

Rewarding ties

Africa reaps huge dividends of modernization via FOCAC  
WORLD, PAGE 8



Inflation means daily struggles for Bangladesh's poor  
ACROSS ASIA, PAGE 7



Battle of brews

Innovation is key as competition in coffee chain market intensifies  
BUSINESS FOCUS, PAGE 6

# CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中国日报 THURSDAY, JANUARY 9, 2025

## Stoppage of Russian gas supply sparks concerns

By SHAO XINYING  
shaoxinying@chinadaily.com.cn

The stoppage of Russian gas supply via a pipeline running through Ukraine has sparked fears of shortages and spiraling energy costs, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe.

It's a no-win situation for the two countries and the European Union, but the United States is likely to gain from the situation, experts said.

Russia's gas exports to Europe via Ukraine through its pipeline network came to a halt on Jan 1, with both Russia and Ukraine confirming the stoppage.

The five-year gas transit deal between Russia and Ukraine expired at the end of 2024, and the latter refused to renew the agreement.

"This was a political decision that did not take into account transit fees as a benefit for its own economics, nor the interests of European countries," Marian Duris, an international affairs analyst and adviser to a member of the European Parliament, told China Daily.

"Thus, these (impacted) countries got a disgraceful retribution," he said, adding, "It is shocking that the EU is not responding to this situation."

Wang Zhen, a researcher of international politics at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of International Relations, said that Ukraine's refusal to extend the transit deal signals a stance of not willing to cooperate or compromise. "It also prevents profits from gas sales from being used to fund military resources," he said, adding, "Russia loses sales, Ukraine forfeits transit fees, and the EU sacrifices access to cheap energy — no one gains in this scenario."

Ukraine now faces losses to the tune of \$800 million annually in transit fees from Russia, while Russia's Gazprom will lose \$5 billion in gas sales.

The stoppage in gas supply has evoked mixed reactions in Europe. While some countries have backed the move, others are wary of its potential impact on energy supplies.

Poland, which took over the EU's rotating presidency from Hungary on Jan 1, has hailed the decision, while Slovakia has strongly opposed it.

"The differing attitudes highlight significant divisions within the EU," Jian Junbo, deputy director of the Center for China-Europe Relations at Fudan University's Institute of International Studies, said. "This is less about an energy crisis and more about political controversy within the EU."

Hungary and Slovakia have alternative access to energy, but at a higher cost.

The Slovakian government said on Tuesday that Prime Minister Robert Fico will discuss the matter with representatives of the European Commission on Thursday.

Fico has argued that Ukraine stopping transit of Russian gas means Slovakia is losing transit revenue and has to pay more to bring gas from elsewhere.

See Gas transit, page 3

## Raging inferno



A helicopter drops water bombs to battle wildfires on Tuesday in the Pacific Palisades neighborhood of Los Angeles, in the US state of California. High winds and low relative humidity are likely to create critical to extremely critical fire weather conditions in southern California through Thursday, the National Weather Service said. Officials said that 30,000 residents were under evacuation orders and more than 13,000 structures were under threat. CAROLINE BREHMAN / EPA-EFE See story, page 10

## Morocco-China relations continue to grow

The years-old relationship between Morocco and China is based on friendship, mutual respect and solidarity. A new dimension was added to the ties with the signing of a strategic partnership in May 2016 during the visit of King Mohammed VI to Beijing.

Morocco and China share the common characteristics of political stability and good governance thanks to the enlightened leaderships of King Mohammed VI and President Xi Jinping, respectively. There has been constancy and sustainability in the close relations that tie both countries, offering numerous opportunities and a promising horizon to lead the nations toward positive and constructive progress.

In 2024, the upward dynamics of the bilateral relations were evident from the numerous visits and high-level exchanges, especially the symbolic visit of Xi to Casablanca on Nov 21 and 22, following his participation in the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting and the G20 Summit.

On this occasion, Xi had the opportunity to engage in an exchange with Moroccan Crown Prince Moulay El Hassan. They celebrated the vitality of the relations that is evident in every field that the two countries cooperate in.

The strength of economic and commercial exchanges as well as the significant increase in Chinese investments in Morocco in areas such as infrastructure, automobile manufacturing, electric batteries, renewable energy and textiles, reflect the continuous upgrading of links between the two countries that will be further consolidated

WORLD WATCH  
By Abdelkader El Ansari

following the restarting of direct flights between Casablanca, Beijing and Shanghai this month.

These flights will help bring people closer by reducing time and distance, while contributing to an increase in the number of Chinese tourists traveling to Morocco.

The Kingdom of Morocco expects to attract more and more Chinese tourists so that they can discover and enjoy the civilization, architecture, culture, traditions, gastronomy and the lifestyle of a state deeply rooted in history of more than 14 centuries characterized by its openness, tolerance, modernity and well-being.

Similarly, China has always been a prime destination for Moroccan tourists, who have been captivated by the richness of its ancient civilization. Furthermore, Chinese universities provide quality training in various fields such as science, innovation and high technologies, attracting each year a substantial number of Moroccan students in quest of excellence.

This multidimensional momentum of the bilateral partnership also benefits China's relations with the rest of the African continent. As a country carrying a vision focused on the development and blossoming of Africa in a framework of peace and stability, the Kingdom of Morocco offers through the Royal initiatives multiple opportunities for connecti-

ty, development and collective progress for the benefit of the peoples. This vision of King Mohammed VI helped break the vicious cycle of poverty and recurrent instability in Africa and provided an entrance space for great projects in the continent necessary to achieve the noble objectives.

The 2024 Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation held in Beijing last September highlighted China's engagement with Africa through promoting peace, defending national sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as by preserving the main principles of equity and justice.

As promoted by the Beijing Declaration adopted during the summit, tripartite cooperation offers both Morocco and China the possibility to create a positive synergy for Africa by combining skills, expertise and complementary visions. These are supported by the Royal initiatives of Morocco and the initiatives of China, among which is the Belt and Road Initiative, for a pacific, developed and connected continent, opening up cooperation and partnerships for the benefit of the African population.

In this regard, Moroccan people have observed with a great deal of admiration the spectacular development that China achieved over the last decades in every single field with the support of all nation's forces ensuring the modernization of the country and prosperity of the friendly Chinese people.

The author is Moroccan ambassador to China. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China.

## XI'S VISION | A SHARED FUTURE

# Expansion of BRICS shows worldwide shift

Growing vitality, strengthened representation bode well for Global South nations, experts say

By ZHAO JIA  
zhaojia@chinadaily.com.cn

As 2025 gets underway, BRICS has continued its expansion, with Indonesia formally joining as its newest full member and eight other nations becoming partner countries. This demonstrates the group's growing vitality and strengthened representation, influence and appeal on the global stage, experts said.

The move, regarded as a milestone in BRICS history, was also seen as signaling a gradual shift in world power dynamics, as the grouping continues to attract Global South nations.

Originally comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, BRICS now accounts for nearly half of the global population, over a third of the global economy, and more than half of the world's economic growth.

Indonesia, which is Southeast Asia's largest economy and the world's fourth-most populous nation, is the first Southeast Asian country to join BRICS as a full member since the group opened the door to expansion in 2023. The new BRICS partner states include Malaysia and Thailand.

Last year, BRICS admitted a number of new members, including Egypt, Ethiopia and Iran, while more than 30 nations reportedly have formally applied to join the intergovernmental organization.

Indonesia's Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday that Jakarta sees its membership as a strategic step to improve the collaboration and cooperation with other developing nations, as well as a commitment to

strengthening multilateral cooperation to create a global structure that is more inclusive and fair.

As BRICS enters a new era of greater cooperation, China has on multiple occasions expressed its readiness to work with the BRICS family to embrace the spirit of openness, inclusiveness and win-win cooperation.

"The future holds tremendous promise for greater BRICS cooperation," Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun told a daily news briefing on Tuesday.

In a speech addressing the 16th BRICS Summit in Kazan, Russia, in October, President Xi Jinping advocated the high-quality development of greater BRICS cooperation, calling on BRICS countries to build the multilateral mechanism into a major venue of solidarity and cooperation for the Global South and a vanguard of global governance reform.

The Chinese leader presented a broad vision at the summit for BRICS countries to stay committed to peace, innovation, green development, justice and closer people-to-people exchanges, in a bid to help BRICS, the leading echelon of the Global South, play a bigger role in building a better shared future for humanity.

Wang Youming, director of the Department for Developing Countries Studies at the China Institute of International Studies, said that in light of the rise of the Global South, China has called for advancing the process of expanding BRICS membership.

See Grouping, page 3

## CHINESE CINEMA TRIES NEW PLOTS, INNOVATION TO SHARPEN ITS IMAGE

With young people preferring shorter video formats, industry at a 'turning point'

By XU FAN  
xufan@chinadaily.com.cn



In a year filled with challenges for the film industry, China once again underscored its crucial role by contributing over 20 percent of global box office in 2024, enhancing its status as the second-largest international movie market.

The year had an upbeat start, with the Spring Festival holiday reaping 8 billion yuan (\$1.1 billion) in takings, topping previous periods and accounting for nearly one-fifth of ticket revenue for 2024, statistics from the China Film Administration and major data tracers Beacon,

and Maoyan Pro showed. However, the May Day, summer vacation, and National Day holiday periods, only slightly surpassed, or even fell below, earnings for 2023. This resulted in total box office takings of 42.5 billion yuan for 2024, a 22.7 percent drop from the previous year.

The number of moviegoers in cities also fell from over 1.29 billion to 1.01 billion.

See Cinema, page 2

## In the spotlight



The three astronauts from China's Shenzhou XVIII crewed mission, Ye Guangfu (center), Li Cong (right) and Li Guangsu, meet with the press on Wednesday, marking their first public appearance since returning from space two months ago. ZHANG WEI / CHINA DAILY

www.chinadailyglobal.com  
Member of ANN  
China Daily Global ©2025 All Rights Reserved  
Newsstand prices: US \$1, Canada C\$1, UK £1, EU €1, Kenya KSh 100, Asia Pacific: Thailand 120, Philippines 120, Myanmar 2000, Japan 210, Dubai 10, Pakistan 300, rupee

# PAGE TWO

From page 1

Despite the decline, construction of cinema facilities surged ahead. A total of 4,658 new screens were installed in 2024, catapulting the country's total to 90,968, the highest amount in the world. Domestic films maintained their market dominance, earning 33.4 billion yuan and accounting for 78.68 percent of total box office revenue for the year.

"China has remained one of the most active film markets in the world, but the domestic film industry is at a turning point," said Yin Hong, deputy chairman of the China Film Association, while emphasizing the need for local filmmakers to step up their efforts, be persistent in innovation, and pursue breakthroughs when facing challenges.

The primary factors influencing the film industry include the limited output of captivating films and young people's growing preference for short videos, industry insiders said.

Last year, the market size of micro dramas, short low-budget productions, surged to 50.44 billion yuan, marking a 34.9 percent year-on-year increase and surpassing the annual box office revenue of the film industry for the first time, according to the China Netcasting Services Association.

Yin said regaining audiences, especially the younger generation, and reigniting their enthusiasm for big screen films, is an urgent goal for cinema operators and filmmakers.

## Domestic blockbusters

Chinese filmmakers produced 873 films last year, with the vast majority, 612 of them, dramas.

Seventy-nine Chinese and foreign movies each achieved box office earnings exceeding 100 million yuan, the bench mark for blockbusters. The figure was six more than in 2023.

Comedian Jia Ling's tale of boxing redemption *YOLO* was the highest-grossing film, amassing 3.4 billion yuan. Starring in and directed by Jia, the film follows an overweight woman's journey to regain self-confidence through boxing after being looked down on by her employer, boyfriend, and relatives.

As one of the country's most sought-after comedians, Shen Teng saw his two films *Pegasus 2* and *Successor*, secure the second and third spots in box office takings.

*Pegasus 2*, which tells the story of struggling rally driver's underdog victory, earned 3.36 billion yuan, while *Successor*, an unconventional parenting journey of a wealthy man, netted 3.33 billion yuan.

