gests potential emissions increases.

"Given their significant populations and importance, supporting their green transition is crucial for global climate goals," Zhang said.

Since 2016, China has provided and mobilized more than 177 billion yuan (\$24.25 billion) in climate-related financial support for developing countries, covering a wide range of mitigation and adaptation projects.

Zhang said green financing and technology support for developing countries had accelerated their green transition and helped them industrialize at a lower carbon level. "This process also brings additional benefits such as improved governance, technological advancements, and enhanced public welfare, contributing to achieving sustainable development goals," he added.

Developing countries also represent a

vast potential market. "Investing in this potential green market can boost China's green industries. This benefit can extend globally, as a larger market can stimulate technological innovation and speed up the advancement of green technologies," Zhang said.

Ma Jun, director of the Beijing-based Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs, said many countries from the Global South have abundant renewable energy resources.

"By leveraging China's renewable energy technology, we can help these nations transition to green energy and achieve the goal of tripling global renewable energy capacity by 2030, from a 2022 baseline, as established in the historic UAE Consensus at COP28," he said.

Ma also highlighted the potential for green economic growth in developing countries through South-South cooperation. "Developing countries are keen on addressing climate change and achieving economic development. China's experience in these areas can be highly useful," he said.

TOP NEWS

C919 begins regular Shanghai-HK service

By WANG YING and YU YILEI in Shanghai

China's domestically developed passenger aircraft, the C919, successfully completed its maiden flight from Shanghai to Hong Kong on New Year's Day, marking the jetliner's first commercial operation beyond the Chinese mainland.

China Eastern Airlines' Flight MU721, carrying 157 passengers, took off from Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport at 8:21 am on Wednesday and arrived at Hong Kong International Airport at 10:44 am, marking the inauguration of the aircraft's new route.

Wan Xiangdong, head of the Civil Aviation Administration of China's East China Regional Administration, said that every achievement made by the C919 has clearly proved China's capability in science and technology.

The launch of a Shanghai-Hong Kong direct flight using the C919 will "further accumulate valuable experience" for the aircraft's commercial operation, "laying a solid foundation for the jetliner to tap into the broader international market", Wan said.

Liu Tiexiang, general manager of China Eastern Air Holding Co, said the flight has opened a new chapter in the high-quality development of the nation's self-developed passenger aircraft.

"Sharing similar cultures, Shanghai and Hong Kong are both international centers for finance, trade and shipping. The two cities have a long history of exchanges and economic cooperation. The new daily flight of the C919 is expected to better showcase China's capability in manufacturing and services by offering more diversified travel options," Liu said.

Since the aircraft's maiden commercial flight on May 28, 2023, China Eastern's C919 fleet has conducted more than 6,600 commercial flights and completed close to 1 million passenger trips, Liu added.

Mable Chan, Hong Kong's secretary for transport and logistics, said: "As the C919 achieved one milestone after another, we hoped that one day it would be used for regular flights to Hong Kong. Today, that dream of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government has finally come true."

As China's first trunk jetliner designed in accordance with international standards, the C919 started its commercial operation in May 2023 and it flew over the scenic Victoria Harbor in Hong Kong in December the same year.

Lin Zhijie, an aviation industry analyst, said the aircraft's commercial launch between Shanghai and Hong Kong will help it accumulate

experience for further overseas use, which in turn will allow more passengers to experience China's self-developed jetliner.

Lin, who is also a columnist for China's civil aviation website Carnoc.com, said the operation record of the C919 shows the aircraft performs well and is safe, adding that more efforts should be made to further enhance its operational reliability.

Guo Jia, a civil aviation expert and a professor at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies' South China Business College, said that existing operation data shows the stability of the aircraft and it is only a matter of time before the C919 is used for more overseas commercial flights. "The maiden flight to Hong Kong was a business decision, but it has also demonstrated the growing enthusiasm of Hong Kong's people to travel onboard a Chinese-made aircraft," Guo said.

Jia Shun, a Shanghai resident visit-

6,600

Number of commercial flights China Eastern's C919 fleet has conducted since the maiden flight in May 2023, completing close to 1 million passenger trips.

ing Hong Kong with his wife, said on Wednesday, after checking in at the airport, that he was very excited to learn that they would board the C919 aircraft.

"We are looking forward to the plane's interior design and the overall travel experience, which I believe will be exceptional," Jia said.

Huang Jian, another passenger traveling to Hong Kong with seven members of his family, said: "I had always wanted to travel on board the C919 and my dream has come true. Taking the plane on the first day of 2025 is double happiness for our family."

China Eastern, the first global customer of the C919, has purchased 105 of these aircraft from the manufacturer, Commercial Aircraft Corp of China, and received its 10th jetliner on Tuesday. The Shanghai-based airline currently operates the largest C919 fleet globally.

Wednesday's flight made Hong Kong the ninth city where China Eastern is operating the C919 after Shanghai, Beijing, Chongqing, Chengdu in Sichuan province, Xi'an in Shaanxi province, Guangzhou in Guangdong province, Taiyuan in Shanxi province and Wuhan in Hubei province.

Contact the writers at wang_ying@chinadaily.com.cn



A C919 aircraft bound for Hong Kong takes off from Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport on Wednesday. YIN LIQIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Ready to fly



Hot air balloons are prepared for flight during the inaugural International Balloon Festival in Pokhara, Nepal, on Wednesday. Thirty countries are participating in the event, and the balloon rides offer breathtaking views of the Himalayas. PRAKASH MATHEMA / AFP

China's chip exports soar despite US curbs

Sanctions have not hindered development of industry, expert says

By SHAO XINYING shaoxinying@chinadaily.com.cn

Imposition of multiple sanctions by the United States has not been able to halt the rapid growth of China's chip industry, which is continuously expanding its production and technological capabilities, experts said.

China's integrated circuit exports touched 1.03 trillion yuan (\$141 billion) in the first 11 months of 2024, a year-on-year increase of 20.3 percent, according to data released recently by the General Administration of Customs.

Integrated circuit design, at the forefront of the chip industry, directly impacts a chip's functionality, performance and cost, according to industry experts.

Integrated circuit exports stood at just 559 billion yuan in 2018 when the US initiated its tech war against China.

The surge in exports comes amid the administration of US President Joe Biden on Dec 23 launching a trade investigation into China's legacy or mature semiconductors, which could lead to higher tariffs or import bans.

China has voiced strong opposition to Washington's unfounded and unilateral move.

Last month, the Bureau of Industry and Security of the US Department of Commerce announced tighter restrictions on semiconductor manufacturing equipment and memory chips meant for China, adding 140 Chinese semiconductor-related companies to its Entity List.

"Amid the US' continued escalation of export controls on chips and related technologies, China's integrated circuit exports have continued to grow, indicating that US sanctions have not hindered the development and expansion of China's chip industry," Xiang Ligang, director-general of the Information Consumption Alliance, a telecom industry association, told China Daily.

"US sanctions over the past several years have allowed China to map out its chip industry chain. While Chinese companies still lag behind some of the world's most

advanced levels of manufacturing, design, packaging, and testing, they have made notable progress in each of these areas," he said.

Experts attribute much of this strong growth to robust policy support and clear government guidance, which have fortified the industry's development foundation.

China in May launched the third phase of the China Integrated Circuit Industry Investment Fund, also known as the "Big Fund", with a registered capital of 344 billion yuan. The fund's earlier phases were established in 2014 and 2019, with 138.7 billion yuan and 204.2 billion yuan, respectively.

In 2020, the State Council released policies to support the high-quality development of integrated circuit and software industries.

In June 2014, the Chinese government published an outline to advance the integrated circuit industry.

According to TechInsights, a semiconductor information platform, China's semiconductor industry is projected to experience significant growth, with production capacity anticipated to rise by 40 percent over the next five years.

A chip industrial professional surnamed Zhu said China's localization rate of chip packaging is indeed showing an increasing trend and the yield rate of domestic chips is also gradually improving.

"Generally speaking, mature process technologies can meet the needs of most application scenarios, as many fields do not require advanced processes like 7nm or 5nm. Cost savings and stability are the main considerations," Zhu said.

Mature processes, which use node sizes larger than 28nm, are more suitable for industries like automotive and manufacturing, while advanced processes under 28nm excel in performance but are more expensive and less durable and used in limited areas.

"China has made good progress in mature process chip production, with a higher self-sufficiency rate. However, challenges remain in advanced nodes manufacturing, which is under heavy US

restrictions," Liu Liang, a researcher at the Institute of Applied Economics of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, told China Daily.

"The export controls have strongly motivated Chinese firms to pursue innovation independently," he said.

One notable example is Huawei's announcement in November that its newly released Mate 70 series features 100 percent domestically produced chips, including 7nm chips. The Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation is also able to mass produce 12nm chips.

Since 2018, the US has steadily intensified efforts to suppress China's chip industry, including sanctions on ZTE in 2018 and restrictions on Huawei since 2019. In 2020, the US introduced measures, including adding multiple Chinese companies to its export control Entity List, to block the flow of 10nm and below chips, as well as related technologies and equipment into China.

"The US restrictions will only backfire on itself and its allies, making it a lose-lose measure," said Xiang of the Information Consumption Alliance.

A report titled "Geopolitical Risk and Decoupling: Evidence from US Export Controls" by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York revised in November stated: "Our estimates suggest that export controls cost the average affected US supplier \$857 million in lost market capitalization, with total losses for all affected suppliers totaling \$130 billion."

"Global supply chain disruptions, intensified international competition, and faster tech iterations pose new challenges, which have shaped the resilience and vitality of China's domestic chip industry," said Liu, the SASS researcher.

"The rapid development of new technologies like 5G, AI, and internet of things has created vast opportunities and market potential for the chip industry," he said, suggesting increasing investment in R&D and enhancing industry chain collaboration.

"There surely is hope for China-US ties as long as the younger generation gets along with each other amicably," he added.

This year, his association will continue working with localities in China and invite more young Americans to visit China through channels such as sister provinces/states and sister cities and "to open more windows for them to perceive and understand China", Shen said.

Chen Yitian contributed to this story.

Initiative: GCI helps to create a fairer world

From page 1

The forum provided an opportunity for these nations to build consensus and promote a more balanced form of globalization.

The Global South countries are standing up against the politics of divisiveness and hegemonic tendencies among civilizations. The rise of multi-lateral platforms such as the BRICS, South-South cooperation, Group of 77, and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, among others, have restructured relations and embraced openness and inclusiveness in promoting development, governance and equality of civilizations.

Initiatives such as the Global Civilization Initiative, unveiled by China — a leading member of the Global South — have provided alternatives to the postcolonial forms of modernity imposed by the West to create the continuation of the old hegemonic world order, and reawakened the Bandung spirit where these countries united to oppose imperialism and colonialism, defend their sovereign rights and pursue a more equitable world.

The GCI advocates mutual respect between civilizations, equality, tolerance, coexistence, exchanges and mutual learning.

These have allowed the Global South countries to promote respect for the diversity of civilizations by upholding the principles of equality, mutual learning, dialogue and inclusiveness. All civilizations are equal, and none is greater than the other. They all require an opportunity to experience rapid and sustainable economic, social and cultural growth without any discrimination.

In addition, the GCI advocates the common values of humanity by genuinely committing to equal recognition of human values and making them explicit in all social systems and institutions. It also supports the importance of inheritance and innovation of civilizations by embracing technology and innovation as a way of life in the Global South. The rural revitalization process in China is a clear example of the importance of promoting innovation. This has enabled China to lift about 800 million people out of poverty.

To try to solve many problems of the present world at the root, the GCI advocates robust international people-to-people exchanges and cooperation by building a global network for inter-civilizational dialogue and cooperation to enhance friendly exchanges among civilizations.

Significantly, the GCI encompasses the spirit of Ubuntu philosophy: I am because you are. The pan-Africanist notion recognizes that all civilizations live in an interconnected society where inclusiveness and prosperity are paramount. African countries being key members of the Global South reject the notion of a superiority complex over other civilizations. The GCI promotes openness and inclusiveness where different civilizations will coexist, and support each other to enhance home-grown forms of modernization, and call for a new world order where peace and development prevail.

As stated by Chinese President Xi Jinping in his congratulatory message to the forum, pursuing modernization and working for a more just and equitable international order are the sacred historic missions of the Global South countries. The GCI truly reawakens the vision of shared prosperity among the Global South countries.

The author is the executive director of the China-Africa Center at the Africa Policy Institute in Nairobi, Kenya. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Exchanges: Dynamism from young people vital to ties

From page 1

In 2023, President Xi Jinping wrote a letter in reply to Greene and Flying Tigers veterans Harry Moyer and Mel McMullen.

Xi endorsed the China-US wartime friendship and expressed his hope that the spirit of the Flying Tigers can be passed down from generation to generation.

Greene said that "feihu, a tiger who flies, cannot be defeated and is immortal", so Flying Tigers became the name that the Chinese people gave to the group of volunteer US pilots

who came to China in 1941 and stood shoulder to shoulder with the Chinese people to fight the Japanese troops.

On Monday, Greene led a delegation to Guangdong province, where they visited Yang Xianyi High School of Zhongshan, founded in 1925 and named after an air force pioneer.

Regarding his foundation's Flying Tiger Friendship School program, Greene said, "We are bringing 200 American schoolkids to China."

He noted that the program now features 63 Chinese schools and 26 US schools, "so this is a program that's going to expand as long as we

can keep them going". Communication and exchange are key concepts of the program, he added.

Greene also visited Pandas Heritage Stadium in Zhongshan, where he was amazed by the baseball field and hummed the American song "Take Me Out to the Ball Game".

"When we bring our students here, we bring them to this baseball field. Maybe they can play a softball game, or even a hardball game, you know, for fun," he said. "It's another opportunity for Americans and Chinese to share something."

Shen Xin, vice-president of the Chi-

nese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, said his association will invite living Flying Tigers veterans, their descendants and representatives of Flying Tigers friendship organizations to visit China and hold commemorative events this year.

"We will revisit the history of the Chinese and American people fighting shoulder to shoulder, pass on the traditional friendship, tighten the two peoples' bond, enhance heart-to-heart contacts, and inject more warmth and momentum into the healthy and stable development of China-US relations," he said.

Hailing the program proposed by President Xi in 2023 to invite 50,000 young Americans to China on exchange and study programs over the course of five years, Shen emphasized the need to consistently gather dynamism from young people for China-US friendship.

"There surely is hope for China-US ties as long as the younger generation gets along with each other amicably," he added.

This year, his association will continue working with localities in China and invite more young Americans to visit China through channels such as sister provinces/states and sister cities and "to open more windows for them to perceive and understand China", Shen said.

CHINA

Shanxi, Inner Mongolia get first direct fast rail line

By ZHU XINGXIN in Shuozhou, Shanxi and YUAN HUI in Hohhot and ZHOU HUIYING

The Jining-Datong-Yuanping High-speed Railway became operational on Tuesday, marking the beginning of a direct high-speed rail line between Shanxi province and the Inner Mongolia autonomous region.

The 309-kilometer line has nine stops. It runs between Ulaanqab in Inner Mongolia and Yuanping in Shanxi, passing through the cities of Datong, Shuozhou and Xinzhou in Shanxi, and also connects with the Datong-Xian High-speed Railway.

It is an important part of the nation's "Eight Vertical and Eight Horizontal" rail network.

The new line, designed for trains running at up to 250 kilometers per hour, will cut the travel time between Hohhot, the capital of Inner Mongolia, and Taiyuan, capital of Shanxi, to about 3 hours and 12 minutes from the previous five hours.

Jining-Datong-Yuanping High-speed Railway



Source: People's Railway Daily CHINA DAILY



Performers onboard a train celebrate the launch of the railway on Tuesday. ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY

"The new line marks the opening of the rapid railway passenger transport channel between the two provincial capitals and the further improvement of the regional railway network," Chen Lei, director of the Shanxi Provincial Development and Reform Commission, said at the opening ceremony. "It is of great significance to the high-quality economic and social development along the line, as well as the promotion of Taiyuan's status as a national comprehensive transportation hub."

The Shanxi section, with approximately 197 kilometers of new track, started construction in November 2021. As the new line opened, the Yanmenguan Railway Station, around 30 km from the Yanmen Pass section of the Great Wall in Shanxi, welcomed its first high-speed railway.

"The opening of the high-speed railway has facilitated the integration of cultural and tourist development, as well as the international popularity of the Yanmen Pass," said Yan Shengyu, Party secretary of the station. "We hope to see more tourists from home and abroad come for sightseeing."

Ping Rui, a 30-year-old resident in Datong, bought a ticket for the first train as soon as he came to know the new rail line would go into service.

"The opening of the high-speed railway can shorten the distance between Shanxi and Inner Mongolia, making travel more convenient by reducing travel time," Ping said.

Expressing his desire to welcome more tourists to Shanxi, he said, "Along the route, there are many filming locations that have inspired the settings of the hit game *Black Myth: Wukong*, including the Yungang Grottoes, the Hanging Temple and the Yingxian Wooden Pagoda."

Contact the writers at zhouhuiying@chinadaily.com.cn

Noodle master class



Students and their parents learn how to make noodles under the guidance of a chef during a Lanzhou noodle cultural activity at a primary school in Lanzhou, Gansu province, on Tuesday. During the event, professional beef noodle chefs from Gansu Heli Vocational Training School demonstrated the process of making beef noodles. FENG LEKAI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Shanghai railway staff finds fame with rapid typing, spoken English

By ZHENG ZHENG in Shanghai zhengzheng@chinadaily.com.cn

A video showcasing a Shanghai Hongqiao Railway Station employee's rapid typing and fluent English skills has gone viral, highlighting the station's efforts to accommodate the growing number of international travelers.

In the video, You Yuan, who has been working at the station since it opened in 2010, deftly assists foreign passengers with ticket purchases and changes. Her remarkable typing speed and clear communication skills have drawn widespread praise online.

"Compared to the past, one-third to two-thirds of our daily customers are now international travelers, as most domestic travelers buy tickets online," said You, who transitioned to ticket sales in 2015. "English has become an essential skill for us."

According to railway authorities, 1.6 million foreign passengers purchased train tickets at Shanghai

railway stations last year, a 200 percent increase from 2023. The surge followed China's expansion of transit visa-free periods from 72/144 hours to 240 hours and an increase in accessible ports and regions.

To meet growing demand, railway staff workers have undergone rigorous language training.

"We regularly attend training sessions and practice through real interactions," You said. "My goal is clear communication and successful transactions."

The station has also implemented technological upgrades. Since November 2023, foreign passengers have been able to verify their passport information online, bypassing in-person checks. Last year, Shanghai Hongqiao upgraded its payment systems to accept international credit cards, including Visa and Mastercard.

"Beyond hardware upgrades, we've intensified foreign language training for staff across various positions to ensure seamless service,"

said Wang Fang, deputy marketing chief at Shanghai Railway Station.

Tourists have praised the improvements. Jaime Martinez, a traveler from Spain, described the ticketing experience as "very helpful," noting how English-speaking workers have helped foreign passengers navigate China's high-speed rail network more easily.

China's railways are expanding rapidly. In the Yangtze River Delta region alone last year, four new high-speed rail lines were launched, and the construction of five more has commenced. The region's railways had transported over 800 million passengers by Nov 19 last year, reaching this milestone 40 days earlier than in 2023.

For You, the modernization effort is a far cry from the early days of paper tickets and long queues. "Now, it's not just about typing quickly, but also mastering multiple skills to handle diverse needs," she said.

