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CHINA DAILY

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Bitter winter



A snowplow clears a parking lot on Sunday during a winter storm in Cincinnati, Ohio, the United States. A major winter blast of snow, ice, wind and plunging temperatures in the US created dangerous travel conditions from central and southern states all the way to the East Coast early Monday, prompting schools and government offices in several states to close. JOSHUA A. BICKEL / AP

Xi calls for win in tough battle against graft

General secretary highlights daunting task of eradicating conditions that breed corruption

By CAO DESHENG
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Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, emphasized on Monday the importance of exercising rigorous Party governance with the spirit of reform, reiterating that the battle against corruption is an unceasing endeavor.

He called for taking simultaneous, coordinated and comprehensive steps to see that officials do not have the audacity, opportunity or desire to become corrupt, and to resolutely win the tough, protracted and all-out battle against corruption.

Xi, who is also Chinese president and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks when addressing the fourth plenary session of the 20th CPC Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, which opened in Beijing on Monday and runs through Wednesday.

While acknowledging the significant advances that have been made in exercising full and rigorous Party governance over the years, he warned of the continued severity and complexity of the fight against corruption, and highlighted the daunting task of eradicating the soil and conditions that breed corruption.

He stressed the need to maintain unwavering determination in the ongoing fight against corruption, and maintain strategic resolve and high-pressure momentum to relentlessly advance the anti-corruption campaign.

Corruption poses the greatest threat to the Party, and fighting corruption is the most thorough kind of self-reform, Xi said.

He underlined the necessity of resolute action to combat corruption, and warned against any wavering, slackening or abandonment of anti-corruption efforts, as such actions could lead to grave errors.

A Party-wide campaign on Party discipline education was held from April to July, during which CPC members studied the newly revised Party regulations on disciplinary action to strengthen their discipline awareness and always remain loyal, clean and responsible.

On the new journey in the new era, it is imperative to make greater progress in governing the Party to ensure it remains the strong leadership core in building socialism with Chinese characteristics and to guarantee the steady advancement of Chinese modernization, Xi said.

He called for advancing concrete, targeted and regular political oversight, and urged maintaining a high degree of consistency with the CPC Central Committee in thoughts, politics and actions.

He stressed the importance of strengthening Party discipline as an ongoing task, and guiding all Party members and officials to take Party discipline as a daily norm.

Highlighting a zero-tolerance approach in the fight against corruption, Xi urged a resolute crackdown on violations of Party discipline, as well as formalism, bureaucratism, hedonism and extravagance.

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WORLD WATCH

By Danilo Turk

Collective action for one shared future

We live in challenging times. This phrase has been repeated so often that it risks becoming a cliché. But the truth is that these challenges are real, and they require our attention. Even those of us who have spent decades in politics and international affairs remain alert to the magnitude of the challenges we face.

But we have to shift the focus from challenges to aspirations — because aspirations drive action. And there are three key aspirations that I believe must guide our collective efforts: Peace, planet and prosperity.

Human beings have the fundamental right to live in peace. Peace cannot be a privilege of the few. It is not something that some can enjoy while others suffer. Peace must be shared, or it will remain unsustainable and a source of grievances.

We must leverage all available political capital to resolve the conflicts in Ukraine, the Middle East and Sudan. I highlight these conflicts due to their risk of escalation and regional impact, but they are, by no means, the only ones requiring our attention and we continue to witness appalling levels of violence and human suffering in many other places, underscoring a chronic failure to secure lasting solutions.

Achieving peace requires concerted action at all levels. The United Nations and regional organizations must fulfill their responsibilities, upholding international law consistently and impartially, free from double standards. Member states, particularly major powers, must leverage their influence to broker peace, acting with legality, responsibility and foresight.

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WeChat, TikTok securing licenses in Malaysia seen as sign of growing capabilities, influence

By CHENG YU
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WeChat's and TikTok's success in securing new social media licenses in Malaysia not only highlights Chinese technology giants' capabilities in meeting stringent compliance standards in overseas markets, but also reflects their growing influence across Southeast Asia, industry experts said on Monday.

They made the comments after the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, the country's communications regulator, said late last week that it had granted permission to WeChat, owned by Chinese tech company Tencent Holdings, and TikTok, owned by Chinese internet company ByteDance, to operate in the country under a new social media law.

The law, which is mainly aimed at addressing rising cybercrime, requires social media platforms with over 8 million users to have obtained a license by Jan 1 to operate in the country. The commission did not clarify what the punishment would be if the new rule was not obeyed.

Wang Peng, an associate researcher at the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences, said: "The success of WeChat and TikTok reflects the proactive attitude and

practical efforts of Chinese tech companies in compliance in international markets. Both WeChat and TikTok have established necessary capabilities and frameworks to protect user data, manage harmful content and cooperate with government regulatory bodies."

"Such efforts provide a legal assurance for their long-term and stable operations in Malaysia, as they are poised to further boost their business scope and market share in the international market," he said.

United States tech giant Google, which operates the video platform YouTube, and major social media platform X, which was formerly known as Twitter, have yet to apply for licenses. YouTube raised concerns about its video sharing features classification under the new law, while X said its local user base did not reach the 8-million threshold, the regulator said.

Meta Platforms, which owns Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, is taking part in the licensing process, while messaging platform Telegram is in the final stages of obtaining its license.

Wang said: "This indicates the cautious stance of international tech giants when addressing regulatory requirements in various countries. They are prudent in

changing their general approach while operating in an overseas market."

It also reflected the growing supervision from governments globally in overseeing tech giants, which brings both opportunities and challenges, Wang added.

According to market research company Statista, the number of TikTok users in Malaysia was estimated to reach around 17 million in 2023, while market consultancy Oberlo said that WeChat had around 12 million users in Malaysia in 2024, highlighting the app's significant penetration in Southeast Asia.

Pan Helin, a member of the Expert Committee for Information and Communication Economy, which is part of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, said that the expansion of Chinese tech companies in Southeast Asia has positively affected local economies and digital ecosystems with convenient payment systems, diverse digital content and innovative business models.

"Such advanced technologies and solutions have spurred innovation and improved the digital ecosystem in the international market, which brings convenience and contributes positively to local socioeconomic development," he added.

FROM CRESTED IBISES TO PANDAS, CHINA LIGHTS CONSERVATION PATH

Diversity of species, international collaboration help ensure survival of vulnerable, endangered animals

By YAN DONGJIE
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As a country rich in wildlife species, China has provided significant support in biodiversity conservation, and promoting global ecological development, officials and experts said.

"China emphasizes the construction of ecological civilization, and has made joint efforts to build



a community with a shared future for mankind — strengthening wildlife protection and international cooperation that is crucial to that process," said Wang Weisheng, director of the flora and fauna department at the National Forest-

ry and Grassland Administration.

Wang said that China's restoration of the once nearly extinct crested ibis population is a "successful model for saving endangered species worldwide."

In recent decades, by providing genetic resources and technical guidance, China has supported Japan and South Korea in restoring crested ibis wild populations.

See **Wildlife**, page 2

Rallies continue



Supporters of South Korea's impeached president Yoon Suk-yeol rally near the presidential residence in Seoul on Sunday. South Korean investigators are seeking to extend an arrest warrant against Yoon, an official said on Monday. JUN HYU-SANG / XINHUA See **story**, page 3

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PAGE TWO

Wildlife: Cooperation making global impact

From page 1

Crested ibises were once widely distributed across East Asia, but were believed to have disappeared from the Korean Peninsula, Japan, and other areas by the 20th century.

In 1981, wildlife experts discovered seven crested ibises in the Qinling Mountains in Northwest China's Shaanxi province. China later gifted several of the birds to Japan and South Korea to assist in saving their populations.

The known global crested ibis population now exceeds 10,000, and all are believed to be descendants of the seven found in the Qinling Mountains, according to the management bureau of the Hanzhong Crested Ibis National Nature Reserve.

Through collaborative breeding and research efforts with China, Japan's crested ibis population has reached 693. The Japanese Ministry of the Environment has downgraded the crested ibis' status on the country's Red List of Endangered Species from "extinct in the wild" to "critically endangered".

In South Korea, more than 500 crested ibises have been bred at a center. More importantly, the birds have been reintroduced into the wild in all three countries, the forestry and grassland administration said.

Wang said China has also helped with the recovery of the Gobi bear population. In August, researchers from the Chinese Academy of Forestry said they had recently spotted a Gobi bear in Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, marking the first recorded sighting of the endangered species in China.

In 2018, China and Mongolia signed an agreement on the implementation of a technical assistance project to save the Gobi bears and improve their range. Through six years of continuous monitoring and protection efforts, the Gobi bear population has grown from 20 to exceeded 50, said a member of the research team.

For 12 years, China has also organized wildlife protection and compliance training courses and workshops for wildlife conservation officers in developing countries in Asia and Africa to enhance their protection capabilities, he said.

However, among all these international wildlife protection efforts, the most fruitful and globally recognized is the conservation and breeding of giant pandas.

Envoy of friendship

Giant pandas Xing Qiu and Yi Lan departed Sichuan province for South Australia on Dec 14, taking the total number of giant pandas sent overseas last year to 10.

The pair replaced Wang Wang and Fu Ni, who were sent home in November after arriving at the Adelaide Zoo in late 2009.

Since 1994, China has engaged in giant panda conservation research cooperation with 26 institutions in 20 countries, with 71 cubs born overseas.

At present, 44 giant pandas are residing abroad, including 15 countries such as the United States, Japan, and Spain. As a symbol of friendship, the national animal receives a lot of love from people all around the world.

"From young to old, everyone who visits our Bamboo Forest falls in love with Wang Wang and Fu Ni," said Zoos SA (South Australia) chief executive Elaine Bensted in 2019, when announcing the pair of pandas were to stay in Australia for another five years.

"They are always a delight to watch, whether they're exploring their habitat, laying in the sun, climbing trees, or eating bamboo."

According to cooperation agreements signed by China and other countries, giant pandas usually stay overseas for 10 years. Cubs born during that period are returned to China before the age of 4.



Left: Tourists take photos of giant panda Ru Yi at the Moscow Zoo in Moscow on July 31. CAO YANG / XINHUA



Right: A crested ibis is released into the wild at the Upo Crested Ibis Restoration Center in Changnyeong, South Korea, on May 10. Changnyeong has taken more protective measures in its rural areas where these birds live. XINHUA

Wang Wang and Fu Ni were the first giant pandas to reside in the Southern Hemisphere.

"We look forward to continuing to help giant panda conservation and gain a better understanding of pandas living in the Southern Hemisphere," said Phil Ainsley, then director of life sciences at Adelaide Zoo, adding that the agreement offered an opportunity to contribute to global panda research.

Giant pandas, an endemic species in China, are revered as a national treasure. In 2016, the International Union for Conservation of Nature revised the status of giant pandas from "endangered" to "vulnerable", highlighting the achievements of China's conservation efforts.

The wild population of giant pandas in China has significantly increased over the past 40 years, growing from around 1,100 in the 1980s to approximately 1,900 today. The global captive population of giant pandas has now reached 757, according to the

2024 year in Review

“They are always a delight to watch, whether they're exploring their habitat, laying in the sun, climbing trees, or eating bamboo.”

Elaine Bensted, Zoos South Australia chief executive

National Forestry and Grassland Administration.

"We look forward to new rounds of international cooperation between China and other countries for giant panda conservation, which will further expand the scientific research achievements in the protection of giant pandas and other endangered species, and promote people-to-people connectivity and friendly exchanges," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said in February.

Since the 1990s, China has engaged in exchanges with 20 countries on giant panda conservation, playing a unique and positive role in promoting friendly interactions among people and spreading China's concept of ecological civilization, said Wang Weisheng, director of the department of wildlife conservation at the administration.

"For over 20 years, we have cooperated with these countries to tackle a series of technical challenges in giant panda conservation, breeding, disease prevention and control, and reintroduction into the wild,



Back: Xin Bao plays at her new home at the San Diego Zoo in San Diego, California, the United States, in July. Giant pandas Xin Bao and Yun Chuan arrived at the San Diego Zoo from China in June. XINHUA Front: A tourist wears her self-made T-shirt with patterns of the panda pair at the San Diego Zoo on Aug 8. ZENG HUI / XINHUA

Villager's encounter with Siberian tiger indicates health of species

By XINHUA

Liu Guifu, 74, never imagined that one day he would come face to face with a Siberian tiger in his own yard in late November.

A surveillance video captured Liu's encounter with the tiger, when the big cat dashed past his village house in Boli county, Heilongjiang province. After stepping out of his yard for a quick look, Liu retreated to the yard and pulled the gate shut. The tiger, however, turned back and lunged at him, denting the iron gate before it left.

"I thought that by closing the gate, the tiger would be kept out," Liu told Xinhua, recalling the incident. "When the tiger charged at me, I was so scared!"

The video has gone viral online, with netizens expressing concern about such incidents.

It was the first recorded sighting of a Siberian tiger in Boli county's history. The county is outside the key distribution ranges of Siberian tigers, according to the Heilongji-

ang Forestry and Grassland Administration. Over 500 personnel from relevant county government departments have been mobilized for deployment and control of the tiger, working around the clock to carry out investigations and track the animal.

The management bureau of the Northeast China Tiger and Leopard National Park, about 200 kilometers from the village, announced soon after the incident that it had activated an emergency response plan and insurance claims procedure.

The national park has coordinated with the insurance company to send a working group to the village to assist the local forestry and grassland department in conducting investigations. If the animal is confirmed to be a wild Siberian tiger, the insurance claims process will be immediately initiated.

Thanks to China's continuous efforts, the population of the Siberian tiger, one of the world's most endangered species, has grown significantly in recent years, while their range of activity has also expanded.

In 1998, only 12 to 16 wild Siberian tigers were believed to be living in China. The NCTLNP, established in 2021 and spanning Heilongjiang and Jilin provinces, now provides a sanctuary for around 70 wild Siberian tigers.

"With an improved ecological environment, the number of wild tigers is increasing, which shows that we have achieved good results in protecting wild animals," said Hu Huijian, a council member of the China Zoology Society.

In recent years, with the implementation of projects such as natural forest protection, wild animal and plant protection, and the construction of a national park-based nature reserve system, the quality of wildlife habitats has continued to improve, with continued growth in the populations and range of activities of wild animals.

China has been prioritizing eco-environmental progress and pursuing green development for biodiversity conservation. In 2021, China established its first group of

national parks, protecting 90 percent of terrestrial ecosystem types and 74 percent of key terrestrial wild animal and plant species. The land area of the country's nature reserves accounts for nearly 18 percent of the total land area.

China has been making efforts to reach harmony between humans and nature.

Experts suggest increasing investment in scientific research to enhance ecological corridors for the reproduction and spread of large wild animals, and to strengthen habitat protection for wild animals, especially endangered ones.

"Connecting the fragmented habitats is the fundamental way to solve the problem. The construction of ecological corridors for Siberian tigers and Amur leopards along the China-Russia border should be accelerated, and a cross-border nature reserve network should be built," said Jin Yongchao, a member of the wild tiger conservation expert team of the World Wildlife Fund.

providing strong support for the protection of giant pandas and other wildlife in their natural habitats," he said.

"This has become a model for international cooperation in the conservation of endangered wildlife."

Captive breeding advances

One of the most significant achievements was the breakthrough at the beginning of this century in addressing the three major challenges of captive giant panda breeding — estrus, mating, and cub survival.

"This breakthrough significantly improved the reproductive capacity and quality of the captive giant panda population. Now, 75 percent of breeding-age female giant pandas and half of breeding-age male giant pandas have produced offspring," said Li Desheng, an expert at the China Conservation and Research Center for the Giant Panda based in Sichuan.

The focus of the next round of cooperation will be prevention and control of major diseases affecting giant pandas, protection of habitats, enhancement of survey and monitoring capabilities, and support for the establishment of the China Giant Panda National Park, according to the China Wildlife Conservation Association.

Affected by the pandemic, the international transfer and return of giant pandas has seen delays in recent years.

The year 2024, however, has seen very active international movement of the pandas. More than 20 giant pandas have returned to China after concluding their stays overseas, while 10 giant pandas have embarked on new lives overseas.

In April, Jin Xi and Zhu Yu moved to the Madrid Zoo in Spain after a family of five giant pandas returned from there to China in February.

Spain was one of the earliest countries to establish a connection with giant pandas. As early as 1978, King Juan Carlos I made his first state visit to China, during which China gifted Spain a pair of giant pandas, Shao Shao and Qiang Qiang. In 1982, Shao Shao gave birth to a cub named Zhu Lin, causing a sensation across Europe.

In 2007, the two countries signed an agreement on an international cooperation project for giant panda conservation and research.

Over the past 17 years, the two countries have collaborated to breed six giant panda cubs, making Spain the most prolific country in Europe in terms of international cooperation in giant panda breeding.

Last year, two pairs of giant pandas embarked on their journeys to the US. One pair was sent to the Smithsonian National Zoological Park in Washington DC and the other to the San Diego Zoo in California.

In November 2023, President Xi Jinping, while addressing a welcome banquet jointly hosted by friendly communities in San Francisco, said that pandas have long been envoys of friendship between the Chinese and US peoples. China is ready to continue with cooperation with the US on panda protection, he said.

Jin said strengthened local patrols and use of technical devices such as infrared cameras should be combined to dynamically track and monitor the activity range of wild Siberian tigers to avoid tigers and humans overlapping.

The NCTLNP has set up over 20,000 smart infrared cameras. These cameras connect to the internet to transmit high-definition images and videos in real-time. It also uses artificial intelligence technology for species recognition, monitoring the activities of Siberian tigers and other large animals.

Many places in China have also explored strategies to prevent and control damage by wild animals. Northwest China's Shaanxi province has started to build isolation and protection facilities, such as pulse electric fences and vegetation isolation belts, to control damage by wild boars. Nearly 400 infrared cameras have also been set up in the hills and mountains in Jiangsu province to monitor wild boars.

TOP NEWS

Copper ore find to boost supply

Over 20 million tons of mineral deposit discovered on Qinghai-Tibet Plateau

By LI PEIXUAN
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China has made a significant breakthrough in copper exploration on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau over the past four years, with the discovery of more than 20 million metric tons of copper ore deposits.

The China Geological Survey, an institution of the Ministry of Natural Resources, said on Monday that the fresh discovery will greatly enhance the security of the nation's copper resources.

The total copper ore deposit in the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, which has four mines each with over 10 million tons of copper reserves, accounts for more than two-thirds of the national total, significantly altering the landscape of copper exploration in China.

The total resource potential of

the four mines is estimated to reach 150 million tons, making the plateau a world-class copper resource base, according to the China Geological Survey.

China has stepped up copper exploration nationwide over the past four years, identifying more than 30 million tons of new copper ore deposits in places from the Xizang autonomous region and Heilongjiang province to Hubei and Jiangxi provinces.

Tang Juxing, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, said the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau's copper resources could ensure the security of China's industrial and supply chains.

"Copper plays a vital role in the development and utilization of green energy such as wind and solar power," Tang said.

The mineral also has vast appli-

cation prospects in emerging fields such as electric vehicles and photovoltaics. For example, the amount of copper used in an EV is four times that of a gasoline-powered vehicle. This makes the new energy sector a new growth point for copper consumption in the country, according to the China Geological Survey.

China's copper consumption has surged in recent years, transforming it from a net exporter of copper to the world's largest consumer and net importer of copper. The nation's annual copper consumption accounted for more than half of the global total in the past 10 years, data from the World Bureau of Metal Statistics and other institutions showed.

Data also showed that global copper concentrate production has seen a slight decline, while the supply and demand of refined copper have tightened as prices keep fluctuating and rising.

"The recent discovery will help

improve the supply of copper in China, greatly securing the domestic industrial chain," Tang said.

Dorje, another academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, emphasized that environmental protection in Xizang is of paramount importance.

"Mining activities must aim for near-zero emissions and minimal ecological damage. After mining activities are over, the scientific restoration, reclamation and re-greening of relevant areas must be undertaken," Dorje said.

In the context of limited growth potential in the agricultural and pastoral industries, the locals may choose to seek employment in mining — a choice that not only allows them to enhance their labor skills, but also significantly improves their living standards and contributes to the region's economic and social development, Dorje added.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

Aspirations: Globalization should be 'a force for good'

From page 1

And civil society must continue to press governments to prioritize peace as a shared and universal objective.

The health of our planet is central to everything we do. Climate change is not just a scientific reality; it is a political, economic and moral test.

We are now in a final countdown to limit global temperature rise to 1.5 C. The years on record have made clear that time is not on our side.