Renowned director Zhang Yimou's *Article 20*, which raised public awareness about justifiable defense, was the fourth highest-grossing film. The 10th installment of the beloved animated franchise, *Boonie Bears: Time Twist*, grabbed fifth position with earnings of 1.98 billion yuan.

They were followed by three Chinese films: the crime thriller *A Place Called Silence*, the war epic *The Volunteers: The Battle of Life and Death*, and the workplace comedy *Johnny Keep Walking!*

Unlike 2023, where all 10 of the highest-earning films were Chinese titles, two imported blockbusters secured spots in the top 10 list. *Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire* took ninth position, while Japanese animation legend Hayao Miyazaki's *The Boy and the Heron*, which won an Oscar winner for Best Animated Feature Film, claimed the 10th spot.

Overall, imported films experienced a resurgence in China. Their box office revenue accounted for 21.3 percent of total earnings, and was the highest share by foreign films in five years. Hollywood scored commercial success with space thriller *Alien: Romulus*, superhero film *Venom: The Last Dance*, the Marvel action-comedy *Deadpool & Wolverine*, and the sci-fi epic *Dune: Part Two*.

Rao Shuguang, president of the China Film Critics Association, said the resurgence of interest in imported films was a good sign. A potential future increase of foreign films' revenue share to 30 to 40 percent of takings will enhance the diversity and dynamics of the local movie market, he added.

"Foreign films' storytelling skills, visual effects techniques, and successful formulas can serve as references for Chinese films, while also catering to the diverse demands of audiences of different ages and backgrounds," Rao said.

## Innovative success

Traditionally, cinemas have been viewed as tranquil spaces where viewers are expected to remain quiet, enabling audience members to fully immerse themselves in the story unfolding on the screen. However, industry players are exploring innovations that go beyond this convention.

During the 2024 Paris Olympics, over 800 cinemas nationwide were selected to livestream the Games from a pool of 10,000. The participating venues had over 2,300 screenings that attracted 55,000 visitors and earned 2.4 million yuan in box office revenue, according to China Film Co, the organizer.

# Cinema: Diversity gives vibrancy to industry



A promotional event for *YOLO* is held in Xiangyang, Hubei province, on Feb 15. YANG DONG / FOR CHINA DAILY



Top: A poster of *Her Story* at a cinema in Shanghai in December. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY  
Above: Visitors engage in a discussion at the China-Brazil Film Exhibition in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on Aug 26. WANG TIANCONG / XINHUA

## 2024 year in Review

As these acclaimed films by female directors depicting women's issues emerge, the plights and struggles of women can be seen by more people, giving the movies a richer social significance."

Zhi Feina, professor at the Chinese National Academy of Arts



Left: Local audience attend the opening of the 4th Chinese Movie Week in Tehran, Iran, on Sept 23. SHADATI / XINHUA



Right: Chinese and foreign filmmakers and actors attend an exchange seminar during the Cannes Film Festival in France in May. ZHANG BAIHUI / XINHUA



An audience member reads the brochure for a Chinese film during China Film Week in Canberra, Australia, on Sept 11. CHU CHEN / XINHUA

Yu Xiaoyan, a 34-year-old sports fan from Beijing, recalled seeing the thrilling moment when Zheng Qinwen secured China's first Olympic gold medal in tennis singles by defeating Croatia's Donna Vekic. Yu found it exhilarating to shout and cheer for her favorite athlete in the cinema, while experiencing an enhanced visual experience.

In 2024, some local cinemas also functioned as venues where fans could revisit iconic performances by their idols.

Similar to the concert film *Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour*, the Jason Zhang *Brilliance Tour* captured three concerts by the popular singer at the Beijing National Stadium, in 159 minutes of screen time. The concerts were part of Zhang's *The Future Live: Yao Beidou* tour, which spanned two years and included 23 shows in 13 cities, and attracted a combined audience of over 900,000.

The film grossed over 46 million yuan at the box office, according to Beacon, breaking several box office records for domestic musicals.

Zhi Feina, a professor at the Chinese National Academy of Arts, said that such innovations have energized the film market and attracted more young audiences to cinemas.

She cited other innovations, such as director Jia Zhangke's *Caught by the Tides*, which received a Palme d'Or nomination at the 77th Cannes Film Festival last year. The film employed a striking and ceremonial approach to hold theatrical screenings in just 22 days, symbolizing the 22-year production process behind it. Normally, a film is screened in theaters for a month.

"In the relatively less busy box office seasons, the market can also re-screen classics to attract a larger audience," Zhi said. "For instance, the eight films of the *Harry Potter* franchise were re-screened in 3,400 cinemas last year, also achieving box office success."

## Word-of-mouth winners

Women comprised 58 percent of all moviegoers last year, an 11 percent increase from the proportion in 2023. This gender shift in viewership has set the stage for a rise in films focused on women and delving into feminist themes, as indicated in a report co-released by the China Film Association and Beacon.

As the most successful films in this category, *Her Story* was director Shao Yihui's second feature depicting independent women in modern society. It received a score of 9.1 points out of 10 on the review aggregator Douban, making it one of the highest-rated Chinese films of the year.

Centered around three unconventional female characters, the film boldly delves into women's perspectives on sex, and confronts societal taboos surrounding menstruation with a light and humorous approach.

A dark horse in cinema earnings, the film topped China's single-day box office charts for 24 consecutive days. With earnings of 715 million yuan, it became the highest-grossing film in November, surpassing British director Ridley Scott's sword-and-sandal epic *Gladiator II*, and Disney's animated film *Moana 2*.

Other women-centric films garnering acclaim through word-of-mouth included *Like a Rolling Stone*, based on the true story of a woman in her 50s who courageously leaves her abusive husband to embark on a cross-country road trip, and *Chinatown Cha-Cha*, a documentary that follows a group of senior dancers from San Francisco's Chinese nightclub scene.

"As these acclaimed films by female directors depicting women's issues emerge, the plights and struggles of women can be seen by more people, giving the movies a richer social significance," said Zhi.

Scoring 9.3 points on Douban, the highest rating among all Chinese films this year, *The Sinking of the Lisbon Maru* stands out as the most popular documentary of 2024. Directed by Fang Li over an eight-year period, the film chronicles his investigations into a tragic incident during World War II — the sinking of a Japanese ship carrying 1,816 British prisoners of war, which was torpedoed by a United States submarine in 1942.

The film won the Best Documentary at the 37th Golden Rooster Awards and was selected as China's entry to compete in the Best International Feature Film category at the 97th Academy Awards.

Rao, from the China Film Critics Association, said the film is inspirational, showcasing that an excellent documentary is not only a window to revisit history or observe contemporary life, but can also play a pivotal role in boosting the diversity of the domestic film market.

"During the post-pandemic era, the market is confronted with a generation of young audiences who are more accustomed to consuming video content on the internet. Chinese filmmakers should refine their storytelling skills and elevate their artistic creations to produce higher-quality work. I believe that Chinese cinema has a promising future with new talent," said Rao.

## TOP NEWS

## Xizang quake survivors embrace warmth

A total of 12,000 people participated in the rescue work and relief efforts, says official

By DAQIONG and PALDEN NYIMA in Shigatse, Xizang and CHEN MEILING in Beijing

Steam rising from pots simmering over fires and the cold breath of people huddled together in front of tents at -16 C gave the semblance of life returning to normal in Dingri on Wednesday, a day after the county in Shigatse, Xizang autonomous region, was struck by a magnitude 6.8 earthquake.

Children waited in line for a meal of eggs outside the temporary shelters, while older people tried to put to rest the memories of the disaster, which reduced more than 3,600 houses to rubble, claimed 126 lives and injured many more.

At a relief camp in Guring village in Dramso township, 55-year-old Sangye basked in the sun, holding a prayer wheel and chanting scriptures. "Natural disasters can't be avoided. Although our house collapsed, my family was brought to a warm tent last night, and we were able to sleep," she said, thanking relief and rescue workers for their untiring efforts to resettle people.

Looking at a new stove her family received as part of relief efforts on Wednesday, Sangye added, "Tonight, we will be even warmer," as she folded her hands in gratitude.

Unfortunately, it was an uneasy night on Tuesday for Penba Norbu, deputy head of Dramso township. He recalled how he felt the strong shaking of his dormitory and noticed walls cracking before he ran outside. The township officials formed groups to check the villages.

When he arrived at Tsa village, Penba Norbu saw a child whose head was bleeding, some people with broken legs and those trapped under the debris of collapsed houses.

Six out of about 464 people living in the village died, but the others

were rescued. When a series of aftershocks rocked the area, he sent out a notice on WeChat, reminding villagers to take care and report damage.

Penba Norbu said he felt relieved after the medical and rescue teams arrived, and the villagers were moved to temporary shelters. "There are enough tents and daily necessities. We can get through this," he added.

At a news conference held in Shigatse on Wednesday, Hong Li, director of Xizang Emergency Management Department, said about 12,000 people participated in the rescue and relief efforts, including public security personnel, the armed police, forest firefighters and the military. Together, they rescued 407 trapped individuals, he said.

A total of 187 relocation sites have been established in Dingri and 46,500 people have been moved. The 484 tourists who were visiting the county left the place as of Wednesday noon.

The relief tents are equipped with folding beds, cotton blankets, heaters, generators, stoves and emergency lighting, while people staying there have been provided with coats and warm footwear, besides food and medicine, the official said.

"The area is at a high altitude and is bitterly cold. We need to guarantee basic living conditions for the affected people, keep them warm and help them rebuild their homes as soon as possible," he added.

Hong said that 391 medical workers had been sent to help with the relief work. Among those severely injured, most have head injuries. Others have fractures. The critically injured people have been transferred to Shigatse People's Hospital.

Communication networks and power supplies in the affected area have been restored, he said, adding that the current disaster-relief work will be focused on relocating survivors and completing post-dis-



A rescue worker serves sweet tea to earthquake-affected residents of Tsogo township in Shigatse, South-west China's Xizang autonomous region, on Wednesday. The quake killed 126 people and left 188 others injured. LI LIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

## Messages of condolence pour in

China had received messages of condolence in various forms from the leaders of 22 countries as of Wednesday morning regarding the deadly magnitude 6.8 earthquake that jolted Dingri county of Shigatse in the Xizang autonomous region on Tuesday.

The countries are Russia, Pakistan, Nepal, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Maldives,

Japan, Cuba, Venezuela, Serbia, Belarus, Spain, Italy, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Oman, Grenada, El Salvador and Uzbekistan.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said at a news briefing in Beijing on Wednesday that China also received expressions of sympathy from the foreign ministries of countries including India, Brazil, Egypt, the United Arab

Emirates, Türkiye, Bahrain and Iran. United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Nurlan Yermekbayev and President of the Central American Parliament Carlos Hernandez also extended condolences.

"We express sincere appreciation for that," Guo said.

MO JINGXI

aster reconstruction.

Tan Xiangdong, deputy director of the Xizang Health Commission, said at the news conference in Shigatse that doctors from Beijing, Shanghai, and Chengdu in Sichuan province have arrived in the region to treat those in critical condition.

Special teams have also arrived to test water quality, disinfect the environment and promote health awareness to prevent an epidemic, he added.

Meng Hui, deputy director of the Xizang Earthquake Agency, said that as of Wednesday noon, 646 after-

shocks were recorded, with the strongest being of magnitude 4.4.

He did not rule out the possibility of more quakes of magnitude 5 to 6 over the next few days.

Contact the writers at chenmeiling@chinadaily.com.cn

## FOCAC fuels Sino-African cooperation

By ZHOU JIN zhoujin@chinadaily.com.cn

Foreign Minister Wang Yi has expressed willingness to further "burnish the credentials" of the

## Inside

Comment, page 11

map for the development of the forum over the next three years.

Wang made the remarks at a news conference on Tuesday after meeting with President of the Republic of Congo Denis Sassou Nguesso in Brazzaville, the capital of the country.