Judiciary embraces AI for efficiency

With a population surpassing 1.4 billion, China operates one of the world's busiest judicial systems, and artificial intelligence is playing an increasingly vital role in shaping its future.

In 2023, Shenzhen, Guangdong province, became a trailblazer in judicial innovation with the introduction of an AI-assisted trial mechanism designed to streamline key judicial processes. The system is deployed across four core stages — case filing, document review, court hearings and document drafting — while also optimizing 85 additional workflows.

The AI-powered system has drastically reduced document preparation time from an hour to under five minutes. It follows templates issued by China's Supreme People's Court, offers automatic proofreading, and ensures accurate and standardized legal documentation.

Shenzhen, a bustling tech hub with a population of 17 million and a GDP of \$472.95 billion in 2023, is home to a two-tiered court system with 1,173 judges. These courts handle over 700,000 cases annually, with each judge averaging nearly 600 cases per year. By automating routine tasks, the AI system has alleviated the burden on court personnel and boosted efficiency.

Following the system's introduction in June, Shenzhen's courts saw a 31 percent increase in civil and commercial case resolutions between July and September, processing 87,000 cases in three months. Judges in these categories resolved 49 cases on average per month, up from 33 the previous year, a 48.5 percent increase.

A standout feature of the system is its ability to generate AI-assisted input during trials. Integrating with the SPC's comprehensive legal database, it analyzes case facts, legal matters and key issues, gener-

ates judgment reasoning and retrieves relevant precedents. The system can even provide real-time analysis of statements made during trials, helping judges identify inconsistencies or ambiguities.

Senior Judge Fu Luqi praised the AI system for its ability to quickly highlight critical issues. In a recent case, the system identified discrepancies in loan agreements, prompting further investigation.

"The AI's ability to identify key issues, verify facts and prompt deeper inquiry expedited the process and helped resolve a long-standing dispute in a single hearing," she told Xinhua.

The AI system has already been used in 95 percent of Shenzhen's civil, commercial and administrative cases, significantly increasing judicial productivity and efficiency.

Recognizing the potential of AI-driven reform, the SPC outlined plans in 2022 to establish a nationwide AI system by 2025, with a comprehensive framework for AI use in the judicial system by 2030. These advancements aim to reduce administrative burdens, enhance judicial integrity, and improve the transparency and fairness of the legal process.

AI-assisted systems are also proving effective in more specialized areas such as intellectual property disputes. In Keqiao district, a textile industry hub in Shaoxing, Zhejiang province, courts have implemented an AI system for copyright disputes over textile patterns.

Judge Zhang Qin noted that the system, which uses image tracing and innovation comparison techniques, has helped clarify ownership and originality in visual works. The system now analyzes over 103,000 registered artworks to assist judges in making fair rulings.

While the potential of AI in the

judicial system is vast, the integration of such technology has sparked mixed reactions. Some legal professionals welcome the efficiency AI brings, while others question its lack of accountability and empathy.

A lawyer surnamed Ren expressed concerns about the absence of human judgment in AI-assisted trials, stating, "Human judges can consider broader social and moral implications, whereas AI systems may be too mechanical, overlooking the nuances and empathy needed in some cases."

Zhao Juhua, president of the Shenzhen Intermediate People's Court, emphasized that the AI system is a tool to support, not replacement for human judgment. "The AI system aids the judicial process but does not take away judicial responsibility," Zhao said. "It ensures traceability and accountability throughout the process."

Despite concerns about AI's limitations, experts agree that its role in the judicial system will continue to expand. Gao Wen, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Engineering, stressed the need to enhance the country's computing infrastructure to support the growing demands of AI in law, especially as the system scales nationwide.

While Shenzhen's AI-assisted system can manage 700,000 cases annually, scaling it for diverse judicial scenarios will require continued advancements in both computational resources and model training.

The integration of AI in China's legal system represents a groundbreaking shift in the way justice is administered with potential benefits for efficiency and fairness, but there are also challenges that need to be addressed as the technology evolves.

XINHUA

Lists outline diseases subject to quarantine

Enhanced surveillance at ports aims to prevent cross-border illnesses spread

By WANG XIAOYU wangxiaoyu@chinadaily.com.cn

Two newly released lists of infectious diseases subjected to border quarantine and prevention measures took effect on Wednesday. The lists aim to promptly curb the spread of diseases while maintaining clearance efficiency, according to authorities.

One list requiring border quarantine outlines 11 highly contagious and potentially lethal illnesses, including plague, cholera, yellow fever and Ebola, the National Administration of Disease Control and Prevention and the General Administration of Customs announced Monday.

Local customs officials are authorized to take on-site preventive measures for confirmed or suspected patients and notify local disease control and prevention authorities to transfer patients to designated hospitals for isolation, treatment or medical observation.

A second list identifies 26 diseases that require close monitoring, including COVID-19, HIV/AIDS, measles and mpox. Local customs will advise incoming travelers suspected of having contracted these diseases to visit hospitals for screenings, where local facilities will prioritize their cases.

The release of the two disease catalogs follows a new amendment to the Frontier Health and Quarantine Law, which was passed in late June. The amendment requires the formulation of lists to identify infections among cross-border travelers, deliver necessary medical services and implement control

and prevention measures.

"Early surveillance of key contagious diseases at ports of entry will be instrumental in detecting and preventing the cross-border transmission of epidemics," the National Administration of Disease Control and Prevention said in a statement on Monday.

The administration emphasized that the range of listed diseases is designed to balance effective disease prevention with ensuring the convenience of customs clearance.

"Beyond thermal scanning, medical patrols and other noninvasive actions, additional measures such as epidemiological investigations will only be applied to the very few travelers who exhibit abnormal symptoms, rather than all travelers," the administration explained.

It added that customs officials have upgraded quarantine procedures and deployed smart quarantine tools to improve efficiency.

The administration also said that customs, disease control and health authorities will enhance communication and cooperation mechanisms, strengthen the sharing of infection-related information at ports of entry, and intensify training for public health and medical professionals.

Efforts will be coordinated to integrate quarantine measures at ports of entry with medical screening and inspections, ensuring timely treatment for patients while preventing the spread of pathogens. The administration reminded cross-border travelers to report any suspicious symptoms or diagnoses to customs and to cooperate with quarantine measures.

Palace celebration



Artists perform a Chaoshan Yingge dance during an anniversary celebration event marking the reopening of the Xingchao Tianhou Palace in Haikou, Hainan province, on Wednesday. ZHANG MAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

Science popularization funding reaches record

By YAN DONGJIE yandongjie@chinadaily.com.cn

China's national science popularization funding exceeded 20 billion yuan (\$2.74 billion) for the first time in 2023, reaching a record 21.5 billion yuan, according to the Ministry of Science and Technology. The funding marked a 12.6 percent increase from 2022.

Public fiscal support from various levels of government was the main source, accounting for 77.7 percent of the total funding.

"This reflects the rapid development of science popularization in China's new era and provides strong support for the implementation of the newly revised Science and Technology Popularization Law," said Wang Ting, director of the China Research Institute for Science Popularization.

Wang added that China is the only country with a law specifically addressing science popularization. Last month, China passed its first amendment to the law since its introduction in 2002, which includes the designation of September as National Science Popularization Month to boost public scientific literacy.

The law aims to promote scientific literacy and foster a favorable environment for technological innovation. According to Wang, it also lays a strong foundation for China's goal of becoming a global science and technology powerhouse and advancing modernization.

Data for 2023 also revealed that over 3.1 billion yuan was spent on the construction of science popularization venues, while more than 2.2 billion yuan went toward funding science exhibits and facilities. The largest portion of funding — nearly 40 percent — was directed at organizing science popularization activities.

The Ministry of Science and Technology reported steady progress in science venue development, with the number of the nation's science and technology museums increasing to 1,779, which is 96 more than the previous year. Public participation in science popularization activities also surged.

The internet has played a key role in these developments, with over 2,000 science popularization websites and more than 1 billion followers on science-related WeChat official accounts nationwide.

BUSINESS

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Resilience, recovery, new economic frontiers in 2024

Consumer goods trade-in initiative supported by 150 billion yuan bonds

China's economy demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability in 2024 amid complex domestic and global landscapes.

The country's economic trajectory was marked by steady progress and supported by a robust package of measures.

Notable growth was seen in key economic indicators such as industrial output, alongside progress in the stabilization of the real estate market. Targeted reforms, fiscal support and innovation-driven measures bolstered domestic confidence.

And the global significance of China's economic performance is clear.

China's economy is expected to have contributed close to 30 percent of global growth in 2024, highlighting its pivotal role in the international economic landscape.

The country has made significant strides in areas of heightened domestic and international interest — consumption, foreign investment, real estate and green development.

Consumption growth

Despite persistent skepticism about China's consumption prospects, the past year has proven successful, with consumer spending on the rise with fresh highlights.

Though challenges such as subdued consumer sentiment and the ongoing adjustment of the real estate sector have been cited frequently, such narratives do not fully capture the complexity of the situation.

But highlights such as steady development in services and tourism, as well as growth in the large-scale trade-in of goods, paint a more promising picture — one that merits further discussion.

In 2024, the country introduced a series of immediate and long-term initiatives to tap into its immense consumption potential.

These efforts encompassed the enhancement of fiscal investment, an increase in household incomes, dismantling of market barriers, exploration of new avenues for consumption through technological advancements and broader opening of the market.

Some policies have already proved effective, including a consumer goods trade-in initiative, which is supported by 150 billion yuan (\$20.55 billion) in funding raised through ultra-long special treasury bonds allo-



The booth of Sanofi at the 7th China International Import Expo in Shanghai. LIU YING / XINHUA

ated to local governments.

The effects of this policy are evident in rising spending on home appliances, automobiles and other goods, with sales of white goods and autos up 22.2 percent and 6.6 percent, respectively, in November, said the National Bureau of Statistics.

Broader economic indicators suggest an optimistic outlook. In October, e-commerce logistics hit a five-year high in business volume, while spending on services gained fresh momentum, particularly in the hospitality and dining sectors.

Foreign investment

In a year marked by growing protectionism and attempts toward economic "decoupling" on the global stage, China has nevertheless remained a popular investment destination.

French pharmaceutical giant Sanofi reaffirmed global investor confidence in the Chinese market by announcing in December that it was investing nearly 1 billion euros (\$1.04 billion) to build a new insulin production base in Beijing, marking the company's largest single investment in China since 1982.

The investment followed China's announcement of further opening-up in its healthcare sector, including a plan to allow the establishment of wholly foreign-owned hospitals in some major cities, including Beijing and Shanghai, as well as the island province of Hainan, to modernize healthcare services and address rising demand.

An increasing number of companies are joining Sanofi in expanding their presence in China to seize growth opportunities and share in

the dividends of the country's continued high-standard opening-up.

In the first 11 months, a record 52,379 foreign-invested companies were established in China, up 8.9 percent from the previous year.

In November, foreign direct investment in the Chinese mainland in actual use climbed 6 percent from the same period a year prior.

Foreign investors are drawn to China for a variety of reasons — its supply chain advantages, innovation-driven growth model and comprehensive offerings that provide everything a company might need.

To help foreign investors capitalize on its supply chain, market and innovation advantages, China has taken significant steps to open up more broadly in 2024. Key measures included expanding industry access and launching pilot programs to attract global investment.

Notably, the 2024 national negative list for foreign investment, effective Nov 1, eliminated all market access restrictions for foreign investors in the manufacturing sector, in a groundbreaking move for global manufacturers entering the Chinese economy.

Property market

Clear signs of recovery have emerged in 2024, bolstered by well-targeted policies that have strengthened confidence and reinforced demand.

In late September, a key meeting convened by the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee underscored the urgency of stabilizing the property market and

reversing its downturn.

The meeting called for adjustments to housing purchase restrictions, reductions in mortgage interest rates and improvements to land, fiscal, tax and financial policies.

Responding to these directives, authorities have lowered home-purchase costs, eased mortgage burdens, and extended critical support for first-time buyers and those seeking to upgrade their living arrangements.

On Sept 29, the central bank instructed commercial banks to cut interest rates on existing mortgages, including first and second-home loans, to no less than 30 basis points below the loan prime rate by Oct 31, aiming to alleviate financial pressure on homeowners.

Subsequently, major cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangdong province's Guangzhou and Shenzhen have introduced tailored measures to boost their local property markets via another round of policy adjustments.

These efforts have built on measures announced in May, which included cutting minimum down-payment ratios, establishing a re-lending facility for affordable housing and pledging to complete unfinished residential projects.

The impact of these policy measures is becoming increasingly evident. In November, the year-on-year decline in commercial residential property prices across 70 large and medium-sized cities narrowed, pointing to early signs of recovery and stabilization in the housing market.

XINHUA

Chinese AI tech charts course beyond ChatGPT

Chinese startup DeepSeek has made a significant mark in the generative AI landscape with the groundbreaking release of its latest large-scale language model (LLM), which is comparable to leading models from heavyweights like OpenAI.

DeepSeek's V3 model, trained for just two months using significantly fewer computing resources, delivers performance on par with the world's top proprietary model, GPT-4o, at a much lower cost than its rivals, according to the Hangzhou-based firm.

DeepSeek-V3 makes it "look easy today with an open weights release of a frontier-grade LLM trained on a joke of a budget (2,048 GPUs for 2 months, \$6M)", posted Andrej Karpathy, a founding member of OpenAI, on social media platform X.

"This is such clean engineering under resource constraints ... all of this looks so elegant," said Tim Dettmers, a research scientist at Allen AI, on X.

DeepSeek's new open-source tool exemplifies a shift in China's AI ambitions, signaling that merely catching up to ChatGPT is no longer the goal. Instead, Chinese tech firms are now focused on delivering more affordable and versatile AI services.

According to a 2024 report by the China Internet Network Information Center, 230 million users in China had registered for using generative AI-powered products as of June 2024.

In November, the Beijing-based AI startup Shengshu Technology unveiled its image-to-video tool called Vidu-1.5, capable of generating a video from as few as three input images within 30 seconds while establishing logical relationships among those objects in a scene.

Its impressive performance has quickly garnered widespread admiration in both the AI community and the film industry.

Sony's *Venom: The Last Dance*, screened in China in October, was accompanied by an elegant Chinese ink-style promotional video crafted by Vidu. In the clip, ink blossoms across the screen as *Venom* morphs into a war horse, fish and crane, before playfully turning into a Kongming Lantern.

Using traditional film methods to produce a 30-second trailer typically takes about 30 days, but with Vidu, it only takes 10 working days and saves nearly 90 percent on postproduction costs, said Zhang Xudong, product director of Shengshu Technology.

XINHUA



Tongyi Qianwen, Alibaba's large language model, on display during an expo in Shanghai last year. LONG WEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Domestic firms increasingly aware of value of IP

For Long Weimin, a 58-year-old mechanical engineer with decades of experience and hundreds of inventions to his name, nothing is more exciting than innovations that can solve problems in the real world.

A chief engineer at Zhengzhou Research Institute of Mechanical Engineering Co Ltd, Long has also been appointed a patent review consultant by China's top intellectual property regulator.

However, in the early years of his career, Long was unaware of the significance of a patent certificate. It wasn't until 2015, when an overseas company challenged an infringement claim on a brazing material product developed by his institute, that he realized its importance. Thanks to several patents secured in advance, Long and his team were able to successfully convince the challengers and secure global orders from leading enterprises.

Today, Long takes pride in showcasing the wall of patent certificates to visitors at his company. Many of these patents have earned numerous accolades and are featured in the country's space station and rockets, a source of national pride for the entire team.

Like Long, an increasing num-

ber of Chinese inventors and companies are recognizing the value of IP and using it to protect their innovative creations.

State-owned enterprises like China Railway Engineering Equipment Group Co Ltd also reap significant benefits from IP. The company has exported its self-developed tunnel boring machines to over 30 countries, generating patent transfer revenue exceeding 8 million yuan (\$1.1 million).

China has become the world's first country with over 4 million valid invention patents, with enterprises being the main contributors. According to the National Intellectual Property Administration, as of November 2024, the proportion of domestic valid invention patents held by enterprises reached 73.5 percent.

Many companies are realizing that IP not only generates profits but also protects a company's image and helps maintain order within the industry.

In Yuzhou, Henan province, Jun porcelain is a pillar of the local economy. Since 2003, delicate porcelain artworks have been gifted to foreign heads of state or collected in national museums and galleries. However,

this growing popularity has also fueled a rise in counterfeit products.

One local workshop owner lamented that while a genuine Jun porcelain vase was priced at 120,000 yuan, a counterfeit version could be sold for only 300 yuan.

Counterfeiting has severely impacted the reputation of leading enterprises. In response, these companies have enhanced IP protection by securing design patents and collaborating with authorities on enforcement. The local government also conducted special law enforcement operations to raise IP awareness.

In May 2024, a rapid IP rights protection center for porcelain patents was established in Yuzhou, slashing patent processing time from four months to just seven to 10 working days.

Through rapid authorization, enterprises can secure quick protection for their innovations and prevent replication or infringement by competitors, thereby safeguarding their market share and profits.

As Chinese enterprises become more involved in global trade, an increasing number are facing IP disputes abroad. The lack of expertise, response capacity and access to

critical information have emerged as major obstacles, preventing some companies from expanding internationally.

To address this, China has established IP centers nationwide to manage disputes and guide Chinese enterprises in safeguarding their IP rights overseas. In addition, the NIPA has also intensified efforts on training and expert guidance, issuing monitoring reports and reminders to alert enterprises on potential risks.

Yutong, a leading electric bus manufacturer, benefited from specialized training by NIPA's patent examination cooperation center in Henan ahead of the 2023 world bus expo in Belgium. The training, including patent early warning analysis, helped the company manage exhibition risks and boosted its confidence, leading to successful participation at the expo.

Overseas markets have become the main driver of Yutong's performance growth. Its pure electric buses topped the European market in sales in 2022 and overall sales volume increased by 79 percent year-on-year in 2023.

XINHUA—CHINA DAILY

Briefly

Urban transit rail starts operations

The Guiyang Urban Rail Transit S1 Line, spanning 30.32 kilometers with 13 stations, has started operating in the provincial capital of Guizhou, a China Railway Construction Corp unit that participated in the line's construction said. The line, which currently boasts the fastest operating speed in Guiyang, was built using several high-tech solutions, particularly related to environmental protection, as the project crosses the Nanming River, CRCC's 24th bureau said. The S1 Line is a key infrastructure serving the coordinated development of the Guiyang city cluster, CR24G said.

Manufacturing sector expands last month

China's manufacturing sector continued to expand in December, official data showed. The purchasing managers' index for the manufacturing sector was 50.1 in December, down from 50.3 in November but exceeding the boom-bust line of 50 for a third consecutive month, the National Bureau of Statistics said. The steady expansion of the PMI suggests that a combination of macroeconomic policies continued to take effect during the month and China's economic prosperity level continued to rebound and improve.

XINHUA—CHINA DAILY

BUSINESSFOCUS

CHINA UP-CLOSE

Retail outlets reflect changing consumer habits

Attract shoppers with value deals, evolve from earlier role as inventory clearance hubs

By WANG ZHUOQIONG
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In China's retail landscape, outlet malls are emerging as a major force, offering significant discounts on global brands and innovative shopping experiences.

This model is attracting middle-income consumers eager to balance quality and affordability.

Joyce Wan, a 28-year-old manager in the fashion industry, has been shopping at outlet malls on the outskirts of Shanghai, focusing primarily on athletic apparel and luxury brands.