Floods are tearing down communities and wiping out critical infrastructure. In November, lives were tragically lost in Valencia, Spain, due to devastating floods. This is not an isolated event. It is happening everywhere, from Asia to Europe, where my own country experienced the brutal effects of climate-induced floods last year.

No one can fight this battle alone. We need a strong and united effort where governments, businesses, civil society and individuals push in the same direction. All countries must do their part. No one is exempt from this responsibility.

Financing will be key. Climate finance is essential not only for mitigation and adaptation but also to ensure equity and justice in how the burdens of climate action are shared.

Our response must go beyond mitigation and adaptation. It must be about transformation. We need to rethink how we produce, consume and govern. COP30 held in Brazil in 2025 will be a defining moment.

There is no future without prosperity. But prosperity must be shared. It cannot be confined to a select few or limited to certain regions of the world. It must be inclusive, fair, and rooted in sustainable development. Prosperity is about economic growth, but also about human dignity, social progress and opportunity for all.

International trade has been a major avenue toward economic progress and prosperity. However, for a number of years now the global trading system has been under stress. It is very encouraging to see that China's policy of opening-up is continuing, and I share the vision of retaining high-standard openness of the Chinese economy for the future.

Open trade is a vital engine for growth, innovation and poverty reduction. Unfortunately, the benefits of globalization have not been evenly distributed, widening the gap between rich and poor, both within and across countries.

Technology has the potential to bridge this gap. It can accel-

erate development, create jobs, and expand access to health, education and finance. But this potential will only be realized if technology is made accessible and inclusive. The digital divide is real, and unless we close it, it will become yet another driver of inequality.

We must place human development at the heart of prosperity. Development must be understood as the creation of conditions where every person can flourish, and nations must ensure that development priorities, from education and healthcare to social protection, are fully embedded in the global agenda.

Prosperity also depends on the stability of the global economy. Recent years have shown us how fragile global economic interdependence can be. From supply chain disruptions to financial shocks, we have witnessed how quickly systems can break down. Economic resilience must be built into the system — diversifying supply chains, promoting sustainable finance, and addressing debt vulnerabilities in low- and middle-income countries.

None of this can be achieved without global solidarity. We need a bold approach to multilateralism that recognizes shared responsibilities and the need to support countries with fewer resources and capabilities.

Addressing inequality is crucial. We cannot afford to leave anyone behind — not women, not young people, not those in vulnerable communities.

We must help to ensure that globalization remains a force for good. We must help to ensure that open trade benefits all, not just the wealthiest. We must help to ensure that technology empowers people, not displaces them. We must help to ensure that our development model prioritizes people and the planet, not just profits.

At a time when global divisions are deepening, platforms for dialogue and cooperation are more essential than ever. The 2024 Imperial Springs International Forum cohosted by Club de Madrid with our friends and partners from China is not just a one-day forum. It is a process, a living platform for dialogue and a positive bridge, connecting people, perspectives and solutions with the long-term ambition of making multilateralism work for all. This is the vision we carry forward, and it is the reason we must keep this process alive.

The author is president of World Leadership Alliance-Club de Madrid and former president of Slovenia from 2007 to 2012. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Ensuring nutrition



A student and a teacher of a school in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, collect lunch boxes distributed as part of a free-meal program that was launched on Monday. The nation implemented the ambitious \$4.3 billion free-meal program to combat stunted growth among children due to malnutrition. CHAIDEER MAHYUDDIN / AFP

South Korean police asked to arrest Yoon Suk-yeol

South Korean investigators will seek an extension of a warrant to arrest impeached president Yoon Suk-yeol, an official said on Monday, as an anti-graft agency asked the police to take over efforts to execute the arrest of the embattled leader.

The requests came after an attempt to serve the warrant on Friday failed following a tense standoff with Presidential Security Service guards who formed a human chain to block access to Yoon by the investigators.

Yoon is under criminal investigation for insurrection following his Dec 3 bid to impose martial law, a move that stunned South Korea and led to the first-ever arrest warrant to be issued by the court for a sitting president.

The Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials, or CIO, is leading a probe, together with the police and the prosecutor's office, into allegations that Yoon masterminded insurrection with his imposition of martial law.

Yoon was impeached by parliament on Dec 14 and suspended from presidential duties. The Constitutional Court is trying the case to decide whether to remove him from office permanently or reinstate him.

The CIO sent a notice to police requesting them to take over execution of the arrest warrant, the anti-corruption agency said in a statement to reporters.

The National Office of Investigation, or NOI, of the Korean National Police Agency said on Monday that the document sent by the CIO regarding the transfer of the execution of the arrest warrant for Yoon contained "legal flaws", making it difficult for the police to comply with it.

The police believe the document is legally flawed, and the execution of the warrant should take place within the framework of the joint investigation unit, said Youn Kun-young, a member of the Public Administration and Security Committee of South Korea's National Assembly.

The joint investigation unit consists of the CIO, the NOI and the defense ministry's investigation headquarters.

According to local media reports, the police's stand implies that the responsibility for executing the arrest warrant lies with CIO prosecutors, with the police playing a supporting role rather than serving as the main executor.

The NOI said the police are discussing methods for executing the arrest warrant within the frame-

work of the joint investigation unit with the CIO, adding it is also considering measures to address potential obstruction by personnel from the Presidential Security Service.

Critics frustrated

The CIO's request comes amid frustration among Yoon's critics at the CIO's failure to carry out his arrest, the warrant for which is due to expire at midnight on Monday.

The CIO plans to request an extension of the arrest warrant in court on Monday, a CIO official said.

Yoon's lawyers have argued that the anti-graft force leading his criminal investigation has no authority under South Korean law to investigate any case involving insurrection accusations.

On Monday, Seek Dong-hyeon, a lawyer advising Yoon, said the bid to transfer the execution of the arrest warrant is effectively an admission by the CIO that its probe and the warrant were "illegal".

After the failed attempt to execute the warrant, the CIO asked acting President Choi Sang-mok to direct the Presidential Security Service to cooperate with investigators. Choi has not reacted to that request despite mounting pressure to intervene.

The unprecedented attempt to

arrest an incumbent president has intensified dueling rallies by those supporting Yoon, and those calling for Yoon's punishment.

On Monday, a group of hardcore Yoon supporters held a news conference and described the fight for Yoon as an "international battle" for freedom.

"Sadly, there's no Fox News in (South) Korea," it said in a statement, referring to the cable news channel popular with Trump supporters in the United States.

Amid the ongoing political upheaval, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is visiting South Korea this week. His visit comes after Yoon's martial law declaration sent South Korea into political chaos, drawing rare rebuke from officials in Washington, including Blinken's deputy, Kurt Campbell, who said it was "badly misjudged".

Speaking after his meeting with South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul, Blinken said Washington had expressed "serious concerns" to Seoul over some of the actions Yoon took over the course of his martial law declaration.

Blinken said on Monday that Washington fully trusts the leadership of acting president Choi.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Festive fervor



Children cheer as they attend the traditional "Cabalgata de Reyes" parade in Barcelona, Spain, on Sunday, to mark the Christian feast of Epiphany. This parade takes place in almost every city and village in Spain on the evening of Jan 5 each year, the eve of Epiphany. EMILIO MORENATTI / AP

Meeting: Resolute measures to eliminate systemic corruption risks urged

From page 1

Party members and officials must oppose privilege-seeking mindsets and practices and have a correct understanding of what it means to exercise power, and what

it means to perform well, he said.

Xi urged intensified efforts to investigate key people in key sectors, punish both bribe takers and givers, and take resolute measures to eliminate systemic corruption risks.

He called for enhancing the mecha-

nisms for checks on and supervision over power to prevent and combat new and disguised forms of corruption.

While underscoring the primary responsibility and supervisory duties of Party committees in exercising full and rigorous Party governance, Xi

called for the continuous extension of this governance to the grassroots level, and advocated deepening reforms of the supervisory system at the grassroots level.

Noting that the disciplinary and supervisory authorities are crucial

forces in advancing the Party's self-reform, Xi underlined the necessity to deepen reforms in the disciplinary and supervisory system to restrain power in an institutional cage.

It is essential to maintain a tough stance on wrongdoing, strengthen

strict management and supervision of the disciplinary inspection forces, and cultivate a loyal, clean, accountable and capable disciplinary and supervisory team, he added.

On Monday afternoon, Li Xi, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and secretary of the CCDI, delivered a work report on behalf of the CCDI Standing Committee.

CHINA

Spotlight on corruption in grassroots

Documentary reveals public interest cases, actions taken against officials

By **JIANG CHENGLONG**
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A documentary on anti-corruption that aired on Sunday has ignited heated discussions on Chinese social media, with its first episode spotlighting grassroots corruption cases affecting people's livelihoods.

The documentary was jointly produced by the Publicity Department of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, the National Commission of Supervision and China Media Group.

According to the documentary, since the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2022, 768,000 cases of misconduct and corruption "affecting people's immediate interests" have been investigated. These investigations resulted in disciplinary actions against 628,000 individuals and the transfer of 20,000 to prosecutorial authorities.

768,000 cases

of misconduct and corruption have been investigated since 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China.

The first episode revealed corruption cases involving grassroots officials that directly impacted people's livelihoods, including housing, food and transportation.

One highlighted case involved Zhou Xiaojian, a grassroots housing security official in Dongan county in Yongzhou, Hunan province. Zhou, who managed local housing maintenance funds, was sentenced to 11.5 years in prison for embezzling and misappropriating over 11 million yuan (\$1.5 million) of these funds.

According to the documentary, Zhou incurred massive debts from speculative lending in 2015, prompting him to embezzle and misappropriate housing maintenance funds.

Local homebuyers were required to pay their housing maintenance funds to the agency he managed. Normally, the agency would issue a special receipt upon receiving payment. However, he replaced these with alternative proofs or handwritten notes, allowing him to siphon off funds.

Zhou later commissioned highly realistic fake receipts to further deceive homebuyers. He even printed his personal payment QR code and placed it at the payment counter during his shifts, directing payments meant for the government into his personal account.

In 2023, the Dongan county

anti-corruption watchdog noticed discrepancies between issued receipts and financial records during routine inspections, prompting an investigation.

The investigation revealed that Zhou had embezzled over 9.93 million yuan and misappropriated more than 1.72 million yuan of housing maintenance funds, issuing over 3,000 fake receipts in the process. The local watchdog, in collaboration with relevant departments, identified residents who received fake receipts and issued them official receipts.

In addition to his prison sentence, Zhou was fined 1 million yuan. Furthermore, 11 grassroots officials were held accountable for inadequate supervision and negligence.

The documentary also revealed another case related to housing in Yongzhou.

Last year, the Yongzhou municipal government launched a special campaign targeting the fair distribution of local affordable housing.

Zhao Yanyun, former director of the investment promotion and cooperation bureau of a local industrial park, was responsible for managing and distributing public rental housing in the park.

The park had over 1,800 public rental housing units, each about 50 square meters, that were available only to workers in the park without local property ownership.

However, the campaign revealed that 12 units were occupied by Zhao's relatives and friends, and violations were found in eight of those units.

According to the documentary, after the park announced its public rental housing policy, Zhao encouraged her relatives and friends to work in the park and used her position to allocate housing to them. In subsequent years, some of Zhao's relatives and friends left the park for other jobs or purchased properties in the city, making them ineligible for public rental housing.

Despite this, they continued to occupy the units, with some even transferring the units to other relatives and friends. Zhao was aware of the situation but did not urge them to vacate the units.

Zhao has since been punished legally, and her relatives have vacated the eight improperly occupied units, which have been reassigned to eligible residents.

Since the launch of Yongzhou's special campaign, as of October 2024, the city has reclaimed 930 public rental units due to illegal subletting and leasing, recovering 27.8 million yuan in overdue rent.



Heralding new year

Visitors admire a dragon-shaped lantern within the World Rose Theme Park in Beijing's Daxing district on Sunday. Tens of thousands of uniquely shaped and symbolically auspicious lanterns are being carefully arranged and will officially go on public display on Jan 22 — the 23rd day of the 12th lunar month — a week before Chinese New Year. They will then continue to be exhibited for another 26 days.

WU YIBIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Harsh penalties await scientific research fraudsters

By **CAO YIN**
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Chinese courts will intensify efforts to combat fraud in scientific research, imposing harsh penalties on corrupt personnel in the field of technological innovation, according to guidelines issued by China's top court on Monday.

The guidelines emphasize the importance of scientific integrity, requiring courts nationwide to severely crack down on fraud in the testing, development, application or promotion of scientific and technological achievements. This includes falsifying or tampering with experimental data, fabricating patents and hiring others to write papers.

Courts at all levels are instructed to prioritize combating corruption in science and technology, imposing heavier penalties on those who

embezzle or accept bribes related to the country's key projects, core industries, major scientific and technological programs and innovation rewards.

Additionally, the guidelines urge judges to focus on resolving cases involving abuse of power, malpractice or dereliction of duty in scientific and technological activities to help create a standardized and clean environment for innovators.

The guidelines, which consist of 98 specific measures, aim to provide stronger protection for innovation and contribute to Chinese modernization by improving the quality of case handling, according to Tao Kaiyuan, vice-president of the Supreme People's Court.

Speaking at a news conference on Monday, Tao noted the documents marked the first time the top court has issued such a systematic and comprehensive document

to promote scientific and technological innovation.

Tao noted that innovation-driven development and high-level technological self-reliance are engines for building a strong nation and advancing national rejuvenation. She emphasized that "protecting and encouraging innovators with optimized legal services and stronger legal support are the responsibilities of Chinese courts."

She also called on Chinese courts to strengthen the use of punitive damages in cases involving intellectual property infringement, improve their handling of foreign-related disputes in science and technology, and increase international exchanges in the sector.

Over the past decade, Chinese courts have enhanced scientific and technological development through case hearings. Currently,

558 courts nationwide have jurisdiction over IP civil lawsuits, according to Li Jian, chief judge of the Supreme People's Court's Third Civil Division.

"We've also invested more effort in IP legal talent education, formulating 26 IP judicial interpretations and guidelines since 2018, and striving to make IP case handling more professional," Li said.

Li added that IP data and information exchanges with government departments have been strengthened to respond promptly to the concerns and legal demands of various market entities.

Furthermore, the guidelines direct courts to address disputes related to trade secrets and the data economy. They also emphasize conducting more research into regulating online behavior while combating monopolies and unfair competition in cyberspace.

Hong Kong engineers get mainland qualifications

By **STEPHY ZHANG** in Hong Kong
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Experts believe the first batch of Hong Kong engineers securing professional qualifications on the Chinese mainland marks a pivotal step in aligning the professional evaluation systems of both sides, further paving the way for local professionals to seek opportunities across the border.

Secretary for Development Bernadette Linn Hon-ho revealed that the authorities will strive to standardize the evaluation mechanism and extend it to more construction-related sectors such as surveying and architecture.

In November, 207 Hong Kong engineers from the public sector, consultancies and contractors passed the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area engineering "Professional Title" evaluation and acquired corresponding professional qualifications on the mainland.

It was the first time Hong Kong professionals had obtained corresponding titles on the mainland,

which serve as benchmarks for evaluating professional qualification levels and provide a basis for construction companies to recruit and promote talent.

The pilot evaluation program involves five engineering disciplines: civil, geotechnical, highway, electrical and measurement and control instrumentation. The mainland qualifications they obtained include professorate senior engineer, senior engineer, engineer and assistant engineer.

In a blog post on Sunday, Linn stressed that the success of the pilot evaluation program for the first group of professionals represented a major breakthrough in aligning professional qualifications between the two regions. She said the development allows professionals to directly offer their services in mainland cities within the GBA, representing a crucial step for local professionals to integrate into the mainland professional qualification system, while demonstrating the support and care extended by the nation.

Having obtained the title of sen-

ior engineer, Long Engineering Director Chan Chi-man said the new title signifies his ability to lead other engineers in solving complex issues, making it easier for mainland peers to understand his professional background.

He added that though he faced many challenges in his preparations for the mainland title, he believes the new evaluation mechanism provides significant recognition and encouragement for Hong Kong engineers.

Jenny Chan, a senior engineer at Binnies Hong Kong who also received her mainland title last year, said obtaining such recognition could create more opportunities for young engineers. She noted that holding a title will enable her to engage in mainland projects, which is beneficial for gaining experience and broadening horizons.

Lo Wai-kiwok, a lawmaker representing Hong Kong's engineering sector, said the new evaluation mechanism could enhance the competitiveness of local professional service industry talent and promote their collaboration with

related industries in the GBA, enriching the pool of professional talent in the cluster.

Yuen Pak-leung, former president of the Hong Kong Institution of Engineers, said that in the past, achieving mutual recognition of qualifications faced significant challenges, including cultural differences, divergent regulatory and assessment frameworks, and even protectionism in some mainland regions.

He said hiring Hong Kong engineers with mainland professional titles will help companies gain competitive advantages during bidding processes, adding that veteran engineers with such titles can secure lucrative salaries with major organizations.

He hopes the government will further promote the mutual recognition of mechanical engineers and other professions.

Apart from the titles, Eric Ma Siu-cheung, president of the HKIE, emphasized the importance of mutual recognition of membership qualifications between professional associations in Hong Kong and on the mainland.

New rail services connect HK with Xi'an, Wuhan

By **QIN FENG** in Xi'an
and **ZHOU HUIYING**

The first direct high-speed rail service between Xi'an, capital of Shaanxi province, and Hong Kong was launched on Sunday, marking a significant step in connecting China's northwestern inland region with the southern metropolis.

In addition to the Xi'an-Hong Kong route, a new high-speed rail service linking Wuhan, capital of Hubei province, with Hong Kong was also launched on Sunday. Trains on this route take less than five hours, stopping in Hunan and Guangdong provinces.

Inaugurating the service between Shaanxi and Hong Kong, train G828 departed Xi'an North

Station at 11:04 am on Sunday. The journey covers major stops in Shaanxi, Henan, Hubei, Hunan and Guangdong provinces, with a travel time of under 11 hours.

The new rail link is expected to strengthen economic ties, cultural exchanges and tourism between Xi'an — home to the world-renowned Terracotta Warriors — and Hong Kong, a global financial hub.

Zhao Xinyu, a college student in Xi'an, was among the first passengers.

"In the past, I had to transfer in Shenzhen to travel from Xi'an to Hong Kong, but now it's much more convenient," she said.

To enhance the passenger experience, China Railway Xi'an Group has set up five cultural exhibition



Passengers board train G828, decorated with elements of Terracotta Warriors, with the help of a train attendant at Xi'an North Station in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on Sunday. QIANG JUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

areas at Xi'an North Station, showcasing Shaanxi's history and culture, Hong Kong's urban charm and the culinary and artistic heritage of

regions along the route.

Train conductor Li Jishuangzi expressed pride in the launch. "We underwent over a monthlong

"We underwent over a monthlong training in etiquette, service skills and communication in Cantonese, English and sign language to ensure a high-quality travel experience."

Li Jishuangzi, train conductor

training in etiquette, service skills and communication in Cantonese, English and sign language to ensure a high-quality travel experience," she said.

The service was expected to boost cooperation in trade, talent exchange and cultural interaction. From January to November 2024,

108 companies were established in Shaanxi by Hong Kong businesses, a 33.3 percent year-on-year increase, according to local government data. The province's trade with Hong Kong grew 26.7 percent during the same period.

The opening of the Wuhan-Hong Kong route brings the total number of high-speed rail services between Hong Kong and Wuhan to four, providing greater convenience for business travelers, tourists and short-term visitors, according to China Railway Wuhan Group.

Hong Kong entered the high-speed rail era in 2018 with the opening of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link. China aims to expand its high-speed rail network from 48,000 kilometers in 2024 to 60,000 km by 2030, according to the national railway operator.

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CHINA

Man takes excavator on six-month journey

The 10,000-kilometer road trip has won him millions of followers on social media



By MA JINGNA in Lanzhou and ZHAO RUINAN

While it's not uncommon to hear about road trips across China in cars or recreational vehicles, what about embarking on such a journey on an excavator?

Thirty-seven-year-old He Ruixiang, who accepted this challenge six months ago, has his answer.

Equipped with his excavator and all the necessary gear, including pots, pans, tools and a tent, he set off from Yinchuan in the Ningxia Hui autonomous region on June 4.

"The idea just hit me and I decided to do it," He said.

He started driving from Ningxia to Gansu province, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, and reached Lhasa, capital of the Xizang autonomous region, on Sept 1. Then he continued along the 318 National Highway and entered Garze Tibetan autonomous prefecture in Sichuan province at the end of September. After that, he decided to turn back toward Ningxia because he wanted to get home before Spring Festival. Last month He arrived in Gansu.

His solo journey on his excavator, which was estimated to span more than 10,000 kilometers, turned out to be quite different from what he had imagined.