Wang said his visit to the Central African country aims to build up consensus on improving and upgrading FOCAC.

In the next three years, a series of meetings and events, including a coordinators' meeting on the implementation of the follow-up actions of the ministerial conference of FOCAC, the China-Africa Year of People-to-People Exchanges and the 10th FOCAC Ministerial Conference, will be held to gradually implement the outcomes of the FOCAC summit held in Beijing last year, according to Wang.

At the Beijing summit, the two sides adopted a declaration on jointly building an all-weather China-Africa community with a shared future for the new era and an action plan for FOCAC for the next three years.

The top diplomat highlighted the role of FOCAC in promoting Africa's development and improving the well-being of African people, calling

it a symbol of China-Africa solidarity and cooperation, a banner of South-South cooperation, and a model for guiding international cooperation with Africa.

In the 25 years since the establishment of the forum, China has helped Africa build 100,000 kilometers of roads, more than 10,000 km of railways, nearly 1,000 bridges and nearly 100 ports, with more than 1 million jobs created in Africa over the past three years alone.

Wang noted that the livelihood projects implemented in Africa have benefited the people of many African countries.

In order to implement the outcomes of the Beijing summit, Wang called for further aligning development strategies and increasing exchanges of governance experience.

He also called for efforts to ensure the full implementation of the zero-tariff treatment that has been granted to some African countries, put in place a China-Africa network featuring land-sea links and advance 1,000 "small and beautiful" livelihood projects.

The two sides should improve the China-Africa investment and trade cooperation mechanism, in order to provide Africa with a broader market, more practical technologies, and more stable investment for its modernization, he said.

On the joint efforts of China and Africa to address climate change, the foreign minister said that China will work with African countries to carry out the clean energy projects proposed at the Beijing summit, and build the "Africa Solar Belt" to help Africa truly embark on the path of

green and low-carbon development.

China has always supported Africa in achieving green development. The installed capacity of photovoltaic power stations jointly built by China and Africa has exceeded 1.5 gigawatts, lighting up numerous homes across the continent.

China will work hand in hand with Africa to promote international climate governance, Wang said.

Upholding the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities, China also calls on developed countries to provide financial, technical and capacity-building support to developing countries, especially African nations, he added.

In his meeting with Wang, Sassou Nguesso said that he expects China's emphasis on Africa will lead to greater attention and more support for the continent from the international community.

He mentioned the pressing need to address challenges facing Africa, pledging to advance the 10 partnership action plans China proposed at the Beijing summit and strive for progress in China-Africa cooperation.

The Republic of Congo is the second stop, after Namibia, of Wang's New Year visit to four African countries.

China's Foreign Ministry announced earlier this month that Wang was scheduled to visit Namibia, the Republic of Congo, Chad and Nigeria from Jan 5 to Saturday at the invitation of these countries.

This is the 35th consecutive year that a Chinese foreign minister has visited Africa on the first overseas trip at the start of the year, according to the Foreign Ministry.

## Gas transit: Vacuum set to be filled by alternative suppliers

From page 1

Fico, who has warned of the "drastic" impact of the supply stoppage on EU countries, estimated Slovakia's losses at 500 million euros (\$514.67 million) and said he would push for the resumption of gas flows or compensation.

"No one stood up to protect the member states that were harmed by this halting," Duris the international affairs analyst said.

"If this decision had been made with the participation of the EU, it would have been an even worse scenario and would have meant deliberate harm to the national interests of certain countries," he added.

Balint Kecskes, an international relations expert based in Budapest, Hungary, noted that Europe's economic strategy has long relied on three pillars of successful Western industry, strong European purchasing power, and cheap Russian raw materials.

Now the EU wants to completely end gas purchases from Russia by 2027, but the deadline "is clearly in danger", Kecskes said. "Europe can live without Russian raw material, but the price is already high."

After the Russia-Ukraine conflict began in February 2022, gas prices surged dramatically — in some cases by more than 20 fold — forcing some European factories to reduce production and many small businesses to shut down, German news agency DW reported.

Natural gas prices in Europe have surged by 20 percent after the latest stoppage in supply, Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Peter Szijarto said in a Facebook post on Tuesday.

He attributed the increase in natural gas prices to "artificially

imposed reductions in supply".

Szijarto warned the rising gas prices will "create new competitiveness challenges" for the EU. Meanwhile, Goldman Sachs has warned that the combination of halting Russian gas flows and colder-than-expected weather could push prices to 84 euros per megawatt hour.

Sevim Dagdelen, a member of the German parliament, criticized the supply stoppage on social media, saying: "The German government and the EU are happily watching the destruction of European industry due to high energy prices."

Despite the EU's efforts in mitigating energy costs after shifting away from Russia, Europe has felt the impact, with higher energy costs hitting its industrial competitiveness, Wang of Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences said.

"Rising energy prices have forced some industries to scale back operations, especially in energy-intensive sectors like manufacturing, contributing to Europe's broader economic struggles," he added.

As Europe weans itself off Russian energy supplies, this vacuum has gradually been filled by alternative suppliers.

In 2023, the US was the largest supplier of liquefied natural gas to the EU, representing almost 50 percent of total LNG imports, according to the Council of the EU. In 2023, compared with 2021, imports from the US almost tripled. Meanwhile, Russia's share of pipeline gas in EU imports dropped from 40 percent in 2021 to about 8 percent in 2023.

"It is no secret that Russia's market share in Europe has been gradually taken over by the US since the beginning of the conflict," Duris the analyst said.

"Part of this increased import of so-called US LNG is just 'repackaged' Russian LNG," he added.

Jian from Fudan University said: "Objectively speaking, the US is indeed benefiting from this situation, as it increases Europe's reliance on American liquefied natural gas," adding that this dependence is likely to deepen.

"However, while this may strain relations, the gas stoppage mainly fuels rhetoric rather than having a substantial impact on the security aspects of the Russia-Ukraine conflict," Jian added.

## Grouping: Influence, voice of BRICS countries enhanced

From page 1

China has also called for establishing a partner country mechanism to enhance the representation and voice of developing nations in global governance, foster greater democracy in international relations, and promote a multipolar world, Wang said.

The expansion of BRICS to Southeast Asia for the first time also means that the influence and voice of the BRICS countries in international and regional affairs have been enhanced, Wang added.

## New governance model

Zhu Jiejun, a professor at Fudan University's School of International Relations and Public Affairs, highlighted that BRICS' adoption of a new governance model — characterized by equal cooperation, mutual respect, collective decision-making and policy coordination — has enhanced its attractiveness.

As an example, he cited the New Development Bank, the first multilateral development bank established entirely by emerging economies and developing nations.

"Unlike the World Bank, the NDB ensures equality by granting all founding member states equal voting rights, with no country holding veto power. This institutional framework guarantees fairness, mutual benefit and respect among its members," Zhu said.

Official data showed that since its inception in 2015, the NDB has financed more than 100 projects, with total loans reaching approximately \$35 billion.

BRICS countries endowed with abundant natural resources, advanced manufacturing, vast markets and technological advantages have transcended the outdated concept of "winner takes all" and embraced a model of complementary strengths, said Liu Ying, a research fellow at Renmin University of China's Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies.

The grouping has become a major force in opposing protectionism while expanding the global economic pie, she added.

Economist Alexey Saliychuk hailed China in an earlier interview for championing innovation and green development to boost growth among the BRICS family. He mentioned China's success in the production of electric vehicles, lithium batteries and photovoltaic products, saying that "all these products are the backbone of the green transition of the world economy".

## High-quality upgrading

China announced in October the establishment of several key institutions, including a BRICS Digital Ecosystem Cooperation Network, and welcomed active participation from all interested parties to drive the high-quality upgrading of BRICS cooperation.

Lan Qingxin, director of the University of International Business and Economics' BRICS Research Center, said, "The open and inclusive nature of BRICS cooperation continues to attract more countries to join, especially amid intensified strategic competition among major powers and escalating regional conflicts."

On critical issues such as geopolitical crises, a greater BRICS has played a leading role in amplifying the voice of the Global South in advocating for fairness and justice, Lan said, adding that it also promotes dialogue and consultation to resolve disputes, contributing to security, stability and a favorable environment for development.

China-proposed initiatives have received positive responses from the international community, he said. China has jointly issued a six-point consensus with Brazil on a political solution to the Ukraine crisis and launched a "Friends of Peace" group with other Global South countries.

## Symbol of friendship

Diplomats from China and Indonesia unveil a logo to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two nations in Jakarta, Indonesia, on Tuesday. The logo was created by an Indonesian youth who won a design competition.

AGUNG KUNCAHYA B. / XINHUA



## CHINA

# China's parcel delivery on record high

2024 data shows sector has become pillar of thriving e-commerce services

By LUO WANGSHU  
luowangshu@chinadaily.com.cn

China's parcel delivery industry shattered all previous records in 2024, handling a staggering 174.5 billion packages — equivalent to more than 124 per person in the country. The rapid expansion of the sector underscores not only the growing dependence of Chinese consumers on e-commerce, but also the increasing role express delivery plays as a barometer of the economy.

This explosive growth comes as no surprise. The total volume of express delivery services last year reached 174.5 billion parcels, marking a 21 percent increase over the previous year. Meanwhile, business income from these services surged to 1.4 trillion yuan (\$191 billion), reflecting a 13 percent growth.

"The postal and express delivery industry has become a driving force in China's logistics sector, and for 11 straight years, it has ranked first globally in delivery volume," said Zhao Chongjiu, head of the State Post Bureau of China, at the bureau's annual conference on Wednesday in Beijing.

"The integration of express delivery into daily life has been profound. It now serves as a vital indicator of both economic vitality and development," he added.

As more parcels move through the country's vast logistics network, it is clear that express delivery is no longer just about transporting packages from point A to point B — it has become a powerful symbol of China's thriving economy.

Across the nation, particularly in the central and western regions, delivery networks have been rapidly expanding. In 2024, express delivery volumes in these regions grew by 30 percent and 35 percent, respectively, compared to the previous year. This expansion has significantly helped bridge the development gap between urban and rural areas.

Subsidized shipping policies to remote villages, such as those in the Xinjiang Uygur and Inner Mongolia autonomous regions, have brought e-commerce services to areas that once struggled with limited access to goods and services.

This growth has also unlocked new economic opportunities, enabling businesses in emerging sectors such as livestreaming e-commerce and cross-border trade to thrive. Online retail sales of physical goods soared last year, and the delivery industry played a crucial role in facilitating these

transactions. This makes it an essential partner in the ongoing digital transformation of the economy.

The result of this booming logistics network is felt in every corner of the country — transforming not only how businesses operate, but also how ordinary people live.

One striking example is the story of Zilati, a young man from the Tajik ethnic group who married last year in a remote village in Tashikurgan Tajik autonomous county, Xinjiang.

As he prepared for his wedding, Zilati was able to purchase nearly everything online — from decorations to large appliances such as a refrigerator — and have it delivered directly to his home. In the past, such a task would have required a long and arduous journey to Kashgar, the nearest big city. Thanks to the expanding logistics network, he was able to concentrate on enjoying his special day.

"I never imagined that my wedding could be this easy," Zilati said. "It's so convenient. I bought the wedding chocolates and decorations online. In the past, we had to travel to Kashgar, which took more than 10 hours. Now, thanks to online shopping, I was able to focus on celebrating my wedding rather than worrying about logistics."

In 2024, the average Chinese consumer received over 120 parcels annually, with the country's delivery network processing more than 5,500 every second.

Looking ahead, the industry is showing no signs of slowing down. In 2025, express delivery volume is projected to reach 190 billion, with corresponding revenue of 1.5 trillion yuan.

"The key growth drivers for the express delivery industry in 2025 will mainly come from the domestic e-commerce market, which continues to grow rapidly, especially with emerging e-commerce platforms like Douyin and Kuaishou driving market expansion. Internationally, cross-border e-commerce will be a major driver, with express delivery companies accelerating their global expansion, contributing to the growth of national delivery services," said Zhou Zhicheng, director of the Research Office of China Federation of Logistics and Purchasing.