"Outlets with better discounts offer the same quality for less money," Wan said. "I can afford expensive, high-quality items, but I'm not willing to pay more than what they're worth."

Wan occasionally visits luxury brand stores in high-end malls in Shanghai for the in-store experience and ambience.

"I still make some purchases at those retail stores," she added.

Eying this trend, popular light luxury brands like Coach, Swarovski and Michael Kors remain staples in outlet malls, while newer entrants such as Ralph Lauren, Lululemon and Arc'teryx cater to the evolving tastes of middle-income customers.

Chen Yabo, head of the China Outlets Association, said, "Outlets in China have become a key retail channel, distinct from their earlier role as inventory clearance hubs."

They attract consumers with value-for-money offerings and a comfortable shopping environment, Chen added.

"Middle-income families in China are increasingly cautious and rational buyers, focusing on value and practicality — traits that align with what outlets offer," Chen said.

This trend is also reflected globally. According to the 23rd edition of the Bain & Company Luxury Study, produced in collaboration with Fondazione Altagamma, "the outlet channel is outperforming, driven by rising demand for value-for-money purchases and growing popularity as a preferred market entry point."

According to the 2023-24 white paper on the country's outlets industry by the China department store association, the outlets sector in China grew 9.5 percent year-on-year in 2023, reaching 230 billion yuan (\$31.5 billion) in sales.

By 2025, the market is projected to hit 260 billion yuan, driven by digital transformation and expansion into lower-tier cities.

Sales figures also underline the format's success.



Citizens buy clothes at a retail outlet in a subway station in Wuhan, Hubei province, in December. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



The first outlet mall in downtown Wuhan, Hubei province, opens in May. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

In 2023, nearly 50 outlets in the country surpassed the 1 billion yuan sales mark, while 12 achieved sales exceeding 3 billion yuan — up from just two in 2017.

Leading the pack, Shanghai Qingpu Bailian Outlets recorded 6.17 billion yuan in sales, outperforming Japan's Gotemba Outlets to become Asia's top-performing outlet center.

The Qingpu outlet is undergo-

ing further expansion, with its second phase — an addition of 100 new stores — expected to open by 2026. This will make it the largest outlet shopping village in Asia, hosting more than 400 stores and 600 brands.

Other developments include the Wangfujing Welltown in Beijing, set to open in 2025 near Universal Resort Beijing. It aims to feature over 500 domestic and

international brands, with 60 percent being first-time entrants to Beijing's suburban retail market.

Outlets are increasingly combining retail with leisure, offering "shopping + micro-vacation" experiences.

Shanshan Outlet, which operates 20 outlets in China, has achieved annual sales of 30 billion yuan. Its recent openings in

optimize and expand its brand portfolio, introducing popular midrange brands that resonate with younger consumers.

For instance, in 2023, Shanghai Florentia Village launched well-known brands such as Kailas, La Martina and Skechers. In 2024, the Florentia Village in Guangzhou and Foshan, Guangdong province, introduced a 1,500-square-meter superstore for domestic sportswear brand Anta.

In September, Florentia Village unveiled a partnership with online travel service provider Ctrip. This collaboration focuses on areas such as data empowerment, joint marketing, and enhancing tourism-related consumption.

Outlets leverage their "big brand, small price" appeal and low return rates, setting them apart from e-commerce platforms.

During the 2023 "618 Shopping Festival", some online retailers experienced return rates as high as 90 percent, while outlets of the Beijing Capital Group Company in Wuhan, Hubei province, and Jinan, Shandong province, reported return rates of just 2 to 4 percent.

The rise of outlets comes amid challenges for traditional high-end malls. Suburban shopping is gaining traction as central business district malls face declining foot traffic and revenue.

For example, Hang Lung Properties' malls in Shanghai and Shenyang, Liaoning province, saw double-digit drops in retail sales during the first half of 2024, reflecting subdued luxury demand. Similarly, Swire Properties reported year-on-year declines of 17 percent and 11.7 percent at its Chengdu Taikoo Li and Guangzhou Taikoo Hui projects, respectively.

RDM Asia, which first entered the Chinese mainland in 2011 with the first Florentia Village luxury outlet in Tianjin, has expanded to seven projects in the market. During the National Day holiday in October, its outlets recorded sales of 600 million yuan, marking a 6.7 percent year-on-year increase, with foot traffic rising to 1.24 million visitors.

By 2023, Florentia Village's annual revenue had reached \$1.9 billion, reflecting a 244 percent increase in corporate revenue from 2017 to 2023. In the same year, it attracted over 25 million customers and generated a turnover exceeding 13 billion yuan. The total number of members grew to 5.3 million by 2023, and surged to 5.8 million by October 2024.

The increasing focus of top luxury brands on upgrading has driven entry-level consumers to outlet stores, where they seek high-quality yet budget-friendly products, according to the company.

Florentia Village, therefore, positions itself not only as an alternative platform for purchasing luxury goods, but also as a reflection of rational consumption and the pursuit of a high-quality lifestyle, said the company.

The outlets operator continues to

Chengdu, Sichuan province; Zhengzhou, Henan province; and Dalian, Liaoning province, mix local cultural elements and outdoor amenities.

Despite these setbacks, Swire Properties is expanding in the mainland market. Its INDIGO Beijing development, renamed Taikoo Place Beijing, is undergoing a second-phase extension set to open in stages from late 2026.

Tim Blackburn, CEO of Swire Properties, highlighted Taikoo Place Beijing as the company's largest project on the mainland, reflecting long-term confidence in the market of the city.

Globally, Bain & Company has forecast a 2 percent decline in the personal luxury goods market to 363 billion euros (\$375.7 billion) for 2024. While Japan and southern Europe show resilience, China faces a rapid slowdown alongside challenges in South Korea, said the report.

The report said that beauty and eyewear lead in growth, while jewelry remains the most resilient luxury category. In contrast, shoes and watches are struggling.

Bain anticipates a recovery in China during the second half, with early signs of improvement in the understated, timeless styles, and in the brands effectively engaging with local consumers. However, the first half is expected to remain challenging for luxury consumption, said the report.

The outlets operator continues to

Walmart China opens two next-generation stores

By WANG ZHUOQIONG

Walmart China unveiled two new next-generation stores in Kunming, Yunnan province, in December, marking a major step in the retailer's transformation strategy.

Walmart aims to cater to precise consumer needs by enhancing product offerings, expanding omnichannel capabilities, and creating long-term value to foster deeper customer loyalty, said the company.

The new generation stores integrate customer-driven design principles across 16 themed sections, reflecting everyday consumption scenarios such as breakfast, hot pot, travel, pet care and global products. New features include areas for fruit cutting, Western-style dining, grab-and-go meals and marinated cooked foods, addressing customer demand for convenient, ready-to-eat options.

To enhance the shopping experience, the stores feature lower shelves, open layouts and informative displays on topics such as fragrance usage, seafood quality, and cookware

maintenance. These changes aim to create a more immersive and educational shopping environment while showcasing products in relatable life scenarios.

The keys to its product transformation are high-quality three-meal solutions, exclusive low-cost products from leading brands, and unique "treasure" items. Fresh food remains a strategic priority.

Walmart's fresh bakery, for instance, has upgraded its products to include options made with 100 percent cream, offering over 30 baked goods at affordable prices.

Other highlights include ice-fresh Australian Angus beef, transported through a strict cold chain process, and globally sourced frozen seafood such as crab and shrimp, preserved with advanced quick-freezing technology for maximum freshness, said the company.

To meet the needs of smaller households, Walmart has expanded its selection of convenient meal solutions, including cooked dishes, regional special-

ties and single-serving soups.

For example, traditional noodle meat steamed buns, combines convenience with traditional flavor.

Walmart continues to integrate its brick-and-mortar stores with digital platforms to enhance omnichannel shopping.

Walmart's investment in store transformation is part of its efforts to accelerate its presence in China.

These next-generation stores are not only an example of Walmart's evolving retail model, but also a step toward redefining the shopping experience for Chinese consumers to drive further growth.

Walmart group's sales in modern trade have steadily increased, with the strong performance of its membership store Sam's Club.

Sam's Club's sales growth in lower-tier cities is significantly higher than in larger cities, indicating increasing demand for the membership store model in lower-tier markets, said Kantar Worldpanel China.

The new generation stores of Walmart echo the industry trend, which has continued to show frag-

mentation, with small supermarkets and convenience stores maintaining their excellent performance, said Kantar.

Increased consumption in the lower-tier market has also contributed significantly to the overall growth of modern trade, which increased by 3.6 percent in the first three quarters. Chinese consumers have also maintained their proximity shopping habits. The fierce competition in offline channels and the integration of multiple formats have driven further fragmentation of the retail market.

Compared to the same period in 2023, the market share of the top 10 retailers in modern trade collectively declined by 1.3 percentage points in the first three quarters, indicating further fragmentation of the Chinese retail market. Major retailers are actively facing challenges and are exploring new development strategies including premiumization, digitalization and multiformat operations.

For example, some retailers are transforming and innovating them-



Customers shop at a Walmart China new next-generation store in Kunming, Yunnan province, in December. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

selves by accepting adjustments through Pangdonglai, a well-known commercial retail enterprise or self-improvement. Others choose to expand quickly. In December, Hema Fresh, the supermarket chain under Alibaba Group, launched more than 10 new stores.

According to the "2024 Hema

Consumption Trend Insight Report", Hema is expected to open 72 additional stores before Spring Festival, nearing a total of 430 stores across the country. This rapid expansion, averaging a new store opening every five days, marks the fastest growth rate Hema has achieved in the past five years.

ACROSS ASIA

Editor's note:

In this weekly feature China Daily gives voice to Asia and its people. The stories presented come mainly from the Asia News Network (ANN), of which China Daily is among its 20 leading titles.

Kuala Lumpur moves to raise tax revenue

Malaysia's capital, Kuala Lumpur, is facing a tax increase this year, according to news outlet The Star.

Any change in the city would be implemented in phases, likely starting with industrial tax rates, according to Zaliha Mustafa, minister in the prime minister's department in charge of federal territories.

Discussions on the matter began in early July last year, Zaliha said, emphasizing the need to revisit taxation to address rising costs and boost revenue.

"We are reviewing all types of taxes, not just assessment taxes but also quit rent, and have been collaborating with the finance departments of various agencies to study the matter comprehensively," she said.

Zaliha said Kuala Lumpur City Hall, or DBKL, had been running a deficit in recent years, necessitating efforts to increase revenue.

When asked about a time line, Zaliha said she could not yet say but emphasized that the hike was inevitable.

"If it happens, it will be done in phases," she said.

25 percent

increase in assessment rates from Jan 1 in Selangor of Malaysia

"We cannot rely solely on the federal government for funding.

"For instance, road repair costs exceeded 100 million ringgit (\$22 million), while the federal government's contribution under Marris (Malaysian Road Records Information System) is only 36 million ringgit."

Zaliha also highlighted rising costs in other areas including waste management and public housing maintenance.

"We have received requests from landfill operators to increase tipping fees due to rising costs," she said.

"Public housing maintenance is also becoming more expensive, with lift upgrades and other needs.

"We must consider all aspects before increasing revenue, but the rates will not necessarily be uniform," she said on the sidelines of a program at DBKL headquarters last month.

DBKL had announced a review of assessment rates at the end of 2013 — the first in 21 years.

Kuala Lumpur is not the first to decide to increase assessment taxes in Malaysia.

Despite objections from ratepayers, the government of Selangor state on the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia has approved a 25 percent increase in assessment rates in all local councils this year.

Speaking to the media on Dec 9, Selangor local government and tourism committee chairman Ng Suee Lim said the new assessment rates by 12 local councils will come into force on Jan 1, 2025.

In June 2014, then federal territories minister Tengku Adnan bin Tengku Mansor announced that the hike would be capped at 10 percent for residential properties and 2 percent for commercial premises.

The state government explained that the revaluation exercise and subsequent increase were necessary as property charges had remained unchanged for 20 to 40 years.

In Malaysia, local authorities are permitted to review and revise assessment rates every five years, as stipulated under Local Government Act 1976.

THE STAR, MALAYSIA



An aerial view of the coastline at Bali island, Indonesia. WU PENGFEI / FOR CHINA DAILY



Senior tourists visit a store in Bali, Indonesia. PUTU SAYOGA VIA GETTY IMAGES



Tourists shop for souvenirs in Bali, Indonesia. FIRDIA LISNAWATI / AP

SILVER LINING

As the world ages, Indonesian businesses see opportunities

The retirement business remains underdeveloped in Indonesia, but experts say the aging population at home and abroad means the time to invest is now.

According to the World Health Organization, the number of people aged 60 years and older was 1 billion in 2019 and it is expected to rise significantly in the next few decades.

Indonesia's senior population is projected to reach 74 million by 2050, or about 25 percent of the total population. According to government institute Statistics Indonesia's national socioeconomic survey, Indonesia currently has 29.7 million elderly, making up about 10.75 percent of the population.

Statistics Indonesia classifies a population as aged when more than 7 percent of the people are elderly, which means Indonesia falls into that category.

According to a report published by property agency Colliers Indonesia in May, the domestic senior housing sector "remains relatively undeveloped", largely due to cultural values of respect and devotion to one's parents.

Moreover, Indonesia's population is still comparatively young, making the sector "unattractive to developers and investors at this time", leading to a limited supply of senior housing.

The report also highlighted that senior housing development is unevenly distributed across the archipelago and remains concentrated in the Greater Jakarta area.

Ferry Salanto, Colliers' senior associate director, said other regions and cities in Indonesia also had growth potential in the senior housing industry, notably Bali, which could leverage its appeal as an attractive destination for foreign retirees.

In the silver economy, the specific needs of the elderly population, such as health equipment, rehabilitation therapy and senior-friendly public services open a great potential for investment and innovation."

Pratikno, Indonesia's coordinating minister for human development and cultural affairs

He said that Bali's biggest market for senior housing is customers from overseas. He further emphasized that the senior living ecosystem could be built in any area by developing its supporting facilities to accommodate senior living.

"So, sell the property and services altogether in one package," he suggested.

Herman Kwik, chairman of the Indonesian Senior Living Association, also pointed to foreign senior citizens as a potential market for areas like Bali.

"Bali is known for its tourism ... I think the potential lies in Bali," he said.

He added that while many sectors in Bali had tapped the potential by offering hotel services targeting foreign seniors, these may not meet all their needs and it could expand the industry by also investing more in retirement homes with adequate senior living facilities.

The senior housing industry in the country has existed for more than a decade, he noted, but it remains relatively small and has shown only modest growth so far.

"But we see this as a starting point. Moving forward, we will thrive faster than in the past 10 years, considering the rising consumer awareness about commercial (solutions) and shifts in family

jobs, resulting in unstable incomes and increased vulnerability to serious health issues.

"But if the senior citizens have assets and sufficient retirement protection, they can have a good quality of life and enjoy their retirement," he said.

Dewa pointed to opportunities despite the challenging impacts, including the "silver economy" and "silver opportunities", which are expected to drive demand for goods and services related to senior living.

"Geriatric clinics within hospitals will be crucial. Demand for long-term care and caregivers will emerge," he said.

Furthermore, in the finance sector, the opportunity could be maximized by offering pension funds and guarantee programs.

"The potential has to be developed from now on," he said.

Dewa emphasized the need for the government to identify senior citizens' needs and characteristics to provide effective services and protection, as well as strengthening health services for the elderly and exploring community and family-based programs to ensure their welfare.

The government recently acknowledged the growing potential of the segment, with Indonesia's Coordinating Minister for Human Development and Cultural Affairs Pratikno saying that the silver economy could stimulate growth in many sectors.

"In the silver economy, the specific needs of the elderly population, such as health equipment, rehabilitation therapy and senior-friendly public services open a great potential for investment and innovation," he said in a news release in December.

THE JAKARTA POST, INDONESIA

Chinese Hakka food culture shines in Singapore

Salt-baked chicken, stuffed tofu and a traditional pork soup may become mainstays in Singapore's food culture and help promote interest in the culture of the Chinese Hakka community in Singapore.

This is the hope of Char Yong (Dabu) Association's president Ho Siong Hin, as Hakka restaurant chain Hakka Yu, which has more than 80 outlets in China, opened its first overseas restaurant at Changi Airport last year.

It is a joint venture between Hakka Yu founder Xu Ke Peng, 44, and Fong Chi Chung, 56, founder and chairman of Putien Group behind the major Chinese restaurant chain.

Hakka Yu hopes to work with the clan association to enrich the cultural dimension of its dining experience, offering patrons a deeper understanding of Hakka culture.

Members of the Hakka, also known as *kejia* under the pinyin Chinese writing system, can trace their roots to Northern Chinese who migrated to South China as early as the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420), retaining their distinctive customs, dialect and lifestyles.

Singapore's Hakka community is its fourth-largest Chinese-speaking group, with more than 200,000 people.

Hakka cuisine is known for its natural flavors and preservation techniques, reflecting the agricultural lifestyle and migration history of the Hakka people. Hakka dishes often use simple, earthy ingredients with robust cooking methods such as braising, roasting and slow-cooking.

Hakka Yu, founded in 2013 in Guangzhou, was recognized as one of China's Top 100 Restaurant Brands (2019-2020).

Ho, 66, said: "There is less and less Hakka food in Singapore. As a result, Hakka cuisine is not as well known here."

Speaking at the media preview of Hakka Yu on Dec 10 at his clan association in the Geylang area, Ho said he hopes "more people will appreciate our food and culture with Hakka Yu's launch, and those of Hakka ancestry will join our clan association too".

The clan association, which has about 6,000 members, was founded in 1858 to look after the welfare of Hakka immigrants from Dabu in Guangdong. Its new building will be completed in 2025. It will be two streets from the association's current building in Geylang.

One of the facilities in the new building will be a kitchen, which Ho said will be used for food research and networking. This is where the clan association can work with Hakka Yu to share knowledge about Hakka food and even fine-tune the dishes to suit local preferences.

Fong said his early encounters with Hakka food were primarily through hawker dishes such as Hakka *yong tau foo* and thunder tea rice.

It was only when he went to eat at Plum Village — Singapore's dedicated Hakka restaurant in the Jalan Leban area — that he experienced the distinct flavors of Hakka dishes such as rice wine chicken, Hakka fried spring roll and Hakka-style noodles. These are dishes rarely found in the local food and beverage scene, he said.

"Will Hakka Yu be a competitor of Putien? Not at all," Fong said. "Putien is known for its seafood, while Hakka Yu focuses on flavorful meat and wild vegetables from the countryside."

Xu said they may even work together on a Hakka food festival in the future.

THE STRAITS TIMES, SINGAPORE



Salt-baked chicken, a Hakka dish. DING JUNHAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

WORLD

Memories of Chinese rail work recalled

Egyptian diplomat applauds China's transformation and its ties with Africa

By EDITH MUTETHYA
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As a young Egyptian growing up in Tanzania's port city of Dar es Salaam in the early 1970s, Maged R Aboulmagd used to watch in admiration the convoys of trucks ferrying Chinese workers to the construction sites of the Tanzania-Zambia Railway, which would link landlocked Zambia with the outside world via Tanzania.

Over the next half a century, Aboulmagd would be assuming various roles in Egypt's foreign missions in different countries, including Nigeria and the United States, and later as Egyptian ambassador to Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.

However, the childhood experience of witnessing the Chinese workers building the landmark Tanzania-Zambia Railway could not be erased from his mind. That became the start of his journey to know more about China.