He said he had been operating excavators for more than 10 years but had never traveled far from home. When the initial excitement faded, various discomforts crept in.

"Driving alone every day feels particularly lonely. Most often, I couldn't have meals on time because

I couldn't find suitable parking and camping spots," he said.

Camping outdoors really tested his nerves. Surrounded by the stillness of night, the sounds of wild animals, rustling leaves and howling winds in the wilderness often made his tent flap noisily.

"I always felt like something could jump out from anywhere. Outdoor camping is a real test for someone on the road."

One of his most unforgettable experiences was camping by a valley in Jingtai county, Gansu.

On the mid-June night, the wind howled fiercely, causing sand to rush into the tent through its seams. "If I wasn't inside holding it, the tent would have been blown away," he said.

Despite all the difficulties, He said he met with kindhearted people who supported him along the way. And when he met those in

He Ruixiang (left) poses with a Tibetan resident behind his excavator in Garze Tibetan autonomous prefecture, Sichuan province, in October. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



He poses with members of a family he helped in Chamdo city, Xizang autonomous region on Dec 23.

need of assistance, he didn't hesitate to help with his excavator. He documented all those encounters in his vlogs.

In October, as snow began to fall in Dege county, Garze, He decided to stay in a parking lot for the night. A Tibetan man came to warn

him: "Wolves and bears roam here at night. It's dangerous. If you have nowhere to stay, come to my house."

The next day, when He saw the man and his family busily repairing their house, he volunteered to transport materials with his excavator.

After one and a half days' work, the task was almost done.

He used the excavator to help other villagers dig drainage ditches, repair roads and assist them in overcoming all kinds of difficulties.

"The village chief came to see me and gave me a thumbs up," he said. "Villagers brought their best butter tea to me, eager to invite me to their homes for a meal."

On Dec 16, on his way from Gansu back to Ningxia, He came across a vehicle struggling to climb a snowy slope.

He used his excavator to clear

the snow, allowing the vehicle to proceed smoothly.

In his vlogs, He documented numerous similar anecdotes of helping others, using the excavator to clear rocks and mud from the road, assisting vehicles stuck in ditches, helping an overturned coal truck and filling potholes.

As of Dec 23, He has amassed over 2.7 million followers on the short-video platform Douyin, winning more than 20 million likes.

He is now frequently recognized by fans on the road, and many ask him for photos. In some tourist spots, he has been invited to enjoy local cultural experiences.

"I am very excited about this trip. It's wonderful that I could assist the people I met during this special journey. And that's what encouraged me to keep traveling to more places," he said.

On the evening of Dec 24, He arrived in Gansu's Qingcheng county. The next day, he continued his journey eastward, eager to arrive in Yinchuan for a family reunion.

"After being away for over half a year, my parents and wife have been worried about me traveling outside. My two children are still young in their teens and they need my company," he said.

"I will return home to have a rest and spend quality time with my family. This year I'll continue traveling with my excavator, though I have no detailed plan of where to go yet," he said.

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Newly discovered spider species named after Jay Chou songs

Chinese pop singer Jay Chou is renowned for his musical versatility, with his songs bringing to mind romance, nostalgia and the charm of traditional culture. However, when his fans listen to his songs these days, they might bring something new to mind: spiders.

A recent scientific paper, featured in an international academic journal, has thrilled music lovers in China by naming 16 newly discovered spiders after iconic songs by the 45-year-old pop star.

These new spider species, belonging to six genera, were discovered at the Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden of the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Yunnan province. To date, 920 spider species have been identified within this 11-square-kilometer garden, which is known as one of the most spider-diverse places in the world.

The names of the spiders include "anjing" (silence), "longquan" (dragon fist), "yequ" (nocturne), "caihong" (rainbow) and "daoxiang" (rice field). The researchers recorded them in Chinese pinyin in a paper published in the journal *Zoological Research: Diversity and Conservation* last month.

Lead researcher Li Shuqiang, from the CAS Institute of Zoology, told Xinhua that his teammates, born between the 1980s and

2000s, are avid fans of the singer and songwriter from the Taiwan region, "having grown up listening to his music". They enjoy listening to his songs in their spare time, which led them to unanimously decide to name the spider species after 16 of Chou's songs.

Regarding which spider was given a particular title, Li explained that they were chosen randomly, with no relation to the features of the spiders.

Mi Xiaoqi, the first author of the study and a professor at Tongren University in Guizhou province, is an admirer of Jay Chou. Almost the same age as the musician, the researcher said that he used to name his discoveries based on animals' morphological features, but in 2022 due to a name coinciding with previous research by other authors, his paper was not published successfully.

"Since then I have been very cautious about naming spiders," Mi said. "Given that many of my peers rely on morphological characteristics for naming, this time I chose to use a different approach to avoid repetition."

In the eyes of the spider researcher, many species, including the newly discovered ones, have fascinating characteristics. For example, mature female spiders can be several times larger than their male counterparts. The



From left: Two members of the research team work in the field. Illustrations of details of one of the new spider species named after pop singer Jay Chou's iconic songs. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

discovery of these new species reflects China's rich biodiversity and the success of ecological conservation efforts.

As the paper made national headlines this week, he expressed satisfaction with his team's accomplishment.

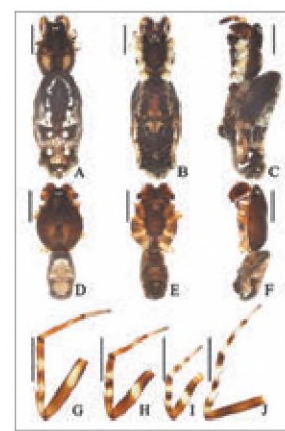
"It has brought our scientific work closer to the public," Mi said. "I hope that more people will take an interest in our research and support nature conservation."

Some netizens on social media have dubbed Mi "the ultimate fan"

and lauded his approach of naming new species after pop songs as "the most innovative way to follow celebrities".

Many of Chou's fans have also found that this is not the first time the pop star has made an appearance in the scientific community.

In 2020, a master's degree student from the Nanjing Institute of Geology and Palaeontology of the CAS discovered a unique trilobite dating back about 500 million years. He named it *Fantasy*, inspired by Jay Chou's second stu-



there is no room for "creativity". Blending science and humanity has been a popular trend among researchers worldwide, especially younger ones, when it comes to naming discoveries.

In 2019, during a deep-sea exploration, scientists discovered a new amphipod creature. To welcome this "new resident" of the deep ocean, they named it "Dorotea" after the beautiful and kind character in the famous novel *Don Quixote*. Similarly, there was also a deep-sea worm that was given the name *Hodor hodor* in 2018, as a tribute to the beloved character from the fantasy TV series *Game of Thrones*.

A Chinese newspaper commented that incorporating elements of pop music into the names of new species is "not only an engaging approach but also helps draw public attention to science, inspiring more people to explore the wonders of nature".

Moreover, this practice introduces a novel way for popular culture to leave its mark.

"Once these names gain recognition from the international academic community, it can be viewed as an embodiment of Chinese cultural elements reaching a global audience," said The Beijing News.

XINHUA

WORLDUS

Tencent's inclusion on Pentagon list puzzling

By HENG WEILI in New York
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Tencent Holdings Ltd, parent company of China's popular WeChat messaging app, is trying to figure out how it ended up on a Pentagon list as being a "Chinese military" company.

Brendan Ahern, the chief investment officer of KraneShares, a China-focused provider of exchange-traded funds (ETFs), explained on X.com how Tencent is basically a video game and social media company.

"The vast majority of Tencent's ... revenue comes from video games ... social media i.e. advertising on WeChat and mobile payments. The largest shareholder is a South African newspaper company."

Ahern wrote that Tencent "can dispute the claim and sue in court if necessary, not w/out precedent for a company to be put on this list, sue and win."

The Pentagon said on Monday it

had added Tencent and major EV-battery maker CATL to a long list of Chinese firms it has deemed military companies.

"We are not a military company or supplier. Unlike sanctions or export controls, this listing has no impact on our business," Tencent said in a statement, adding that its inclusion on the list was "clearly a mistake."

"We will nonetheless work with the Department of Defense to address any misunderstanding," the Shenzhen based company said.

Liu Pengyu, a spokesperson for the Chinese embassy in Washington, said in a statement: "We firmly oppose the US' generalization of the concept of national security, the establishment of discriminatory lists of various names, the unreasonable suppression of Chinese companies, and the disruption of normal Sino-US economic and trade cooperation."

"The US' practices violate the market competition principles and international economic and trade rules that it has always advocated,

undermine the confidence of foreign companies in investing and operating in the United States, and damage the interests of American companies and investors, which will eventually backfire on itself."

US-traded shares of Tencent fell \$4.05 in over-the-counter trading on Monday, closing at \$49.10, down 7.6 percent.

Despite the downturn, some on Wall Street remain bullish on Tencent shares.

Citigroup analyst Alicia Yap reiterated a "buy" rating and "top pick status" on Tencent, according to Business Insider. She wrote in a research report that Tencent's growth outlook and fundamentals are sound. She sees the selloff as an "enhanced buying opportunity" and has a HK\$573 price target on the share.

The analyst consensus rating on Wall Street is that Tencent is a "strong buy" with an average price target of \$69.13 — \$20 above Monday's closing price — the website reported.

While the designation of the companies on the list does not involve immediate bans, it could add pressure on the US Treasury Department to sanction the companies.

Brian Tycanco, an editor and analyst at Stansberry Research who follows China, Asia, tech, energy and commodities posted on X: "It's turning out that if you're an innovative Chinese business making money, you're likely to be considered a threat to US national security. Wild."

"Extreme Bagholder", an investor, wrote on X: "Just as I was diving deep into Tencent and considering a position, it gets added to the US Military blacklist."

TechCrunch, a prominent news website based in San Francisco, reported how Tencent also invests in several American companies.

"While the Chinese internet giant Tencent is best-known for its super-app WeChat, it's also a major investor in US tech companies and startups. Some of its most notable and still active investments include

Reddit, Snap, and Fortnite creator Epic Games," the website reported.

The list of Chinese military companies, mandated under US law as the "Section 1260H list" and updated annually, designated 134 companies, according to a notice posted to the Federal Register on Monday.

The Pentagon list also included chipmaker Changxin Memory Technologies, Quectel Wireless and drone maker Autel Robotics.

Two previously listed companies, drone maker DJI and Lidar-maker Hesai Technologies, both sued the Pentagon last year over their previous designations, but remain on the updated list.

The Pentagon also removed six companies it said no longer met the requirements for the designation, including AI firm Beijing Megvii Technology, China Railway Construction Corp Ltd, China State Construction Group Co and China Telecommunications Corp.

CATL also called the designation a mistake, saying it "is not engaged

in any military related activities".

Other companies added include MGI Tech, which makes genomic sequencing instruments, and Origincell Technology, which lawmakers have alleged operates a cell bank network and bio-storage technologies.

A Quectel spokesperson said the company "does not work with the military in any country and will ask the Pentagon to reconsider its designation, which clearly has been made in error."

US lawmakers had pushed the Pentagon throughout 2024 to add some of the companies, including CATL, to the list.

Ford Motor is building a battery plant in Michigan and plans to license CATL technology to produce low-cost lithium-ion batteries at the facility. CATL is the world's largest electric-vehicle battery maker, with its products also used by other major automakers.

Yifan Xu in Washington and agencies contributed to this story.

Manhattan enters the congestion pricing zone

By HENG WEILI in New York

New York has rolled out its controversial congestion pricing plan, angering commuters while pleasing advocates of a Manhattan less clogged by vehicular traffic.

The plan went into effect on Sunday. The fee for most vehicles traveling in the zone — which covers all of Manhattan below 60th Street — from 5 am to 9 pm weekdays will be \$9, reduced from \$15 following a public outcry. The overnight rate is \$2.25.

"The Congestion Relief Zone has been in operation since midnight — 1,400 cameras, over 110 detection points, over 800 signs and 400 lanes of traffic, and it's all gone smoothly," said Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) Chair and CEO Janno Lieber at a news conference in Grand Central Terminal on Sunday.

The first day went relatively well, but the real test will come during the work week.

"It's way too early to declare victory or to draw any permanent conclusions, but the indication so far is positive," Lieber said in an update on Monday. "Now, it's a snow day. We'll see. But, positive, positive."

Since the pandemic, Mondays and Fridays have tended to be lighter traffic days in Manhattan.

"We want to encourage trucks to do more deliveries at night, we want improvements to vehicle speeds especially for buses, we want to make sure that emergency response vehicles can get where they are going faster, and I hope drivers will take another look at the speed and convenience of mass transit," Lieber said on Sunday.

"The toll will result in at least 80,000 fewer vehicles entering the zone every day, relieving crowding in what is today the most congested district in the United States," the MTA website says.

Over in New Jersey, drivers heading into Manhattan have been hit with a double whammy as fares for Port Authority bridges and tunnels, such as the Holland and Lincoln tunnels, increased by 3 percent this week.

New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy released a statement on congestion pricing saying that the state will "continue fighting against this unfair and unpopular scheme," CBS New York reported.

Passengers in yellow cabs will be charged 75 cents within the zone, while those using ride-hailing services such as Uber and Lyft will be charged \$1.50.

"Our beloved, iconic yellow cabs, which have really had a brutal 10 years," Manhattan Borough President Mark Levin told The New York Times. "They're going to get a boost from this, because the fee for Uber and Lyft is double."

Congestion pricing is expected to bring in \$15 billion for the MTA's \$51.5 billion capital improvement program.

Eighty percent of the money raised from the plan, which will be collected via cameras reading vehicles' E-ZPass tags and license plates, will go toward infrastructure improvements for the city's subway and buses. Those without E-ZPass, however, will pay more — \$13.50 — and will be billed through the mail



Vehicles pass a sign on Friday on Ninth Avenue announcing New York City's congestion pricing program. In the controversial plan, which went into effect on Sunday, cameras will be deployed to charge most drivers \$9 to enter Manhattan below 60th Street from 5 am to 9 pm Monday to Friday. MIKE SEGAR / REUTERS

“My only thought on this is that for congestion pricing to work, public transit has to be safe.”

Jack Raines, in post on X.com

after having their license plates read. "With my experience of the MTA and where they've allocated their funds in the past, they've done a pretty poor job with that," said Christakis Charalambides, a supervisor in the fashion industry, as he waited for a subway Sunday morning in Lower Manhattan. "I don't know if I necessarily believe it until I really see something."

Anyone who has been in Manhattan on a weekday can see the obvious gridlock in the borough, especially when traveling east to west. The subway also has been beset with instances of people being shoved on the tracks, along with the shock of riders seeing a video of a woman burning to death after she was lit on fire while sleeping on a train in Coney Island, Brooklyn. A Guatemalan migrant in the United States illegally has been charged with murder in the case.

Nick Sortor posted on X.com on Sunday to 678,000 followers: "JUST IN: A man has been stabbed in the NYC Subway, just HOURS after congestion pricing kicked in, which forced MORE riders into the dangerous system. This is just going to get worse, and @GovKathyHochul is doing NOTHING about it"

Jack Raines, who described himself as a Columbia Business School graduate, posted on X to 68,000 followers: "My only thought on this is that for congestion pricing to work, public transit has to be safe. NYC has to have a zero tolerance policy

toward aggressive behavior on the subway. Laws need to promote a safe, efficient society for everyone, not enable society's worst."

The Guardian Angels, a volunteer watchdog group, have restarted patrols in the subways for the first time since 2020. The group is led by Curtis Sliwa, a radio personality who lost to current Mayor Eric Adams in the 2021 mayoral election and who plans to run again.

Lieber caused some consternation, when in an interview with Bloomberg Surveillance on Monday, said transit crime was down 12.5 percent and that the perception about crime among riders may be "in people's heads".

The Transport Workers Union, in a post on X wrote: "Total BS" adding that Lieber "ignores the fact that violent crime is soaring. Felony assaults were up 51.6% and murders were up 233% last year compared to 2019 (January through 12/29). Such # are published in the MTA's own committee books."

Many commuters also are irate at the MTA, which loses millions of dollars a year due to fare beaters, for example — people who jump the subway turnstile or board buses and don't pay the toll, which is currently \$2.75 a ride.

In 2023, the MTA estimated that it had lost as much as \$690 million in 2023. The agency said that fare beaters make up a third of bus riders and about 13 percent of subway riders.

Only time will tell if the \$9 will be enough to deter driving in a city that is used to high costs and has many wealthy individuals who can easily afford the congestion fare.

On Sunday, two New York City firefighters unions also voiced concern about the pricing plan applying to firefighters using their personal vehicles to drive into Manhattan.

"Where do these officers put their gear? Do they get on the Long Island Rail Road? Do they get on the 7 train?

How do they get to work with this gear? And whose responsibility is it to get them there safely?" Uniformed Fire Officers Association President Jimmy Brosi asked, reported radio station 1010 WINS. "And why [has] this message not been heard at the state level, at the MTA, at the department level or even at the New York City mayor's office? We have brought this to every one of them."

Drivers who show that they make less than \$50,000 will be eligible for discounts. Disabled commuters, who cannot take public transit, can apply for an exemption to the fees.

To Roger Corrado, 62, who lives in North Bergen, New Jersey, congestion pricing felt like a "slap in the face," he told The New York Times. "Think about a guy like myself, for 40 years commuting into Manhattan, paying the tolls, contributing to all the businesses in Manhattan. Now we feel like, where's the loyalty? Like, this is how you treat us?"

Phil Bauer, a surgeon who lives in Midtown Manhattan, supports congestion pricing. "I think the idea would be good to try to minimize the amount of traffic down and try to promote people to use public transportation," he told the Times.

US President-elect Donald Trump, a native New Yorker, has vowed to end the program when he takes office, starting on Jan 20. In November, Trump said that congestion pricing "will put New York City at a disadvantage over competing cities and states, and businesses will flee".

The toll was supposed to go into effect last year with a \$15 charge, but Hochul abruptly paused the program before the 2024 election, when congressional races in suburban areas around the city, the main opponents to the program — were considered to be vital to the Democratic Party's bid to retake control of Congress.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Blocked deal with Japan for US Steel raises concerns

By JIANG XUEQING in Tokyo
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Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba on Monday urged the White House to address the concerns of Japan's industrial sector and clarify the issue of "national security" cited in sinking Nippon Steel's acquisition plan for US Steel.

At a news conference in Ise, Mie Prefecture, Ishiba addressed a question regarding US President Joe Biden's decision against Nippon Steel's proposal, stating: "We take this matter very seriously and cannot afford to ignore it. While it would be inappropriate for the Japanese government to comment on individual corporate management cases under review based on US domestic law, we strongly urge the US government to address these concerns."

Biden on Friday justified the decision by citing risks for US national security and critical supply chains.

In response, Ishiba stressed the need for clarity: "As for why national security is cited as an issue, it must be clearly explained; otherwise, future discussions on the matter will not

work. I believe that the points I have just made are very important for our future relationship, no matter how close we are as allies."

Biden's move is not a surprise but could have implications for future foreign investment in US companies, CNN reported.

On the same day, Japan's Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Yoji Muto expressed strong disappointment over the decision, calling it "extremely regrettable".

Muto acknowledged the concerns raised by Japan's industrial sector in response to Biden's decision and emphasized the need to address them, including providing an explanation of the judgment made during the review process by the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States.

"It is crucial to create an environment where companies can make investment decisions with confidence," Muto said.

Nippon Steel and US Steel have jointly filed lawsuits against the US government after Biden blocked the Japanese company's takeover of the US firm, NHK reported on Monday.

Trudeau stepping down



Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau leaves after speaking at a news conference at Rideau Cottage in Ottawa, Canada, on Monday. Trudeau announced his resignation, saying he will leave office as soon as the ruling Liberal Party chooses a new leader. DAVE CHAN / AFP

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WORLD

By XING YI in London
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The year 2024 witnessed a series of high-level meetings between China and Europe, with more than a dozen European state leaders and senior officials paying visits and engaging in bilateral discussions with their Chinese counterparts.

In May, President Xi Jinping embarked on a trip to France, Serbia and Hungary, strengthening China-Europe mutual trust and promoting pragmatic collaboration.

Amid the increase in high-level communications between China and Europe, senior officials and experts have urged the two sides to further their strategic dialogue and win-win cooperation, because sound and stable China-Europe relations, they emphasized, are beneficial to global prosperity and crucial to tackling global challenges.

"Europe holds an important position in China's diplomatic agenda. A healthier and more stable China-Europe relationship serves the fundamental interests of both sides and the common aspiration of the world," Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said at the Symposium on the International Situation and China's Foreign Relations on Dec 17.