As China's express delivery sector continues to expand, it is clear that the logistics industry is not only driving economic growth, but is also becoming an integral part of everyday life for millions.

## Seafood soiree



People gather around a giant pot with a 6-meter diameter filled with seafood, including scallops, abalones, oysters, clams, crabs and large prawns, at the launching ceremony of a local seafood fair in Rongcheng, Shandong province, on Tuesday. The fair celebrating the upcoming Spring Festival holiday also featured craftsman stalls showcasing intangible cultural heritage products and folk performances. LI XINJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Documentary: 'White gloves' cloaked corrupt officials

By JIANG CHENGLONG  
jiangchenglong@chinadaily.com.cn

An anti-corruption documentary aired on Tuesday night revealed that some former senior officials involved in corruption used family members or close associates as "white gloves" to conduct power-for-money transactions and evade detection.

The third episode of the documentary, jointly produced by the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, the National Commission of Supervision and the China Media Group, exposed Tang Yijun, former governor of Liaoning province and minister of justice. He used companies controlled by his wife as a cover-up for his corrupt activities to present them as market operations, according to the program.

Tang was placed under investigation in April last year. His wife, Xuan Minjie, had extensive experience in finance and economics and ventured into business in 2005, after holding a senior position at a State-owned enterprise. According to the documentary, Xuan's initial capital for entering the business world was obtained through Tang's influence. At that time, he was serving as deputy Party secretary of Ningbo city, Zhejiang province.

A company collaborated with Xuan's firm on a real estate project. However, she didn't need to make any investment, as her husband intervened with relevant departments and secured the land-use rights and other necessary approvals for the project. After the project was completed, Xuan's company profited over 5 million yuan (\$681,970) under the guise of exiting the project and receiving equity compensation.

This zero-investment windfall demonstrated the benefits of power, which Tang and his wife found enticing, according to the documentary.

It revealed that Tang operated behind Xuan who, in turn, hid behind multiple proxies, controlling several shadow companies. This complicated the investigation. However, based on clues, investigators used big data techniques to uncover more shadow companies, suspected proxies and bribery suspects linked to Xuan, gradually revealing the truth behind the guise.

The investigation found that the couple meticulously disguised each bribe as a different business activity. From 2012 to 2017, a tech company gradually acquired a small company controlled by Xuan, resulting in her holding 4.5 million original shares of the tech company.

The acquisition aimed to leverage

Tang's influence to facilitate the company's public listing. He used his position to advocate for the company with relevant officials. After the company was listed, the value of Xuan's shares soared, resulting in profits exceeding 40 million yuan, completing the massive transfer of benefits under the guise of market operations.

Sensing the risk of being investigated, the couple initially colluded with relevant individuals to fabricate stories and conceal evidence. They resisted the investigation with lies at the beginning. However, when the special investigation team presented them with solid evidence obtained through big data analysis, the couple's "psychological defenses" quickly crumbled, according to the documentary.

Tang was found to have used his positions to benefit others in business operations, company listings, promotions and case handling, receiving substantial illegal gains. In October, he was expelled from the Party and dismissed from public office, with his suspected criminal activities referred to the procuratorial authorities for prosecution.

Additionally, the documentary disclosed similar corruption by Sun Zhigang, former Party secretary of Guizhou province, who came under

investigation in August 2023. Sun exploited his position to benefit others in project contracts and share subscriptions, receiving substantial illegal gains.

The investigation revealed that several close relatives were involved in Sun's corrupt activities, with his brother, Sun Shaowu, acting as his primary "collector". The brother, who had long been involved in business, leveraged Sun's influence to interfere in market activities in Guizhou.

A company seeking to operate in Guizhou needed the former provincial Party chief's support for certain projects. He agreed to assist but requested that the firm acquire equity in a land project owned by the brother in Wuhan, Hubei province. The company executive, with the intention of currying favor with the former official, completed the acquisition at a price far above the market rate.

Sun's wife and son also exploited his power to gain resources and interfere in projects for personal gain. The investigation found that Sun directly or indirectly accepted money and goods illegally from relevant organizations and individuals, amounting to over 813 million yuan.

Sun was sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve for bribery last year.



Couriers sort parcels inside a logistics park in Suqian, Jiangsu province, on Wednesday. WANG LI / FOR CHINA DAILY

### STATEMENT

Mr. Yang Jiantang passed away due to illness in Shanghai on July 9, 2024. He had a legacy support agreement before his death, and bequeathed 30% of the property located at Room 304, No. 22, Lane 805, Zhongshan North Road, Shanghai to Chen Anli. Chen Anli has now applied to Shanghai Jing'an Notary Public Office for relevant notarization. This statement is hereby issued. If anyone claims any rights against the above, please bring relevant evidence to Shanghai Jing'an Notary Public Office within 30 days from the date of publication of this statement. If no expression is made within the deadline, it shall be deemed that there is no objection to the validity of the testamentary support agreement.

Contact: Gao Shujuan  
Address: Rm 801, He Yi Building, 418 Jiangning Road, Shanghai 200041, China  
Phone: 86-21-3217-0327 or 86-21-6215-9911; Fax: 86-21-6217-4237

## Shanghai opens its doors to foreign-owned hospitals

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai  
zhouwenting@chinadaily.com.cn

Shanghai announced on Wednesday plans to encourage the establishment of wholly foreign-owned hospitals in the municipality's key economic zones, biopharmaceutical industry clusters and downtown districts with a high concentration of expatriate residents.

Each of these areas will allow a maximum of two foreign-owned hospitals. Key economic zones include the free trade zone, the Lingang Special Area, the Hongqiao business district and the eastern hub international business cooperation zone.

According to a document published on the municipal government's website, the pilot program aims to deepen the opening-up of the healthcare sector, enhance the diversity of healthcare services and improve the city's business environment.

Shanghai's move responds to a national initiative released in late November, which permits wholly foreign-owned hospitals in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen in Guangdong province, and five other cities or regions.

Experts believe this initiative will attract foreign investment, promote

high-quality development in the country's medical services and better meet the public's diverse healthcare needs.

The Shanghai document specifies that foreign investors must demonstrate advanced hospital management concepts, models and service standards. They are also required to provide cutting-edge medical technologies and equipment at an international level, complement or enhance local healthcare service capabilities and expand the diversity of healthcare offerings.

Approved hospital categories include general hospitals, specialized hospitals and rehabilitation hospitals, all of which will be designated as tertiary medical institutions. However, foreign investors are not permitted to establish hospitals dedicated to psychiatric diseases, infectious diseases, hematology, traditional Chinese medicine, integrated TCM and Western medicine, or those specializing in minority ethnic medical practices.

Additionally, wholly foreign-invested hospitals are prohibited from engaging in high-risk medical and ethical activities, including organ transplantation, assisted reproductive technologies, prenatal screening and diagnosis, inpatient psychiatric

treatment and experimental treatments using tumor cell therapy.

The initiative allows these hospitals to hire expatriate physicians and healthcare professionals from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan. However, at least half of the hospital's management and healthcare professionals must come from the Chinese mainland.

The document was jointly issued by the Shanghai Municipal Health Commission, the Shanghai Municipal Commission of Commerce, the Shanghai Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine and the Shanghai Municipal Bureau for Disease Control and Prevention.

Industry insiders regard the move as a significant step toward broadening Shanghai's healthcare landscape, fostering medical innovation and promoting a dual innovation system where public hospitals ensure basic services, while foreign-owned hospitals provide high-end care for both local and expatriate residents seeking personalized, high-standard treatment plans.

John K. Hsiang, chairman of the Jiahui Health executive committee, said: "We hope that the government can allow short-term work permits for nurses and technicians from overseas. Additionally, the review

process for expat doctors to receive professional title recognition could be streamlined."

Jiahui Health operates the Hong Kong-owned Jiahui International Hospital in Shanghai, which was opened in 2017. It also runs outpatient clinics in Shanghai and other cities.

Last month, Parkway Shanghai, the Chinese mainland operating entity of IHH Healthcare, held a ceremony marking its 20th anniversary in the Chinese market. Prem Kumar Nair, group CEO of IHH Healthcare, one of the world's largest private healthcare networks, said they had witnessed the remarkable vitality and potential of the market.

"As the local government continues to open up with new policies on foreign investment in the healthcare sector, we're confident that Parkway Shanghai will experience even greater opportunities for growth," he said while announcing the launch of Parkway Shanghai's new flagship ambulatory care center in downtown Shanghai in 2025.

This announcement follows the 2023 opening of Parkway Shanghai Hospital, which involved an investment of 1.61 billion yuan (\$220 million) and spans 84,400 square meters.

## BUSINESS

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

## Special visa benefits African students

By ZOU SHUO in Changsha  
zoushuo@chinadaily.com.cn

Hunan has launched a special visa to help international students from Africa start businesses in the province.

Four African international students have each obtained an "entrepreneurship visa" in Hunan, which has paved the way for them to established 14 startups in the International Youth Entrepreneurship Port of the China (Hunan) Pilot Free Trade Zone Changsha Area, according to Wang Hao, an official with the China (Hunan) Pilot Free Trade Zone Changsha Area.

Previously, international students needed two years of work experience before applying for a work visa in China, which has proved an impediment for them staying in Hunan after graduation, Wang said.

The China (Hunan) Pilot Free Trade Zone has the task of building a "demonstrative highland" of cooperation between China and Africa.

Hunan's trade with Africa has grown from 15.08 billion yuan (\$2.06 billion) in 2012 to 55.66 billion yuan in 2022, according to Xinhua News Agency.

Hunan's Department of Commerce has projected the province's trade with Africa to exceed 100 billion yuan by 2025, with an annual growth rate above 25 percent.

Sakariye Abdia Hmed from Somalia was the first to get the entrepreneurship visa in Hunan after graduating from Central South University last year.

He started by establishing a trading company last year, selling Hunan products, such as clothes, suitcases and agricultural machines to Somalia. His company has so far realized a total of \$400,000 of import and export trade value.

Changsha has offered him the opportunity to develop his business, with favorable policies and help in getting potential clients, he said.

After spending five years in Changsha, he has fallen in love with the city, which has a good climate, delicious food and nice people, he said.

The local government has helped him to establish the company and recommended business partners.

Odjo Rachald from Benin also obtained the special entrepreneurship visa after graduating from Central South University in 2024.

His startup, which is also a trading company selling Hunan products to Africa, was established in August.

He said he has spent four years in Changsha and fallen in love with the city. "Most of my friends are here, so I do not want to move."

He can speak fluent Mandarin and has spent lots of time exploring the city as local people do.

"I am a night person and the rich nightlife in Changsha suits me perfectly, and I enjoy it very much," he said, adding that he considers himself a Changsha local now.

## Briefly

## China ranks second in lithium reserves

China has made significant strides in lithium exploration, emerging as the world's second-largest holder of lithium reserves. The China Geological Survey under the Ministry of Natural Resources said on Wednesday that the country's lithium reserves have increased from 6 percent to 16.5 percent of the global total, propelling it from sixth to second place in the world rankings.

## Yuan weakens against greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, weakened 8 pips to 7.1887 against the US dollar on Wednesday, according to the China Foreign Exchange Trade System.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY



A car that is part of the trade-in program attracts potential buyers during an expo in Nanning, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region. PENG HUAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Steps afoot to spur domestic demand

New energy passenger vehicle sales last year stood at 11 million units

By WANG KEJU  
wangkeju@chinadaily.com.cn

China has rolled out more forceful measures to promote large-scale equipment upgrades and consumer goods trade-ins, as the world's second-largest economy has put boosting demand high on its work agenda this year in the face of domestic and external headwinds, officials and experts said on Wednesday.

Significantly increased funding from ultra-long term treasury bonds and extended coverage of eligible items will further spur these business investments and consumption-boosting initiatives, allow more households and enterprises to reap the benefits, and give a much-needed boost to the country's economic recovery, they said.