"My father used to tell us about the big project underway when he saw trucks ferrying Chinese technicians through the city. It was a particularly eye-catching sight as I remember them wearing cone-shaped hats and waving to bystanders. Everyone knew they were building a railroad to Zambia," Aboulmagd, now a member of the Egyptian Council for Foreign Relations and a member of the Egypt-China Friendship Association, recalled in an interview with China Daily.

His father, a hydrologist, was then sent to the East African country for work-related reasons, and he took his family along.

The 1,860-kilometer railroad, built through the friendly cooperation between China, Tanzania and Zambia, was officially inaugurated on July 14, 1976, after five years and eight months of construction. It is one of the biggest projects built with Chinese assistance in Africa.

From a boy waving to Chinese workers, Aboulmagd graduated to engaging Chinese people when he served as an Egyptian diplomat in Lagos, Nigeria, from 1989 to 1991.

Close contacts

"I had close contacts with Chinese diplomats exchanging house visits. I was invited many times to the Chinese embassy to watch 15-20-minute movies, most of them about new Chinese mega projects like ports in China," he said.

"Every foreign diplomat was interested in the content of the movies, but very few anticipated the huge success these ports had in transforming China into a trading giant that it is today," he said.

During his term in Chicago as Egypt's consul-general from 2011 to 2015, US-China relations were the focal point in global affairs. He attended every seminar about China organized by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs.

"Most speakers from the business community and former politicians at that time were talking about the importance of improv-



We have all witnessed during the last decade how the Belt and Road Initiative grew from planning to execution. Today, the BRI is a global economic endeavor like no other, an important and far-reaching project.

Maged R Aboulmagd,
Egyptian diplomat



ing trade and political relations with China as an imperative and not a choice," Aboulmagd said.

He also served as Egypt's ambassador in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador from 2017 to 2020.

"During my stay, El Salvador recognized one China and later Honduras made the same move," he said.

Over the past few decades, Aboulmagd has been impressed with the transformation of China in many aspects, including China-Africa relations.

He said China-Africa relations have evolved greatly in the last three decades. In particular, the partnership has seen a great step forward since the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, he added.

"We have all witnessed during the last decade how the Belt and Road Initiative grew from planning to execution. Today, the BRI is a global economic endeavor like no other, an important and far-reaching project," he said.

He lauded China's ability to devise effective tools to finance and build projects in telecommunications, infrastructure and industry.

"These Chinese advantages will certainly continue to expand relations and benefit both Africa and China," he said.

The role of China on the global stage, he said, will evolve gradually both in scale and quality. Additionally, China's new focus on innovation, technology and space will have a significant impact on how the world interacts with the Asian powerhouse, he said.

"Developing countries will look up to China to lift their populations from poverty, improve their economies, as well as create more jobs," he said.

"The friction between China and the West will unfortunately continue. More Western pressure is expected on Chinese companies, yet the more China invests in its relations with developing countries, (the more) these pressures will be less effective and less harmful," he said.



A man holds up a newspaper published on Jan 1, 2000, announcing the handover of the Panama Canal from the United States to Panama in 1999, in Panama City on Tuesday. ARIS MARTINEZ / REUTERS

Panama marks 25 years of canal handover

PANAMA CITY — Panama on Tuesday marked the 25th anniversary of the United States' handover of its interoceanic canal, a milestone overshadowed by President-elect Donald Trump's threat to demand control be returned to Washington.

The anniversary came two days after the death of former US president Jimmy Carter, who in 1977 signed the treaties that led to the vital waterway's eventual transfer decades later.

Panamanian President Jose Raul Mulino said at the anniversary ceremony held at the Panama Canal Authority's headquarters that "a sadness ... fills us with the death of Jimmy Carter".

A moment of silence was held in memory of Carter, whose endorsement of the treaty set up transfer of the canal to Panama on Dec 31, 1999. Former Panamanian president

Mireya Moscoso, who oversaw the symbolic turn-of-the-century handover, told Agence France-Presse that "today we feel the same emotion" as on that occasion 25 years ago.

Neither Mulino nor the various other speakers at Tuesday's ceremony mentioned Trump and his recent threats in their speeches.

But the US president-elect has sparked anger among Panamanians by saying he will demand the canal "be returned to us" if Panama could not ensure its "secure, efficient and reliable operation".

Panama's political class and many of its citizens have roundly rejected Trump's threats.

The 1977 treaties "put an end to an era of subjugation and began a period of independence and dignity", former Panamanian president Martin Torrijos told AFP.

"Any attempt to reverse or violate

our sovereignty will be condemned and rejected by all Panamanians," he added.

Mulino has ruled out negotiations with Trump over control of the canal.

Francisco Cedeno, a 51-year-old graphic designer, described Trump's threats as "completely nonsensical".

"He should first try to resolve his country's many problems and forget about the canal," Cedeno said.

An estimated 5 percent of global maritime traffic passes through the Panama Canal, which was inaugurated in 1914 and allows ships to avoid the long, hazardous route around the southern tip of South America.

The canal generates 6 percent of Panama's national economic output and 20 percent of its fiscal revenues.

Since 2000 it has pumped around \$28 billion into the state coffers.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Romania, Bulgaria join Schengen zone

BUCHAREST — Romania and Bulgaria became full members of the Schengen zone on Wednesday, expanding the borderless area to 29 members and ending a 13-year wait for the two eastern European countries.

The expansion, made possible when Austria and other members dropped their objections to the countries joining, officially took place at midnight on Wednesday, marked by ceremonies at various border posts.

Romania and Bulgaria, both members of the European Union since 2007, were partially included in the Schengen zone in March, eliminating border checks at ports and airports.

But Austria had threatened to veto their full entry over migration concerns, which meant that controls still applied at land border crossings.

Austria had for years complained about hosting a disproportionate number of undocumented migrants as a result of poorly protected external Schengen borders.

It dropped its objections to Romania and Bulgaria joining Schengen after the three countries signed a border protection agreement in November.

The deal provides for the joint deployment of guards at the Bulgarian-Turkish border and temporary controls at land crossings for an initial period of six months.

Created in 1985, the Schengen zone will now include 25 of the EU's 27 members, as well as Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein, covering a total population of more than 400 million people.



Romanian and Bulgarian border police work at the Giurgiu-Ruse border crossing between the two countries on Wednesday. DANIEL MIHAILESCU / AFP

Romania and Bulgaria had met the Schengen zone's technical requirements for membership since 2011.

But "member states objected every time" they tried to join, analyst Valentin Naumescu said.

That became "a source of frustration exploited by anti-EU parties, which alleged Romania was being treated unfairly," he added.

Now "that feeling of being second-class citizens" should fade, he said.

Many hailed the expansion as "historic".

Joining the zone will boost Romania's and Bulgaria's GDP growth by at least one percentage point, analysts estimated.

Truck drivers, who currently wait up to 20 hours at border crossings, celebrated the news.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Macron admits snap polls 'divisive'

By JONATHAN POWELL
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French President Emmanuel Macron used his New Year's address to admit his early election strategy had backfired and to propose referendums to end the country's political stalemate.

Speaking on national television on Tuesday, the president conceded that the snap elections in the summer, following poor European election results, had "brought more divisions in parliament than solutions for the French people".

Macron delivered a humble eight-minute address, saying he had called elections to "let you have your say, to recover clarity and avoid immobilism", reported the French newspaper Le Monde.

"Lucidity and humility compel me to recognize that at this time this decision has caused more instability than serenity and I fully accept my share (of responsibility)," he said.

Political chaos

The elections left France with a divided parliament, leading to political chaos that culminated in members of its parliament, the National Assembly, toppling prime minister Michel Barnier during a December budget debate.

Barnier's successor Francois Bayrou leads an unstable minority coalition of centrists and conservatives, while the 2025 budget remains unapproved.

"The hope, prosperity and peace of the quarter-century to come depend on our choices today, and that's why in 2025 ... I will ask you to decide on certain crucial issues," Macron said, adding: "We will have choices to make for our economy, our democracy, our security, our children."

According to Macron's aides, this opens the possibility of both referendums and "citizen conventions", which are public assemblies where selected groups of citizens would discuss specific policies and advise the government.

While the French Constitution gives the president power to call referendums, Macron has previously used nonbinding citizen conventions to address social unrest like the yellow vest protests of 2018 and 2019, reported Reuters.

France's Constitution prevents the president power to call referendums, Macron has previously used nonbinding citizen conventions to address social unrest like the yellow vest protests of 2018 and 2019, reported Reuters.

Macron urged the public to celebrate France's achievements in 2024, including the Paris Olympics and the restoration of Notre-Dame de Paris.

Macron praised national unity, saying French people had been "united, determined, and in solidarity" throughout the year.

On Europe's security, Macron stressed the importance of self-reliance, noting that the continent can no longer delegate its security to other powers.

He also urged Europe to accelerate its efforts to take charge of its defense and border security.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

World welcomes 2025 with light shows, embraces and ice plunges

NEW YORK — From Sydney and Mumbai to Paris and Rio de Janeiro, communities around the world welcomed 2025 with spectacular light shows, embraces and ice plunges.

The New Year's Eve ball dropped in soggy Times Square, where thousands of revelers stuck it out in heavy rain to celebrate the start of 2025 in New York City.

Countries in the South Pacific were the first to ring in the new year, with midnight in New Zealand striking 18 hours before the ball dropped in Times Square. Auckland was the first major city to celebrate

with thousands thronging the downtown area or climbing the ring of volcanic peaks for a fireworks vantage point.

Conflict muted acknowledgments of the start of 2025 in places like the Middle East, Sudan and Ukraine.

A few hours after Auckland, fireworks blasted off Australia's Sydney Harbor Bridge and across the bay. More than a million people gathered at the city's iconic harbor area for the celebration.

The celebration also featured indigenous ceremonies and per-

formances that acknowledged the land's first people.

In New York City, crowds cheered and couples kissed when the ball weighing more than 5 metric tons and featuring 2,688 crystal triangles descended down a pole in Times Square.

In Pasadena, California, Rose Parade spectators were camping out and hoping for prime spots, while in Nashville, Tennessee, about 200,000 people flocked to a country music party.

Much of Japan shut down ahead of the nation's biggest holiday as

temples and homes underwent a thorough cleaning.

In South Korea, celebrations were cut back or canceled during a period of national mourning following Sunday's crash of a Jeju Air flight in Muan that killed 179 people.

In India, thousands of revelers in Mumbai flocked to the financial hub's bustling promenade facing the Arabian Sea. In Sri Lanka, people gathered at Buddhist temples to light oil lamps and incense sticks and pray.

In Dubai, thousands attended a fireworks show at the Burj Khalifa,

the world's tallest skyscraper. And in Nairobi, Kenya, scattered fireworks were heard.

Rome's traditional New Year's Eve festivities had an additional draw: the start of Pope Francis' Holy Year, the once-every-quarter-century celebration projected to bring some 32 million pilgrims to the Eternal City in 2025.

Paris capped a momentous 2024 with its traditional countdown and fireworks extravaganza on the Champs-Elysees. The city's emblematic Arc de Triomphe monument was turned into a giant tableau for a

light show that celebrated the city's landmarks and the passage of time, with whirring clocks.

London rang in the new year with a pyrotechnics display along the Thames River. With a storm bringing bitter weather to other parts of the United Kingdom, however, festivities in Edinburgh, Scotland, were canceled.

But in Switzerland and some other places, people embraced the cold, stripping and plunging into the water in freezing temperatures.

Rio de Janeiro threw Brazil's main New Year's Eve bash on Copacabana Beach, with barges shooting off 12 straight minutes of fireworks.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

WORLDUS



A field hospital is flooded following heavy rains in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip on Tuesday, amid Israel's continuing military assault in the Palestinian enclave. MOHAMMED SALEM / REUTERS

Vetoes deepen gridlock over Gaza truce at United Nations

By MINLU ZHANG
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In a year marked by new global conflicts and rising international tensions, the United States has drawn much attention at the United Nations Security Council for its repeated use of veto power on Israel-related draft resolutions.

Since the outbreak of the latest conflict between Israel and Palestine on Oct 7, 2023, 14 resolutions have been proposed at the Security Council but only four have been passed. During these votes, the US exercised its veto power six times, including five instances where it was the sole opposing country.

That brought the total number of US vetoes on Israel-related resolutions to 49 — more than half of all its vetoes since the UN's founding.

The US, along with China, France, Russia and the United Kingdom, holds the privilege of unilateral veto power as a permanent Security Council member.

On Oct 18, 2023, the US vetoed a Brazil-proposed resolution calling for humanitarian pauses in the Gaza crisis. A week later, both the US and the UK vetoed a Russia-backed resolution that ultimately failed because of insufficient support. On Dec 8, 2023, the US vetoed a resolution calling for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza, despite overwhelming support within the council.

The trend persisted into 2024, with vetoes on Feb 20 and April 18, the latter rejecting a resolution to admit Palestine as a UN member state. Most recently, on Dec 8, the US vetoed a resolution demanding an immediate humanitarian cease-fire in Gaza.

"We express great

"I am totally convinced that we need a humanitarian cease-fire and we need the unconditional and immediate release of hostages..."

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, speaking in February

disappointment and regret that the draft has been vetoed by the US," said Zhang Jun, at that time China's permanent representative to the UN.

Mohamed Abushahab, then-deputy permanent representative of the United Arab Emirates to the UN, also expressed his deep disappointment with the outcome.

'Instrument of paralysis'

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has described the veto as an instrument that has paralyzed the council from taking action on Gaza.

Worsening geopolitical divides have "transformed the veto power into an effective instrument of paralysis of the action of the Security Council", Guterres said in February.

"I am totally convinced that we need a humanitarian cease-fire and we need the unconditional and immediate release of hostages and that we should have a Security Council able to achieve these objectives," he said.

China and Russia have each used their veto power twice since Oct 7, 2023. On Oct 25, 2023, the two countries vetoed a US-proposed

draft resolution regarding the Palestine-Israel conflict.

"The draft departs from the spirit of previous UN resolutions and embeds the dangerous logic of clash of civilizations and the justification of war and use of force," Zhang said in an explanation of the vote.

On March 22, China and Russia vetoed a US-proposed draft resolution on a Gaza cease-fire, with Algeria also voting against it.

Algeria's permanent representative to the UN, Amar Bendjama, told the Security Council that the US draft resolution would have allowed "continuing bloodshed".

Since the founding of the UN, the five permanent members of the Security Council have collectively exercised their veto power 323 times. As of November, Russia and its predecessor, the Soviet Union, account for 159 vetoes, followed by the US with 93 (49 of which were to shield Israel), the UK with 32, China with 21 and France with 18.

When a resolution is vetoed in the Security Council, the General Assembly — the UN's highest deliberative body — automatically convenes to discuss the issue. Unlike Security Council resolutions, which are legally binding, General Assembly votes carry no binding authority but reflect the stance of the international community, as they represent the collective decision of all 193 UN member states.

Following the US veto of a Gaza cease-fire resolution on Dec 8, the General Assembly overwhelmingly approved resolutions calling for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza and supporting the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, which Israel has sought to ban. The US and its close ally Israel were in a minority voting against the resolutions.

15 die in New Orleans as driver rams crowd

By HENG WEILI in New York
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Fifteen people were killed when a man drove a pickup truck displaying an Islamic State flag into a crowd of New Year's revelers early Wednesday on Bourbon Street in New Orleans' famed French Quarter.

Thirty-three people also were injured when Shamsud-Din Jabbar, 42, a US Army veteran whose last-known residence was in Houston, Texas, drove into the crowd before he was shot and killed by police around 3:15 am Central time on Wednesday.

"An ISIS flag was located in the vehicle and the FBI is working to determine the subject's potential associations and affiliations with terrorist organizations," FBI headquarters said in a statement.

Investigators also found guns and pipe bombs, which were hidden inside coolers, according to a Louisiana State Police intelligence bulletin obtained by The Associated Press. The bulletin said that both devices were wired for remote detonation, and a remote control was discovered inside the suspect's truck.

About 30 minutes after the attack, police found a homemade bomb near police cars parked at Orleans and Bourbon streets. The device was a pipe bomb with nails and plastic explosives concealed inside an ice chest, reported nola.com, a city news website. A second bomb was later found on Bourbon Street.

Jabbar was killed after he left the vehicle and opened fire on officers, police said. Two officers, in addition to the 33 people injured, were shot and were in stable condition, the AP reported. Investigators recovered a handgun and AR-style rifle, according to a law enforcement official.

President Joe Biden said that the FBI found videos that the driver had posted to social media hours before the attack in which he said he was inspired by the Islamic State group and expressed a "desire to kill".

"We do not believe that Jabbar was solely responsible," Alethea Duncan, an assistant special agent in charge of the FBI's New Orleans field office, said at a news conference.

"We are aggressively running down every lead, including of those of his known associates."

There were also deadly explosions in Honolulu, Hawaii, and outside a Las Vegas hotel owned by President-elect Donald Trump. Biden said the FBI is looking into whether the Las Vegas explosion was connected to the New Orleans attack but had "nothing to report" as of Wednesday evening.

One person died and seven others were injured Wednesday when a Tesla Cybertruck that appeared to be carrying fireworks caught fire and exploded outside Trump's Las Vegas hotel, authorities said.

According to a law enforcement official, the truck was rented via the Turo app and appeared to have a load of fireworks. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly.

Tesla CEO Elon Musk said that

"we have now confirmed that the explosion was caused by very large fireworks and/or a bomb carried in the bed of the rented Cybertruck and is unrelated to the vehicle itself."

Jabbar served in the Army as a human resources specialist and information technology specialist from 2007 until 2015. He joined the Army Reserve as an IT specialist until 2020, leaving as a staff sergeant, according to an Army official.

He also deployed to Afghanistan from 2009 to 2010. Jabbar had enlisted in the Navy in August 2004 under a delayed-entry program but was discharged a month later, a Navy official told Reuters.

New Orleans City Council President Helena Moreno said Jabbar was wearing full military gear in the attack, nola.com reported.

City Police Superintendent Anne Kirkpatrick said the driver was "hell-bent on creating the carnage and the damage that he did".

"It was very intentional behavior. This man was trying to run over as many people as he could," Kirkpatrick said. "We had barriers there. We had officers there, and they still got around. We did indeed have a plan, but the terrorist defeated it."

New Orleans Police Captain LeJon Roberts said officers had a police car placed by an opening the bollard barriers, which were in the process of being replaced for the NFL Super Bowl at the Superdome in the city on Feb 9, The New York Times reported.

"This particular terrorist drove on to the sidewalk, behind the police car to gain access to the 100 block of Bourbon Street," Roberts said.

Tiger Bech, 27, a former Princeton University football player, died in the attack, according to a post on X.com by his brother. Bech, a Louisiana native, had been working as a stock broker in New York City.

"He was just starting a successful career in the business world," Princeton football coach Bob Surace told sports network ESPN. "There were two or three times we had career nights, and you could call him with a day's notice, and he came down and shared his experiences as a young professional with our team."

The Sugar Bowl, a college football playoff game between Notre Dame and Georgia, which had been scheduled for Wednesday evening at the Superdome, was postponed until

Thursday afternoon. Many students of both universities are in the city for the game, and at least one was hurt in the attack.

"At this point, we have learned that a University of Georgia student was critically injured in the attack and is receiving medical treatment," university President Jere W. Morehead posted on X.

The family of Ni'Kyra Cheyenne Dedeaux, 18, in Gulfport, Mississippi, learned on Wednesday that she had been celebrating New Year's Eve in New Orleans with her cousin and was among those killed, The New York Times reported.