Calling Xi's Europe trip "historic," Wang noted its achievements: advancing the 60-year-old China-France diplomatic relationship into a new phase, reinforcing the "ironclad friendship" between China and Serbia, and elevating China-Hungary ties to an "all-weather comprehensive strategic partnership for the new era."

Peace, development and exchanges topped the agenda of Xi's visits, which were warmly welcomed by the host countries.

Historic trip

During his visit to France, Xi and French President Emmanuel Macron issued joint statements on the situation in the Middle East, on artificial intelligence and global governance, on biodiversity and oceans, and on agricultural exchanges and cooperation. Nearly 20 bilateral cooperation documents were signed in such areas as green development, aviation, agrifood, commerce and people-to-people exchanges.

As China and France celebrated the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties, Macron noted that the two countries enjoy a friendly relationship and productive cooperation regarding not just cutting-edge technologies but also global issues such as climate change and marine biodiversity.

In Serbia, Xi and his Serbian counterpart, Aleksandar Vucic, together announced the building of a China-Serbia community with a shared future in the new era. Serbia became the first European country to establish such a high-level relationship with China.

Vucic acknowledged China's significant investment in Serbia to help the local economy and improve living standards. He welcomed further Chinese investments, and more direct flights, and ensured the timely completion of the Serbian segment of the Belgrade-Budapest Railway.

In Hungary, Xi held talks with Hungarian President Tamas Sulyok and Prime Minister Viktor Orban. The leaders witnessed the exchange of multiple bilateral cooperation documents on the Belt and Road Initiative, economy and trade, investment, science and technology, culture, and agriculture, among others.

In addition to the Europe visit, Xi also engaged with leaders from Germany, the United Kingdom, Spain and Italy at meetings surrounding the G20 Summit in Brazil, and welcomed heads of European states, including Belgium, the Netherlands, Ger-

Sound, stable ties needed to tackle global challenges

Furthering China-Europe strategic dialogue, win-win cooperation with rise in high-level communications seen as beneficial to prosperity for all



Above: A performer breakdances at the national pavilion of France during the 2024 China International Fair for Trade in Services in Beijing on Sept 14. CHEN YEHUA / XINHUA **Below left:** Chinese and local engineers inspect a construction site of the Serbian segment of the Belgrade-Budapest Railway, in Novi Sad, Serbia, on Sept 16. WANG WEI / XINHUA **Below right:** A student at the Hungarian-Chinese bilingual school in Budapest shows her painting of a giant panda on May 3. ZHAO DINGZHE / XINHUA



many, Poland, Italy, Spain, Finland and Slovakia, in Beijing.

Feng Zhongping, director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of European Studies, said the visits demonstrate the efforts the two sides are making to promote political mutual trust despite the challenges in China-EU relations.

European countries have realized the importance of pragmatic cooperation with China, as they are closely interconnected in terms of the economy, and such cooperation serves the interests of both sides, he said.

Luigi Gambardella, president of ChinaEU, a Brussels-based association promoting Chi-

na-Europe business cooperation, said Italian President Sergio Mattarella's Beijing visit brought commitments to further expand trade, particularly by increasing China's imports of high-quality Italian goods.

Michael Schumann, chairman of the Board of the German Federal Association for Economic Development and Foreign Trade, praised the meeting between Xi and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz which highlighted Sino-German collaboration. Schumann said that Germany's export-driven economy has long thrived on international cooperation.

For many years, the EU had been China's largest trading partner. It became the sec-

ond-largest after Brexit in 2020.

According to the European Commission, the volume of trade in goods between the EU and China accounted for 739 billion euros (\$770 billion) in 2023.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of China-EU bilateral relations. Besides economic cooperation, China and Europe have often worked closely on various multilateral issues throughout the history of China-EU relations, such as global climate change governance and World Trade Organization reforms, said Jin Ling, a senior research fellow on European studies at the China Institute of International Studies.

"There is a strategic consensus among China and European countries in support of multilateralism in response to the challenges posed by (US President-elect) Donald Trump's unilateralism," said Jin, adding that strengthening multilateral cooperation has been an element in nearly all joint declarations from China-EU summits for a long time.

However, advancing a global order and fostering multilateral cooperation between China and the EU has been challenged by ideological divides and excessive geopolitical thinking in recent years.

In 2019, the European Commission published an EU-China Strategy Outlook which declared China to be a "partner for cooperation, an economic competitor, and a systemic rival".

In 2023, Ursula von der Leyen, the chief of the commission, launched a "de-risking" policy toward China.

More recently, the EU finalized a decision to place additional tariffs of up to 35.3 percent on Chinese electric vehicle imports.

A recent report by the China Chamber of Commerce to the EU found that 93 percent of surveyed Chinese companies say the EU's



economic security stance has affected their operations and dented their confidence.

About 60 percent of the companies say they have felt "strong anti-China sentiment", while 64 percent say they have met unfair treatment due to their identity as a Chinese company, according to the report.

"The EU's current priority should not be asserting rule-setting in areas like trade remedies, investment screening and industrial policies, nor attempting to impose these through instruments such as duties, fines, lawsuits, or administrative intervention upon China," said Cui Hongjian, director of the Center for the European Union and Regional Development Studies at Beijing Foreign Studies University.

"A world increasingly marked by 'geopolitical competition' and even conflicts between country groups does not serve either side's interests," he wrote for the China Think-tank Network on Europe in November.

Lu Shaye, China's ambassador to France, used the Paris Olympics as a metaphor for competition between China and Europe at a forum in Paris on Dec 17.

"Just as athletes compete to surpass their limits, nations inspire each other through mutual pursuit and progress," Lu said.

"China's success does not mean Europe's failure, and vice versa. Economic issues should be resolved through economic logic, as overly politicizing them could backfire."

Cai Run, head of the Chinese Mission to the European Union, stressed that China and Europe are "partners", not "rivals", in a commentary for Euronews on Dec 20.

"China and the EU, as two major forces driving multipolarity, two large markets supporting globalization, and two great civilizations advocating diversity, have no fundamental conflicts of interest," Cai wrote.

"The essence of China-EU practical cooperation in trade and other areas is complementary advantages and mutual benefit."

Xinhua contributed to this story.

Sustained engagement urged in Sino-UK relations

By ZHENG WANYIN in London
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Experts in the United Kingdom have called for healthy China-UK relations, supported by consistency in policy, sustained two-way engagement, and a well-informed understanding of China within the UK.

Their comments came after good momentum in bilateral relations as leaders and senior officials of the two sides had held talks or made phone calls to each other since the Labour Party took power in July, covering areas such as foreign policy, trade, clean energy and more.

In November, President Xi Jinping and UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer met on the sidelines of the G20 Leaders' Summit in Brazil, marking the first in-person meeting between leaders of the two nations since 2018.

During the meeting, Xi said China and the UK should jointly write the next chapter in the sound and stable development of Sino-British relations. He also emphasized that China and the UK share extensive common interests and enjoy vast space for cooperation, despite differences in history, culture, values, ideas and social systems.

Meanwhile, Starmer said the UK's approach to China would be "consistent, respectful, and pragmatic" to advance shared goals on trade, global stability, green transition, and other areas, according to the Prime Minister's Office.

Noting the positive signals from recent high-level contact, Mark Logan, a former member of the British Parliament and former vice-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on China, pointed out the need

for "consistency" in the UK's approach to China in an opinion piece published in October in the South China Morning Post.

While engagement was also on the agenda of the previous Conservative government, the reality was that "the UK hit the reset button so many times ... There was no consistency whatsoever," he said.

But interactions have continued at the non-governmental levels, Logan said.

"China is a reality that presents opportunities and many new questions for us in the UK. So, even when the previous government, or indeed politicians, refused to engage with China by speaking with angry opposition, the reality of the situation is that businesses, universities, and students continued to engage daily and with consistent intensity."

"I have argued that the UK-China relationship is an even more historic one," he added. "Our two countries have much to learn from one another. We have a lot to offer the world."

In post-pandemic times, the business community in the UK has helped spearhead engagement.

Clear commitment

In a report released in December, titled "China-Britain Business Council Submission: HMG's Audit of the China Relationship", the council highlighted its members' "clear commitment" to the Chinese market, with nearly 75 percent of the respondents to a member survey remaining optimistic for growth in China over the next five to 10 years and a majority planning to increase investment.

The report also drew attention to the opportunities brought by Chinese invest-

ment for growth and job creation throughout the UK, with data showing its contribution to local prosperity in regions beyond London and the southeast area.

Nonetheless, the document noted bilateral trade had been impacted by the "challenging relationship" and urged a "consistent, clearer" government strategy toward China, along with a support system backed at the high level to facilitate visits, dialogues, market-entry, regulatory changes and more.

Beyond trade, an opinion piece published in August by James Keeley and Lewis Husain, fellows at the Institute of Development Studies, a research organization affiliated with the UK's University of Sussex, said that China cuts across all global challenges and those that matter to the UK, such as climate change, energy transition, infectious diseases and antimicrobial resistance, sustainable food systems, and biodiversity loss.

"Cooperation must now be brought back to the center of the relationship," they wrote.

David Houliston, head of city policy of Manchester City Council, echoed the need for committed support from the UK government. The policy and partnership manager for the city has been working to promote trade and clean energy exchanges between Manchester and its counterparts in China.

"What cities and regions are able to do is continue the collaboration ... But having government-and-government relationships and a platform to do that does make a difference," he said. "The relationships at the local level will always continue, but what the government can do is accelerate that by showing its intentions."

Ollie Shiell, co-founding director and



A visitor talks with a staff member at the China pavilion of the World Travel Market London 2024 on Nov 5. LI YING / XINHUA

chief executive of the UK National Committee on China, an educational nonprofit promoting understanding of China, said the UK also needs to develop its China capabilities — "a determined effort to enhance the UK's competence in understanding and interacting with China."

Shiell deemed the strategy vital for a more "sophisticated, resilient, and civilized" China-UK relationship — one that balances mutual interests and disagreements.

He suggested this could be achieved by broadening civic leaders' perspectives on

China, fostering practical skills such as negotiation, communication, and networking for professionals, and nurturing young talent.

"Developing robust 'China capabilities' cannot be done in isolation," he said. "To make a positive difference it must extend beyond Westminster to permeate all levels of British society. After all, the bilateral relationship is not just managed by government officials — it involves the 100,000 people who actively interface with China through business, education, and cultural exchange."

BUSINESS

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Introduction of bourse stabilization fund in focus

Strategy can work effectively to avoid excessive market volatility

By ZHOU LANXU
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China should speed up the establishment of the much-anticipated stock market stabilization fund this year as an emergency policy reserve to smooth out any extreme market volatility due to growing uncertainties, policy researchers said.

The likelihood of policymakers extending direct funding support for the nation's bourses via such a fund has increased, they said, as equity market stability has emerged as a more prominent policy goal to vitalize domestic confidence amid a harsh external environment, they said.

It is "of great necessity" to launch the stock market stabilization fund as soon as possible this year, said Zhang Ming, deputy director of the Institute of Finance & Banking at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Zhang said it is advisable to raise money by issuing 2 trillion yuan (\$272.9 billion) of special treasury bonds to establish the fund, buying blue-chip leading shares and exchange-traded funds linked to main indexes at low prices and communicating with the market clearly on the conditions for it to buy and sell the related shares.

The fund, in coordination with social security funds and other large institutional investors, can work effectively to avoid excessive market volatility, he said, as part of a policy pivot since late September in which authorities have regarded stabilizing asset prices as increasingly important to shore up confidence among both companies and individuals.

As a sign of monetary policymakers paying more attention to safeguarding stock market stability, the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, completed the operation of a policy tool that encourages equity investments by financial institutions for the second time on Thursday.

It also optimized the implementation rules of another pro-market tool — the central bank lending facility for share buybacks and shareholding increases — to further enhance policy support and streamline the process for participants.

At the annual work conference of the PBOC, which concluded on Saturday, it was decided to make full use of the two tools, explore regular institutional arrangements and maintain stable operation of the capital market.

On Monday, the Shanghai Composite Index closed down 0.14 percent at 3206.92 points, the fourth consecutive day of losses and the lowest level since October.

"Overall, given the rising uncertainties and risks, stabilizing the stock market has become more challenging, and the likelihood of regulators introducing a stabilization fund is growing," said Feng Jianlin, chief economist at Beijing FOST Economic Consulting.

"In particular, if the SCI falls below the 3000-point threshold, the likelihood of a stabilization fund stepping in would significantly increase," Feng said, with a potential initial fund size of 500 billion yuan to 1 trillion yuan.

Citing the experiences of Japan, South Korea and the United States in using stabilization funds or similar tools in the past, Feng said that the fund should only be used as an emergency measure, not a regular stabilizing tool.

"The fundamental resolution lies in substantial improvements in economic fundamentals."

In late September, PBOC Governor Pan Gongsheng said the country was studying setting up the stabilization fund, though no further details were provided by officials so far.

Luo Zhiheng, chief economist at Yuekai Securities, said the introduction of stabilization funds requires first addressing legislative issues, with certain exceptions needed in the Securities Law regarding market manipulation behaviors to grant the fund statutory powers to address market slumps in specific circumstances.

The stock market stabilization fund can act as an important tool of countercyclical adjustments, preventing further market declines and restoring confidence in the face of major internal and external shocks, Luo said.

At a meeting held by the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee in early December, the top leadership called for strengthening "unconventional countercyclical adjustments".

Financial regulators have also strengthened their focus on foreign exchange market stability. The annual work conference of the State Administration of Foreign Exchange held last week vowed to improve the monitoring and early warning system for cross-border capital flows and strengthen countercyclical regulation and expectation management.



Customs officials inspect imported durians at a warehouse in Chengdu, Sichuan province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Policy to help tap western region potential

By ZHONG NAN
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China's push to develop its western regions through new policy measures will reduce regional disparities and further unlock the region's economic potential, market watchers and exporters said on Monday.

The General Administration of Customs (GAC) unveiled 15 measures aimed at advancing the large-scale development of the country's western regions on Sunday, with a particular focus on promoting openness.

The measures include support for the opening or expansion of ports in eligible areas, and the exploration of further measures to facilitate intermodal river-sea and rail-sea transportation.

The administration will support the construction of international aviation hubs in cities such as Chongqing municipality; Kunming, Yunnan province; and Urumqi, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, while promoting the export of specialty agricultural products from China's western regions.

Zhou Mi, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation in Beijing, said that economic diversification and balance are central to China's long-term development strategy, especially in addressing the economic disparities between its eastern and western regions.

By building modern transportation infrastructure, fostering inno-

vation and attracting investment, Zhou said China aims to create new economic opportunities in its western regions and reduce the disparity between regions, ultimately contributing to the nation's long-term prosperity.

Echoing that sentiment, Wan Zhe, a professor at the Belt and Road School of Beijing Normal University, said that improving transportation networks and supporting international hub development will allow China to streamline the movement of goods, reduce costs and boost export volumes.

These measures will further boost growth of the New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor, a landmark logistics network connecting China's western regions to global markets, particularly those in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, she said.

The corridor reached a significant milestone by handling over 10,000 intermodal rail-sea train journeys in 2024, facilitating the transport of 87,846 twenty-foot equivalent units to and from member countries of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, a 32 percent year-on-year increase, according to Beibu Gulf Port Group, a Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region-based State-owned enterprise.

The foreign trade of China's western regions surged 8 percent year-on-year to 3.63 trillion yuan (\$495.31 billion) from January to November, data from Chengdu Customs showed.

Southwest China's Sichuan province — a hub for high-value manufacturing and exports in western China — exemplifies this growth trend. Its export-import value rose 8.7 percent to 937 billion yuan in the first 11 months of 2024, driven by fast-growing industries such as electric vehicles, aerospace, energy and industrial equipment manufacturing.

One notable example is Sichuan Honghua Petroleum Equipment Co Ltd, a Deyang-based oil drilling equipment manufacturer.

"We have made significant progress in gaining overseas market orders, having signed export contracts for three island drilling rigs last week," said Wang Wei, general manager of the company's international business unit.

Island drilling rigs are designed to be stationed on artificial islands, typically constructed in relatively shallow waters. They are used to drill for oil, gas, or other minerals beneath the seabed, according to information provided by Sichuan Honghua.

Apart from traditional industries, new business models, such as bonded maintenance, have experienced rapid development in China's western regions in recent years, said Xie Hongjian, an official at Chengdu Customs.

The key measures introduced by the government will explicitly support the establishment of new business models such as bonded research and development, maintenance and remanufacturing in western regions, Xie added.

Guideline to enhance biz climate

By WANG KEJU
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China's clear guideline to rein in excessive administrative inspections of enterprises is part of the country's efforts to foster a more enabling business climate and bolster the confidence of private firms, a backbone of economic growth, analysts said.

Arbitrary fines and forfeitures, out-of-jurisdiction enforcement, maximum penalties, and other issues, which have long been a source of frustration for businesses, should be addressed head-on to create a level playing field, the experts added.

Administrative inspections are crucial for government agencies to guide businesses toward lawful operations. However, some localities and departments have been engaging in arbitrary behaviors while conducting such inspections, causing disruptions to enterprises, said the State Council, the country's Cabinet, last month.

A natural gas transmission company in Shandong province, according to cases published by the Ministry of Justice in November, has endured over 100 inspections annually from 2021 to 2023, conducted by various government agencies including those responsible for safety, and energy, across provincial, municipal, county and township levels.

"The sheer volume of inspections faced by this natural gas company is truly staggering, and it speaks to a larger systemic issue where enterprises are being overburdened by arbitrary enforcement practices," said Zhao Peng, director of the School of Law-based Government, which is part of the China University of Political Science and Law.

The key is finding a sweet spot where the government provides necessary regulatory oversight, but also respects the autonomy and rights of enterprises. This is not an easy balance to strike, but is essential for unleashing the full potential of China's vibrant private sector, Zhao added.

To this end, the frequency and intensity of government inspections must be carefully calibrated, so as to eliminate excessive interference, while also ensuring that targeted regulatory functions are not neglected, according to the guideline.

The key requirements include clearly identifying the government agencies responsible for conducting these inspections and streamlining the list of inspection items. Meanwhile, government agencies should adhere to strict standards and procedures when carrying out inspections, and scale back the frequency of on-site visits to businesses, according to the guideline.

The goal here is to establish clear boundaries and procedures for administrative inspections, eliminating the potential for abuse and enhancing predictability in the regulatory environment, said Zhu Lijia, a professor at the National Academy of Governance.

The new guideline comes after the government's recent emphasis on nontax revenue growth — including fines and confiscations, as well as returns on State-owned assets and capital — caught the attention of the market due to its potential risks to the overall business environment and market sentiment.

In the first 11 months of last year, nontax revenue climbed 17 percent year-on-year to about 3.7 trillion yuan (\$507 billion), while tax revenue declined 3.9 percent year-on-year to 16.19 trillion yuan, data from the Ministry of Finance showed.

"We cannot simply assume that the rapid growth in penalty and confiscation-related revenues is synonymous with profit-driven law enforcement," said Xu Hongcai, deputy head of the financial and economic affairs committee of the National People's Congress.

However, it is clear that in recent years, some local authorities have been aggressive in their approach, prioritizing revenue generation over fair and responsible enforcement practices, Xu said.

Tips on power usage



Staff members of Zhumadian Power Supply Co visit Lucheng Modern Cattle Farming Co Ltd in Rendian town, in the prefecture-level city of Zhumadian in Henan province, to offer on-site help with electricity usage and cattle raising. The farm houses 15,000 heads of cattle, benefiting over 700 nearby farmers. ZHANG YONGSHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Briefly

Yuan strengthens against greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, strengthened 2 pips to 7.1876 against the US dollar on Monday, according to the China Foreign Exchange Trade System. In China's

spot foreign exchange market, the yuan is allowed to rise or fall by 2 percent from the central parity rate each trading day.

Oilfield sees record natural gas production

Daqing Oilfield said its natural gas

production exceeded 6 billion cubic meters in 2024, achieving steady growth for the 14th consecutive year. The 6 billion cubic meters of natural gas can meet the daily needs of 39 million small families for a year, according to the oilfield.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

Steel giant Hebei to get even greener

By ZHANG YU in Shijiazhuang
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Hebei, a major steel-producing province in China, has made important strides in promoting the green transformation of the sector with producers achieving remarkable environmental protection results.

To date, the province boasts 55 steel companies with A-grade environmental performance, accounting for over 60 percent of the national total and maintaining its position as tops nationwide in this regard.

Apart from the enterprises that are currently relocating and constructing, Hebei has achieved comprehensive Grade A status for all of its steel enterprises in operation, said the Department of Ecology and Environment of Hebei Province.

Environmental performance refers to the specific achievements and conduct of enterprises in environmental protection, serving as a crucial indicator of their environmental management levels.