Last year's experience shows that these initiatives have been proven effective in driving consumer demand and catalyzing investment growth, as well as facilitating industrial upgrading and supporting the country's green transformation, said Zhao Chenxin, deputy head of the National Development and Reform Commission, during a news conference in Beijing.

Retail sales of new energy passenger vehicles came in at 11 million units in 2024, while the total volume of equipment upgrades in key areas across the country is expected to have reached over 20 million units, according to the commission, the country's top economic regulator.

As US president-elect Donald

Trump — who has raised the idea of imposing tariffs of up to 60 percent on all Chinese goods — is about to return to the White House later this month, China is set to boost domestic demand, both in terms of investment and consumption, to offset potential external shocks, said Zhang Yongjun, secretary-general of the China Center for International Economic Exchanges.

"Fostering expansive and robust domestic demand goes beyond merely addressing immediate concerns, as it lays the foundation for China's continued advancement and the realization of its modernization aspirations," Zhang said, adding that these initiatives could be important levers.

This year, China has broadened the scope of its equipment upgrade program, with a strong emphasis on high-end, intelligent and green applications, and the government has also earmarked funding to provide loan interest subsidies to lower businesses' financing costs, according to a guideline issued by the commission on Wednesday.

By investing in the replacement of outdated equipment with advanced, high-tech alternatives, the government is not only creating a strong impetus for effective investment, but also improving operational efficiency and competitiveness of relevant industries, said Dong Yu, executive vice-president of the China Institute for Development Planning at Tsinghua University.

China has also intensified

support for consumer goods trade-ins, with more categories such as mobile phones, tablets and smartwatches eligible for subsidies, as noted by the guideline.

The 150 billion yuan (\$20.5 billion) from last year's ultra-long term treasury bonds dedicated to the trade-in initiative has generated a multiplier effect, leading to a 2.5-fold increase in new consumption, said Wang Qing, chief macroeconomic analyst at Golden Credit Rating International.

The amount of funding allocated to support the initiative this year is expected to double compared to 2024, reaching 300 billion yuan, Wang said.

"Our estimates suggest that the increased funding could drive around 750 billion yuan in new consumption, which would translate to a 1.5 percentage point acceleration in the year-on-year growth of total retail sales of consumer goods in 2025," Wang added.

The central government recently front-loaded 81 billion yuan in funding for the consumer goods trade-in program in 2025, said Fu Jinling, an official with the Ministry of Finance.

Policymakers will take into account a comprehensive set of factors, including demographics, regional GDP, household ownership of automobiles and home appliances, as well as the performance of the 2024 trade-in program, to determine the appropriate funding levels for each provincial-level region, Fu said.

In particular, funding allocation will be weighted toward regions that have achieved the most success with consumer goods trade-ins last year, Fu added.

## National data infra design underway

By FAN FEIFEI  
fanfeifei@chinadaily.com.cn

China's latest efforts to construct a national data infrastructure are expected to fully unleash the value of massive data elements, bolster the development and utilization of data and facilitate the high-quality growth of the country's digital economy, said officials and experts.

China's investment in data infrastructure will attract about 400 billion yuan (\$54.6 billion) in annual direct investment, with the total scale reaching about 2 trillion yuan over the next five years, said the country's top data governance regulator.

Shen Zhulin, deputy head of the National Data Administration, said at a recent news conference in Beijing that the newly launched guideline on the construction of a national data infrastructure will drive the circulation and utilization of data, as well as promote the establishment and upgrading of networks, computing power and facilities related to data security.

"The guideline will boost effective social investment and inject fresh momentum into high-quality economic and social development," Shen said, adding that the move will reduce the threshold of data development and utilization for enterprises, and cultivate a good ecosystem for the data industry.

He said that promoting data opening and sharing — and unleashing the value of data elements — is a key task in promoting the construction of a national data infrastructure. Shen also highlighted the significance of improving laws and regulations concerning data security.

The guideline, jointly issued on Monday by the National Development and Reform Commission, the National Data Administration and the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, said China aims to complete the building of the core infrastructure of a national data system by 2029.

The guideline, which is the country's first policy document on national data infrastructure construction, stated that efforts will be made to complete the top-level design of a national data infrastructure, and to build such infrastructure that supports large-scale data circulation and interconnectivity, while integrating data networks and computing power facilities between 2027 and 2028.

The move is part of the country's

broader push to build a unified national data market and develop the digital economy. The country has also vowed to upgrade the 5G network to 5G-advanced, or 5G-A, a crucial upgrade of the 5G network in functionality and coverage, and promote 6G-related research, development and innovation, according to the guideline.

Du Wei, director of the department of digital technology and infrastructure construction at the National Data Administration, said the move is aimed at facilitating the large-scale circulation and utilization of data in various regions, industries and enterprises, giving play to the advantages of massive data and abundant application scenarios and advancing the construction of a "Digital China".

Statistics from the administration show that China's total data output reached 32.85 zettabytes in 2023, up 22.44 percent year-on-year, while the added value of core digital economy industries accounted for 10 percent of GDP.

Du said that only 2.9 percent of data have been reserved, and enterprise data — which haven't been utilized for more than a year — account for nearly 40 percent of the total, so the efficiency of data circulation and utilization needs to be further improved.

Zhu Keli, founding director of the China Institute of New Economy, said the mobility and allocation efficiency of data elements will be significantly elevated through the building of national data infrastructure, thus injecting new vitality into the digital economy.

"The launch of the new guideline will help propel deeper integration of data elements with the real economy, boost the transformation and upgrading of industries and cultivate new economic growth drivers, while attracting more social capital and resources to invest in the digital economy domain," Zhu said.

Noting that computing power facilities are crucial for building such new infrastructure, Zhao Zhidan, deputy director of the NDRC's department of innovation and high-tech development, said heightened efforts will be made to accelerate the construction of a national unified computing power network, deepen the integration of computing power with a wide range of fields like finance, industry and transportation, and bolster the green and low-carbon development of computing power centers.



A view of a data center in Qingyang, Gansu province. LANG BINGBING / XINHUA

## NEV makers partner for shared charging tech

By LI JIAYING and LI FUSHENG

In a bid to ensure widespread and more efficient access to fast charging, new energy vehicle manufacturers are accelerating their efforts at collaboration and mutual growth through shared charging technologies and networks.

Volkswagen Group China and Chinese automaker Xpeng said on Monday that they will jointly build an ultrafast charging network covering over 20,000 terminals across 420 cities and regions in China, which will be open to users of both companies' vehicles.

The collaboration is expected to leverage their technological advantages in high-power liquid-cooled ultrafast charging and complementary charging network in the country, they said, allowing NEV owners across the nation to enjoy better fast-charging experiences.

In addition, the two automakers

will also explore the possibility of jointly developing ultrafast charging stations under a co-branded partnership, they said.

The charging network will be developed by CAMS, Volkswagen's joint venture for charging business in China. According to official data from both companies, CAMS' charging stations totaled 1,621 as of Oct 11, with 13,112 charging terminals across 214 cities, while Xpeng had covered over 1,880 self-operated charging stations and more than 9,680 supercharging piles by the end of December, covering over 420 cities.

The collaboration comes amid the nation's efforts to advance the interconnectivity of its charging network.

The National Development and Reform Commission and the National Energy Administration issued a guideline in May 2023 to accelerate the development of charging infrastructure, with an

emphasis on the need to "promote interoperability among public charging and battery swapping network operators".

Yan Jinghui, a member of the expert committee of the China Automobile Dealers Association, said an interconnected charging network can help enhance the convenience of charging services, eliminate use barriers, and better provide both online and offline charging support.

Furthermore, information connectivity is crucial for forming a unified energy supply network and encouraging interoperability among automakers and charging operators, Yan said.

In this regard, several automakers have announced plans to accelerate collaboration on sharing charging networks.

In December, Xiaomi said it would partner with NIO, Xpeng, and Li Auto for sharing charging infrastructure.

Over 14,000 NIO charging piles, more than 9,000 Xpeng piles, and over 6,000 Li Auto piles will be included in Xiaomi's online charging map that displays real-time information.

Chinese tech giant Huawei also announced the establishment of a "supercharging alliance" in April, which to date covers 31 provincial-level regions and 122 cities and includes 11 automakers such as Avatr, BAIC, BYD, Great Wall Motor, GAC, Chery and Seres.

According to a classification by the China Passenger Car Association, the country's NEV charging facility operators can be divided into four categories — integrated enterprises involved in both charging pile manufacturing and network operation, electric grid operators constructing their own charging networks, scaled automakers with self-built networks, and third-party charging network operators.

Scaled automakers constructing their own charging networks have become one of the major types of charging operators in China, with leading operators showing strong performance, said Cui Dongshu, secretary-general of the CPCA.

"The active participation of automakers will help drive the standardization and interoperability of charging facilities, ultimately providing consumers with a better charging experience," Lin Xianping, secretary-general of Hangzhou City University's cultural and creative research institute, said in an earlier interview.

Lin said the rapid growth of the electric vehicle market is increasing demand for charging infrastructure, offering more opportunities for the development of charging facilities.

According to data from the NEA, by the end of November, China had built a cumulative total of 12.352 million charging piles, up 50 percent year-on-year.

Contact the writers at  
lijaying@chinadaily.com.cn

## BUSINESS FOCUS

## CHINA UP-CLOSE

## Competition in coffee chain market intensifies

Some companies focus on digital innovation, others eye affordability, operation efficiency

By WANG ZHUOQIONG  
wangzhuoqiong@chinadaily.com.cn

In a highly competitive coffee chain market, Starbucks China has expanded its focus from its traditional "third place" philosophy — positioning its stores as a comfortable space between work and home — toward digital innovation and targeted marketing.

Starbucks' recent appointment of Yang Zhen as chief growth officer signals a strategic pivot. Yang, an experienced digital marketing leader from Alibaba and Jidu Auto, has been tasked with leveraging digital tools, creative campaigns and product innovation to attract younger consumers and revitalize growth.

The new direction was reflected in Starbucks' recent viral marketing campaign, "I Opened Starbucks in Ancient Times", which blended storytelling with cultural appeal, an effort to reconnect the brand with Gen Z audiences. It is alleged that Yang was behind the production of this short video.

Meanwhile, Starbucks' renewed emphasis on digital marketing highlights the growing importance of customer engagement outside of physical stores.

The strategy reflects broader shifts in China's consumer behavior, where digital experiences — like app-based promotions and viral campaigns — play an increasingly crucial role in brand loyalty, and marks a change from Starbucks' historic reliance on physical store experiences as its primary brand differentiator.

Starbucks opened over 45 new stores in Shanghai last year and upgraded more than 32 to operate over 1,100 stores in the city, becoming the city with the largest number of Starbucks stores.

Nationwide, the coffee chain has penetrated about 1,000 county-level markets. In the beginning of 2025, Starbucks opened a store at Jianshe village around the Dongqian Lake in Ningbo, Zhejiang province, a renowned tourism site that urban dwellers often visit during holidays and weekends.

In addition to the penetration of lower-tier markets, digital engagement has become a focal point in Starbucks' efforts to reclaim relevance and counter declining sales.

In the fourth quarter of fiscal 2024, Starbucks China reported a 7 percent year-on-year revenue decline, with comparable store sales falling 14 percent. While the company launched an "affordable coffee" series to compete with budget rivals



Visitors purchase coffee at a Starbucks booth during an exhibition in Beijing in December. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

like Luckin Coffee, its primary strategy now revolves around building stronger digital connections with consumers.

In contrast to Starbucks' digital pivot, Ora Coffee, a newly launched sub-brand of Peet's Coffee, is taking a different path — focusing on affordability and operational efficiency to capture mid-to-low end consumers.

Ora Coffee debuted quietly in Beijing with a small-store model that emphasizes takeouts and simplified design. With prices starting at 9.9 yuan (\$1.35) for an Americano and combo deals like coffee and baked goods from 18.9 yuan, Ora directly targets the rapidly growing affordable coffee market. The move reflects a broader trend as premium players adjust to China's evolving consumer demand for value-driven options.