"We didn't know she was over there, because I would've discouraged it, especially during times when it's the holidays," said Jennifer Smith, her grandmother.

Louisiana Governor Jeff Landry said he would mobilize a 100-member military police company from the Louisiana National Guard, nola.com reported.

The pickup truck used in the attack also was rented via Turo, an app that connects drivers with vehicle owners, according to Steve Webb, the company's vice-president of communications.

"We are heartbroken to learn that one of our hosts vehicles was involved in this awful incident," Webb said in an email. "We are actively partnering with the FBI."

Around 4 pm Wednesday, a team of FBI agents and Harris County Sheriff's Office deputies descended on a property in Houston that was believed to be Jabbar's residence, according to the Houston Chronicle.

Police were carrying long guns as a drone flew over the property. One officer on a loudspeaker told someone inside a building on the property to come out with their hands up, the website reported.

Court and property records show Jabbar previously lived in Fresno, Texas — about 20 miles south of Houston — with his wife before they divorced in August 2022, according to nola.com, and they had one child. The Times reported that Jabbar was married twice and had two daughters, ages 15 and 20. He had a real estate license from 2019 to 2023 and worked for the financial services company Deloitte.

Agencies contributed to this story.



The remains of a Tesla Cybertruck that burned at the entrance of Trump Tower are inspected in Las Vegas, Nevada, on Wednesday. RONDA CHURCHILL / REUTERS

Growth and stability 'focus' for next year

By MAYZHOU in Houston
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Growth and structural reforms for the economy were the focus of China's annual Central Economic Work Conference, or CEWC, held from Dec 11 to 12, when top policymakers decided the country's economic priorities for the next year, analysts said.

"The meeting's readout discussed pursuing a 'more proactive fiscal policy' and a call to 'raise the fiscal deficit ratio,'" said Jon Taylor, associate dean at the College of Liberal and Fine Arts, and chair and professor at the department of political science and geography, at the University of Texas at San Antonio.

"It recognized that while the country's economy has posted generally stable performance during 2024, the nation faces growth headwinds from domestic demand weakness and external uncertainty," he said.

Anthony Moretti, an associate professor at Robert Morris University, said he believed the measures

were a "common sense" approach to ensuring stability.

Moretti saw the focus as twofold, "expanding domestic consumption and ensuring that inflationary pressures are kept in check".

Taylor pointed out that prefacing the CEWC, the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, the Party's core leadership, announced on Dec 9 plans to boost domestic demand, stabilize the property and stock markets, and address weak consumer consumption.

The meeting pledged that China would switch to a moderately loose monetary policy stance, have more proactive fiscal levers and step up unconventional countercyclical adjustments.

The announcement underscored concerns expressed by both officials and economists regarding China's economy during the past year, Taylor said.

The meeting emphasized the need for China to maintain steady economic growth, keep employment and prices relatively stable, ensure a

rough equilibrium in the balance of payments and exchange rate, increase Chinese citizens' income in step with economic growth, and address "involution-style" competition, Taylor said.

Taylor said that while the local property market was beginning to stabilize, China still faced challenges ahead in the next year and beyond, including ensuring supply, accelerating demand and stabilizing prices.

"Local debt is still a major concern and will continue to require a lot of attention, presumably in March during the two sessions (the annual meetings of China's top legislative and political advisory bodies)," Taylor said.

Strong signal

He said that the CEWC provided a strong signal that the specific targets for fiscal and monetary policies will be announced during the National People's Congress meeting in March.

US politics is likely to impact China's economic policy, Taylor said, with the Chinese economy likely to shift its focus amid former US president Donald Trump's return to the White House

next year and his proposed tariffs on Chinese goods. Chinese exports could take a hit with US tariff hikes.

Moretti offered a more optimistic perspective on the potential impact of US trade policies. He said he hopes any proposed tariffs are merely a "bargaining tool" and emphasized that ultimately, "US consumers will suffer" if a trade war escalates.

Taylor said he agreed with the general direction set by the CEWC. "Frankly, the time is now to implement stimulus measures and deliver meaningful reforms," he said. "While China's economy faces persistent structural challenges, they can be successfully addressed."

"Swift action and creativity" are needed to tackle the issues of stabilizing and maintaining consistent economic growth, boosting domestic demand, assisting a struggling housing market, improving weak consumer sentiment as well as "handling the challenges of external economic and geopolitical pressures that may arise" with the return of Trump to the White House, Taylor said.

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WORLD

Uncertainty clouds conclusion to conflict

Western support for Ukraine put into question as role of next US administration seen as key factor

By REN QI in Moscow
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The Russia-Ukraine conflict began in February 2022 and both sides remain entrenched in battle with no peace in sight, with some observers closely watching whether the incoming administration of US President-elect Donald Trump will bring changes to the situation in 2025.

In Russia's Tatarstan, which hosted the 2024 BRICS Kazan Summit in October, Ukrainian forces used unmanned aerial vehicles to attack residential buildings on Dec 21, leading to the temporary closure of several airports.

The head of Tatarstan, Rustam Minnikhanov, reported that eight drones attacked Kazan, over 1,000 kilometers away from the Ukrainian border. Six hit residential buildings, one struck an industrial facility and one was shot down over a river. The attacks caused fires and destroyed buildings, with no fatalities or injuries reported.

"Whoever tries to destroy something in Russia, no matter how hard they try, will face much greater destruction in their own country and will regret their actions here," President Vladimir Putin vowed.

Although Kyiv has not commented on the strike, Russian experts suggested that the attack on Kazan could escalate tensions between Ukraine and the Trump administration.

"Broadly, the attack is an attempt to change the logic of the negotiation process proposed by Trump," said Ivan Loshkarev, an associate professor of political theory at MGIMO University.

Trump repeatedly said during campaigning that he planned to settle the conflict in Ukraine in just one day. Many considered that a "clear" victory for Russia and a "death sentence" for Ukraine if Trump achieved his goal. In an interview with Time magazine published on Dec 12, Trump also criticized Ukraine's use of US-supplied missiles deep into Russian territory, saying "We are just escalating this war and making it worse."

At his annual end-of-year news conference on Dec 19, Putin said he was ready for talks with the US president-elect at "any time". He also said his troops held the upper hand across the battlefield.

Loshkarev stated that Ukraine will continue coordinating with the departing US administration and is frantically trying to create obstacles for the potential negotiation process after Trump takes office on Jan 20.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has threatened further attacks on military installations in Russia.

"We will definitely continue to strike Russian military targets — with drones and missiles, increasingly with Ukrainian-made ones — specifically targeting military bases and Russian military infrastructure used in this terror against our people," he said in his evening video address from Kyiv on Dec 21.

In mid-November, US President



Residents take shelter at a subway station in Kyiv, Ukraine, on Dec 13. YAN DOBRONOSOV / GETTY IMAGES



From left: Firefighters work to extinguish a blaze near the site of a building destroyed during a Russian missile strike in central Kyiv, Ukraine, on Dec 20. THOMAS PETER / REUTERS; Smoke rises from a high-rise building of a residential complex in Kazan, Russia, on Dec 21. VLADIMIR KRAINOV / TASS



2024 year in Review

Joe Biden approved Ukraine's use of its Army Tactical Missile System, or ATACMS, against targets inside Russia. This was soon followed by Britain's approval for similar use of its Storm Shadow missiles.

Nuclear doctrine

Moscow responded swiftly and dramatically. Putin first announced a revision of Russia's nuclear doctrine. Moscow then used a nuclear-capable hypersonic Oreshnik missile against Ukraine and issued a statement asserting the right to strike military installations in states allowing Ukraine to use their weapons to attack Russia.

Putin recently indicated that Russia may use the Oreshnik again, including hitting "decision-making

centers" in Kyiv, if Ukraine continues attacking Russia with long-range Western weapons. Putin also claimed that the Oreshnik is impossible to intercept and has destructive power comparable to that of a nuclear weapon even when fitted with a conventional warhead.

Military expert Vladislav Shurygin stated that the Oreshnik missile could bypass any existing missile defense system and destroy well-protected deep bunkers without using nuclear warheads.

The Oreshnik missile was launched at Yuzhmash, a Ukrainian plant that produced the world's largest strategic missiles of their kind.

"That was a demonstrative launch that will make the West reconsider its direct involvement in the Ukraine conflict," Russian military expert Viktor Litovkin noted.

However, Chinese experts believe that Moscow's threats and the use of a new missile do not suggest that escalation to nuclear use is likely. On the contrary, they see strong indications that it is unlikely.

In spite of tensions, Russia still

maintains that the conflict is a special military operation rather than a full-scale war, said Zhang Hong, a researcher at the Institute of Russian, Eastern European and Central Asian Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Zhang explained that Russia's goal in launching the operation is to ensure its own security interests, including demanding that Ukraine be demilitarized, and maintaining its traditional friendship with Ukraine, rather than allowing it to become a leading anti-Russian force.

Since the launch of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, the Biden administration has been cautious in what it has permitted Kyiv to do with US-supplied arms.

For months, the US resisted calls to allow the use of long-range missiles against targets inside Russia.

The White House's decision to reverse the approach in mid-November indicated a high degree of confidence that Russia would not respond with any kind of nuclear weapons against Ukraine or any NATO state.

Wang Wen, executive dean of the

Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies at Renmin University of China, does not think the US is likely to end the Russia-Ukraine conflict in the short term under Trump's leadership.

He noted that the conflict is long-term and neither Ukraine nor Russia is likely to have an agreement within the current conditions and borders.

Experts also said Trump and Republicans in Congress are unlikely to continue to provide Ukraine with the same levels of economic and military support as the country received from Democrats and the Biden administration. Ukraine has relied heavily on international aid to keep its economy afloat.

In a show of solidarity at a summit in Brussels recently with Zelensky, European Union leaders insisted that no decision can be taken about the future of war-ravaged Ukraine without its consent — or behind the backs of its partners in Europe.

"So now is not the time to speculate about different scenarios. Now is the time to strengthen Ukraine for all scenarios," said Antonio Costa, the president of the European Council.

There are also concerns that the comeback of Trump might result in a poor deal for Ukraine.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said it is important to "ensure long-term aid to Ukraine — it must be clear that we are prepared to enable support as long as it is needed". Air defense, artillery and ammunition are high on the list, he told reporters.

Luxembourg's Prime Minister Luc Frieden had a similar message.

"We need to stand with Ukraine, and every step ... needs to be taken with Ukraine and in the presence of the European Union. The future of Ukraine is decided in Europe and not elsewhere," he said.

Dutch Prime Minister Dick Schoof underscored that only Ukraine can determine the conditions for talks, "and it is not for us to talk about that. At the moment, Ukraine has not yet indicated that they are prepared to do so".

In Ukraine, the 27-nation EU has provided at least as much support — more than 180 billion euros (\$187 billion) since the conflict — as the US.

Gas deal

In an economic blow dealt to Europe under the shadow of conflict, Russian energy giant Gazprom said on Wednesday that it has stopped the gas supply for transit through Ukraine due to the expiration of key agreements and the lack of renewal by the Ukrainian side, according to Xinhua News Agency.

However, the European Commission played down the impact of the halt, saying the stop had been expected and that the bloc was prepared for it.

While the EU can probably continue to prop up Ukraine's ravaged economy, it is almost certainly unlikely to be able to provide the military backing that the country's armed forces would require to prevail.

However, economic aid from the West brings hope to Kyiv in maintaining its fight against Russia. The Biden administration recently transferred \$20 billion to Ukraine, providing an urgently needed economic lifeline in the form of a loan that will be repaid using interest earned from Russia's frozen central bank assets.

Zelensky said Kyiv needs the EU and the US to stay united and that "only together" can the US and Europe "stop Putin and save Ukraine". He said that the only effective security guarantee remains NATO membership.

"I don't think Ukraine will join NATO as desired, judging from the current situation, but NATO and the US will possibly provide Ukraine with a certain level of security guarantee," said Wang Yong, a professor at the School of International Studies and director of the Center for American Studies at Peking University.

Andrey Sidorov, head of the world politics department at Moscow State University, agreed. He said Trump was not particularly enthusiastic about meeting Zelensky, although his advisers insisted that it was very necessary.

Sidorov said Moscow and Kyiv still have major differences of opinion.

"It will be challenging for Ukraine to accept the loss of territories, while sanctions from Russia are unlikely to be lifted even if peace is reached."

Liu Hongjie in Beijing and agencies contributed to this story.

Expert says Trump return raises hopes for negotiations

By REN QI in Moscow

Russia may seize the opportunity presented by US President-elect Donald Trump's return to initiate dialogue with Ukraine and the West in 2025, while Ukraine will also adopt a more strategic approach to seek a better position in negotiations, said a Chinese expert.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has surpassed 1,000 days, revealing both changes and constants in the goals of each side, according to Chen Yu, deputy director of the Institute of Eurasian Studies at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations.

On the one hand, Moscow's current objective is to achieve more results on the battlefield before

Trump takes office, thereby accumulating leverage for future negotiations. It is difficult for Russia to demand the complete demilitarization of Ukraine or a total change in its leadership again. However, Chen said that Russia would still insist that Ukraine does not join NATO and seeks a degree of neutrality, and that Russia controls most of the territories in Eastern Ukraine.

On the other hand, Ukraine's long-term goal has been to defeat Russia and compel a full withdrawal of its forces. Chen noted that in the past year, as the battlefield situation has deteriorated and with Trump's resurgence, Ukraine's stance has also evolved.

"Although Ukraine will not legally abandon its territories, it is increas-

ingly open to discussing a cease-fire in some form and has begun to mention using diplomatic means to reclaim territories in the future, marking a clear shift from its previous position," said Chen. At the same time, Ukraine will continue to pursue NATO membership. On this issue, the objectives of both Russia and Ukraine remain sharply opposed, Chen noted.

Diplomatic challenge

The expert stated that the situation in Ukraine is currently not optimistic, as the battlefield is becoming increasingly difficult, and there are significant diplomatic challenges posed by Trump's influence. Domestic public opinion is also shifting.



Chen Yu

Chen indicated that the Ukrainian leadership is becoming more aware that negotiation might be a necessary trend. Rather than being forced into negotiations under pressure, it may be more strategic to proactively shape the discussions. Recent statements from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, including attacks on Russia's border region of Kursk, are actually aimed at supporting this approach.

"If negotiations begin in 2025, we can expect that Ukraine will not legally abandon its territories but

may be willing to discuss a cease-fire based on the current status of controlled areas under certain conditions, while continuing to assert claims over occupied territories," Chen said.

Chen also mentioned that Ukraine's use of Western long-range weapons to strike Russian military command centers and munitions depots may negatively affect Russia's operations, but it is unlikely to alter the overall battlefield situation.

From one perspective, the current unfavorable battlefield situation for Ukraine is primarily due to a severe shortage of personnel, which long-range weapons cannot address. From another perspective, the high cost of weapons like the US ATACMS and the UK Storm Shadow, along with limited Western stockpiles, complicates the sustainability of large-scale, long-

term consumption of weapons, Chen noted.

As Russia restructured its Defense Ministry by appointing economists as ministers, Chen pointed out that Russia has made substantial investments in defense and related industries driven by military needs since the onset of the conflict, leading to unexpected economic growth. Despite this, the Russian economy has also faced overheating, high inflation, and labor shortages.

Particularly since the second quarter of 2024, economic growth has gradually slowed, prompting continuous interest rate hikes to curb inflation, resulting in a significant recent depreciation of the rouble. The impact of military actions on Russia's economy and society is growing, making it increasingly difficult to balance them with normal economic operations.

COMMENT

Editorials

Manila the one acting like a modern-day Viking with its plundering in the waters

In a Financial Times report on the maritime disputes between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea published on Tuesday, the finger of blame is pointed at China. But by citing the remarks of some senior officials of the Philippines, the one-sided report simply fries Manila in its own oil.

Jonathan Malaya, assistant director-general in President Ferdinand Marcos Jr's National Security Council, is quoted as saying, "We cannot go toe to toe with China." He laments the Philippines is not a rising superpower like China with enormous resources at its disposal, and that it has to live with what it has.

But it is not China, but the Marcos government, that has taken the initiative to reignite the disputes whose fires had largely died down after a consensus was reached between Beijing and Manila that they should be resolved through consultations to the benefit of both sides and the region. It was only when the Marcos government decided to leverage the Joe Biden administration's gunboat diplomacy to the Philippines' "advantage", replacing its predecessor's cautious and practical balanced foreign policy with a blind bet on the US, that the disputes flared up again.

Apart from continuously trying to incite China into acting as a "bully" with its provocations, the Marcos government has also opened several military bases for the US in the north of the Philippines overlooking waters to the south of China's Taiwan island, and tried to purchase and install US mid-range missile systems whose range covers large patches of East and South China, claiming these aggressive moves are necessary "capacity building" to protect a "free and open Indo-Pacific".

Meanwhile, with the backing of some Western media, the Marcos government has also initiated a propaganda war against China at home and abroad, seeking to blame China for the South China Sea tensions, and trying to rally other regional countries to its side.

In its latest move in that regard, Alfonso Torres Jr, chief of the Philippine military's Western Command, was quoted in the FT report as saying: "I never expected someone who wants to be a superpower to behave like Vikings".

But Torres knows well that it is his country not China that is behaving like the "Vikings", and that China has exercised long-term restraint in responding to the Philippines' shameless provocations, such as its grounding of a ship on China's Ren'ai Reef so that it can justify its untenable claim.

Trying to denigrate one of the world's largest sources of goods, investment, growth and stability, and ardent promoter of international connectivity and cooperation by referring to it as acting like the "Vikings" just reflects the absurdity of the Marcos government's China policy.

Manila is trying to make the maritime disputes a defining factor of not just Sino-Philippine relations but also the regional situation by soliciting the support of the United States and the US' allies.

It is not the US' weapons or its promised "protection", but China's restraint that keeps the region's stability.

China will not be deterred from safeguarding its sovereignty no matter the military muscle that is flexed against it. But neither does it have any thought of making any country, including the US, an enemy, not to mention a country, such as the Philippines, which is a close neighbor.

With a new US administration taking office on Jan 20, many US allies are trying to mend their ties with China fearing they will be left high and dry by any change of US policy. The Marcos government too should take the opportunity to reevaluate its policy toward China.

The positive and negative lessons of China-Philippines relations in recent years have proved time and again that it is not easy to build good relations, but it is easy to destroy them.

China-Philippines relations are facing serious difficulties and challenges, which are rooted in the fact that the Philippine side has repeatedly violated the consensus of the two sides and its own commitments, continuously pushed its infringement of rights at sea and magnified its speculation on public opinion. China-Philippines relations are now at a crossroads and there is no way of avoiding conflict and confrontation, except through dialogue and consultation.

Latest spy series installment offers nothing new

Washington does enjoy a spy story. It seems that a frisson of excitement spreads through the political circle in the US capital at the thought of peepers prying into their guarded intimacies. So what better way to step into the New Year and greet a new administration than with the recounting of another tall tale of being voyeuristically viewed.

This time the storyteller is Assistant Treasury Secretary Aditi Hardikar, who, in a letter to the leaders of the Senate Banking Committee, outlined the hackneyed trope of Chinese hackers remotely accessing United States Treasury Department workstations and unclassified documents via a "China state-sponsored Advanced Persistent Threat actor".

Likewise in US media accounts, as in a string of similar scaremongering thrillers in recent years, this was another intrusion attributed to "hackers linked to the Chinese government/state", or simply "one of China's intelligence agencies". All said with certainty, without any elaboration, let alone any evidence, to support the claim.