The A-grade rating represents the highest level, signifying the best environmental governance practices within the industry.

According to regulations from environmental watchdogs, during periods of heavy air pollution, A-grade enterprises have the autonomy to reduce emissions, while others including B, C and D-grade enterprises must proportionally limit or cease production. Total emissions of pollutants from the steel sector account for around 40 percent of total industrial emissions in the province, making it the main battleground for air pollution control, according to a recent report by Hebei Daily.

In 2022, Hebei took the lead nationwide in initiating the A-grade environmental performance evaluation for steel companies through reform and innovative approaches, catalyzing a green transformation in the steel-rich province.

"The evaluation aims to enhance

steel enterprises' innovation capabilities, reduce energy consumption and increase overall competitiveness," Bai Yu, head of the A-grade coordination team at the department, was quoted as saying by Hebei Daily.

Bai said the initiative is considered a fundamental strategy to continuously improve air quality, adjust and optimize industrial structures, and accelerate green development.

Preliminary estimates suggest that after the comprehensive Grade A status is achieved in the province's steel industry, emissions could be reduced by over 30 percent, contributing more than 12 percent to industrial emission reductions in Hebei, Hebei Daily added.

The province has established stricter A-grade standards, incorporating specific indicators beyond national standards, including equipment levels, digitalized intelligent manufacturing, energy conservation and carbon reduction.

BUSINESS

Floating PV station glows in Shandong

By ZHAO RUIXUE in Jinan
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Workers recently finished inspecting and cleaning the solar panels of a large floating photovoltaic power generation project in Lingcheng district of Dezhou, Shandong province.

The project, spanning an area equivalent to 800 standard soccer fields, is situated over the waters of Dingzhuang reservoir, which serves as an industrial water source for the Dezhou power plant of Huaren Power International Inc. It is one of the biggest floating photovoltaic power generation farms in the world, said the plant.

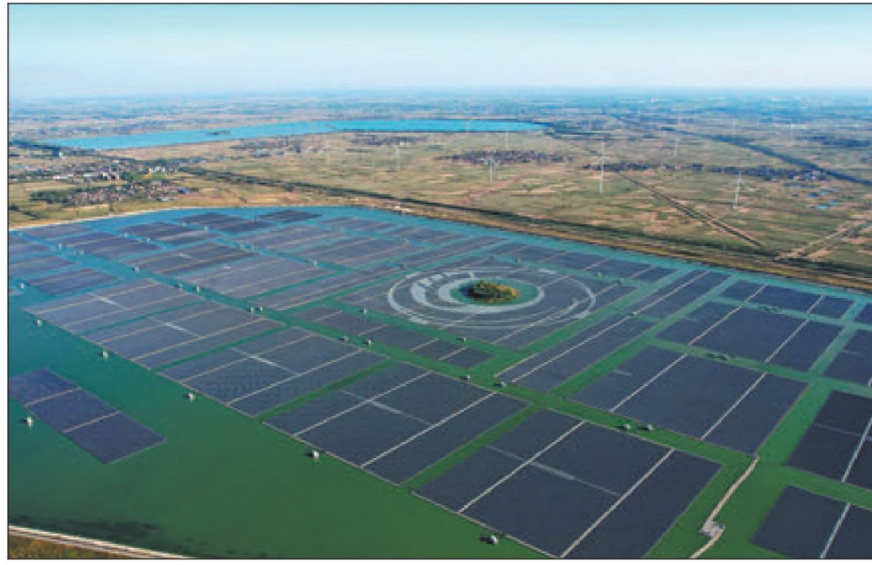
"We conducted thorough checks on the panels to identify any issues such as cracks that could impact power generation," said Jia Yinzhi, an engineer of the plant's new energy team.

The project comprises over 600,000 panels divided into 81 sections, with each section containing inverters equipped with advanced monitoring systems.

"If a panel malfunctions, the inverters will send a signal to the control room, which has efficiently facilitated our work on inspecting the panels," he said.

The solar panels are not actually floating on the water. Instead, they are installed on top of floating devices that support them, creating ample space beneath them.

"The upper side of the solar



Floating solar panels are seen at Dingzhuang reservoir in Dezhou, Shandong province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

“This means that 190 billion kilowatt-hours of green electricity can be generated each year, saving 54 million tons of standard coal annually ...”

Wang Fudong, an official from the Shandong Provincial Development and Reform Commission

panels absorbs light, as does the other side of the solar panels," said Jia.

When light shines on the upper side of the solar panels, it is also

reflected from the water underneath to the other side of the solar panels that faces the water, improving the panels' power generation efficiency.

Since it was connected to the grid in 2021, the project has generated a total of 1.26 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity. This has brought an average annual saving of 200,000 metric tons of standard coal and a reduction of 500,000 tons of carbon dioxide emissions.

Additionally, the solar panels contribute to reducing water evaporation by 1.6 million cubic meters annually, said Jia.

Shandong has been accelerating the development and utilization of clean energy, advancing toward greener and low-carbon energy development. Since 2021, the installed capacity of new energy and renewable energy in the province

has been growing at an average annual rate of 25.2 percent.

By the end of June this year, the installed capacity of new energy power generation in Shandong exceeded 100 million kilowatts. "This means that 190 billion kWh of green electricity can be generated each year, saving 54 million tons of standard coal annually and reducing carbon dioxide emissions by over 140 million tons," said Wang Fudong, an official from the Shandong Provincial Development and Reform Commission.

As of late October, the cumulative installed capacity of new energy and renewable energy power generation in the province has exceeded that of coal-fired power generation, making it the primary source of electricity in Shandong, according to data from the energy administration of Shandong province.

PowerChina to build major wind farm in Egypt

1,100-MW project to generate 4.3b kWh annually; largest in the African nation

By ZHENG XIN
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Egypt's largest onshore wind power project is to be designed and built by a Chinese company, which is deemed by insiders as a milestone in the country's renewable energy sector and demonstrates the growing global influence of Chinese energy and infrastructure firms.

Power Construction Corp of China (PowerChina) signed an engineering, procurement and construction contract with Suez Wind Energy recently for a 1,100 megawatt wind power project in the country — the largest onshore wind power development in Egypt and the second-largest in Africa, it said.

The project, following PowerChina's earlier 500 MW wind power facility in the region, sets a new record for the company's largest overseas project to date, it said.

"This project is a major step toward Egypt's goal of sourcing 42 percent of its energy from renewables by 2030," said Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University.

"Its scale and expected output, over 4.3 billion kilowatt-hours annually, highlight Egypt's commitment to reducing dependence on fossil fuels and advancing its climate goals under the Paris Agreement."

For PowerChina, the project strengthens its position as a global leader in renewable energy infra-

structure, demonstrating the competitiveness of Chinese companies in the global clean energy market, Lin said.

The partnership structure of the project, involving Saudi Arabia-based electric power generation company ACWA Power and financing from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), also underscores the role of international collaboration in large-scale renewables, he added.

Additionally, the project's impact on carbon emissions, a reduction of 2.2 million metric tons annually — and its provision of clean energy to over a million households — will have more long-term benefits.

The Suez Wind Energy joint venture is co-owned by ACWA Power and consortium partner HAU Energy, a unit of Hassan Allam Utilities. The project will be developed and operated under an independent power producer model, with financing supported by international institutions, including the EBRD.

PowerChina will oversee the project's design, procurement, construction, commissioning, handover and warranty. Once operational, the project is expected to generate over 4.3 billion kWh annually, providing clean and stable energy to more than 1 million households in Egypt. It will reduce carbon dioxide emissions by approximately 2.2 million tons per year, contributing to Egypt's commitments under the Paris Agreement.

CSSC shipyards show robust growth in 2024

By WANG YING in Shanghai
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Three Shanghai-based shipyards delivered 69 vessels and received new shipbuilding orders for 128 units in 2024, according to their parent company China State Shipbuilding Corp.

This represents a year-on-year growth of 19 percent and 70 percent, respectively, the world's largest shipbuilder said.

All the new orders are medium to high-end models and more than 20 billion yuan (\$2.74 billion) worth of these signed orders will be settled in renminbi, solidifying the nation's position as a shipbuilding powerhouse, the State-owned conglomerate added.

Hudong-Zhonghua Shipbuilding (Group) Co Ltd signed an order with QatarEnergy in April to build 18 super-large liquefied natural gas carriers with a maximum capacity of 271,000 cubic meters. It is so far the world's largest single order for LNG tankers.

The two parties signed another order for six ships on Sept 9, cementing Hudong-Zhonghua Shipbuilding's leading position as a builder of LNG carriers amid fierce global competition.

Hudong-Zhonghua Shipbuilding delivered a record eight LNG carriers in a single year. The shipbuilder delivered the 174,000 cubic meters LNG carrier *Greenery Pearl* on Dec 18, eight months ahead of schedule.

Its same-town peer Jiangnan Shipyard (Group) Co Ltd also displayed its shipbuilding prowess on Nov 25 by delivering the nation's first large-sized LNG carrier featuring Mark III technology, two months ahead of schedule.

Named *Al Shelila*, the vessel was the first of the six 175,000 cubic meters LNG carriers ordered by Abu Dhabi National Oil Co Logistics and Services in 2022.

Following this order, Jiangnan Shipyard became the nation's first shipbuilder to construct LNG carriers equipped with the

Mark III membrane system.

Shanghai Waigaoqiao Shipbuilding Co Ltd, also a subsidiary of CSSC, created another record in China's shipbuilding history by becoming the first to cross the 100 million deadweight ton mark in terms of total ships completed, after delivering an FPSO, or floating production, storage and offloading, vessel named *Jaguar* to Netherlands-based SBM Offshore on Nov 14.

The FPSO is the 22nd vessel delivered by Shanghai Waigaoqiao Shipbuilding in 2024, fulfilling its whole-year delivery target one and a half months ahead of schedule.

Celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, Shanghai Waigaoqiao Shipbuilding has delivered a total of 579 ships and offshore platforms, or 125.87 million dwts.

Deadweight tonnage is a key indicator to measure the transportation capacity of ships, as well as one of the gauges recognized worldwide to measure the construction capacity of a shipbuilding company.

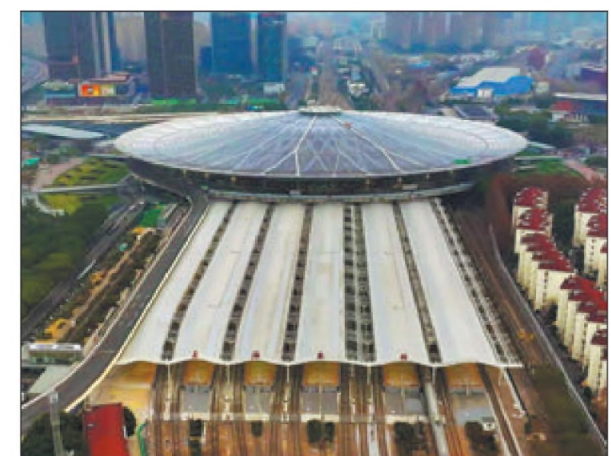
Since delivering its first ship on June 22, 2003, Shanghai Waigaoqiao Shipbuilding has completed and delivered vessels at a rate of 27 ships, or 4.76 million dwts, annually.

Shanghai Waigaoqiao Shipbuilding delivered the nation's first domestically built large cruise ship *Adora Magic City* in 2023. It is currently working on China's second domestically produced large cruise ship *Adora Flora City*, which is expected to be completed at the end of 2026.

"In comparison with the first one, the second home-built cruise ship is more efficient in terms of design and construction, with higher quality and standards," said Chen Gang, general manager of Shanghai Waigaoqiao Shipbuilding.

As of Dec 21, 91 percent of the cruise vessel's total construction workload had been completed, and the hull structure construction is well underway, said the shipyard.

Services upgraded



Shanghai South Railway Station on Sunday launched its first high-speed rail service with the departure of the inaugural train G1305, a significant milestone, said China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp, a State builder involved in its construction. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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BUSINESSFOCUS

CHINA UP-CLOSE

Higher deficit to scale up fiscal firepower

Proactive policy toolkit to play bigger role in counter cyclical adjustments

By WANG KEJU
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A more proactive fiscal policy toolkit will play a bigger role in counter cyclical adjustments in 2025 amid sluggish domestic demand, a tepid property market and local government debt risks, as well as rising protectionism, to help the country tackle various challenges head-on and spur stable growth, analysts said.

A budget deficit up to 4 percent of gross domestic product, the highest on record, could be considered along with increased issuance of local government special-purpose bonds and ultra-long special treasury debt, to anchor market expectations, boost domestic demand and weather external shocks, they added.

The annual Central Economic Work Conference, where the nation's policymakers set the policy agenda for the world's second-largest economy in mid-December, charted a "more proactive" fiscal policy in 2025 for the first time, explicitly noting "an increase in its deficit ratio".

Details surrounding the annual fiscal deficit target are usually unveiled in March during the annual meeting of the National People's Congress — the country's top legislature, said Guan Tao, global chief economist at BOCI China.

However, the recent meeting's clear policy direction came as the authorities felt the need to act swiftly and communicate their fiscal plans more transparently to shore up market confidence as the economy is facing severe headwinds, Guan said.

Since the deficit ratio was set at 3 percent for 2024, analysts predict the figure could reach 3.5 to 4 percent in 2025, which will be officially announced at the NPC meeting in March.

"The fiscal deficit ratio holds a special significance compared to other fiscal policy tools, as people often gauge the government's policy stance based on this specific indicator," said Luo Zhiheng, chief economist at Yuekai Securities.

China has the policy room to raise the deficit ratio to 3.5 percent or even up to 4 percent, so as to scale up its fiscal firepower available to drive domestic demand and economic stability, and provide much-needed relief to local governments, Luo said.

Funding the deficit expansion through government bond issuances can translate into faster spending and more direct support for local economies, as they face fewer constraints in terms of their usage compared with special treasury bonds and local government special-purpose bonds, Luo added.



Workers renovate a house in Ji'an, Jiangxi province, in November. ZHU HAIPENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

2024
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Review

But the deficit ratio alone does not adequately capture the true extent of the government's policy actions.

The deficit number in China's general public budget account is just one piece of the puzzle. Special treasury bonds and local government special-purpose bonds, which are classified under government-managed funds, are not included in this deficit calculation, said Zhang Jun, chief economist of China Galaxy Securities.

Over the past three years, the sluggish property and land markets have led to a significant drop in land sales revenue, which accounts for a large portion of government-managed fund revenue, Zhang said.

The drop in land-based revenue has put pressure on government-managed funds, prompting China to turn to alternative financing channels. To stabilize government-managed fund expenditures, China has increased the issuance of special treasury bonds and

expanded the quota for local government special-purpose bonds, Zhang added.

In the first 10 months of 2024, China's government-managed fund budget expenditures declined by 2.6 percent year-on-year, reaching around 8.1 trillion yuan (\$1.1 trillion). This came against the backdrop of a significant 22.4 percent plunge in land sales revenue during the same period, according to data from the Ministry of Finance.

The narrowing of expenditure decline can be attributed to the issuance of 1 trillion yuan in ultra-long-term special treasury bonds and nearly 4 trillion yuan in new special local government bonds last year, Zhang said.

The usage of local government special-purpose bonds, as outlined during the meeting of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee in mid-December, will extend to purchasing idle land resources, increasing land reserves and acquiring existing commercial housing units for government-subsidized housing purposes.

This expansion of usage scope, combined with the previously announced 800 billion yuan quota specifically for debt reduction, has led experts to forecast that the new quota for local government special-purpose bonds in 2025 will

exceed 4 trillion yuan.

Wang Qing, chief macroeconomic analyst at Golden Credit Rating International, said that local government land sales revenue is likely to see negative growth again this year, which will weigh on government-managed fund expenditures.

However, the new issuance of special-purpose bonds, in addition to the debt reduction quota, is expected to increase to between 4.5 and 5 trillion yuan this year, Wang said, stressing that this substantial increase, which sits outside the regular public budget, is set to play a crucial role in supporting government fund expenditures and offsetting the decline in land-based revenue.

Compared to special local government bonds, which are a more traditional policy instrument, special treasury bonds can enhance the effectiveness of fiscal policies and deliver precise, tailored solutions to the challenges facing the economy, analysts said.

The volume of ultra-long special treasury bonds — typically those with a tenor of more than 10 years — is expected to increase from the current 1 trillion yuan to between 1.5 and 2 trillion yuan in 2025, said Zhang of China Galaxy Securities.

The country is also expected to issue 1 trillion yuan of special trea-

surey bonds to support State-owned large commercial banks in replenishing their Tier-1 core capital, enhancing their ability to withstand risks and increasing credit extension, thereby better serving the real economy, Zhang said.

Tier-1 core capital refers to the core capital held in a bank's reserves, including common stock and disclosed reserves.

When observing the strength of China's proactive fiscal policy, the adjustment of expenditure structure is just as important as the expansion of spending volume, analysts said.

To optimize the fiscal spending structure, policy focus is transitioning from being primarily investment-driven to now placing equal importance on both investment and consumption, said Luo of Yuekai Securities.

Investment and consumption are the *yin* and *yang* of domestic demand — it's not an either-or situation, the goal is to find the optimal mix of the two complementary forces to ensure well-rounded growth, Luo said.

Infrastructure investment must be coupled with considerations around population mobility, structural changes and boosting the economy's potential growth rate, Luo said, adding that fiscal spending needs to be increased in areas

such as healthcare, education and elderly care.

This increased focus on social welfare expenditures is closely linked to China's ongoing urbanization efforts and the integration of migrant workers into the urban economy, to boost their willingness to spend, Luo said.

Meanwhile, the trade-in policy for consumer goods, which provides incentives from fiscal spending for consumers to replace older products, has already showed clear signs of positive outcomes, Luo said.

The trade-in policy had driven over 1 trillion yuan in related product sales as of Dec 13, contributing to the sale of over 5.2 million passenger vehicles, as well as the purchase of more than 49 million units of household appliances, data from the Ministry of Commerce show.

In 2025, policymakers should encompass a wider range of consumer products under the trade-in programs, allowing more households to participate in and benefit from the initiative, Luo added.

Given the uncertainty surrounding fiscal revenue and the pace of special bond issuances, policymakers should be prepared to promptly augment budgets within the year to accelerate expenditure growth and better leverage the counter cyclical function of fiscal policy, Luo added.

China reduces import tariffs with objective of expanding domestic demand

BEIJING — China has reduced import tariffs on a large number of goods in its latest move to expand domestic demand and advance high-standard opening-up.

Provisional import tariffs, lower than the most-favored-nation rates, were applied to 935 commodities as part of an annual tariff adjustment plan effective Jan 1. This plan "will help increase the imports of quality products", according to a statement from the Customs Tariff Commission of the State Council.

The tariff reduction aligns with the need to foster new quality productive forces through scientific and technological innovation, enhance people's well-being, and promote green and low-carbon development, the commission said.

For instance, lower provisional tariffs have been implemented for some raw materials, including ethane, cycloolefin polymers and ethylene-vinyl alcohol copolymers, which are important basic materials

for the petrochemical industry.

"These tariff cuts will effectively reduce the production costs of enterprises, promote their technological innovation and facilitate the green development of the petrochemical industry," said Fan Min, deputy head of the information and market department at China Petroleum and Chemical Industry Federation.

According to the commission, some recycled copper and aluminum raw materials have also had their import tariffs reduced.

In addition, automatic transmissions for special-purpose vehicles such as fire trucks and repair vehicles now enjoy lower import tariffs, which analysts say will better guarantee the production of such vehicles and improve their competitiveness.

While continuing to apply zero tariffs on some drugs and raw materials to treat cancer and rare diseases, the country has cut tariffs on sodium zirconium cyclosilicate, viral vectors for CAR-T tumor therapy

and nickel-titanium alloy wires for surgical implants.

By continuously reducing import tariffs on the pharmaceutical raw materials and medical equipment in high demand, China will better ensure people's access to medical services, said Gao Yuning, vice-dean of the School of Public Policy and Management of Tsinghua University.

China has been bringing down the import tariffs for drugs and active pharmaceutical ingredients since 2018.

Under 24 free trade and preferential trade arrangements, conventional tariff rates will this year be applied to certain products from 34 countries or regions as part of China's efforts to expand its globally-oriented network of high-standard free trade areas, according to the commission.