Unlike Peet's traditionally high-end positioning, Ora Coffee seeks to balance quality and affordability. By introducing localized drinks like tea-coffee hybrids and fruit-infused coffees, Ora aims to differentiate itself beyond price while addressing diverse consumer tastes.

Affordable brands such as Luckin Coffee and Cotti Coffee dominate through economies of scale, operating over 20,000 and

7,400 stores, respectively.

Their aggressive pricing strategies, often as low as 9.9 yuan per cup, have reshaped consumer expectations and forced established players to respond.

According to Mintel Group, a research institute, the freshly brewed coffee market in China has seen brands adopting new strategies to maintain competitiveness. In 2024, the coffee market was projected to reach 16.9 billion yuan and market concentration was increasing, as chain brands accelerated their expansion through franchise systems.

Cross-category players, such as fast-food and street drink brands, are performing well, while foreign chain brands are slowing down their pace of store openings, said Bernie Gao, research analyst of food & drink and foodservice of Mintel China.

According to Mintel, the number of coffee shops nationwide was expected to reach 161,800 by the end of 2024, reflecting a year-on-year increase of 12.6 percent, though growth slowed significantly compared to the previous year.

In the current climate of cautious consumer spending and intensified competition among freshly brewed

coffee brands, chain players — beyond those already positioned with a "low-price product strategy" — have also introduced various price adjustments to address consumers' continued price sensitivity.

Mintel data show that the ideal price range for classic freshly brewed coffee products (milk coffee, black coffee and tea) is between 11 and 15 yuan per cup.

Gao said that in third-tier and lower-tier cities, a higher proportion of consumers prefer products in this price range compared to those in first and second-tier cities. Consequently, the creation of affordable sub-brands allows companies to preserve the premium image of their main brands while expanding their presence in lower-tier markets.

"Although pricing remains a key battleground, a purely low-price strategy is unsustainable in the long run," he said. "Brands must focus on communicating product value effectively and enhancing customer loyalty in this era of cautious consumption."

"Our research indicates that while cost-effectiveness is important, returning to core product quality is more likely to win over consumers," Gao added.

Taste remains the top factor influencing consumers' choice of freshly brewed coffee, followed by aroma and functionality, according to Mintel. The lower ranking of cost-effectiveness highlights that competitive pricing alone is insufficient to sustain consumer interest.

Furthermore, refined operations and high-quality development are essential for brands to thrive in a slowing market. Companies can enhance their credibility by highlighting their supply chain reliability and consistent product quality, while reinforcing the value of premium coffee through skilled baristas, engaging store environments and personalized services. As the consumption gap among different-tier cities narrows and specialty products gain popularity, brands should explore how to integrate innovative product concepts into their strategies for lower-tier markets, meeting the diverse needs of a broader audience, Gao added.

According to data from Zhaimen Restaurant, a catering portal, as of Nov 12, the tea and coffee industry had opened 214,000 new stores in the past year, with a net growth of 500.

In January, Luckin Coffee

launched coffee bean products in collaboration with FreeNow, a plant-based beverage manufacturer in China, to develop coffee products for business customers such as coffee shops, hotels and tea drink shops.

Luckin Coffee has introduced three coffee bean products. With its existing supply chain network, Luckin Coffee's specialty coffee beans are expected to rapidly expand their market share and attract more trade customers, said the company.

Tea chains are also adapting to market pressure through talent acquisition and operational upgrades. Chagee, for instance, recently brought in Huang Hongfei, former CFO of McDonald's China, to enhance its supply chain and digital systems.

Chagee's rapid expansion, with over 6,000 stores globally, and its plans for an IPO in the United States reflect its ambition to challenge market leaders like Starbucks China in total sales.

With consumer preferences shifting and competition intensifying, brands that effectively balance affordability, innovation, and digital engagement will be best positioned to thrive in China's dynamic coffee market.

## China's liquor industry caters to evolving tastes of younger consumers

By WANG ZHUOQIONG

The liquor industry in China is getting younger, propelled by demand from younger consumers looking for more personalized and fashionable low-alcohol beverages, despite initial difficulties in attracting them.

According to the 2024 Youth Drinking Report by Houlang Research Institute, beer remains the top choice for young drinkers, while fruit wine and cocktails account for over 40 percent of market share.

Liquor ranks fourth but is showing signs of rejuvenation, as companies focus on co-branding and product innovation to engage younger audiences.

Leading firms like Luzhou Laojiao and Kweichow Moutai are tapping into the low-alcohol trend popular among post-1990s and post-2000s generations.

Luzhou Laojiao reported that sales of its 76 proof Guojiao 1573 now represent half of its total revenue, signaling a sustained shift toward lower-alcohol products.

Similarly, Wuliangye and Yanghe Co Ltd are increasing investments in youth-centric products, with Yanghe targeting 1-2 billion yuan (\$136.4-272.8 million) in revenue

from its fruit wine project within two to three years.

To cater to younger tastes, liquor companies are expanding beyond traditional products by launching fruit wines and alcoholic teas in collaboration with beverage brands. Examples include Meijian's collaboration with Chabaidao on a "Plum and Green Tea" drink and Luzhou Laojiao's joint gift box with Nayuki Tea.

A report by iiMedia Research predicts that the 18-30 age group will become the second-largest consumer segment for alcoholic beverages in China, accounting for 39.13 percent of the market.

According to Ries China, the youth alcohol consumption market has reached 400 billion yuan, with a potential consumer base of 490 million.

However, capturing this market comes with challenges.

"Despite widespread product promotion, liquor brands must enhance deeper, more diversified consumption scenarios and interactions to change young consumers' perception of liquor," said Cai Xuefei, a liquor marketing analyst.

Cai added that while low-alco-

hol options are popular, maintaining interest requires a deeper understanding of youth preferences.

Shen Meng, a strategist at Guangke Consulting, echoed similar sentiments.

"Low alcohol is a preference, but not a guarantee of purchase," Shen said.

He said that future growth depends on innovation in taste, stronger consumer loyalty and supply chain improvements to create diverse drinking occasions and encourage repeat purchases.

Meanwhile, the overall liquor market continues to grow steadily.

The China Alcoholic Drinks Association reported a 6 percent year-on-year increase in total output, a 13.8 percent rise in sales revenue, and a 13.1 percent increase in profits during the first half of 2024. The A-share liquor sector posted revenue growth rates of 16 percent, reflecting performance differentiation among listed companies.

The report highlighted strong demand across key price bands — 300-500 yuan, 100-300 yuan, and below 100 yuan.

While premium liquors have



Visitors wait to taste beer at a food service exhibition in Changsha, Hunan province, in September.

CHEN SIHAN / XINHUA

maintained stable prices, local brands have faced price pressures, intensifying market competition.

The industry was projected to achieve 800 billion yuan in total

sales in 2024, representing a 10 percent year-on-year increase. E-commerce was expected to play a pivotal role in this growth.

"Between 2022 and 2024, the alcohol market on Douyin experi-

enced rapid expansion, with liquor leading the category," said Li Bo, head of e-commerce alcohol imports at Douyin. The platform has attracted 330 million consumers of alcoholic beverages.

## ACROSS ASIA

Editor's note:

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

## HIGH COST OF LIVING

Inflation can mean a daily struggle for the working poor in Bangladesh

As inflation greets Bangladeshis at breakfast time, even the humble paratha becomes a symbol of struggle. Once hearty and filling, the traditional flatbread now seems to arrive thinner and lighter — a daily reminder of the unending calculations between hunger and affordability for many people.

Previously, a simple meal of three parathas and an accompanying plate of dal would commonly cost 39 taka (32 cents). Today the modest breakfast can demand 50 taka, as spiraling prices threaten the most vulnerable consumers — day laborers, marginal farmers and transport workers.

For Mofazzal Hossain, a 45-year-old rickshaw puller in Mirpur's Duaripara area, breakfast used to mean rice, vegetables and an occasional slice of fish. Now, it is a cup of tea and a single biscuit. His earnings have plummeted from 500 taka to 600 taka a day, to 350 taka to 400 taka. Feeding his family of six has become a painful calculation, with every meal a trade-off.

"I hardly remember the last time we ate meat," he said quietly, staring at his hands.

Mofazzal's plight mirrors that of many others across Bangladesh's capital Dhaka and beyond. In Karwan Bazar, Sattar Mia, a 38-year-old day laborer, often begins his day with an empty stomach. Once earning 600 taka daily, he now struggles to make 400 taka. The rising cost of basics has forced him to skip breakfast at times, pushing his first meal to late morning.

"Sometimes I eat at 11 am. Sometimes later," he said with a rueful smile. "It hurts, but what can be done?"

Food inflation soared to 14.1 percent in July last year, nearly doubling from 7.76 percent at the start of 2024, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. But the statistics cannot completely capture the quiet sacrifices happening in homes like Sattar's where sending money to the village is scarcely possible.

For Bangladesh's working poor, each day can begin with a painful negotiation as essentials like sugar and cooking oil climb ever higher in price: What can be sacrificed? What can still be afforded? For them, inflation is not just an economic phenomenon — it is a test of survival.

In Barishal, grocery vendor Shambhu Nath Saha observes a shift in purchasing behavior. Customers who once bought five liters of cooking oil now opt for one or two, and those purchasing two kilo-



Sellers wait for customers at their stalls at a wholesale market in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on Aug 14. LUIS TATO / AFP

To address inflation in the current context, the focus must be on improving supply chains and increasing the availability of products in the market."

Fahmida Khatun, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, Bangladesh



Cattle traders take their livestock to a market on a trawler in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on June 11. KAZI SALAHUDDIN RAZU VIA GETTY IMAGES

grams of sugar now settle for one. "Someone who used to spend 2,000 taka on groceries is now spending 1,000 or 1,200 taka," he said.

Economists have warned of serious implications. Fahmida Khatun, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, pointed out that lower food intake will affect nutritional and health conditions, with long-term consequences for children's growth and education.

She further said that the interim authorities have implemented several measures aimed at easing inflationary pressures. These include raising policy rates as part of monetary tightening, rationalizing public expenditure by prioritizing only critical development projects and removing tariffs on certain essential imports.

Fahmida, however, said she believes that winning the inflation battle hinges on improving the supply chain and increasing product availability in the market, a process that demands both time and sustained effort.

Price volatility has plagued neighboring countries like India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, which have managed to bring food inflation down to about 5 percent, according to media reports. Fahmida expressed optimism that Bangladesh could achieve similar results, though not without sustained effort.

"To address inflation in the current context, the focus must be on improving supply chains and

increasing the availability of products in the market," she said.

Fahmida also emphasized the importance of expanding open market sales of essential goods and broadening social safety net programs to alleviate the burden on vulnerable populations.

"These measures are crucial to mitigating the impact of rising prices on millions of households," she said.

A study by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies showed a striking shift in dietary patterns in rural areas amid rising food costs. The daily average rice consumption per person climbed to 412 grams in 2023, up from 349 grams in 2022.

In stark contrast, the consumption of protein-rich foods like mutton and beef has plummeted. The study found that daily average consumption per person dropped to just 0.28 grams of mutton and 4.02 grams of beef, down sharply from 1.23 grams and 10.25 grams, respectively, the previous year. These changes reflect the difficult trade-offs many households make to cope with inflationary pressures.

Inflation remained persistently high in recent years, a trend worsened by supply chain disruptions.

In Dhaka, fruit vendor Nur Islam Sheikh sees a similar trend. Apples that sold for 180 taka per kg a year earlier now cost 300 taka, and customers who bought 3 kg now haggle for 2.

Outside the capital, the situation is grimmer. Samiul Islam, a 40-year-old microbus driver in Dinajpur, earns a stagnant monthly income of 15,000 taka. Rising food prices have altered the family's equation, forcing them to cut down on meals and essentials.