The response from Beijing, which is by now well-versed in the United States' sensationalized narratives in which it plays the villain, revealed how tiresome it finds such "groundless accusations that lack evidence".

Beijing "has always opposed all forms of hacker attacks", said Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning. "We are even more opposed to the spread of false information against China for political purposes."

Her counterpart at the Chinese embassy in the US denounced the letter as an effort to "smear" China's reputation, and urged Washington to stop slandering China.

As in similar previous exchanges, Beijing's diplomatic envoys pointed to the fact that China is a constant target of hacking, with the US a regular perpetrator of such snooping.

It all seems very familiar: And so, as we enter a new calendar year and brace for a new chapter in bilateral ties with a new US administration in weeks, since there is nothing new, or unusual in an episode like this in today's China-US relationship, perhaps the opportunity should be taken to rethink this pattern of exchanges.

Except for adding additional chill to the already frosty bilateral ties, what can such a blame game do? Assigning China a malicious role may serve some parties' need for an insidious national security threat. But after all the hoopla surrounding the alleged cybersecurity threats from China, has the US actually publicly verified any of them? Is it less secure? If so, why, given the money it pumps into national security?

The Treasury accusation is concerning because it is the latest freshly-baked anti-Beijing narrative that has been cooked up and delivered straight out of the oven by the previous and current US administrations.

In March, Washington charged seven Chinese nationals with a hacking operation that had allegedly lasted at least 14 years. The White House recently claimed at least nine US telecommunications companies, including AT&T and Verizon, were hacked. The FBI and Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency even accused "actors affiliated with the People's Republic of China" of targeting US general elections. The hackers allegedly targeted the phones of president-elect Donald Trump, vice-president-elect JD Vance, and people working for Vice-President Kamala Harris' campaign. The hysteria has gone to such an extent that US authorities have told China Telecom Americas it is a national security threat.

There are malicious cyber actors at work. And with artificial intelligence making picking virtual locks easier, the constructive engagement of Beijing and Washington on cybersecurity would undoubtedly be of great practical value.

The US Treasury, and other US government agencies, have numerous working groups established for close communication with their Chinese counterparts on matters of common concern. Washington should use these channels to discuss ways to address cybersecurity threats rather than spending its time concocting another far-fetched plot in which Beijing plays the baddie.

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Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Chinese diplomacy promotes world peace and cooperation

China's major-country diplomacy has made solid progress in uniting the international community to meet various challenges and promote peace and development in 2024.

China has promoted the sound and steady development of its major-country relations, and led the Global South to unity and self-improvement. Through busting head-of-state diplomacy, China has comprehensively promoted all-dimensional, multitiered and multidimensional major-country diplomacy, forging its image as a responsible major country with greater international influence and appeal.

China has always unwaveringly followed the path of peaceful development and actively made efforts to restore peace in hot-spot regions. It has taken an objective and impartial stance and advocated for peace talks to resolve the conflict in Ukraine. On

the Palestine issue, it has actively pushed the UN Security Council to adopt the first cease-fire resolution on Gaza, and brokered reconciliation talks among Palestinian factions and their signing of the Beijing Declaration.

Over the past year, China has made sound advancements in promoting Chinese modernization, attracting and inspiring countries in the Global South to pursue dreams together.

China is ready to share its development opportunities with other countries to achieve common development and mutual achievements, and it is willing to work together to realize the modernization of all countries in the world with peaceful development, mutually beneficial cooperation and common prosperity. The steady progress of China's Belt and Road Initiative over the past years has injected stronger

impetus into the joint modernization of the countries involved and brought a fuller sense of gain to people around the world. China's successful poverty alleviation shows that with the resilience, perseverance and a struggling spirit, other developing countries can also succeed in solving their poverty problems.

In the process of eradicating poverty and seeking prosperity, China has explored a Chinese-style modernization path that transcends the Western experience. The Astana Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Summit of the BRICS leaders in Kazan and the informal meeting of APEC leaders in Lima show how much the international community respects China's status as a major power in the world and its recognition of China's leading role in the Global South.

— XINHUA NEWS AGENCY

Strengthen supervision to protect farmers' interests

The National Audit Office has recently reported to the top legislature some issues regarding rural investment it identified in 2023.

According to its report, 58 counties urged social capital entities to fulfill their obligations of paying overdue land transfer fees and dividends to farmers, totaling 111 million yuan (\$15.2 million).

Due to the lack of standardized management, farmers are often kept in the dark about their dividends while it is often they that sustain the investment risks.

For example, some enterprises, aft-

er enjoying agricultural support policies, tend to reduce investments or divert subsidy funds for other uses. In some places, the mechanisms designed to pay farmers are either flawed or too cumbersome, resulting in prolonged fund disbursement cycles.

Local governments need to improve their management mechanisms, enhance the efficiency and benefits of agricultural production and increase the income of enterprises, village collectives and the public, forming a relatively close community of interests.

Rural industries have a bright future but they also involve heavy investment, long cycles, slow returns and low profits.

Therefore, when introducing social capital into rural areas, it is crucial to avoid the mindset of merely seeking policy benefits and instead adopt a strategy of planning before acting and knowing when to stop to achieve gains. That is conducive to realizing a win-win situation for both enterprises and the agricultural sector, and achieving both economic and social benefits.

— ECONOMIC DAILY

What They Say

Energy Law starts long journey to green development

China's first Energy Law came into force on Wednesday as a fundamental law in the energy sector.

China's energy management has been fragmented for decades. The management systems of different kinds of energy vary greatly. It took nearly 20 years for the law to be materialized in a bid to address the relevant issues so as to pave the way for the energy transition of the country.

By the end of October 2024, China's installed capacity of new energy power generation accounted for 41.48 percent of the country's total installed capacity, exceeding coal-fired power generation by 4.5 percentage points. New technologies in new energy generation and energy storage are emerging, and a legal framework is urgently needed to support their development.

In addition, new market players and business models are emerging, and how to better coordinate the relationship between them has also become an issue that legislation and policies must respond to. The law therefore aims to provide a fair and sustainable market environment for promoting

the country's energy transition. It actively supports new energy development and the establishment of an energy reserve system, and clarifies the responsibilities of enterprises in this regard. Even if some new energy fields may not be profitable at present, investors can still clearly see from this law the country's long-term support for them. The law makes clear that the country will continuously encourage research and development of alternatives to traditional fossil fuels.

This law meets the expectations of all parties, fits the actual situation of China's needs to upgrade its energy structure, and has enhanced the confidence of the new energy industry. Besides, it is different from the Western energy legal system, including the European Green Deal and the Inflation Reduction Act of the United States that have clearer short-term goals and implementation details, and many targeted measures are oriented toward specific years. The Energy Law of China is more like a long-term institutional declaration. It provides a framework and leaves it

to subsequent policies, regulations and implementation details to gradually supplement and improve it.

That means the law is only a starting point in its field, and almost every clause of it faces complex challenges to be implemented, which, for example, include how to coordinate the regulatory functions of various bodies and the roles of the market supervision and management departments, and how to form an effective oversight mechanism integrating pre-operational, operational and post-operational supervision.

The future policymaking and the amendment of the legal framework should adapt to the actual situations of the energy sector so as to better address the practical concerns of the industry. For instance, it is an urgent task for policymakers and legislators to form a supporting market environment to establish a renewable energy utilization guarantee mechanism so that the surplus new energy that has been generated in the high season can be transferred to the needy regions, or properly stored for future use.

— JIEMIAN.COM

COMMENT

Q: The world has witnessed the Russia-Ukraine conflict since 2022, and the Israel-Palestine conflict since 2023, and in 2024 there was a sudden political upheaval in Syria. How do you view the evolution of the international situation?

A: The global order to some extent, is in disorder, which has led to the intensification of many existing conflicts around the world, as well as the emergence of new ones. The Russia-Ukraine conflict, when traced back, can be seen as a continuation of regional shocks following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Similarly, the Israel-Palestine conflict has persisted since World War II, continuing to pose a significant grave challenge to stability in the Middle East.

In 2024, the international political and security landscape was marked by turmoil and change. More than 4 billion people voted governments in or out of power in over 70 countries and regions, including in Iran — where an election was necessitated because of the unexpected death of president Ebrahim Raisi in a plane crash — and the US. While some elections threw up “surprises”, the US presidential election resulted in a “Trump 2.0 shockwave”.

Donald Trump's victory in the presidential election has made the US' role in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which was in its third year in 2024, uncertain, while the European Union is struggling to deal with the emerging situation. And while both Russia and Ukraine have shown signs of fatigue, Ukraine took the fight to Russia's Kursk region.

As for the Israel-Palestine conflict, it too raged on, spreading across the Middle East with Yemen's Houthi forces imposing a blockade on the Red Sea, Israel and Iran exchanging attacks, and Hezbollah escalating its conflict with Israel. Israel's brutal assault on the Palestinian people in Gaza prompted the International Criminal Court to issue arrest warrants for Israeli leaders — as well as Hamas commanders for the Oct 7 attack.

Global power relations continued to evolve with a “new Cold War” looming, as the US pursues a dual containment strategy against China and Russia, and the EU remains indecisive due to a lack of clear strategic direction. Overall, there has been no winners. Peace and cooperation remain elusive.

The global economy remained disappointing in 2024, especially because the post-pandemic economic recovery did not happen as expected, with geopolitical tensions accelerating the reshaping of global supply chains. While Sino-US trade continued to grow amid fluctuations, China maintained its position as the world's leading goods trading country for the seventh consecutive year.

Despite this, the global economy remained stuck in stagnation, facing weak growth and high inflation, with no signs of a breakthrough from the technological and industrial revolutions. This prompted countries to intensify their risk management measures, which has led to “over-securitization”, which has impacted normal economic exchanges globally.

Composure vital for China amid global uncertainty in 2025

Editor's Note: How will the world outlook evolve in 2025? How will Sino-US relations develop after Donald Trump begins his second term? Gao Fei, vice-president of China Foreign Affairs University, shares his views with China Daily's Liu Jianna for Dialogue with Thinkers, China Daily's heavyweight high-end interview program. Below is an excerpt from the interview.

Since the lack of development posed the greatest risk, global economic cooperation is the only way countries can overcome the crisis.

The coexistence of competition and cooperation continued to impact global governance, while globalization and the new technological revolution deepened the interdependence of countries. However, the benefits were uneven, exacerbating wealth inequality and the digital divide, particularly across different countries, social classes and generations. This in turn gave rise to the rampancy of populism, and made political polarization more pronounced especially in the US and Europe.

Q: In a world marked by constant turbulence and evolving conflicts, how should China navigate its path in 2025 to secure its future and contribute to global stability?

A: In spite of the Global South's call for stronger governance cooperation, protectionism and unilateralism continued to rise in some countries. As such, the world order in 2025 is expected to remain in a state of disarray, giving rise to new challenges.

Regional hotspots such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the Israel-Palestine conflict are unlikely to see a swift resolution, while economic stagnation and intensifying competition over limited resources and markets will exacerbate global turmoil.

The advancement of technology has added another layer of complexity to the international situation. Therefore, 2025 is likely to witness sustained global tensions, underscoring the need for countries to focus on internal resilience amid external challenges.

With the world entering a new era of upheaval and change, China actively played the role of a responsible major country, safeguarding its sovereignty, security and development interests while promoting global peace and development. China worked to create a favorable external environment for its own growth and global benefits and projected a distinctive national image on the world stage.

Despite the upheaval in international relations, China is experiencing one of the most favorable periods of development in its modern history. As a stabilizing force in the world, China's growing strength



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

enables it to fight against global disorder effectively. However, it is crucial for China to focus on its domestic objectives while navigating external complexities.

China's role has evolved through experiences, pushing it to the forefront of global leadership. But stepping into the spotlight requires more than just being on stage; it must learn to engage with the audience. This shift in China's diplomatic role is essential to its continued growth.

Unlike the United States, which emphasizes strategic competition with China, China remains steadfast in its commitment to peaceful development and win-win cooperation. China's goal is not to vie with the US for global hegemony but to engage constructively with the world and win the trust and support of the global community. This transformative approach underscores a vision of leadership rooted in mutual respect and shared prosperity, rather than dominance. Ultimately, China's development

involves taking on greater responsibility in global governance. It is not just about leadership but about showing the commitment and wisdom needed to guide the world through uncertainties. This is a pivotal moment for China's diplomacy, as it assumes a central role in shaping a peaceful and stable world order.

For instance, the South China Sea disputes transcend territorial contention among the countries involved. They also raise questions about the improvement of international legal frameworks. Although historical territorial disputes cannot be ignored, building mutual trust and fostering cooperation among nations could transform the region into a collaborative area. This approach reflects a broader necessity to find constructive solutions to the world's conflicts amid a shifting world order.

Q: What are the key aspects of international relations in 2025?

A: The relations among major countries are obviously of great sig-

nificance. The international order, equivalent to the framework of the relations between major countries.

Whether these major countries can cooperate, and whether they can lead smaller countries to find cooperation paths in certain areas and solve some existing problems, is of paramount importance.

Recently, US President-elect Donald Trump mentioned that if China and the US work together, they can solve many of the world's problems. For two large countries like China and the US, whose GDP exceeds 40 percent of the world's total, cooperation in various fields could help avoid sliding into a new Cold War. If the two countries can truly contribute to better global governance and shoulder their responsibilities, many global problems can be resolved.

Indeed, as the world's two largest economies, China and the US have a combined GDP that accounts for more than 40 percent of the global total. Genuine cooperation between the two countries could improve global governance and help solve many problems. But to avoid a Cold War-like confrontation, the US has to respect China's core interests, particularly the Taiwan question.

For China, Taiwan question remains a core interest that cannot be compromised. For decades, it has been the linchpin of China-US relations. Any US attempt to use the Taiwan question as leverage that risks crossing China's red line and could irreparably damage bilateral ties. Strategic competition between the two countries is unlikely to diminish, as evidenced by the US' formal designation of China as a strategic competitor in its 2017 and 2022 national security strategies.

Nevertheless, economic globalization creates mutual dependencies that could either serve as a basis for collaboration or a tool causing mutual harm, depending on the level of trust between the two countries.

The US' containment strategy has underscored the importance of technological self-reliance for China. All countries, especially major countries, need to have a strong foundation in innovation and a mechanism to promote high-level international cooperation. By

maintaining strong ties with the rest of the world, China ensures that any US decoupling attempt has broader repercussions for the US.

China's commitment to opening-up and collaboration allows for low-cost innovation and shared prosperity. In this context, fostering global exchanges in science and technology is essential. By focusing on its strategic confidence, China can drive innovation and development while retaining the initiative in China-US relations.

Q: Will the Global South, such as the expanding BRICS, challenge the US' role in world order?

A: I think the real issue is not about the Global South, or BRICS economies trying to de-dollarize, but about how the dollar regains its credibility. How can the dollar prove its reliability? This is a question the US needs to answer. If the US can do this, we would welcome the dollar as part of a stable international system. The real problem now is the US dollar, and whether the US is willing to play a constructive role in global development and uphold global peace and development.

The rise of the Global South reflects the shared aspirations of developing nations to prioritize growth despite geopolitical tensions, and make development as their primary national strategy. The BRICS nations, encompassing diverse strengths such as resource abundance (Russia and Brazil) and industrial capabilities (China), exemplify this collective drive.

BRICS cooperation offers a pathway toward a more equitable international system. By leveraging their collective resources, population and industry capacity, these countries can address systemic inequalities and promote shared prosperity. For instance, the concerns about de-dollarization are less about BRICS actively undermining the dollar and more about whether the US can maintain trust in its currency by engaging in constructive global interaction.

China frequently faces criticism from Western countries, which often misrepresent its actions and intentions. They have scrutinized China-proposed development programs such as the Belt and Road Initiative despite such programs improving global connectivity. Similarly, the West has criticized China for its leadership in renewable energy, accusing it of having overcapacity, despite its contributions to green development.

Such challenges highlight the need for resilience and clarity in China's approach to international relations. Staying focused on long-term goals, responding to criticism with facts, and continuously refining its strategies will enable China to project a positive and credible global image. By fostering mutual benefit and adhering to principles of fairness and innovation, China can establish itself as a widely respected country and continue to be a stabilizing force in the evolving world order.

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

Peng Yuchao and Li Juncheng

High-level opening-up ushers quality development in a new year

The stagnation of the World Trade Organization's reforms, the United Kingdom's Brexit and the United States' withdrawal from multiple international organizations and agreements (although the US later rejoined them) show that certain countries are no longer interested, or are losing interest, in multilateral cooperation.

In fact, some Western countries are trying to establish international mechanisms that exclude China in areas such as trade, investment and finance in a clear demonstration of economic protectionism.

The rising “de-globalization” sentiments in some countries are indicative of an imbalanced global power structure, insufficient global public goods provision and ineffectual governance mechanisms. This means global economic and trade rules have failed to keep pace with the developing times. With the global division of labor shifting toward value chain segmentation, traditional international economic and trade rules, which focus on border-opening measures, are no longer sufficient to meet the demands of the new situation.

This inferior high-quality institu-

tional environment limits the cross-border flow of innovation-driven elements. Factors such as trade and investment facilitation, intellectual property rights protection, fair competition principle and business environment have increasingly become critical variables affecting global trade and capital flows.

The era when a single country dominated international economic and trade rules has passed. The development of the international economic system requires the participation of new forces, with expanding institutional opening-up being important for addressing the changing dynamics of globalization.

Institutional opening-up can significantly reduce the institutional transaction costs of global trade and investment, and promote liberalization, as well as trade and investment by adopting a negative list approach to manage market access of goods and factors, and combining pre-establishment national treatment with a negative list for investment. This will simplify the economic process, reduce transaction costs and improve operational efficiency.

Institutional opening-up also

builds a transparent, stable and predictable institutional environment, boosting the confidence of global investors. It focuses on rules, regulations, management and standards to stabilize market expectations and stimulate the vitality of various market entities, fostering endogenous growth.

In summary, the essence of advancing institutional opening-up lies in fully leveraging China's advantages, helping reform the global economic governance system and leading its development. China's contributions to the improvement of global economic and trade rules will provide more Chinese wisdom and solutions to the global economic governance system.

China has signed more than 200 cooperation documents with more than 150 countries and over 30 international organizations, covering all aspects of the “five connectivity” (policy coordination, infrastructure connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and closer people-to-people ties). The Belt and Road Initiative, for example, is dedicated to establishing international cooperation mechanisms that align with the develop-

ment plans and needs of various countries. The initiative strengthens multilateral cooperation, lifting institutional opening-up to new levels, thereby shaping a fairer and more reasonable and efficient global economic governance system.

In terms of “hard connectivity”, the China-Europe Railway Express now links 123 cities in China with 227 cities across 25 European countries, with domestic rail routes covering up to 1,600 kilometers and international routes up to 1,000 km. The freight transportation time between China and Europe has been reduced by more than five days and customs clearance has become more efficient and convenient since the railway began operating, with the total transit time reduced by more than 30 percent.

In terms of “soft connectivity”, the goals of the Belt and Road Initiative are aligned with those of global and regional organizations such as the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the European Union's Connecting Europe and Asia strategy, the African Union's Agenda 2063 and ASEAN's Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025, strengthening

strategic and policy coordination between China and the world.

The initiative has prompted participating countries to create dozens of small multilateral cooperation mechanisms through cross-border integration of rules, regulations, management and standards. These include mechanisms for cooperation among ports along the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, energy cooperation under the Belt and Road framework, a regular banking cooperation mechanism, a Green Development Coalition and an accounting standards cooperation system.