Among these, lower tariffs under the China-Maldives free trade agreement, effective Jan 1, will eventually lead to zero tariffs on nearly 96 percent of tariff lines between the two

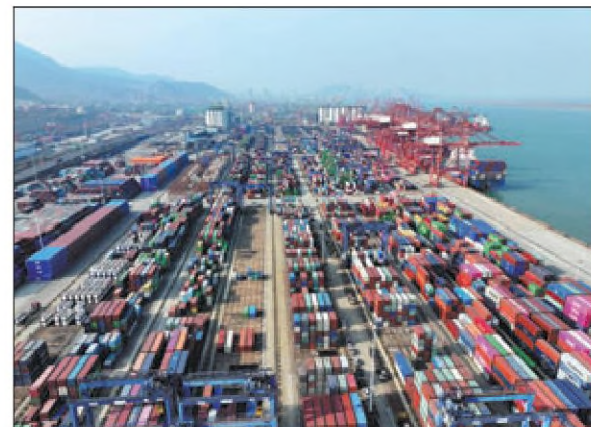
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China will also this year continue to offer zero-tariff treatment on 100 percent of tariff lines to the 43 least developed countries with which it has diplomatic relations in a bid to support their development and foster mutual benefits, according to the commission.

These measures demonstrate China's determination to advance high-standard opening-up and its sense of duty as a responsible major country, said Gao Lingyun, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Despite global headwinds against globalization and rising geopolitical risks, China has acted to open its doors wider. The tone-setting Central Economic Work Conference held in December vowed to expand voluntary and unilateral opening-up in an orderly manner.

Specified tariff items have been introduced for products such as pure electric passenger vehicles to support industrial development and sci-tech advancement, while



A view of a container terminal in Lianyungang, Jiangsu province, in December. WANG CHUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

import tariffs have been increased on goods including battery diaphragms, in light of domestic industrial development and market supply and demand, and in accord-

ance with its commitments to the World Trade Organization, according to the commission.

XINHUA

COMMENT

Editorials

Party leadership will never give in and never stop the fight against corruption

How to break out of the rise-and-fall historical cycle is a question that all ruling parties seek to answer. For the Communist Party of China, the answer to that question is to continuously advance the Party's self-revolution.

As Xi Jinping, general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, said at the ongoing fourth plenum of the 20th Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, being held in Beijing from Monday to Wednesday, China is in a critical period of national rejuvenation, and the Party's construction is also facing unprecedented new situations, new problems and new challenges. Corruption represents the gravest threat to the Party and the fight against corruption is the toughest test of the Party in its self-revolution, Xi emphasized.

That a total of 58 centrally managed officials were investigated for disciplinary violations in 2024, among whom 47 were at the vice-ministerial level or above, shows the vital need for the Party's self-cleansing. It also underscores that it is by no means an empty talk that no matter how high their position is, those that violate the Party's discipline or the law will be held accountable.

The fight against corruption is always being waged as efforts are constantly needed to ensure that officials dare not, cannot and do not want to trade power for personal gain. The corruption fight is by no means a campaign-style rectification or anti-corruption storm, but a normalized, precise and institutionalized process that is carried out under the leadership of the CPC Central Committee in a rule-of-law manner. It not only focuses on corruption, but also rectifies bureaucratism and other malfeasance practices to ensure the execution capabilities, cohesion and vitality of the Party. With more than 99 million members, the Party must never be allowed to become a place for those to pursue their own interests. The reason why many major parties in the world with extraordinary histories and achievements did not break out of the historical cycle and collapsed is that they ignored or were unable to resolutely deal with their own problems.

By daring to examine itself, not whitewash its mistakes, and promptly discover and solve its own problems, the Party can prevent the corrosion of interest groups, power groups and privileged classes, and, as Xi noted, form an atmosphere in which the Party members exercise self-discipline and make fulfilling their duties a conscious act. Few ruling parties, if any, are willing to conduct self-scrutiny in such a scientific, systematic and sustained manner as the CPC. This is due to the crisis awareness in the blood and genes of the Party since its founding in difficulties. The Party has only emerged stronger from overcoming all the challenges it has encountered along the way that has brought it to where it is today by adapting itself to the times. In that process, it has learned that it is essential to keep itself clean in the exercising of power, so that it can be efficient in operation and execution, and responsive to people's needs.

As Xi urged, the fight against corruption must continue to exert efforts to eradicate the soil and conditions that produce corruption problems. So it is necessary to strengthen supervision of those with key powers such as policymaking, decision-making, and approval and supervision, especially in some emerging fields and industries to accelerate the establishment of effective supervision mechanisms, plug loopholes in the monitoring system, standardize discretionary power, reduce rent-seeking opportunities, and quickly deal with any new types of corruption and hidden corruption that may emerge.

Legislators should work together with the disciplinary inspection agencies to further improve the basic laws and regulations, improve and strengthen the supporting system for supervision of the key power holders, continue to promote national anti-corruption legislation, and revise the Supervision Law in line with the times. The anti-corruption struggle must severely punish corruption that links politics and business, crack down on profit-seeking behavior based on power, and prevent various interest groups and powerful groups from infiltrating the political field. In particular, it is necessary, as Xi stressed, to strengthen the anti-corruption work at the grassroots level and in areas related to people's livelihoods so that the people can better feel a stronger sense of gain from the success of anti-graft efforts.

Founded in 1921, the Party, with its experience of ruling the most populous country in the world since 1949, must always remain vigilant to ward against degeneration from within. It must not forget the lessons of history and must not be slow to respond to its own problems to ensure that it retains its vigor and vitality.

US' fabricated cyber threats only strain ties

In their latest scaremongering about China, China hawks in the United States have once again been voicing allegations of Chinese hacking.

While they no doubt like to believe they are like apex avian predators swooping on their prey, with their abrasive cawing of yet another spurious China threat, they appear more like a conspiracy of ravens rather than a boil of taloned raptors. This time, by rasping harsh accusations of "Chinese hackers" having conducted massive cyberattacks on US telecommunications companies and infrastructure, they are behaving just like a noisy unkindness of ravens affronted by change. Anything unfamiliar to ravens or a shift in the hierarchy of the group will be met with stress responses, such as noisy overpreening by individuals, something that has become prevalent in Washington's anti-China circle. These rasping Washington ravens are practitioners of the notoriously false notion that "a lie told a thousand times becomes the truth" when it comes to spreading erroneous and biased information about China.

Despite it being universally known that the United States is the world's largest hacking empire, taking advantage of its strength in technologies to conduct prolonged theft and surveillance of other governments and even its own citizens, some politicians in the US with a prejudiced view of China defy reality by pointing an accusing finger at Beijing as the biggest cybersecurity threat to the US.

"Chinese hackers" compromised even more US telecoms than previously known, including Charter Communications, Consolidated Communications and Windstream, The Wall Street Journal reported late on Saturday, citing "people familiar with the matter". One day earlier, the US Treasury Department said in an announcement that "Chinese malicious cyber actors" were responsible for the "recent targeting of the Treasury's own IT infrastructure".

Moreover, as if to justify the claim of China posing a serious threat to US national security in cyberspace, the US on Friday sanctioned a Chinese company, Integrity Technology Group, accusing it of being behind a prolific hacking group known as "Flax Typhoon". The US State Department claims that the company is a large Chinese government contractor with ties to the Ministry of State Security and that its hackers are working at the direction of Beijing to target critical infrastructure in the US and overseas.

These imagined Chinese keyboard warriors are depicted as an all-powerful, destructive force with astonishing skill level and ability to "shut down dozens of US ports, power grids and other infrastructure targets at will", as US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan was quoted by the newspaper as telling telecommunications and technology executives at a secret meeting in the fall of 2023.

Washington's narrative duplicitously portrays Beijing as the wicked mastermind wielding state-of-the-art cyber capabilities to orchestrate espionage, malign influence and attack operations against the US and its allies in an Oscar-deserving role-reversal that exonerates Washington of all culpability for such actions that it has been repeatedly shown to be the primary perpetrator.

For Washington, such pot-kettle-black claims are the means by which it legitimizes the US conducting more "offensive cyber operations" to maintain its supremacy in cyberspace, and justify more inputs in preparation for future cyber warfare against its so-called adversaries.

China has consistently opposed all forms of hacking activities, and the US resorting to dissemination of false information targeting China for political purposes will not change the fact that it is the US that is the world's largest source of cyberattacks and that it poses the biggest threat to cybersecurity globally.

According to an investigation report released in April last year by China's National Computer Virus Emergency Response Center and other technical teams, US government-backed hacking organizations waged over 45 million cyberattacks against Chinese government entities, academies, scientific research institutes, enterprises and critical infrastructure from May 2023 to January 2024. Such attacks were authorized by Section 702 of the US Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, a domestic law that allows the US government to continue collecting communications of non-Americans located outside the country without a warrant, according to the findings. That poses serious threats not only to Americans, but also to countries around the world in terms of state sovereignty and individual privacy.

Those in the US fabricating groundless allegations about China conducting cyberattacks against the US and its allies are squawking to the wind and their shenanigans only attract an audience willing to believe the Earth is flat. Their antics will do nothing but only further strain China-US relations.

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Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Central bank's to-do list points way to stimulate economic vitality

The year 2024 was extraordinary for China, because, on the whole, the external environment facing China's economic development was complicated and severe. There are signs that China's economy is on an upward and solid footing, but it is still facing multiple pressures.

China has effectively intensified countercyclical regulation and improved policy precision, which play a positive role in supporting the recovery of the real economy and the stable operation of the financial market.

As China continues to promote its high-quality development, how to do it well in the new year will remain a challenge. A recent work conference convened by China's central bank put forward a series of key work points for the country's monetary policy in 2025, and made top-level institutional arrangements, which will create a good monetary and financial environment for expanding domestic demand, stabilizing expectations and stimulating economic vitality.

According to the conference, while implementing a moderately loose monetary policy, the country will focus on defusing financial risks in key areas through deepened financial reform, and use a combination of monetary policy tools to maintain sufficient liquidity, optimize the structure of capital supply and channel more financial resources to areas in urgent need. The country will also strengthen the guidance of policy interest rates to improve the transmission mechanism for the formation of market-oriented interest rates and promote the steady lowering of corporate financing and household credit costs.

In 2024, the central bank cut banks' required reserve ratio and policy interest rates twice, to drive down interest rates in the loan market, achieving good economic and social results. At present, the foundation for China's upward economic development is not yet solid, and traditional industries are still in the process of transformation and upgrading. The central bank

working conference stressed that the structural functions of the country's monetary policy tools will be strengthened at the institutional level, creating a good monetary and financial environment for promoting sustained economic recovery, and effectively support high-quality development.

The central bank said it will give full play to its role to stabilize the economy and market expectation in a prudent manner, and better use structural monetary policy tools to support the risk disposal of small and medium-sized banks and ensure there are no systemic financial risks.

The fundamentals of China's sustained economic development have not changed, the strong regulatory capacity of China's economic, financial and monetary policies has not changed, and the strong resilience of the Chinese economy has not changed. All of these will contribute to China's high-quality economic development in 2025.

—WU YIXUE, CHINA DAILY

Government investment funds new drivers of innovation

The central authorities have recently stressed effective supervision on government investment funds in accordance with market-oriented, law-based and professional principles. By establishing government investment funds and adopting market-oriented methods such as equity investments, the government guides social capital toward key areas and weak links, such as emerging industries, infrastructure and small and medium-sized enterprises.

In recent years, local governments have launched a large number of funds of considerable size. However, some government investment funds have faced issues such as overlapping

policy objectives, idle and fragmented funds, and noncompliant investments. It is therefore necessary to ensure that the establishment and operation of government funds are legal and compliant. At the same time, improving the internal governance structure of funds, respecting market laws and enhancing the operational efficiency of funds are crucial.

Government investment funds should become responsible long-term and patient capital providing long-term and stable financial support for investment projects and the capital market. Meanwhile, reforming its assessment and error tolerance mechanisms and creating a good environ-

ment that encourages innovation and tolerates failure are essential. The layout of funds should be moderately concentrated, focusing on critical and innovative industry sectors that require government regulation.

By promoting the high-quality development of government investment funds, better leveraging fiscal funds and actively guiding social capital investment, the government can effectively support the growth of new industries, models, and drivers of growth, and make the government investment funds new drivers of technological innovation and industrial upgrading.

—ECONOMIC DAILY

What They Say

Huge potential to tap in China-Namibia cooperation

China and Namibia have strong complementarity in industry and trade structures, a good cooperation foundation and huge collaboration potential. This explains why Beijing chose Namibia as the first stop of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit to four African countries. The others being the Republic of the Congo, Chad and Nigeria.

In 2023, the bilateral trade volume between China and Namibia was \$1.31 billion, a year-on-year increase of 16.5 percent. China mainly exports electromechanical products, textiles, furniture, and other manufactured products to Namibia. It imports natural resources such as uranium, lead, manganese, and copper ore from the coastal country in southwest Africa.

Namibia is rich in mineral resources and is known as the "strategic metal reserve" for the world. Its main mineral deposits include diamonds, uranium, copper, lead, zinc, gold, etc. The output of uranium in the country was 8,200 tons last year, making it one of the top four producers of the

key mineral resource along with Kazakhstan, Canada and Australia. No wonder Namibia has close economic and trade ties with Western countries. The United States and some European Union countries are Namibia's main aid donors. But in recent years, Namibia has actively promoted its Looking East policy and strengthened cooperation with Asian countries. While attaching great importance to relations with China, it has also actively strengthened cooperation with Japan, Indonesia, India, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia and Singapore in various fields.

China values Namibia's balanced strategic autonomy in foreign policy, attaches great importance to the development of China-Namibia relations, and is willing to carry forward the traditional friendship between the two countries, deepen mutually beneficial cooperation, and promote the continuous development of their comprehensive strategic partnership that was established in 2018 to better benefit

the people of the two countries.

China is also willing to strengthen exchanges with Namibia, share development opportunities, and promote the two countries' modernization. The two sides should strengthen the docking of their development strategies and create new highlights of cooperation in the fields of agriculture, clean energy, infrastructure, energy minerals, and science and technology.

Beijing encourages Chinese companies to invest and start businesses in Namibia, and hopes that Namibia will continue to provide relevant convenience and support.

China firmly supports Namibia in various regional and global mechanisms, and is willing to strengthen multilateral strategic coordination with Namibia on the world stage, so as to continue to consolidate and strengthen the solidarity of the Global South, and contribute to the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.

—LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

COMMENT

Xu Jiuping

AI reshaping global future in a new year

With the unprecedented advancement of technology, artificial intelligence is rapidly transforming societies and elevating global collaboration to new heights. AI has already made groundbreaking strides in the core areas of data, computing power and algorithms, ushering in a new era in which innovation is fueling large-scale applications. Given these developments, there is a need for the world to engage in dialogue and cooperation, in order to chart new pathways for the development of AI and build a brighter future.

The rapid progress of AI is based on a solid foundation. Data, computing power and algorithms, often referred to as the "three driving forces" of AI's development, are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. These are continuously pushing the boundaries of innovation, transitioning AI from an abstract concept to tangible applications. Underpinning this development are the foundational contributions of numerous scientists.

Data serve as the cornerstone of AI development. Global data generation continues to soar, providing an unprecedented wealth of resources for training and the optimization of AI models. Open-source data platforms have fueled the development of general-purpose models, while global internet users and industrial data offer highly customized training resources for industry-specific models, and high-quality data inputs facilitate the development of AI models.

For instance, Turing Award winner Judea Pearl's Bayesian networks have significantly improved the efficiency and reasoning capabilities of data analysis, while the spatial navigation mechanisms developed by Nobel Prize winner for Physiology/Medicine John O'Keefe and his team have developed AI to structure complex data environments. Yet data monopolization and scarcity have become critical bottlenecks, especially in vertical industries,

Strengthening antitrust regulations is also necessary to prevent monopolization by a few companies, and ensure that AI technologies are accessible and beneficial to everyone.

which need to be addressed.

Algorithms are the driving force of AI systems. And AI's advancement in algorithms follows two primary directions: general-purpose large models and industry-specific large models. While general-purpose large models, such as OpenAI's ChatGPT and DeepMind's Gemini, excel in multimodal and multilingual processing, accelerating the adoption of generative AI, industry-specific large models such as AlphaFold have revolutionized biology by predicting protein structures.

Also, foundational contributions, such as Fields Medal winner Stephen Smale's work on saddle points in optimization theory, and Nobel Prize winner for Physics and the Turing Award winner Geoffrey Hinton's deep learning frameworks, have provided crucial mathematical and algorithmic underpinnings for AI models.

Besides, Nobel Prize winners for Chemistry Demis Hassabis and John Jumper have demonstrated the immense potential of domain-specific large models in addressing critical social issues. These pivotal efforts are driving the homomorphic and isomorphic development of problem spectrums, model groups and algorithm clusters within the technological paradigm, laying the foundation for the continuous innovation of AI.

Computing power serves as the energy source for AI's development. The demand for large-model computational capacity

has surged, while technologies such as NVIDIA's GPUs and Google's TPUs have provided robust computational support for AI models.

More important, Google recently unveiled its Willow quantum chip, which performed a task, which would take a conventional supercomputer 10 septillion years, in five minutes — which is a giant leap forward in quantum technology.

On the other hand, China's "Eastern Data and Western Computing" initiative has helped expedite the construction of an integrated nationwide computing network, enabling efficient resource coordination. In this process, Fields Medal winner Terence Tao's contributions to harmonic analysis and partial differential equations have helped make AI computational models more precise and efficient. And Turing Award winners Allen Newell and Herbert Simon's research on the complexity and computational frameworks of algorithm has laid the groundwork for large-scale distributed computing.

Moreover, Nobel Prize winner for Physics Alain Aspect's experimental breakthroughs in quantum entanglement have further expanded the potential applications of quantum computing in enhancing AI's computational power. These breakthroughs, combined with traditional and quantum technologies, are paving the way for more efficient training and practical applications of AI models.

While it is crucial to achieve balanced and coordinated development, it is necessary to increase investments in data, algorithms and computing power, so as to synergize AI's core driving forces. The development of algorithms depends on high-quality data, but the scarcity of data and platforms has limited potential breakthroughs.

The widespread adoption of AI requires the participation of society as a whole. And more investments in education and skill training are needed to ensure ordinary people acquire AI-related skills.

While it is necessary to establish a platform for international dialogue and ethical standards, it is equally essential to develop a shared ethical framework to drive the development of AI, and ensure organizations such as the United Nations play the leading role in formulating and implementing rules for the use of AI especially in the fields of privacy protection, and algorithmic fairness and safety.

Since the development of AI requires collaboration among countries, the global leaders should build a global AI innovation network to advance AI technology. In this regard, China and the US, as the two leading major powers in global AI research and development, should seek common ground while respecting their differences, and boosting technology sharing and standard-setting. For example, the two countries could sign data-sharing agreements for AI model training and strengthen collaboration in AI applications in fields such as medicine and climate change.

Strengthening antitrust regulations is also necessary to prevent monopolization by a few companies, and ensure that AI technologies are accessible and beneficial to everyone.

AI represents a technological leap for humanity, but its progress should benefit all of humanity, not just a privileged few. So major AI powers must rise above their competition in high-tech and pursue win-win outcomes. By abandoning zero-sum games and embracing cooperation to achieve mutual benefit, countries around the world can embark on a global "AI labor race", turning AI into a powerful force for building a community with a shared future for mankind.

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Kang Bing

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Foreign visitors need home-like convenience

The National Immigration Administration's new immigration-friendly policies for foreign visitors announced in December are set to prompt more foreigners to visit China. The policies show China's determination to advance high-quality opening-up at a time when some countries are resorting to protectionism and isolationism.

The new policies extend the duration of visa-free visits by foreigners to 10 days, and add 21 new ports of entry to the existing list. Since the NIA's announcement has added a new set of countries whose nationals can enjoy visa-free entry, China now has visa-free entry arrangement with 25 countries, offers unilateral visa exemption to the nationals of 38 countries and provides visa-free visits for visitors from 54 countries.

The visa-free entry policies are yielding the desired results, as data show that in the first 11 months of last year more than 29 million foreigners visited the country — an increase of 86.2 percent year-on-year. In fact, foreign visitors taking advantage of the visa-free policies have increased by more than 132 percent. And with the latest announcement extending the duration of visa-free visit, a lot more foreigners are expected to visit China for business or for sightseeing this year.

But the authorities have to improve many things to better serve the increasing number of foreign visitors.

Hence, the authorities should consider encouraging more Chinese people to open their doors to foreign visitors.

China is now largely a cashless society with people paying for their purchases by scanning QR codes with their mobile phones. But digital payments are not yet popular even in many developed countries, making it difficult for visiting foreigners to pay their bills. And although the authorities have taken measures to enable foreigners to swipe their credit cards and/or connect their mobile phones with their home bank accounts to make payments in many hotels, restaurants and shops, the arrangement is far from smooth.

In different cities and on different occasions, I have seen foreigners getting frustrated after being unable to pay their bus or metro fares, settle their restaurant or hotel bills, or book their tickets to enter tourist sites. Therefore, measures should be taken to make foreigners' stay in China more convenient.