"Sometimes, I skip meals so that my children don't go hungry," Samiul said.

In Kushtia, Babul Kumar Acharjee, a battery-run auto-rickshaw driver, echoed the sentiment. His family now lives on rice, vegetables and dal, with meat a distant memory.

Mehedi Hasan, a welding mechanic in Shimulia, a village in Kushtia, struggles with frequent borrowing for daily needs.

"Amid the struggle, I now have to ask for money from my relatives even for smaller needs," he said.

Liton Ghosh, who runs a modest roadside eatery in Dhaka's Tejguri Bazar, is a quiet reflection of how small businesses are adapting to rising costs. His words, like his meals, echo the struggles of the poor recalibrating to survive.

Liton recalled a time not so long ago when he could serve three parathas with vegetables for 39 taka. Today, the same plate costs 50 taka — but with smaller portions.

"The parathas are a bit smaller now, and the portion of vegetables has also been reduced," he said.

THE DAILY STAR, BANGLADESH

## Nepal gears up breast cancer fight with latest technology

The National Public Health Laboratory of Nepal has validated next-generation sequencing for breast cancer, with many oncologists no longer needing to send specimens of suspected cancer patients to India for testing.

With the development, patients or their relatives will also pay about half the cost they were paying in India.

"We have successfully validated next-generation sequencing for breast cancer," said Ranjan Raj Bhatta, director at the laboratory.

"Now doctors do not need to send samples to India. We will provide the service at almost half the price patients have been paying in India."

Next-generation sequencing is a technology for determining the sequence of DNA or RNA to study genetic variations. This technique can detect rare causative variants for monogenic conditions when many possible mutations exist.

Due to a lack of such a service within the country, hospitals treating cancer patients had to send samples to India and it would take several weeks for the test results to arrive.

Patients who are suspected to be suffering from cancer, as well as their families, had to anxiously wait for confirmation of the diagnosis.

"We will provide the result within three weeks," Bhatta said. "It currently takes around four weeks for reports to come from India. We can provide reports earlier, but it depends on the number of samples from suspected cancer patients. Carrying out testing on fewer samples costs more, so we sometimes need to wait longer."

Doctors say that the start of the service by the laboratory helps patients and their families get reports more quickly, which in turn will help doctors to start treatment earlier. Starting treatment on time makes a big difference in recovery from cancer, according to them. It is estimated that only about 2,000 Nepalis undergo breast cancer screening every year.

## Medical gap

The latest report released by the International Agency for Research on Cancer suggests that breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer among women and the leading cause of incidence in 157 countries and mortality in 112 countries.

Breast cancer mortality rates vary significantly across regions in both geographic and temporal terms, which appears to correlate with the extent of basic healthcare coverage.

Compared to developed countries, most developing nations, including Nepal, have a lower incidence of breast cancer but a higher mortality rate for weaker healthcare infrastructure and delayed diagnoses.

The World Health Organization launched the Global Breast Cancer Initiative in 2021 to reduce mortality rates by 2.5 percent a year by 2040 to save 2.5 million lives through three key pillars of action on health promotion for early detection, timely diagnosis, and comprehensive breast cancer management.

Meanwhile, the public health laboratory said that along with next-generation sequencing for breast cancer, preparations are underway to begin genomic testing for four other cancers, including leukemia.

Experts say the start of next-generation sequencing and genomic testing also helps maintain databases and ensure genomic confidentiality and privacy, which are essential for research and making policies on disease management.

Oncologists say not all cancer treatment centers require all types of diagnostic services, as testing is costly and some centers do not get enough samples.

They also said that hospitals can be encouraged to start super-specialty services through tax concessions.

THE KATHMANDU POST, NEPAL

## Thai dugong mammals face extinction

Dugongs in Thailand are currently at risk of extinction as fatalities of the aquatic mammals continue to increase over the past few years.

Kasetsart University's marine ecologist Thon Thamrongnawasawat has called for Thai people to preserve dugongs, saying that the population of the mammals has been dropping every year due to a decline in seagrass, habitat loss, hunting, marine pollution and plastic waste.

A report by the Seub Nakhasathien Foundation indicated that 273 dugongs were spotted in 2022. But 18 of them had died and been washed ashore in the same year, mostly after getting hit by hard objects.

The dugong is one of four living species of the order Sirenia, which also includes three species of manatees.

Dugongs have historically provided easy targets for hunters, who killed them for their meat, oil, skin and bones. It is now the only living representative of the once-diverse

family Dugongidae. Its closest modern relative, the Steller's sea cow, was hunted to extinction in the 18th century.

The species is found in 40 countries and territories worldwide but classified as "vulnerable" on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's red list of threatened species.

In Southeast Asia, dugongs inhabit coastal waters near Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, with populations ranging from a few hundred to around a thousand individuals in each country.

Dugongs also feature in Southeast Asian folklore. They are often considered the inspiration for mermaids and people around the world developed cultures around dugong hunting.

In languages like Ilocano, Mapun, Yakan, Tausug and Kadazandusun of the Philippines and Sabah, the name for dugongs is a synonym for "mermaid".

Dugongs became a hot topic among Thai people in 2019 when two orphaned baby dugongs, Mari-

am and Yamil, died. Despite several agencies' efforts in preserving dugongs, the preserved species' death rate has not declined.

Dugongs have also been dubbed "sea cows"; thanks to their pivotal role in maintaining seagrass fields, which play an important role in offering homes for other marine species, preventing coastal erosion and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The mammal can consume about 35 kilograms of seagrass a day, while its stool becomes fertilizer for feeding grounds. The stool can also contain seagrass seeds that help restore the marine ecosystem.

Climate change and human activities were among the causes of dugong deaths impacting the marine ecosystem. Data from the Department of Marine in Thailand and Coastal Resources indicated that 90 percent of dugong deaths occurred as they were caught in fishing gear.

Dugongs, sea turtles and saltwater fish are among victims of plastic waste. Though humans are seeking



A herd of dugongs near Panwa beach in Phuket, Thailand, on Dec 27. LILLIAN SUWANRUMPHA / AFP

ways to reduce waste as much as possible, 80 percent of marine waste items have been recorded to originate from ashore.

An increasing number of countries are enhancing community engagement in conservation efforts and launching public awareness programs amid the challenges facing dugongs.

India established the country's first conservation reserve of its kind for dugongs in 2022 to enhance the entire marine ecosystem.

Australia, the largest habitat for dugongs, also made significant investments in conserving those living in the Great Barrier Reef.

THE NATION, THAILAND

## WORLD

## Infrastructure and people-to-people exchanges bring more development across continent

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

Once dotted with dilapidated roads, limited railway lines, inadequate port facilities, isolated and underdeveloped regions due to poor connectivity, and unending power outages coupled with extreme poverty, today Africa boasts smoother roads, standard gauge railway lines, expanded modern ports and airports, as well as a growing economy, largely attributed to intensified Sino-African cooperation over the past two decades through the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation platform.

Established 24 years ago, FOCAC has given life and shape to Africa with the impact trickling down to even the most remote areas of the continent. Over the past two decades, Chinese enterprises have built or upgraded more than 10,000 kilometers of railways in Africa, nearly 100,000 km of roads, nearly 1,000 bridges and 100 ports.

In September 2024, the FOCAC summit held in Beijing, painted a new picture for the joint China-Africa endeavors to achieve modernization for both sides, through intensified cooperation ranging from infrastructure, trade, security to digital economy and advanced technologies such as lunar exploration.

Dennis Munene, the executive director of the China-Africa Centre at the Africa Policy Institute, based in Nairobi, Kenya, said if Africa was still stuck with the old partners and ignored China, the continent would continue to struggle with poor infrastructure and increased poverty rates.

Munene said that Africa's claims that FOCAC and the Belt and Road Initiative have transformed the continent are backed by facts, noting that Africans are able to travel smoothly and enjoy continental integration, thanks to infrastructure development by China.

"I can access Kenya's Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in less than 15 minutes, a journey that used to take almost two hours prior to the construction of an expressway. Today, my countrymen are enjoying safe travel by the standard gauge railway line from Nairobi to Mombasa, cutting the journey's duration by half," he said.

"If we hadn't looked East, there are things we would not have enjoyed as a continent. Today Ethiopians are enjoying a speed rail and Tanzania is in the process of finalizing hers, thanks to the FOCAC platform."

Munene expressed hope that one day, through FOCAC and other initiatives like the BRI, the entire continent will be connected by a standard gauge railway, easing transportation and facilitating intra-African trade.

"If we continue partnering with China, we will witness a lot of transformative projects that will help Africa to enjoy its resources," he said.

After FOCAC was established in 2000, he said Africa received an initiative that was more focused on its issues, such as development, peace, health, and industrial growth.

Munene said FOCAC has given rise to some of China's initiatives, the reason the continent has embraced the



A Kenyan student tries paper-cutting at the Yanching Institute of Technology in the city of Langfang in Hebei province, on Dec 10.  
WANG XIAO / XINHUA

## Africa reaps dividends of modernization via FOCAC



Isabella Adams-Israel (center), a female driver of the China-built Lagos Rail Mass Transit Blue Line, poses for a picture with her colleagues on a platform in Lagos, Nigeria, on June 12. XINHUA



A boy gives a high five to a volunteer at the Angola pavilion of a permanent exhibition of Sino-African economic exchanges in Changsha, Hunan province, on Aug 30. CHEN SIHAN / XINHUA

2024  
year in  
Review

BRI quickly and confidently, as well as the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative.

He said FOCAC has provided African countries with financial support that is flexible, sustainable and has no strings attached, aiding development of its infrastructure.

Unlike other similar platforms, Munene said FOCAC has action plans and a declaration after every summit. "It is not just an agenda or an initiative that is coming from China alone. It's an initiative that integrates what Africa wants," he said.

Mwangi Wachira, a former economist with the World Bank, said that in terms of development, many of

the programs announced, presented or discussed at FOCAC, have been "standard setters".

"They have been the flagships of development in the participating countries," he said.

Wachira described the BRI as one of the most important projects for Africa alongside FOCAC, which has seen Africa transform its infrastructure, consequently facilitating trade, investment and integrating the continent into one huge market.

"If FOCAC remains focused on integrating Africa into one market, it will play a historic role in the development of the continent," he said.

Wachira said the unusual degree of honesty, the unusual degree of openness, and the unusual degree of consultations on the details of initially multilateral engagement sets FOCAC apart.

Wachira wishes that China could partner with Africa to have more of the green energy products made on the continent, noting that most of

the minerals used to make the products are sourced from Africa.

"There is no reason why Kenya cannot produce vehicles in cooperation with Chinese companies such as BYD, which is already operating in some African countries," he said.

"Green energy is the wave of the future. It is what is going to save the world from self-annihilation from pollutants."

### Clean energy

Cavince Adhere, a scholar of international relations with a focus on China-Africa relations, said China is the largest home for green energy technologies, while Africa is home to the largest green energy resources, hence both parties can play a critical role in promoting green industrialization through FOCAC.

According to the African Development Bank, Africa has almost unlimited potential for solar capacity at 11 terawatts; 350 gigawatts of hydropower, out of which

only 5-6 percent is being harvested; 110 gigawatts of wind energy, of which only 2 percent is being used; and 15 gigawatts of geothermal energy sources.

Adhere praised China for helping Africa to exploit its green energy potential, noting the Asian country has contributed to over 21 percent of the continent's green energy transition in the last decade.

"When growing up in the rural areas, we used kerosene for lighting. Today, every roof in the rural areas is dotted with a solar panel, most of which are manufactured in China," he said.

According to Ember, an energy think tank headquartered in London, Africa's solar imports from China increased by 187 percent year-on-year in 2023.

Adhere said Africa is also witnessing an increased presence of Chinese electric vehicles which are helping to reduce emissions. "Chinese EV manufacturers have

shown that they can manufacture high-quality cars at affordable rates. So, we look forward to many African markets adopting these Chinese technologies to decarbonize the transport sector," he said.