The Belt and Road Initiative follows global economic, technological, industrial and social development trends and adopts a steady approach to cooperation in new fields such as the green economy, the digital economy and innovation-driven sectors, cultivating new growth areas. Over the past decade, the Digital Silk Road and the Green Silk Road have transformed from concept to reality. These initiatives have promoted the opening-up of markets in emerging fields such as the digital economy and the green economy. Specifically, the initiative pro-

motes shared decision-making rights in rule-making among participating countries, strengthening cross-border integration of digital and green trade rules, and developing multilevel digital trade and green investment suited to various levels of development. This serves as a model of institutional opening-up facilitating the development of global trade and investment.

Through its strategic projects and institutional innovations, the initiative has been facilitating greater cooperation and deeper integration across diverse sectors and regions. The initiative, in essence, represents China's commitment to expand institutional opening-up and contribute to global governance reform in order to make the global economic system fairer, and more efficient and sustainable.

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GLOBAL VIEWS

DAVID GOSSET

Building on strong foundation

Enduring relationship between France and China a testament to understanding and dialogue between nations

The year 2024 was a momentous year for France and China as they celebrated the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. This significant milestone was marked by a series of events that underscored not only the enduring relationship between the two countries but also their shared commitment to fostering cultural



exchanges, mutual understanding and global cooperation. From exhibitions and official visits to cultural tourism initiatives, the year stood as a testament to the strength of Franco-Chinese ties, even amid the complexities and changes of the modern world.

The celebrations began with the opening of the Year of Cultural Tourism in Harbin, which is the capital city of Northeast China's Heilongjiang province and known for its rich history, vibrant arts and architectural influences that reflect a unique blend of Chinese and European styles. This opening ceremony set the tone for the year, drawing dignitaries, artists and cultural ambassadors from both nations. While often referred to as the "Ice City", Harbin put the spotlight on the warmth and depth of the relationship between France and China. The initiative aimed to highlight the importance of cultural tourism, showcasing how both countries can learn from each other's heritage while encouraging travel and people-to-people connections.

Throughout the year, a diverse range of exhibitions and events were organized, creating a cultural bridge between the two nations. In Paris, visitors had the opportunity to immerse themselves in exhibitions featuring Chinese art, history and traditions. Museums, such as the Musée Guimet renowned for its extensive collections of Asian art, hosted exhibitions that celebrated China's ancient heritage and its contemporary contributions to global culture. Visitors were able to admire intricate calligraphy, ancient ceramics and modern installations that captured the essence of Chinese artistry.

Simultaneously, French culture found its way in China, with exhibitions held in major cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Chengdu. Chinese audiences were treated



LI MIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

to a glimpse of France's rich artistic legacy, from Impressionist paintings to contemporary French design. The events included musical performances, culinary festivals, and fashion showcases, reflecting France's unique ability to blend tradition with innovation. Such cultural exchanges not only deepened mutual appreciation but also reinforced the fact that art, culture and his-

tory are powerful tools for fostering understanding and dialogue between nations.

A highlight of the year's celebrations came in May, with the State visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to France. This visit underscored the importance both countries place on their bilateral relationship. President Xi was warmly welcomed by his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron

and their meetings were marked by mutual respect, open dialogue and a shared vision for the future. The visit provided an opportunity for the two leaders to strengthen their personal rapport, fostering a deeper understanding of each other's perspectives and priorities. It was clear that beyond the formalities of diplomacy, there was a genuine effort to build trust and cooperation at the highest level.

The discussions held during this visit covered a wide array of topics, including trade, climate change and global security. France and China reaffirmed their commitment to multilateralism, emphasizing the need for cooperation in addressing global challenges. Both leaders acknowledged the complexities of the international landscape, marked by geopolitical tensions and economic uncertainties. Yet, they expressed a shared belief that the two countries' partnership could serve as an element of stability in a world too often divided. By prioritizing dialogue over discord, France and China demonstrated how bilateral cooperation can contribute to a more peaceful and balanced global order.

In addition to political dialogue, the visit also highlighted practical initiatives aimed at enhancing collaboration between the two nations. Agreements were signed to boost economic partnerships, particularly in the fields of sustainable development, technology and innovation. French companies were encouraged to invest in China's growing green economy, while Chinese businesses explored opportunities in France's advanced industrial and technological sectors. These agreements reflected a forward-looking approach, ensuring that the momentum generated in 2024 would translate into tangible benefits for both countries in the years to come.

The year of celebrations also highlighted the importance of people-to-people exchanges in strengthening Franco-Chinese relations. It was a fortunate coincidence that the 60th anniversary coincided with the year of the Paris Olympics. The growth in people-to-people exchanges represents real progress in the relationship, which is solid and resilient because it relies on the ability of both societies to interact and create value. This is not to say that the political factor is unimportant; rather, it has played its role by facilitating

the flourishing of non-governmental interactions.

Despite the challenges posed by an increasingly fragmented world, France and China have managed to nurture their cooperation and remain committed to acting as forces of stability. Their ability to navigate differences while finding common ground serves as a powerful example for other nations. At a time when global tensions threaten to undermine progress, the Franco-Chinese relationship highlights the importance of dialogue, collaboration and mutual respect.

It was clear that the year 2024 had set a strong foundation for the future. The events and initiatives launched during this landmark year underscored the depth and resilience of the relationship between France and China. However, the momentum initiated in 2024 must not be allowed to fade. Both nations recognize that their partnership is not merely about commemorating the past but about building a shared future based on trust, cooperation and common values.

Looking ahead, there is immense potential for France and China to further deepen their collaboration across various domains. In culture, science, education and sustainable development, there are countless opportunities for the two sides to work together for the benefit of their people and the global community. The year 2024 served as a reminder that even in a divided world, partnerships based on mutual respect and understanding can thrive.

The 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between France and China was more than just a celebration; it was a reaffirmation of a relationship that has weathered the test of time. It highlighted the enduring importance of dialogue, cultural exchange and shared aspirations in building a better world. As the two countries move forward, the spirit of 2024 will undoubtedly serve as a guiding light, ensuring that the friendship between France and China continues to flourish for generations to come.

The author is the founder of the China-Europe-America Global Initiative. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

TIAN XUAN

Demand driver

More investment needed amid the volatile and complex global economic environment

The rise of trade protectionism has created a severe external environment for China, which will undoubtedly put Chinese exports under higher pressure. Thus, the domestic market plays an increasingly important role in stabilizing economic growth.

In this context, government investment and policy incentives have undoubtedly become a key point and an important strategic tool to boost domestic demand.

The recent Central Economic Work Conference called for more government investment to effectively drive private investment. Due to its public nature, government investment can accurately support key projects that represent the strategic direction of the country and industrial investment that has a key supporting role in economic transformation and upgrading. And by directing more resource input in economically backward regions through transfer payments, the government can promote more balanced and coordinated development of regional economies.

Meanwhile, government investment, with its demonstration effect and policy incentives, can effectively mobilize social capital and steer capital toward scientific and technological innovation and emerging industries, so as to optimize and upgrade the allocation of productive forces. It can also create new job opportunities, thus injecting strong impetus into a sustained recovery and expansion of China's consumer market.

In recent years, China's government investment has shown the marked features of a continued expansion in scale and gradual optimization of structure. Through more policy incentives, it has effectively stimulated the vitality of private investment, and played a critical role in boosting short-term growth and driving long-term economic structural transformation and upgrading.

China has earmarked 700 billion yuan

(\$95.9 billion) for investment in the central government budget of 2024, an increase of 2.94 percent over the figure of 2023. The funds will mainly be invested in public infrastructure, agriculture and rural areas, environmental protection and restoration, high-tech industry, social services and other key areas.

Moreover, the government is actively exploring multiple financing channels and innovation in investment models. It has issued 1 trillion yuan worth of ultra-long-term special government bonds, focusing on major infrastructure, livelihood improvement and new-type urbanization projects, which lays a solid foundation and expands room for long-term economic and social development.

The issuance of special bonds is also expanding rapidly. In 2024, China's local government special bond quota was 3.9 trillion yuan, which has been widely used in infrastructure construction, housing projects for low-income residents, social welfare programs and other fields, in an effort to accelerate economic growth. Meanwhile, local governments have set up guidance funds to give full play to the leverage effect of financial funds. China had set up a total of 2,126 government guidance funds, with a target size of 12.82 trillion yuan, in the first half of 2024.

But from the perspective of the implementation, the amplification effect of government investment has not been fully unleashed.

In 2024, driven by increasing exports and large-scale equipment renewal policies, China's private investment has shown some signs of recovery. However, the growth rate is still low. Private investment in capital markets has also shown a downward trend.

There are a number of reasons for this. First, the quality of government projects needs to be improved. The reserve of high-quality projects is insufficient, and most of the invested projects are public welfare projects with low investment returns. Some projects have insufficient project assessment and unreasonable project design, resulting in their weak attraction to private

capital and low utilization rate of funds.

Second, under the pressure of hefty debts, local governments are more cautious about investing in projects. At the same time, when financial institutions offer financing support, their participation is limited based on considerations of debt risks and investment returns as well as relevant regulatory policy constraints. In addition, interventions by the government and government-run platform companies have a crowding-out effect on private capital.

Therefore, to effectively exert the amplification effect of government investment, the above-mentioned problems need to be solved.

First, the central government should strengthen overall planning and project planning. Through the requirement to improve the project planning year by year, a balance can be struck between the public welfare attributes and the value-added attributes of projects. At the same time, the government should provide effective support for the implementation of projects.

Second, the central government should strengthen policy coordination and beef up financial support. Monetary policy should be kept moderately loose to provide sufficient liquidity support for economic growth. At the same time, China should actively introduce more structural monetary policy instruments and special support tools to improve the accuracy of pro-growth policies.

In terms of fiscal policy, on the basis of continued promotion of more proactive counter-cyclical incremental fiscal policy measures, China should gradually shift the focus of government expenditure from traditional infrastructure investment to education, healthcare, elderly care and other areas of people's livelihood.

Third, by issuing government bonds and lending them to local governments, and adjusting the mechanism for determining



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

and allocating special debt quotas, the central government can support local governments to carry out debt replacement, defuse debt risks, and reduce the hidden burden of government investment and financing pressure.

With the principle of "special funds for special purposes", China should accelerate the issuance of ultra-long-term special treasury bonds and special bonds, and reasonably expand the scope of special bond investments.

Last, China should improve market-based operation mechanisms and increase the inclusiveness of government-managed funds. A sound board of directors system, management mechanism and risk control mechanism need to be established to improve the professionalism and inde-

pendence of investment decision-making.

The assessment requirements for government-managed funds should also be improved, with the fault tolerance and exemption mechanism enhanced, and the boundaries of fault tolerance and exemption clarified.

In particular, the tolerance for the failure of innovative investment projects should be raised. At the same time, policies of talent attraction, incentive and guarantee need to be enhanced.

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LIFE



From left: Young musical actors and veteran traditional Chinese opera artists join forces in the Chinese musical *Jinfeng Yulu*, including 23-year-old Li Chenyuan (the bridegroom featured in the right photo), who will graduate from Beijing Dance Academy this summer.

Stepping into Huguang Hui-guan, or Huguang Guild Hall in Beijing, people who come to watch a resident musical may find the venue a heart of tradition and innovation. It comes alive with *Jinfeng Yulu*, or *Till We Meet Again*, a musical that blends well the timeless artistry of Peking Opera with the emotive power of music.

Opened at the hall on Dec 23, it will run as a resident show in 2025. Set against the historical backdrop of the 1910s to 1949, it tells the story of Chunmingshe, a Peking Opera troupe stationed at the guild hall that unexpectedly becomes embroiled in a murder mystery. The troupe's owner-master, Lai Xifu, is arrested as the prime suspect.

As the troupe faces operational difficulties and struggles for survival, the leading Peking Opera actor, Jin Sheng, who specializes in *wusheng* (martial arts male roles), takes on the responsibility of rescuing his master and revitalizing the troupe. Amid choices of family, love, friendship and national duty, he fights his way out of the crisis.

"At the core of this show is Peking Opera because the performance is staged at this special venue," says director Li Zhuoqun, referring to the guild hall, a complex of buildings over 200 years old, that is tucked away in a *hutong* area in downtown Beijing. "However, this is no ordinary Peking Opera."

Infused with a contemporary twist, the show integrates modern musical elements, such as electronic beats and jazz, bringing a fresh energy to the performance and appealing to both traditionalists and the younger generation in the audience.

Guild halls, *huiguan* in Chinese, which first appeared in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and reached their peak in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), referred to gathering places for people either from the same hometowns, or with shared interests, meeting venues for merchants, scholars or regional associations. There were more than 500 guild halls in the capital.

Huguang refers to present-day Hubei and Hunan provinces during the Ming and Qing dynasties. The Huguang Guild Hall dates back to 1807 and was built by Liu Quanzhi, a scholar from Changsha in Hunan, and Li Junjian, a government official from Huanggang in Hubei. It originally functioned as a cultural, business and social center, serving the increasing number of people from the two provinces living in the capital.

With its courtyards and halls filled with ancient wooden beams and intricate carvings, the guild hall is most famous for its center stage, where Peking Opera masters such as Mei Lanfang (1894-1961), Tan Xinpei (1847-1917) and Yu Shuyan (1890-1943) once performed. The space, rich in history, provides an intimate atmosphere where the audience can almost feel the pulse of centuries past reverberating through its walls, creating a deep connection to the cultural heritage being performed.

Xu Xiaohui, general manager of the Tianqiao Zenith Group, a Beijing-

Peking Opera show puts musical tale center stage

Murder mystery provides backdrop to compelling plot of family, friendship and duty, **Chen Nan** reports.



Featuring elements of Peking Opera, Chinese musical, *Jinfeng Yulu*, or *Till We Meet Again*, is being staged as a resident show at the Huguang Guild Hall in Beijing. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

headquartered company in charge of the upkeep of the guild hall, says the complex has undergone several renovations. In 1984, it was placed on the cultural heritage protection list by the Beijing municipal government, which has been working to revive such old buildings and promote their reuse since 2021.

As the musical opens, the performers, wearing vibrant Peking Opera costumes and intricate make-up, deliver the opera's good blend of stylized movement, powerful vocals and dramatic storytelling.

The air is thick with the passion of the performance as the singers' high-pitched, operatic vocals blend with the rhythmic beats of traditional percussion instruments, creating a captivating auditory landscape.

"From the moment the music starts, the atmosphere is electric," says Li, noting that the goal of staging the musical is to attract more young audiences to the old guild hall, allowing them to experience the intersection of old and new.

"The audience is invited not only to witness a performance but to be

part of a larger cultural dialogue."

The historical guild hall, with its intimate and acoustically rich environment, offers a sense of closeness to the performers that larger venues cannot match.

"As the show progresses, the audience immerses itself in the fusion of sound, movement and emotion, becoming part of the show," she adds.

Li, who is the scriptwriter, lyricist and director of the production, has a large fan base, especially among the younger generation, thanks to her contemporary approach to telling

stories in productions of traditional Chinese operas. Born into a family that worked in local folk opera in 1985, Li joined the Jingju Theater Company of Beijing after graduating from the National Academy of Chinese Theater Arts in 2011.

Peking Opera, known as *jingju* in Chinese, has a history of more than 200 years and is a performance art incorporating singing, reciting, acting and martial arts. The art form was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2010.

"It was the first time I directed a musical, and we selected performers from top Chinese art schools, such as the National Academy of Chinese Theater Arts, the Central Academy of Drama, and the Beijing Dance Academy," Li says, adding that there are also professional traditional Chinese opera artists in the cast.

Since the complex is an ancient wooden structure, protection is key, according to Li, who adds that they made efforts to preserve its historical charm while incorporating technology and interactive elements.

Before the performers started rehearsals at the guild hall, they learned about the historical and cultural significance of guild halls in Beijing. "We spent hours reading the script at the Huguang Hui-guan, which allowed us to experience the unique atmosphere of this complex," says actor Li Chenyuan, 23, who plays the lead role of Jin in this musical.

He will graduate from the Beijing Dance Academy with a major in musical performance this summer. He stood out among his peers during auditions and received rigorous training in traditional Chinese opera, from singing and martial arts to reciting lines.

"I've performed in some musical productions, but Peking Opera is new to me. I started by imitating Peking Opera masters' performances by watching videos, and the more I learned, the more I admired those masters," says Li Chenyuan.

A Peking Opera piece that he performs in the musical is *Lin Chong Ye Ben* or *Lin Chong Flees by Night*, one of the best-known Peking Opera pieces for *wusheng* actors.

"It's such a deep art form that takes years to learn," he adds.

For actor Hu You, 36, the challenge is learning the techniques of singing and dancing in musicals. He graduated from the National Academy of Chinese Theater Arts in 2012 and joined the Beijing Quju Opera Troupe that year. Hu plays the role of Yu Tao, an ambitious young man from a noble family who returns to his hometown of Beijing after studying abroad. Yu is also a fan of Peking Opera and becomes a friend of Jin.

"I performed at the Huguang Hui-guan when the Beijing Quju Opera Troupe staged Lao She's *Teahouse* last year and this year. It's quite a different experience when I performed in this musical, which is a new art form for me," Hu says.

Quju, a traditional opera, is believed to be the only local opera in Beijing that combines singing in the local Beijing dialect, also with dancing and martial arts.

Unlike Li Chenyuan, who was challenged by performing traditional Chinese opera, Hu faced difficulty with singing and dancing when he received training for musical performance.

"I've worked with the director, and I was intrigued by the idea of performing in a musical," Hu says. "Tradition does not need to be static. It can evolve and breathe new life when given the space to do so."

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Teenager's rewarding Chinese language journey sparks interest in Kenya

NAIROBI — Mirriam Wambui, a 13-year-old student, speaks Chinese with the confidence of a seasoned linguist despite having only two years of exposure to the language. She won the national title in the Chinese Bridge competition in Kenya, ranked sixth in Africa, and placed in the top 30 globally at the 17th Chinese Bridge Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign Secondary School Students held in China's Tianjin in late October.

"I was thrilled to be announced the winner during the Chinese Bridge Kenya edition competition," Mirriam says.

Her journey with the Chinese language began through her eldest brother, who traveled to China in 2015 to pursue a master's degree in Chinese. When he returned to visit their family in Nairobi in 2019, Mirriam was captivated by his fluency in Chinese. "My brother came back with a cellphone I had never seen before, and everything he brought, including electronics, was made in China. I became curious about this country that seemed to produce so much," she says with a giggle.

Inspired, she enrolled in Chinese language classes at her junior secondary school two years ago. In May,

she made a request to her Chinese teacher: She wanted to join the team representing her school in the Chinese Bridge competition.

"My teacher was shocked because it was just two weeks until the competition. All along, I had been waiting to be chosen, but when it became clear that I wasn't, I decided to ask for the opportunity because I believed in myself," she recalls.

Her belief in herself paid off. She impressed the judges with her speech, essay and performance at the competition held at Kenyatta University, Kenya's second-oldest university. "I won a laptop, a trophy and a ful-

ly sponsored two-week trip to China. It was so exciting," she says.

In October, she traveled to China with her teacher. "I loved it. The people were so welcoming. Everyone was so nice," she says of her trip.

Her success has inspired other students at her school to take up Chinese. Her teacher, Charity Atunga, says that Chinese is the most popular of the three optional languages offered, with 90 out of 200 students choosing to learn it.