Homestays are now popular across the world. I too have opted for homestays in many countries not only because it is cheaper but also because it allows you to cook your own food and communicate with the hosts. Unfortunately, homestays are few and far between in China for foreign visitors. Hence, the authorities should consider encouraging more Chinese people to open their doors to foreign visitors.

True, about 200 million people in China can speak some English or other foreign languages, but communication remains a problem for foreigners visiting the country. Many cities now provide instructions and information on buses, subways and high-speed trains, and have put up road signs in English, but they are hardly of any help because they are translated from Chinese into English or other foreign languages using translation software or are printed without being professionally edited.

While strolling in and around an annual international forum venue in Hainan province a few years ago, I found at least 20 signs in English that were either inaccurate, erroneous or simply ridiculous. So I suggest that the authorities start a national campaign to correct the inaccurate and erroneous signs in public places to ensure they serve their intended purpose. Also, policemen, taxi and bus drivers, shop assistants and restaurant employees should get foreign language training so they can be more helpful to foreign visitors.

China has more than 500,000 public toilets. They are free, clean and mostly well-maintained. But, unfortunately, few of them provide free toilet paper, which is frustrating for many foreign visitors who are not used to carrying toilet paper and soap as they are mostly available in public toilets in the West.

Perhaps installing vending machines dispensing toilet paper and soap in front of public toilets is a better way of addressing this problem.

To make China a foreign visitor-friendly country, we still need to do more.

David Zilberman

Biotech revolution facilitates 'smart agriculture'

The increase in agricultural productivity over the past century has enabled a five-fold increase in the human population and about a 50 percent increase in food per person.

Knowledge, machinery and chemicals significantly replace land and labor in agricultural production. These achievements have also led to increased greenhouse gas emissions, groundwater depletion and biodiversity loss. China exemplifies both the achievements and challenges of this transition. It has performed outstandingly on the agricultural front, feeding 22 percent of the world's population with 9 percent of the world's arable land and an uneven distribution of water resources.

Between 1990 and 2009, China's agricultural labor decreased by 5 percent while agricultural productivity increased by 6.5 percent a year. However, agriculture accounts for 17 percent of China's greenhouse gas emissions and about 8 percent of the degradation of agricultural soil. China and the rest of humankind face the challenge of increasing agricultural production by 70 percent by 2050 while simultaneously reducing or eliminating the side effects of agriculture to make it sustainable.

We suggest that agriculture develop "smart" strategies to increase agricultural productivity while reducing resource load and eliminating environmental side effects. These strategies will take advantage of the capabilities of modern science and the development of enlightened policies and institutions.

"Smart agriculture" should take advantage of modern scientific discoveries. First is the biotechnology revolution, starting with the discovery of DNA, which led to a better understanding of how genetics affects the performance of animals and plants. Biotechnology has become essential to modern medicine. The COVID-19 vaccine was developed using biotechnology tools.

Yet the adoption of agricultural biotechnology has been limited by regulation. All major national academies of sciences say that genetically modified crops are as safe as traditional crops. Still, regulations have limited the adoption of genetic engineering, mainly in producing fiber and animal feed. About three-fourths of the world's cotton and soybean



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and one-third of the corn are produced by genetically modified organisms. The adoption of GMOs has substantially increased the yield of these crops, reduced the use of toxic pesticides and increased the income of farmers.

The biotechnology revolution is only in its infancy. New biotechnology capabilities, such as gene editing, allow faster development of new varieties of crops in response to diseases and climate change. Modern biotechnology has immense potential to improve veterinary medicine and prevent billions of dollars in economic losses from animal diseases. The Beijing Institute of Genomics provides China with an excellent foundation for genetic engineering research and development. Hopefully, it will be used more intensively.

The "Information Revolution" is another contributor to "smart agriculture": Precision farming can monitor crop conditions and apply input wherever and in the specific amount needed. This increases yield, saves input use, and reduces the adverse side effects of overusing chemicals and water.

Precision agriculture, too, is under-adopted in China. Still, adoption rates can be improved by developing low-cost precision methods for small-scale farmers and providing financial incentives and technical support for adoption. Smart agricultural systems also include drip irrigation, which has increased crop yield by about 40 percent while reducing water and chemical use by up to 50 percent. And low- and no-tillage practices and cover cropping can lead to less car-

bon loss and greater productivity in the long run.

Scientific discoveries enable us to develop circular technologies to reuse agricultural residues as a source of value. The black soldier fly is an example of an insect that converts agricultural waste into proteins that can be used to feed livestock and support aquaculture. Its potential is apparent from its use in China. Crop and forest residues can be converted into biochar to enhance farm productivity and store carbon. In this regard, significant agricultural productivity differences exist among regions in China and the rest of the world.

Thus, the transfer of knowledge among regions and the adoption of "smart agriculture" have an immense potential to increase the productivity and sustainability of agriculture.

Policies can enhance the development of "smart agriculture". First is continued investment in life sciences and agricultural research and development and extension efforts to transfer the knowledge to practitioners. The rate of monetary return for agricultural research is much higher than market rates. And since climate change is a global challenge, it is crucial to drastically expand agricultural R&D in developing countries, enhancing their capacity to adapt and mitigate.

Second is regulatory reform, which introduces science-based regulation of technologies and activities, balancing benefits and risks. Extreme precaution leading to inaction is risky. But risk is part of life; we cannot avoid it but can control and mitigate it.

Third is the introduction of pricing that considers the cost of environmental side effects from economic activities, thus providing the incentive for introducing clean technologies.

Finally, it is essential to maintain a global exchange of knowledge and global trade in agricultural markets. We are stronger when cooperating against common challenges than when each country operates alone.

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GLOBAL VIEWS

ARKEBE OQUBAY

Dynamic developers

China-Africa win-win cooperation should be advanced for modernization and sustainability

China-Africa cooperation is the largest and most dynamic form of South-South cooperation. It is comprehensive, cooperative and strategic. It is based on mutual respect and the principle of win-win cooperation. China and Africa share common aspirations for development and prosperity.

Both are committed to developing a fair global governance system and represent the solidarity spirit of the Global South. It is the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in 2025.

Significant achievements in trade, investment, infrastructure development and people-to-people relations have been recorded over the 25 years. However, we also need to recognize that the potential for China and Africa is still to be fully tapped, and we should scale up our joint efforts to release that potential. For instance, bilateral trade has increased from over \$10 billion in 2000 to \$282 billion in 2023. Research indicates that the trade volume between Africa and China has more potential for further growth over the next decade. During the past 25 years, China's foreign direct investment flow to Africa reached around \$50 billion. However, given Africa's demographic and economic transformation, there are vast opportunities and necessity for massive productive investment to create jobs, exports and productive capacity. Significant infrastructure development — energy, transport, communications — was achieved during this period. China and Africa have substantial opportunities for green transformation and building of a carbon-neutral economy through a joint effort.

In his speech at the FOCAC Beijing summit in September 2024, Chinese President Xi Jinping stated that the founding of the forum was a milestone in the history of China-Africa relations. He proposed that bilateral relations between China and all

African countries having diplomatic ties with China will be elevated to the level of strategic relations, and that the overall characterization of China-Africa relations will be elevated to an all-weather China-Africa community with a shared future for the new era.

Furthermore, he also stressed the vital features and urgency of modernization in support of the African Union's Agenda 2063, the continent's development blueprint over a 50-year period.

In his speech, President Xi stressed that over the next three years, China will work with Africa to take partnership actions for modernization in the following respects, including deepening China-Africa cooperation and spearheading the modernization of the Global South; mutual learning among civilizations; trade prosperity; industrial chain cooperation; connectivity; development cooperation; health; agriculture and people's livelihoods; people-to-people exchanges; green development; and common security.

At the Beijing summit, significant attention was given to accelerating Africa's

industrialization and developing industrial chain cooperation, modernizing agriculture and food security, energy cooperation, the digital economy and financial cooperation.

China has removed all import tariffs on goods from 33 African countries and has taken the initiative to apply alternative payment systems for cross-border trade. Both sides should maximize their cooperation and efforts to achieve these shared goals and aspirations.

More importantly, China has remained a source of inspiration and development experiences for African countries in poverty reduction, industrialization, infrastructure development, urban development, human development, economic catch-up, and economic governance. Policy learning is a vital dimension of China-Africa cooperation. I have been involved in Ethiopia's continuous endeavor to learn from China's reform and opening-up journey over the past more than four decades.

China is at the forefront of the global fight for sustainability and a carbon-neutral economy. China is the leader in renewable energy, accounting for over 80 percent

of solar power production and contributing to massive cost reduction and accessibility. China is also the world's leading manufacturer of electric vehicles and battery storage. In the past decade, China has emerged as one of the innovation and technological leaders, in many fields such as renewable energy and electrification — solar, wind, green hydrogen, automotive and digital technologies. In comparison, Africa has a massive demand for clean and renewable energy. It accounts for over 60 percent of the potential for global solar energy. Africa must also create millions of jobs, generate exports and develop its industrial capacity.

I genuinely believe in the potential and impact of what I describe as a new green pact for Africa as one of the drivers of Africa's green transition and economic transformation. This pact will bring together China's capability and African requirements for a better future. It will also manifest the vision of a shared future for the Global South. This cooperation should be comprehensive and include green financing, investment, industrial capacity, knowledge transfer and a common position on climate justice.

The vision for China-Africa cooperation should be more resilient in meeting people's expectations. It should also aim to promote multilateralism and a multipolar world, reform the international financial architecture, and reform the United Nations system and Bretton Woods institutions. New institutions should be established to accelerate economic growth, sustainable development and build a prosperous future.

Let China-Africa cooperation live forever. Let us work for a prosperous, shared future.

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SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

LIXING

An exhausted empire

Without the "safety valve" of sustained outward expansion, political and social decay is accelerating in the US

Samuel Huntington's book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* has retained significant influence. However, it also continues to face criticism for its broad generalizations and controversial assumptions, along with the rising global interconnectedness of economies and cultures that challenge the inevitability of Huntington's vision.

But there is an often overlooked yet critical argument in the work, where Huntington asserts: "The West won the world not by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion ... but rather by its superiority in applying organized violence. Westerners often forget this fact; non-Westerners never do." This statement fosters a deeper understanding of the historical dynamics of US hegemony.

Huntington's statement emphasizes that Western global dominance in modern world history stems not from any inherent cultural or moral superiority but from its mastery of military technology, strategy and state organization. This proficiency allowed European powers to colonize extensive territories, outmaneuver rival nations and dominate global trade and the distribution of resources. Technological advancements, especially in organized warfare — such as firearms, naval forces and later air power — were pivotal in establishing and sustaining Western hegemony on the global stage.

The fact that Western dominance has historically been rooted in organized violence rather than cultural or ideological superiority, undermines claims that universal values such as democracy or human rights are the primary drivers of its global influence. Huntington's assertion explains why global military alliances such as NATO, the "Five Eyes" alliance, the quadrilateral security dialogue (the Quad) among the US, Japan, India and Australia and worldwide military bases, armed interventions in the Ukraine crisis, the Middle East and Afghanistan, as well as ruthless containment of China, are integral to the geopolitical strategy of the United States in the nexus between the "internal and external dimensions of its reliance on organized expansionist violence as its foreign policy tool".

The current international order is



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

designed to uphold the capacity and sustainability of US hegemony across economic, trade and security domains, as well as in cultural leadership, norm-setting and value projection. The architecture of this order was built with an unspoken yet clear underlying objective, explicitly articulated by George Kennan, a US diplomat: "We have 50 percent of the world's wealth but only 6.3 percent of its population ... In this situation, we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity. We should cease to talk about vague and ... unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of the living standards and democratization. The day is not far off when we are going to have to deal in straight power concepts. The less we are then hampered by idealistic slogans, the better."

Kennan's candid statement revealed that the strategic objective of US foreign policy during the Cold War was less about engaging in an ideological battle against the "communist threat" and more about

embedding a "reward mechanism" within the US-led international "rules-based order". This mechanism aims to preserve the vast economic and political inequalities of the international system and the immense privilege and power this global wealth disparity afforded the US. More importantly, this mechanism requires and perpetuates a reciprocal dynamic: the US has to align its internal social, political, economic and defense systems with the external imperatives of imperial armed expansion, while ensuring that its global strategies reinforce its internal structures of power.

As Greg Grandin, a Pulitzer Prize-winning historian, rightly points out: "One of the things that has made America exceptional — compared to other crisis-prone and class-conflicted countries — is that it has long enjoyed a benefit no other modern nation in the world could claim: the ability to engage in ceaseless, endless movement outward."

Greg's observation accurately captures the essence of the argument that the US' pursuit of endless expansion — whether through militarism or markets — has been

instrumental in alleviating domestic tensions and establishing resilient institutions.

Recognizing the inseparable connection between US imperial expansion — military, economic and ideological — and its domestic stability provides key insights into how the US legitimized and sustained its global identity as the embodiment of the "American dream" and "American exceptionalism".

By creating external outlets for economic surplus, fostering ideological cohesion, and promoting social stability and democracy at home, imperial expansion enabled the US to maintain its image as a unique and aspirational global power. This dynamic illustrates a positive connection between outward armed expansion and the preservation of the rewards mechanism, where military intervention and imperial expansion help maintain internal stability and support the broader geopolitical and economic interests of the dominant power.

The rise of Trumpism in 2016 should be seen as signaling the exhaustion of US imperialism. The imperial expansion and interventionist foreign policies that once helped diffuse domestic contradictions had

been in retreat since the Iraq War, the Afghanistan War and the financial crisis. Now, the multifaceted challenges posed by the rise of emerging powers and the Global South — such as the BRICS — along with the Ukraine crisis and China's comprehensive rise, have forced a reckoning with domestic social and economic contradictions that were once displaced outward. In other words, the internal-external rewards mechanism — the "safety valve" of empire — has been exhausted. This inability to project and sustain outward expansion has exacerbated domestic crises, deteriorating systemic inequalities and political decay.

If the victory of Donald Trump in 2016 symbolized the emerging decline of US imperial overstretch and its impact on domestic politics, the question arises: Will his return to the White House represent a deeper structural crisis linked to the weakening of the US' ability to project power and channel domestic conflicts outward through expansion, resulting in a more inward-looking America-firstism?

The new Trump administration is expected to reshape US foreign policy, resulting in the intensification of great power rivalry, the waning influence of neoliberal economics, and the retreat from neoconservative militarism. This transformation may be marked by a pendulum swing between two competing approaches: a revival of internationalism and exceptionalism on the one hand, and a resurgence of nationalist and authoritarian tendencies on the other. Furthermore, it is argued that the US under Trump represents, among other things, a renewed critical rethinking that imperial "organized violence" alone will not ensure continued American dominance.

In this new context, the US' allies in Europe and Asia must prepare for a shifting international order, one where hegemonic superiority in outward organized violence no longer serves as the foundation of dominance.

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CULTURAL HERITAGE



From left: The ancestral hall of the Shen family in Baoji, Shaanxi province, from the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) is a new cultural heritage site discovered during the fourth national census of cultural relics. Census takers measure the Binzhou Cave Temple in Shaanxi, a property of UNESCO World Heritage Site "Silk Roads: the Routes Network of Chang'an-Tianshan Corridor". Census takers record details of a tomb in Baoji.

Zhao Xuyang, the 49-year-old director of the Xianyang Archaeology Institute and head of the team of Shaanxi province's Xianyang city for the fourth national census of cultural relics, had, quite literally, lost track.

It occurred as he was with several young team members rechecking the Qinwangdian Site, ruins of buildings in the remote mountains of Chunhua county, Xianyang, dating back to the 4th to 5th century for the fourth national census.

Although they had GPS data, photos and descriptions of the site left by the third census conducted from 2007 to 2011, they struggled to find paths leading to the mountains, since the people who had lived there moved out in recent years, in response to the proposal of returning farmland to forests for ecological, environmental protection. With fewer people traversing these routes, the mountain pathways gradually faded away, causing the sites to become obscure and Zhao and his colleagues to lose their way.

Fortunately, they met a local man surnamed Yang in his 70s who had previously resided in the mountains but had left years before, only returning occasionally to gather herbs. After a two-hour hike through the hilly terrain, the man guided them to the site.

"If not for Yang, we would not have discovered the location. Looking around, the environment has changed tremendously compared to photos taken before," Zhao says. "At that time, the site was covered with wild grass but is now part of the forest. By checking the stone architectural components left, we identified the site and completed the census work."

Zhao thanks Yang for his help. "Growing up in the mountains, he has traversed every path, possessing an intimate knowledge of the terrain, which enabled him to lead us to the site," Zhao says, adding that such sites, nestled deep in the mountains, may fall into oblivion without helpers like Yang.

These invaluable heritage sites are swept off dust that allows them to reveal their ancient yet charming visages. In this way, the census is a rare opportunity to record cultural relics in the wide territory and involves passing the experience down from generation to generation.

Zhao says he told his young colleagues to remember the experience.

"It's a meaningful trip. During the next fifth census, my colleagues may not find other people who still know the paths and I will probably retire by then. But they still know how to get to its location and can pass on the infor-

Passing down history

Well-equipped archaeologists discover that holding the past in their hands teaches a lifetime worth of lessons, **Wang Ru** reports in Shaanxi province.



An aerial photo of the mausoleum of Emperor Li Shimin of the Tang Dynasty (618-907) in Xianyang, Shaanxi. The site was reexamined during the latest census. PHOTOS BY ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

mation to future generations, so it doesn't disappear," Zhao explains.

New resources

The national census began in November 2023 and will end in 2026. After preparations, field investigations started in May in the cities of Shaanxi. Census takers visit the sites to survey and map them using real-time kinematic devices, take aerial photos with drones and other photos from different angles, measure the sizes of buildings, collect specimens and record all the detailed information in the census database.

In addition to rechecking sites that are already on the list recorded by the third census, members add new sites and gain a better understanding of China's heritage resources. For example, in Baoji, Shaanxi, census takers found a complex of primitive

simplicity when they visited Zifu village, Qishan county, Baoji, to check another site where they discovered the ancestral hall of the Shen family from the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) and added it to their census list.

According to Shen Dekui, who is in his 80s and a descendant of the Shen family, the complex was built in 1833 in memory of their ancestor Shen Jin, a Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) official. The nearly 200-year-old complex was renovated in 2016 through family fundraising and is well-preserved.

"For newly discovered sites, we record their realities and report to the cultural heritage authorities. In the future, they will be identified and possibly classified as sites protected at different levels," Zhao says.

According to Zhou Junli, deputy Party secretary of Zifu village, the village used to have three promi-

nent families — Wang, Zhou and Shen — each with an ancestral hall. However, only the halls of Zhou and Shen families have been preserved.

Zhou says villagers welcome the census and hope ancient buildings will be preserved.

He also mentions that the ancestral hall will be opened to the public to become part of local rural tourist development.

With a picturesque view, the village attracted nearly 10,000 people daily when large fields of yellow rapeseed flowers bloomed last year. Moreover, the millet wine industry is developing and cultural heritage resources will become a new highlight in its rural tourist development, Zhou says.

Professional growth

Li Kunhua, 38, deputy director of the Xianyang Archaeology Institute,

has a different experience in this census from the one she participated in before.

When the third census began, she had just begun her career and became a team member who followed leaders' instructions to accomplish detailed tasks. "I was carefree and devoted to completing tasks," Li recalls.

"But this time, as a group leader, I need to pay attention to more issues like the division of labor, making daily plans, designing itineraries and communicating with grassroots officials to apply for their support. It's not as relaxed as last time; it's much more stressful."

She highlights what she has learned from the census. As an archaeologist, she studies ancient tombs and sites in her daily work but didn't have much knowledge about ancient buildings, such as

cave temples. The census covers different types of immovable cultural heritage sites, filling the gaps of understanding in the area.

"It's such an honor to take part in the census. The sites you visit in person bring a totally different feeling from reading books," she says. "This way, I have a deeper understanding of the heritage sites in Xianyang and their cultural connotations. The census also improves my abilities significantly. I feel proud being involved in it."

Xing Yuting, 26, a new member of the Xianyang Archaeology Institute, participates in the census for the first time and has become a member of Li's team. She highlights Li's role in the team, especially during their visit to the Shijiyuan Site from the Western Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century-771 BC) in Chunhua county.

Hidden under layers of terraced fields, not yet excavated, the site could only be identified by its sections which contained pottery pieces and animal bones. Census members visited the area twice and hiked in the fields but failed to find it, leaving them frustrated.

"At that time, Li encouraged us by repeatedly saying 'It's no big deal. If we cannot find it today, we'll come tomorrow and find it,'" Xing recalls. "She convinced us to view our setbacks with a light-hearted perspective and, ultimately, we succeeded."