"There's a lot of support from parents and the school administration, which makes the learning experience positive. The students also see the

benefits, such as scholarships," says Atunga, who, teaching Chinese for four years, accompanied two students to China.

Atunga is also a beneficiary of Chinese language scholarships. After studying in China, she worked for several Chinese businesses and educational institutions before becoming a teacher.

Salome Nyambura, director of Kenyatta University's Confucius Institute, speaks of Mirriam's achievement as "a testament to the growing interest in Chinese culture and language in Kenya".

Nyambura also mentions a new

crash program at the university for teachers wanting to learn Chinese. "The classes are full, showing a strong desire to introduce Chinese programs in schools."

Kenyatta University, in partnership with Shandong Normal University, hosts the Chinese Bridge competition for high school students in Kenya. Through this partnership, over 300 Kenyan students have traveled to China.

"I want to become an ambassador in the future and learn more about Chinese language and culture," says Mirriam.

XINHUA

LIFE



Top from left: Scallops from Guangdong province, saffron from Iran, cocoa from Mexico, and sweet basil from Italy. Above: Dishes made with sambal sauce from Penang, Malaysia. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Series shares real spices of life

Once Upon a Bite's new season traces evolution of little seeds and plants that enhance global cuisine, **Li Yingxue** discovers.

Once prized as treasures worth their weight in gold and serving as bridges between Eastern and Western civilizations, spices are an essential part of everyday life. From the ancient Silk Road to modern supermarket shelves, their influence has spread to every corner of the globe.

But how well do we truly understand these small seeds, barks and leaves? How have they shaped diverse culinary cultures and in what subtle ways do they continue to impact our daily lives?

The fifth season of *Once Upon a Bite*, focusing on *The Spice Legends*, takes an in-depth journey to answer these questions. With a global perspective, the series traces the origins, expansion and evolution of spices, illustrating how they influence human life and become woven into our shared cultural heritage. It invites viewers to rediscover these "familiar strangers."

Premiering last month on Tencent Video, the seven-episode documentary series has quickly resonated with audiences, climbing to the top of the platform's documentary charts, trending lists and food documentary rankings to secure the No. 1 spot.

This series not only takes viewers on a deep dive into essential culinary seasonings like chili peppers, cinnamon, pepper and garlic — staples in daily meals — but also broadens the horizon, exploring the global boundaries of fragrant creations. It follows the flow, migration, conquest and integration of spices, offering a global perspective on unique Chinese cuisines.

After the third season's focus on seafood and the fourth on grains, this season's spotlight shifts to the often-overlooked world of spices — appearing as supporting characters in previous seasons' episodes.

Producer Zhu Lexian explains that the aim of *Once Upon a Bite* is to uphold continuity and thematic expansion. "What started as a singular focus evolved into a vast series, with each season offering new angles and sensory experiences, touching on taste, smell, sight and sound. Season 5 adds a fresh chapter to the *Once Upon a Bite* universe," Zhu says.

According to chief director Chen Xiaoqing, the spice theme is not just a shift in narrative focus but serves to deepen the understanding of food as a whole. "Spices make eating an intriguing experience. We want to tell a story that you can actually smell," he says.

Pepper, cumin, fennel ... these are "small heroes". The first episode focuses on the story of seed-based spices. It includes the history of black pepper, one of the earliest global spices, and how it journeyed from South Asia to reach every corner of the world, ultimately dominating dining tables worldwide.

Guo An, director of this episode, recalls that before working on this



Top: Chief director Liu Shutong (right) with photographer Wang Yao (left) and Guo Liu (center), director of the fruit theme episode, film tomatoes in Italy, July 2023. Above: Young Danes enjoy cinnamon rolls in the documentary.

theme, he thought of spices as merely a cooking additive. However, through research and preparation during the filming process, he gradually learned that small spices not only enhance but also play a role in balancing and controlling flavors.

"The most profound takeaway from filming spices was the sense of depth in flavors. When I saw the beautifully presented dishes on the monitor during the shoot, I realized my sense of smell was deeply engaged. Suddenly, I could associate these beautiful images with a sensory memory of scent," he says.

Chief director Liu Shutong explains that the documentary took two and a half years from planning to release, with the preproduction phase involving extensive research and preparation, which consumed a significant amount of the team's energy.

“This season we focused more on a systematic approach, showcasing how spices have influenced human diets and shaped eating habits.”

Liu Shutong, director

"Spices like Sichuan pepper (or Chinese prickly ash), saffron and star anise, which are featured this season, were touched upon in previous episodes. However, this season we focused more on a systematic

approach, showcasing how spices have influenced human diets and shaped eating habits," Liu says.

Liu emphasizes that the documentary doesn't only focus on spices as they are today but aims to explore how they gradually influenced our eating practices.

"After humans began farming, the range of food was quite narrow. Eating noodles or rice every day can become monotonous," he says. "Spices have made our meals more vibrant and diverse. I think this is the biggest effect of spices. They make the world more colorful."

"We also view the history of spices as a different perspective on culinary culture. The ones we explore in this series reflect the changes in food culture over time," he adds.

This season also has the highest proportion of overseas content in the *Once Upon a Bite* series.

"When selecting overseas topics, we sought common ground through Chinese cuisine. By choosing relevant content, the audience feels more connected. At the same time, we leveraged global cuisines to offer viewers a worldwide view of food," Liu says.

When introducing basil in the documentary, the production team filmed at a mother-daughter-run pho shop in Vietnam. Liu explains that the team visited more than 100 pho shops before selecting the one that was ultimately featured. "Our core focus is to tell people's stories, not just picking a trendy spot," he says.

Liu also recalls a memorable filming experience at a barbecue restaurant in Texas in the United States. "I could see the barbecue owner's spirit — focus, passion for food, warmth toward the people around him, and a love for life," he says.

One challenge for Liu and his team was conveying the spices' scents to viewers. "Spices are all about smell but how do we 'translate' that? Unlike ingredients like meat or grains, whose appeal is more visual, an aroma is intangible," Liu says.

To make the spices appear more vivid, the team used dynamic and microscopic shots, including time-lapse sequences of plant growth and CGI effects. "We captured key moments when the flavor forms, whether it's blooming, growing, cracking or changing color," Liu says.

The team also employed montage techniques using visuals of familiar flavors to represent the unknown. For example, to show the numbing sensation of Sichuan peppers, they used images of vibrating water droplets and electrical currents and fiery chili peppers were represented by using images of volcanoes and molten lava.

Narration plays a crucial role as well. "Many spices are unfamiliar to the audience, so we used familiar tastes to describe them," Liu says. "For example, fennel is like mint with a hint of fruitiness and a mild numbing sensation."

"For saffron, we found foreign writers who described it as having hints of licorice, honey, and so on. Instead of using adjectives, we used more specific terms, aiming to give the audience a more intuitive sense of the flavor," he adds.

Music also played a key role in "translating" the scent of spices. Liu says the team wanted the music to maintain the series' consistent style while incorporating different instruments and chord progressions to help convey each spice's unique character.

"For example, the music during the saffron flower harvesting scene was specially composed to express the vitality and freshness of the plant," he says.

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TCM teas are hotter in health market

KUNMING — Several Chinese hospitals have found their edge in the country's growing health drinks market by prescribing herbal formulas that target minor symptoms, from calming nerves and aiding sleep to promoting healthy hair.

Struggling with insomnia, Guo Xiaofan, a 26-year-old resident of Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province, recently consulted the online platform of a traditional Chinese medicine hospital, where she was prescribed herbal tea.

Guo brewed the dried herbs at home and found it a great alternative to drinking milk tea. "The first sip tasted a bit strange but as I continued drinking, it tasted quite good," she says.

This herbal tea is based on a well-known Chinese medicine formula designed to treat symptoms of insomnia and neurasthenia. The tea includes sauteed jujube kernels, dried lily, *poria* fungus and *albizia* bark.

Yunnan Provincial Hospital of Traditional Chinese Medicine recently launched five herbal medicine formulas for drinking. On the first day of the market release, 10,000 doses were sold.

Wan Xixi, deputy director of the hospital's medical administration department, says these formulas are crafted based on prescriptions from renowned TCM practitioners.

Each dose of herbs is individually packaged and can be brewed or boiled for easy consumption at home. "The bags of dried herbs are not available for purchase on the market. To obtain them, individuals must obtain a prescription as they are tailored to specific syndrome differentiation," Wan explains.



Herbal tea inspired by traditional Chinese medicine is being prepared at a TCM hospital in Dingxi, Gansu province, in December. WANG KEXIAN / XINHUA

In recent years, an increasing number of health-conscious people have developed a strong interest in such medicinal herbal tea drinks.

According to a consumer behavior survey on the Chinese herbal tea drink industry conducted by data analysis provider iiMedia Research earlier this year, more consumers are paying attention to and trying herbal drinks, with purchase intentions steadily rising.

An employee surnamed Huang from Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, recently purchased several herbal remedies through Zhejiang Provincial People's Hospital's online platform.

"I bought five doses of each type. With medical insurance, the total bill came to less than 100 yuan (\$13.9), which I think is very reasonable. After drinking them, I felt the effects were good," Huang says.

Many Chinese hospitals, especially TCM hospitals, are keen to promote their special herbal tea formulas, some of which change seasonally. For example, in summer, they focus on formulas of smoked plum tea for relief from summer heat. In winter, herbal tea formulas for clearing throat mucus are more popular.

In addition to hospitals, many pharmacies, including the established brand Beijing Tong Ren Tang, have seen a boost in herbal tea sales.

Pharmacies remind buyers that while some herbs like Chinese yam and coix seed are available in drink form and others, and can be consumed as food, herbal formulas are still considered medicine and should be taken under proper medical supervision.

According to data from iiMedia Research, the Chinese herbal drinks market reached 41.16 billion yuan (\$5.64 billion) in 2023 and is expected to surpass 100 billion yuan in 2028.

XINHUA

MAKING A MINT ONLINE

Foreign writers embrace adaptation, translation to boost viewer numbers and success, **Mei Jia** reports.

This is the year in which a fictional protagonist of the esports-themed online Chinese novel *The King's Avatar*, Ye Xiu, was named a Swiss Tourism Pathfinder of 2025 by the Swiss National Tourism Board as part of a promotion in conjunction with the Yuewen Group's strategy to boost its global intellectual property.

Online literature is nothing new in China where audiences are used to TV series, films and cartoons being adapted from online serial novels. It has been more than 20 years since the literary form, an industry worth 38.3 billion yuan (\$5.25 billion) last year, according to a report released by the China Audio-video and Digital Publishing Association on Dec 16, took root in the country in 1998.

Although the final chapter of the esports novel wrapped up in 2014, it has attracted 135 million readers outside China since an English version appeared in 2017 on WebNovel, a Chinese platform run by Yuewen Group, for international online literature and translations.

In addition to translations of Chinese novels, a group of online writers of multiple nationalities have been contributing to the flourishing online literature scene, which netizens describe as one of four cultural phenomena along with Hollywood movies, Japanese cartoons and comics, and South Korean TV series.

Kawin Jack Sherwin tasted sweet success four years ago and is now enjoying the extension of that success through adaptations into other forms, including audiobooks and comics.

The 28-year-old author of one of WebNovel's top English-language titles, *My Vampire System*, which he wrote under the pen name JKSManga, comes from Slough in the United Kingdom.

In 2020, he won the \$10,000 Gold Prize in the WebNovel Spirit Awards. Now, audio versions in English, Hindi and German have received 243 million hits so far, according to Qin Lei, vice-president of the Yuewen Group.

"I thought the popularity of my stories would stop growing at some point, that things would slow down. After all, how could things get better than being ranked No 1?" Sherwin says. "Yet the story has done better than ever. Now, because of the audio, people I've never met are hearing and enjoying my work, including friends who didn't even know I wrote it."

"What I'm seeing is a focus on bigger IPs that are recognized worldwide," he says, adding this second boost to his writing shows the momentum gaining among foreign online writers.

"Because we follow the Chinese way of operating IPs, we avoid making mistakes," Sherwin says.

With no professional training as a writer, Sherwin quit his job as a music teacher in a Hangzhou school in Zhejiang province to devote himself to online writing in 2020. He said in a previous interview with China Daily that his decision to combine the techniques employed for Harry Potter and Sun Wukong (the Monkey King) provided the answer to how he could impress someone with his story in 30 seconds.

Able to quickly learn and analyze other popular online novels, which he reads a lot, he was even thinking about how to apply storytelling techniques to his work when he was dragged by his Chinese wife to a costume drama. The couple met in the Hangzhou school and live in Qingdao in Shandong province.

His online editor at WebNovel, a Singaporean known as JJ, tells China Daily: "*My Vampire System* was one of a kind during publication as there was no other novel that offered the same premise and storyline during its serialization. It was a



Some of the overseas writers of online literature see the sites during the Shanghai International Online Literature Week from Dec 16 to 19. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



WebNovel authors Kawin Jack Sherwin (second from left) from Britain and Barisbi Alborov (third from left) from Russia during the event.



Left: Ghanaian writer Lucia Ewoenam Oniong Ekanem wears a Chinese traditional costume in Shanghai. Above: Sherwin, also known by his pen name JKSManga, has seen his work adapted into audio programs and comics in various languages.

mixture of sci-fi and fantasy themes that the author managed to blend together, where you have people with fantastical superpowers fighting against alien invaders in a futuristic setting."

In the 5-million-word novel, the "system" and "leveling up" elements used in Chinese online literature work in harmony with vampire legends and interstellar sci-fi settings.

Instead of pushing his limits every day by rising at 4 am to write, Sherwin says he is now relaxed, though he still writes 4,000 words a day between 9 am and 5 pm, gym time included.

With five titles under his belt, he is awaiting the publication of his Vampire book in comic form in Chinese, English and Japanese, and would like to explore more of China with his wife, as well as

cater to his growing German fan groups, he says.

Sherwin is among the 449,000 overseas online writers on WebNovel who have written 680,000 titles, says Li Hong from the audio-video and digital publishing association, referring to the report on 2024 Chinese online literature overseas trends, which was released during the Third Shanghai International Online Lit-



The First Legendary Beast Master, an award-winning WebNovel book this year.



My Billionaire Ex-Husband Chase Me Back.



Major League System.



The Hivemind is Conquering for Me?



Shadow Slave.



My Vampire System.

erature Week from Dec 16 to 19.

Li says overseas writers born after the year 2000 account for 45 percent of those writers, and in 2023, 411 titles were viewed more than 10 million times. The hot labels are action, adventure, romance, rebirth and system.

Unlike Sherwin, whose father brought him up on Asian, especially Chinese, dramas and books as a child, Lucia Ewoenam Oniong Ekanem, a 36-year-old from Ghana, became interested in translated Chinese online literature in 2019 during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Under the pen name Glorious_Eagle, she writes online romances about strong women with alpha male husbands that provide her with an escape from the bitterness she feels toward living with a stepmother as a child. The mother of two made a name with *The President's Pregnant, Ex-Wife*, and most recently worked on *Two Times Rejected Luna*, which concluded in early December.

"As someone whose first language is not English, I conducted extensive research before publishing anything, with the plot being the most crucial aspect," she says, recalling her first experience of writing on WebNovel as a learning journey in which everything felt new, including the readers' responses.

"To be honest, it has brought about significant changes in my life and for my family," she says.

Ekanem knows the daily update routine well, much like her Chinese peers. "Never miss updates and be prepared," she says. "This may seem difficult, but I have applied it during tough times in my life while battling illness and domestic challenges."

Barisbi Alborov, a Russian writer who goes by the online pen name Guiltythree, was recently in Shanghai during the literature week to collect the award of High Potential Overseas IP for *Shadow Slave*. Formerly a game writer, he says his favor for Chinese and Korean dramas, as well as science fiction, led him to try writing online.

"My first novel failed terribly and I gave myself six months to see if I could earn enough to feed myself," Alborov says. In five months, *Shadow Slave* became a hit, and fans draw illustrations or make audio content based on the novel.

He says the secret is to learn from other writers.

Besides adaptations, online novels in multiple foreign languages, whether by writers in or outside of China, are sources of inspiration for artists.

Italian stage designer and multidisciplinary creative director Carlo Maria Rossi took to *Lord of Mysteries*, one of the 26 Chinese web novels added into the British Library's collection, to create an immersive space of art and shows.

"The beauty of Chinese online literature transcends the (physical) limitations of traditional literature, helping to break cultural barriers to resonate with readers around the world," he says. "Themes like the pursuit of dreams and the fight for justice are universal, uniting people across cultures."

Hou Xiaonan, chief executive officer and president of the Yuewen Group, says the overseas presence of Chinese online literature has increased 30 percent. With the assistance of AI translation, new language markets are emerging, including Japanese, Spanish, French, Brazilian and German. The Japanese market has grown by 180 percent year-on-year.

Sherwin uses AI as a tool for coming up with character names, which poses a real headache for some online writers, and doesn't consider AI a serious threat to "writers of our generation."

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Films, TV series deepen cultural ties between China and ASEAN countries

NANNING — When *How to Make Millions Before Grandma Dies*, a heartfelt Thai film about family bonds, grossed over 100 million yuan (\$14 million) on the Chinese mainland this summer, it became more than just a box-office success.

The film's cultural resonance extended beyond its storyline, with its warm narrative and inclusion of elements like the Chaozhou dialect and local opera striking a deep chord with Chinese audiences.

In recent years, films from China and ASEAN countries have gained widespread acclaim in each other's markets, fostering a deeper mutual understanding.

The recently concluded 2024 China-ASEAN Film and Culture Week in Nanning, South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, featured 20 outstanding films, highlighting the power of cinema in fostering cultural bonds.

"I watched *Abang Adik* at the film festival and look forward to seeing more Malaysian films in Chinese cinemas in the future," says Tan Jun Jie, a Malaysian

“These works highlight the creativity of cultural integration and the unique role of films as a cultural bridge.”

Wan Xingwen, director of Guangxi Film Group Co

student residing in Guangxi.

Tan notes that he has attended the festival for two consecutive years and hopes that more Chinese audiences will gain insight into Malaysian culture through films.

Meanwhile, Chinese films such as *The Wandering Earth* and *No More Bets* have garnered widespread attention in ASEAN countries, as platforms like iQiyi, Tencent, TrueID and iflix have integrated Chinese and Southeast Asian media, expanding access to



The 2024 China-ASEAN Film and Culture Week recently concluded in Nanning, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, featuring 20 outstanding films.

a diverse range of films and TV series across the region.

"The digital medium has become an omnipotent link connecting everyone in life and work in both the region and the world,"

says Zheng Xuefang, charge d'affaires of the Chinese embassy in Malaysia, in a seminar held in Kuala Lumpur earlier last month.

Beyond film and drama distribution, coproductions between China and ASEAN

countries have yielded artistic and commercial success. Chinese films such as *Detective Chinatown* and *Lost in Thailand* were shot in both China and Thailand, blending the cultures of both countries, which were widely loved by audiences.

"These works highlight the creativity of cultural integration and the unique role of films as a cultural bridge," says Wan Xingwei, director of Guangxi Film Group Co.

He adds that future China-ASEAN film collaborations should expand beyond imports and exports to include joint production, talent exchange and technological cooperation.

"Chinese teams have advantages in narrative and filmmaking techniques, while Thailand excels in visual aesthetics; Vietnam is renowned for its documentary production; and Indonesia's traditional animation techniques are worth learning from. By leveraging these strengths, we can create win-win cooperations," Wan says.

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