To Xing and other team members, Li "shines like the sun" within the team. "I learned so many things from Li, an experienced archaeologist who teaches us lessons we cannot learn in a classroom. Her ways of communicating and treating people also guide my growth," Xing adds.

Bai Xuefan, 23, a senior archaeology major at Northwest University in Xi'an, Shaanxi, also participates in the census. He shares Xing's view that the census work imparts knowledge that cannot be learned in a classroom.

"We are told in class about pottery pieces from different eras but only when we discover the real pieces at the sites, hold them and identify them can we recognize their differences," Bai says.

He also learns from senior members of the team. "Many of our members are approaching retirement age but they hike in the mountains all day with us," he adds. "I have learned so many things from them. In some ways, the census work is a kind of inheritance."

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Experts make light of challenging circumstances

At first I thought being engaged with the fourth national census of cultural relics was straightforward, after interviewing a number of its members.

Every one of them said it had clear and distinct procedures and was not that difficult compared to archaeological excavations that they were involved with all day.

But when I closely observed the census teams in Baoji and Xianyang, Shaanxi province, I began to realize maybe their work is not that easy, as their passion overshadows the difficulties.

The car stopped beside a large area of farmland. After rain in the morning, the soil was moist and the air clean. If not told by archaeologists it's a site from thousands of years ago, I would have thought it's nothing different from other farmlands I had seen. This is the Qiyang Site in Qishan county, Baoji.

Wang Hao, 52, director of the Baoji Institute of Archaeology, led us to a section of the site and point-



Wang Ru
Reporter's Log

ed at it. From there, we could clearly see a red piece in the soil. He pulled it out and removed the soil around it. "It's probably a pottery piece from the Yangshao Culture (a Neolithic culture dating back 5,000 to 7,000 years across the northern part of China)," he says.

Guided by him, we soon discovered more pottery pieces and animal bones from the section. "It's not a treasure-hunting game. In a census, we look for specimens of this type to judge time and type of the site," Wang says.

He especially mentions the discovery of pottery pieces some time before Yangshao Culture, dating back over 7,000 years from this site, which pushed back the site's estimated age by more than a millennium — an unexpected surprise and



Members of a census team of Baoji, Shaanxi province, check the Qiyang Site in the city which has relics from the Neolithic era to the Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century-256 BC). ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

bonus from the census.

Traversing the fields, our footwear accumulated a weighty layer of mud, causing us to feel as though they might slip off with each step. Despite this, the team members persisted in their tasks, too preoccupied to clean the clinging mud.

They measured the scale of the land with their feet by reaching the four corners and middle of the site and using real-time kinematic surveying instruments to record each location's three-dimensional data.

By combining the data with panoramic photos taken by drones, the

outline and extent of the site can be accurately delineated, according to a census taker who operated the devices.

With the advanced high-precision positioning devices, census takers found this time the site covers 330,000 square meters, much larger than the previous understanding of about 60,000 sq m, Wang says.

The relics discovered span several thousand years from the Neolithic era to the Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century-256 BC).

Close to the Qiyang Site is the Zhouyuan Site, a cradle of Zhou culture. Archaeologists believe the Qiyang Site is also related to the thriving of the Zhou people.

I stared at the field, where wheat seedlings seemed to be lush and extending to the sky. What was the site like thousands of years ago? How were people's lives here? It's so hard to imagine things from that long ago. But the relics we have found clearly showed the real existence of the past.

Hou Xiaoqin, 31, a census member, told me she felt excited taking part in the census.

"By participating in the census, I feel like I'm a recorder of the times," she says.

When talking with census takers, I noticed scratches on their arms and legs, caused when they worked in the mountains. They often had to open paths using sickles, but they could not prevent wild plants from scratching them.

Many of the cultural heritage sites that need to be checked are in remote mountainous areas, where climbing steep slopes, crossing deep ravines, traversing dense forests, and wading through rivers are daily routines for census takers, Wang says.

Replying to my question if the census work makes her tired, Hou says, "Working is inherently tiring. But there is a difference between being 'tired yet happy' and 'tired and unhappy'. Engaging in activities you enjoy brings daily happiness despite the fatigue."

CULTURE

Chinese cuisine sets the scene

Famous playwright scripts popular story inspired by Peking duck revolving around the relationship between food and life, which prompts a challenging Cantonese adaptation, **Chen Nan** reports.

On Dec 31, renowned playwright He Jiping visited Quanjude, a famous restaurant known for its traditional Peking duck nestled in the heart of Beijing's Hepingmen area. As she savored the meticulously carved bird, He shared the story behind one of her most celebrated plays, *The Top Restaurant*, which was inspired by the art of roasting duck. The visit not only brought her back to the origins of her inspiration but also allowed her to reflect on the deeper connections between food and life.

"I still recall the days I spent in this restaurant's kitchen, immersing myself in the preparation of the roast duck. I was the only woman and no one spoke to me in the beginning," recalls He, 74. "I observed the chefs, many of whom had shaved heads, as they expertly roasted ducks, sliced scallions, and prepared pancakes.

"I was fascinated by the precision and grace with which they moved and how their body language stayed in sync with the cooking rhythm, mirroring the beat of music."

To understand the craft more deeply, He enrolled in culinary classes to obtain a secondary chef's certificate.

This immersion into Beijing's food culture gave He a wealth of material for her script. After three years of research and rewrites, *The Top Restaurant* was born, depicting the rise and fall of a fictional restaurant called Fajude. The story revolves around the intense rivalry between two brothers and the ambitious Lu Mengshi, who attempts to revive their faltering family business when their father, the restaurant owner, retires due to bad health. The script reflects the artistry of Chinese cuisine while exploring the emotional and philosophical underpinnings of life and human relationships.

In 1988, *The Top Restaurant* premiered at the Beijing People's Art Theatre, an esteemed company with which He had collaborated as a playwright. The play quickly gained fame, becoming one of the theater's best-selling productions. Since then, it has been performed nearly 600 times, including tours to Japan, the United States and Europe, and was later adapted into a highly praised Chinese TV drama.

In 2022, the Hong Kong Repertory Theatre took on the iconic play, bringing with it the challenge of adapting it into Cantonese. This shift added another layer of complexity and charm to the stage play.

With director Roy Szeto and leading actor Tse Kwan Ho, the production toured across China, with recent performances at the Tianqiao Performing Arts Center in Beijing on the past Friday to Sunday and upcoming shows in Shanghai from Friday to Sunday. It will return to Hong Kong from Jan 18 to 26.

"I have worked with the Hong



Kong Repertory Theatre for eight years. When they first adapted the play in 2022, it was a big success, enjoying a sold-out run," says He. "The play, originally shaped by the deep cultural underpinnings of Beijing, has been re-imagined with Hong Kong context, where the Cantonese dialect's rhythm, humor and subtleties offer a fresh take on themes like food, identity and social stratification."

"Food is particularly important to Chinese people, with a culture that spans over a thousand years. I enjoy eating and love cooking," adds He. "Eating is also an art. When the characters in the play talk about food, they reveal something about themselves."

In *The Top Restaurant*, food is not just sustenance — it is a means for the characters to express their innermost selves. For example, Xiu



Top and middle: Collaborating with playwright He Jiping, Hong Kong Repertory Theatre adapted *The Top Restaurant* and has launched a new nationwide tour. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY **Above from left:** Lead actor Tse Kwan Ho, He and director Roy Szeto in Beijing on Dec 31. ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

Dingxin, a central character, is portrayed as someone who deeply understands the art of food. Throughout his life, he studied cuisine and even delivers a monologue in the play about the relationship between eating, managing a family, governing a country, and being a virtuous person.

According to director Szeto, one of the biggest challenges for the Hong Kong theater in adapting this classic play was translating the cultural references, mannerisms and social codes of Beijing into a Hong Kong context.

"Restaurants in Beijing and Hong Kong are very different — from how the chefs work to how servers greet customers. I visited many roast duck restaurants in Beijing to understand their working dynamics and how they communicate with customers," says Szeto,



Food is particularly important to Chinese people ... Eating is also an art. When the characters in the play talk about food, they reveal something about themselves."

He Jiping, playwright

58, in Beijing on Dec 31.

He also notes that *The Top Restaurant* is not just a play about food; it's an immersive experience. The story is set in an exclusive dining establishment, where chefs, servers and diners serve up much more than gourmet dishes. The food is a metaphor for life — a plate of emotion, garnished with wit, humor, and existential musings. It's a roller-coaster of laughter, tears, and everything in between.

The Beijing People's Art Theatre version is performed in the Beijing dialect, which is an integral part of the play's identity. The dialect has a distinct rhythm, intonation and linguistic humor, all of which significantly contribute to the emotional depth and tone of the dialogue. The specific expressions, colloquialisms and cultural nuances embedded in the dialect have a vital role in the play's authenticity and impact.

"While Cantonese is a rich, expressive language in its own right, its vocabulary, intonation and idiomatic expressions differ from the Beijing dialect. Since our rendition is performed in Cantonese, the actors must adapt the language carefully to preserve the comedic timing, emotional depth and local relevance while ensuring that the essence of the original script remains intact," Szeto says.

Since its founding in 1977, the Hong Kong Repertory Theatre has become the city's longest-standing and largest professional theater company.

A renowned actor and former principal performer at the Hong Kong theater, Tse plays the central role of Lu. To prepare for the role, Tse watched various versions of the play by the Beijing People's Art Theatre, including the 1988 premiere.

"Though I don't fully understand the Beijing dialect, I loved the actors' accents and the fast-paced dialogue, which sounded almost like singing," says Tse, 61. "I also love the script and its profound idea that life is like a complex meal, with a mix of bitter, sweet, salty, and sour experiences."

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Audiences eat up TV show's top dishes

By XING WEN
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For over two decades, the documentary series *Across China* has sent reporters across various locations in China to observe the country's evolution from a humanistic perspective. This year, the program produced by China Media Group launched a special season focusing on food titled *Top Dish of Cities*, which features hosts, actors and gourmets traveling to different cities to discover the top dishes that represent the local cuisine.

The show airs on CCTV-4, a channel primarily aimed at overseas viewers that is broadcast in Chinese. "The major advantage of a program like this is that audiences from any country or region can find resonance in food," says Ren Weijiao, chief editor of the show.

"The channel has long been producing food-related programs, using food to tell Chinese stories. With the resources accumulated over the years, we can continuously innovate the program format in

the culinary field."

The special season of *Top Dish of Cities* creatively integrates elements of reality shows, food documentaries and urban exploration. Each episode features a host, an entertainer and a food expert who embark on separate journeys in a city to discover its top dishes, including collecting ingredients, cooking with chefs and discussing the cultural stories behind each dish.

Many of the guests on the show are locals.

Ren emphasizes the importance of featuring local guests as food experts in the program, stating that their perspectives enable the audience to grasp perspectives that might otherwise elude external guests.

The season has filmed the local cuisine of 15 cities and counties, including Datong and Taiyuan in Shanxi province, Putian in Fujian province, Dalian in Liaoning province and Chun'an county in Zhejiang province.

Ren mentions a preference for

selecting smaller cities where the local lifestyle is vibrant, the culinary scene is concentrated, and each dish possesses distinct regional characteristics.

Actress Yu Siyuan was invited to explore the coastal county of Cixi in Zhejiang province, to search for a top dish that would captivate both her heart and taste buds. Cixi boasts extensive mud flats where fishermen gather seafood such as clams, razor clams, and mudskippers when the tide recedes. Yu rode a motorcycle and joined the local fishermen in collecting ingredients needed to prepare the "top dish".

Yu trudged through deep mud, the thick sludge rising above her knees and splashing onto her face. Each step was a struggle as she navigated the muddy flats, experiencing the traditional technique of hook-and-line fishing, where fish are captured using sharp hooks spaced along a mainline.

"Going through the fishing process, I gained a deep appreciation for the value of food and the labor required to procure it. I also deeply

admire the hardworking spirit of fishermen," says Yu.

Wang Guoqiang, director of *Top Dish of Cities*, notes that to make the program both entertaining and profound, they incorporated games designed around the cultural features of each location. For instance, at their stop in Haikou, Hainan province, the guests must learn the local Qiong Opera to vie for priority in visiting restaurants. In Taiyuan, Shanxi province, the guests are required to try their hand at making *huamo*, a locally produced decorated steamed bun.

The program aims to break away from conventional cultural introductions and cleverly infuse local culture into entertaining games, allowing the audience to learn about these elements in a relaxed atmosphere, says Wang.

The show achieved its highest viewership of single episode that rated 58 percent and reached a cumulative audience of 1 billion as of Dec 26, according to industry information from CSM Media Research.



Top from left: CCTV reporter Zhou Xuemei, actor Zhao Zhengting, and vlogger Zhang Wenxiu search for dishes in Huangshi, Hubei province. **Above:** The TV show *Top Dish of Cities* features hosts, actors and gourmets traveling to places to discover the dishes that best represent the local cuisine. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

LIFE



The Open Day Festival of the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing in December features song and dance performances. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

A chance to conduct yourself

NCPA festival gives music lovers an opportunity to perform on virtual stage, Cheng Yuezhu reports.

Those interested in music and performing arts were in for a treat at the Open Day Festival of the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing on Dec 22, which offered diverse cultural experiences, some innovative and interactive, and others that were nourishing for the mind.

One of the highlights was the *Art Reinvented — NCPA Digital Artworks* exhibition, which opened at the festival and will run until Nov 30 this year, offering an overview of the center's efforts in integrating art and technology.

There, visitors can indulge their musical fantasies like being a master conductor at an interactive video installation. It features a giant curved screen displaying a virtual orchestra and creating an immersive onstage experience, where participants can ascend a podium and pick up the baton.

After completing a brief tutorial session under a staff member's guidance, they can then wave the baton in sync with directional arrows on the screen and lead the virtual orchestra to perform excerpts of two classical pieces, the Chinese symphony piece *Ode to the Red Flag* or Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9*.

"Many children were so eager to participate that even though some couldn't meet the height requirement, they were lifted up by their parents so they could take part," says He Meiling, a curator of the NCPA.

"While many participants were unfamiliar with conducting, they could gradually get a feel for it during the experience and begin to naturally wave the baton. Some even started moving their bodies along with the music."

Launched by the NCPA this year, the installation integrates motion-sensing technology and sound mapping. The virtual orchestra is not simply video footage — each member is a motion capture of a real musician, including detailed body gestures, facial expressions and the mouth movements of the choir singers.

Recordings of the two music pieces are provided by the music label NCPA Classics, which were captured during live performances at the NCPA concert hall. The installation adopts surround sound to re-create the rich timbre and spatial depth of the concert hall, providing the participants with an authentic experience.

"This reflects one of our initial intentions when planning this project — to allow people with no prior knowledge to easily experi-

ence the charm of conducting," she says.

"We all know that the conductor plays a pivotal role in a choir or an orchestra, guiding the dynamics, tempo, and the nuances of a piece. We've worked to incorporate all these different gestures into the installation."

The exhibition includes a range of artworks that seek to reinterpret performing arts genres, such as music, dance and traditional Chinese opera, with digital technology, which allows viewers to interact with art and even take part in creating personalized pieces.

Other works include an installation co-created by artist Fei Jun and psychologist Liu Zhengkui that offers a personalized music therapy experience by detecting users' emotions, interactions with the NCPA's virtual employee Art Goose, and a digital screen that allows users to paint Peking Opera makeup and display video excerpts in accordance with the role painted.

"With the core idea that art has endless possibilities, this exhibition aims to present the NCPA's work in performing arts through technological formats," says Sheng Lei, another curator from the NCPA.

"All content in the exhibition hall is digital and interactive, and at the same time, we showcase content from our original productions enhanced by technology. Each project offers in-depth participation and personalized experiences."

Themed "Art for the People, Three Locations in Same Splendor", the Open Day Festival celebrates the 17th anniversary of the NCPA's inauguration, and the first year of the center as a cultural institution of three sites — the NCPA, the Beijing Performing Arts Centre and the NCPA Taihu Stage Art Centre.

With a total of five sessions offering free online booking, the three sites hosted 15 performances and more than 50 cultural activities.

On the day, visitors could attend a variety of live performances. The traditional Chinese performances included *xiangsheng* (cross-talk), *pingshu* (storytelling), *yangge* (a type of Chinese folk dance) from Shaanxi province, and folk songs and dances from Yunnan province.

At the NCPA concert hall, the morning sessions featured two concerts of traditional Chinese orchestra and the afternoon saw two symphony concerts. Visitors could encounter performances of a jazz quartet, a children's choir and flash mob dances in the NCPA's public areas.

They could also attend screenings of recorded stage productions, browse products at the book mar-



From top: The Nobel Prize in literature laureate Mo Yan (center) speaks at a session centered on his works written for theater; a visitor experiences the thrill of a virtual orchestra at an interactive installation at the *Art Reinvented — NCPA Digital Artworks* exhibition; and visitors view a performance of traditional Chinese musical instruments at the NCPA's public space.

ket and cultural creative merchandise market, and listen to experts sharing their thoughts in panel talks. A session highlighted the theater works written by Nobel Prize in literature laureate Mo Yan, who also held a book signing on the day.

For those who could not attend the festival in person, the NCPA also launched an online program in the evening, recapping the festival's highlights and bringing on an online chorus and orchestra concert.

"For the NCPA, 2024 marked a milestone as it became an organization of three sites, which are unique in their positioning and operations," says Zhu Jing, vice-president of the NCPA.

"Upholding the goal of serving the people, cultural confidence, openness and inclusivity, integrity and innovation, we have been introducing a broader variety of cultural and artistic offerings, meeting the demands of audiences and the market."

Over the past 17 years, the NCPA has hosted around 14,000 performances, produced 112 original productions, as well as organized around 650 exhibitions and 15,000 art popularization activities.

In the month or so following the festival, the China NCPA Orchestra, China NCPA Chorus and NCPA resident singers are hosting multiple concerts. The NCPA Chorus celebrated the 15th anniversary of its founding on Dec 8.

Jiao Miao, the chorus' resident conductor, says that the chorus has staged 73 opera productions with more than 1,600 performances, giving young artists a platform of endless potential to consistently improve themselves and exercise their creativity.

"When December approaches each year, all staff members of the NCPA enter a state of excitement, frenzy and anticipation, because we have all kinds of events to celebrate the anniversary and the upcoming New Year," Jiao says.

"It is amid such a joyous and cheerful atmosphere that we are bringing a lineup of events, with the hope that audience members from all walks of life can come to the NCPA and experience the brilliance of stage art."

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Foreigners cook up a treat for hotpot certificate

CHONGQING — A total of 54 people, including 19 foreigners, received their vocational skill certificates as "hotpot chefs" recently, becoming the first batch of professionals to be officially accredited for this occupation in China.

After passing previous cooking exams, these skilled workers from countries such as Poland, Pakistan and Ghana were awarded certificates of various levels during the Launch Ceremony of the Belt and Road International Skills Certification, held in southwest Chongqing municipality late last month.

"I am happy to pass the certification exam and receive my certificate as a junior-level hotpot chef," says Claudia Katarzyna Bzyl, a Polish student at the School of Economics and Business Administration, Chongqing University. She adds that after undergoing systematic training, she now has a deeper understanding of Chongqing's hotpot and has developed a fondness for its food culture.

"I will continue learning and plan to open a Chongqing hotpot restaurant in Poland. Thus, people can savor the Chongqing flavor," Bzyl says.

The role of the hotpot chef was officially recognized in the 2022 edition of China's occupational classification code. A detailed standard outlining the profession's definition, skill levels and vocational training requirements was jointly published in February by China's Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security and the Ministry of Commerce.

Renowned nationwide for its spicy hotpot, Chongqing took the lead in formulating the industry standard. As of June 2024, the municipality was home to around 37,000 hotpot restaurants, with the total output of the hotpot industry chain reaching 300 billion yuan (\$40.1 billion), according to the Chongqing Municipal Commission of Commerce.

Chongqing has made significant progress in establishing an international evaluation system for skilled talent, according to Xie Ligu, head of the Chongqing Municipal Human Resources and Social Security Bureau, the organizer of the ceremony.

During the event, Chongqing also launched other international skills certifications across various sectors, including catering, logistics, the internet and new energy. Furthermore, Chongqing institutions also signed a memorandum of understanding on skills certification cooperation with TUV Rheinland (China) Ltd, a leading testing and certification service provider headquartered in Germany.

XINHUA



Top: Apprentices learn to cook hotpot at a restaurant in Nan'an district, Chongqing. XINHUA Above: Diners enjoy the offerings at a hotpot restaurant in Jiulongpo district, Chongqing. LIU CHAN / XINHUA