Isaac Ankrah, a research fellow at the Africa-China Center for Policy and Advisory, said through FOCAC, Africa is not only industrializing but also doing so sustainably, setting the stage for a new era of growth driven by green energy, innovation, and collaboration.

Ankrah said the FOCAC 2024 Action Plan adopted at the summit in Beijing set a comprehensive road map to bolster energy infrastructure and advance the continent's overall industrial growth through a sustainable lens.

A notable feature, he said, is the commitment by China to develop 30 strategic clean energy projects in Africa, with a focus on solar, wind, and hydropower.

"These initiatives intend to drive Africa's industrial shift away from fossil fuel dependency toward renewable energy, allowing it to meet its industrial demands while aligning with global sustainability targets and addressing the climate crisis," Ankrah said in a statement published by the Africa-China Center for Policy and Advisory on its website.

### Role of youth

With FOCAC serving as a major platform for cooperation, Paul Frimpong, the executive director and senior research fellow at the Africa-China Centre for Policy and Advisory, suggests that it is time for young Africans to play a more central role in shaping the policies and projects that will define their future.

With more than 60 percent of the population under the age of 25, Africa boasts the world's youngest population, with youthful energy and untapped potential.

Frimpong said engaging young leaders in FOCAC discussions will help break down stereotypes, build diplomatic bridges, and foster a sense of shared purpose, ensuring the partnership remains strong and mutually beneficial in the future.

"By including youth in shaping FOCAC policies, the forum can ensure its strategies are aligned with the interests and priorities of the vibrant population, creating a more inclusive and forward-looking partnership," he said.

Similar sentiments were shared by Adhere who said the future of Africa-China relations will be shaped by the youth. They have a responsibility to shape how they want to engage with China by informing their respective governments about their priority areas, he said.

"Today, young Africans prefer to study in China, where they believe the quality of education is quite high just like in Western countries and the cost of living is quite low compared to Western countries. So it's easier for them to learn from the Chinese experience and transpose those ideas into their own countries," he said.

On the Western criticism of Chinese investments in Africa, Wachira is of the view that Africa should ignore them and concentrate on enriching its relationship with China.

Noting that there will always be criticism, Wachira urged China and Africa to ignore criticism and strengthen cooperation between the two sides.



Online  
Watch the video  
by scanning  
the code.

By EDITH MUTETHYA  
in Nairobi, Kenya

## Chinese EV makers invest to boost green economy

Africa is emerging as a key investment destination for Chinese electric vehicle manufacturers seeking to go global, with some of them opening flagship stores and assembly plants on the continent.

E-mobility investments are expected to help reduce harmful emissions, thus mitigating environmental challenges. Additionally, electric vehicles present numerous economic advantages over traditional combustion engines because they don't require fuel and their maintenance costs are low.

Xn Iraki, an associate professor at the University of Nairobi's Faculty of Business and Management Sciences, said Africa is a new market with huge potential, which is the reason it's appealing to Chinese EV makers.

This is in addition to the fact that many motorists are shifting to electric vehicles due to high fuel prices. Data from the World Food Programme indicate that petrol prices

across the East African region averaged \$1.3 per liter, a year-on-year rise of 64.6 percent in the third quarter of 2024.

Compared to vehicles manufactured in other parts of the world, Iraki said Chinese cars are reasonably priced, adding that China has acquired a good understanding of Africa's consumption habits.

He projects that Chinese electric vehicle makers will continue to invest not only in Africa but also globally, and that they are likely to dominate the market if their cars remain affordable and reliable.

In late October, Moja EV Kenya, a distributor of Chinese EV maker Neta, introduced 100 Chinese-made Neta V taxis and plans to increase the number to 500 by mid-2025. This followed the opening of its flagship showroom in Nairobi in June.

To enable accessibility to the vehicles, the company partnered with



Taxi drivers in Mombasa, Kenya, try out a new Chinese brand electric vehicle on Aug 16. WANG GUANSEN / XINHUA

financial institutions to create a system where clients can pay for taxi rides directly to drivers' bank accounts.

This arrangement will help taxi

drivers build a financial history, enabling them to access loans and improve their economic status over time.

Erick Lumallas, the assistant to

the CEO of Moja EV Kenya, said the company is also planning to bring in public vehicles and lorries, adding that currently, they are in discussions with public vehicle Savings and Credit Cooperative Organizations that have expressed interest in long-distance electric vehicles.

He added that they are waiting for the necessary licensing documentation, to start assembling the electric vehicles in Kenya with future plans to build the entire vehicle in the country.

Basi Go, a Nairobi-headquartered provider of electric bus solutions in sub-Saharan Africa, first introduced two electric vehicles in Kenya in 2022, imported from BYD, a Chinese multinational manufacturing company and the world's largest EV manufacturer.

In 2023, the company partnered with Associated Vehicle Assemblers

to fully assemble imported parts in Kenya. In October, the company announced plans to provide 1,000 electric buses in East Africa within the next three years.

Plans are also underway to expand to Rwanda, where the company has received over 300 reservations from bus operators.

BYD Auto also entered the South African market in 2023 with the Atto 3 and released a Dolphin model this year.

Enviro Automotive, a South African importer and distributor of multibrand electric vehicles, introduced a Chinese-made Dayun Yuehu, a four-seater mini SUV electric car, into the country in July, which is the cheapest electric vehicle so far, retailing at just under \$21,899.

Data from the National Association of Automobile Manufacturers of South Africa indicated that sales of electric vehicles surged this year, with 324 units having been sold in the third quarter of 2024 compared to 218 units sold in the same period in 2023.

# WORLD

## German voters voice concerns as election nears

By JONATHAN POWELL in London  
jonathan@mail.chinadailyuk.com

Growing political unrest in Germany has left 39 percent of voters concerned about the country's future, with a further 15 percent voicing frustration with political leaders, a survey revealed on Wednesday.

With less than seven weeks to go before the Feb 23 federal election, a YouGov research institute poll found that German voters have significant issues with the government's performance.

The survey reveals a crisis of confidence in Chancellor Olaf Scholz's ruling Social Democrats, or SPD, with 50 percent of respondents opposing the party's inclusion in the next government, citing "trust and competence" issues.

Nearly half, or 46 percent, of respondents blamed the SPD for the current economic woes, while only 11 percent believed the party was competent to handle the economy.

Loyalty among SPD supporters has eroded significantly, as only 55 percent of those who backed the party in 2021 said they still feel it represents their interests.

Consistent with recent polling, the conservative alliance of the Christian Democratic Union and its Bavarian partner, the Christian Social Union, maintains a clear lead.

The alliance leads voter intentions with 29 percent support, while the far-right Alternative for Germany, or AfD, trails in second place at 21 percent.

Support for the ruling SPD has plunged to a historical low of 16 percent, with their Green Party coalition partners falling behind at 14 percent.

The pro-business Free Democrats, whose November withdrawal triggered the government's collapse and early elections, are now struggling to reach the 5 percent threshold required for parliamentary representation.

The findings were based on a survey of 1,908 voters conducted earlier this month.

### Support for far right

A separate YouGov survey published on Wednesday showed that a recent endorsement by US industrialist Elon Musk has boosted support for the far right as the election approaches.

Nearly six in 10 of those surveyed believe Musk's support has strengthened AfD's position, according to the poll commissioned by the dpa news agency. Just 4 percent saw the endorsement as damaging, while 24 percent detected no effect and 13 percent said they were unsure.

Musk, who serves as a close adviser to US President-elect Donald Trump, drew criticism after backing the AfD on X and in Germany's Die Welt newspaper.

Despite Musk's vocal support, half of those surveyed expect his influence on the election to be minimal or nonexistent. By comparison, 27 percent anticipate he will significantly shape the campaign.

## Learning lesson



Palestinian students attend lessons at a makeshift classroom in Deir al-Balah, central Gaza Strip, on Monday. The health ministry in Gaza said on Wednesday that 51 people were killed in the Palestinian territory in the past 24 hours, taking the overall death toll to 45,936. RIZEK ABDELJAWAD / XINHUA

# Iran says committed to nonnuclear defense

### President affirms Teheran's readiness for talks despite Washington's pullout

By MIKE GU and JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong

Iran has no plan to acquire a nuclear bomb based on its ideological beliefs, President Masoud Pezeshkian said on Tuesday, emphasizing Teheran's commitment to fostering friendly relations with other countries.

"The Islamic Republic has absolutely no intention of utilizing its nuclear capabilities for military purposes based on its ideological beliefs and a fatwa by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei," Pezeshkian said during a meeting with the United Kingdom's new ambassador, news network Iran International reported.

Iran's nuclear development has been subject to restrictions stipulated in the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, an agreement signed by Iran and the P5+1 group — China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States and Germany.

However, the US withdrew from the deal in 2018 and reintroduced unilateral sanctions on Iran.

A new round of talks between Teheran and three European countries — France, the UK and Germany — is scheduled for Monday in Geneva, Switzerland.

Pezeshkian affirmed on Tuesday Iran's readiness for all parties to return to the JCPOA and fulfill their mutual commitments while referring to the US withdrawal

and the European parties' failure to compensate for it, despite Iran's adherence to the deal's terms, the official IRNA news agency reported.

He also highlighted his administration's aim to promote consensus inside the country and friendly interactions with countries worldwide, IRNA said.

Majid Takht-Ravanchi, Iran's deputy foreign minister for political affairs, said in a recent interview with Italy's Radio Radicale that acquiring nuclear weapons has no place in Iran's defensive doctrine.

Teheran has lived up to its commitments in its relations with the International Atomic Energy Agency, Takht-Ravanchi said, adding that Iran is a member of the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

### Consistent position

"In all these years, our position has been consistent and transparent," he said. "We are ready to talk within the framework of the JCPOA."

Abdolreza Alami, director of the Asia West East Centre in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, told China Daily that the statements by Pezeshkian and other Iranian officials underscore Teheran's commitment to its obligations under the JCPOA.

The leaders attribute the current crisis to the US' unilateral withdrawal from the accord and Europe's inaction in addressing

the fallout, said Alami, who is also a senior lecturer at the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies at Universiti Teknologi MARA in Malaysia.

While previous Iranian administrations demonstrated a willingness to engage in dialogue while safeguarding national interests, Pezeshkian's government, with its reformist outlook and emphasis on de-escalation, has expressed readiness to enter negotiations while adhering to established principles and prior commitments, Alami said.

This approach could pave the way for the initiation of new talks, he added.

Economic challenges and the pressures of sanctions have amplified the necessity for such negotiations from Iran's perspective, he said.

However, he cautioned that the potential inclination of the incoming US administration to expand the scope of discussions to include other domains may complicate the process.

Alami further explained that evolving regional dynamics, such as the Gaza crisis, have rendered the current conditions for dialogue more complex compared to those during the initial JCPOA negotiations.

Nevertheless, he said that in politics, all possibilities remain open, and this juncture could provide a foundation for significant new developments.

Contact the writers at [mikegu@chinadailyhk.com](mailto:mikegu@chinadailyhk.com)

## Syria advances recovery with airport reopening

DAMASCUS — A series of developments took place across Syria on Tuesday as the new authorities sought to restore normalcy and tackle long-standing infrastructure challenges after the previous government's downfall.

Damascus International Airport resumed international flights to and from Gulf nations, launching a morning departure to Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates and welcoming the first civilian flight from Qatar's Doha in 13 years.

It marks a step toward alleviating the burdens Syrians have faced while traveling through alternate airports.

"We are now able to reactivate Damascus International Airport," said Ashhad Salibi, head of Syria's civil aviation authority. "This development will help our citizens avoid higher travel costs and, in the near future, we hope to restore service at Aleppo Airport as well."

In a separate announcement on Tuesday, the General Organization for Electricity Transmission and Distribution said two power-generating vessels from Turkey and Qatar were en route to Syria, capable of producing a combined 800 megawatts. It did not specify over what period.

Director-General Khaled Abu Dei said this capacity is roughly half of Syria's current total electricity output, predicting a potential 50 percent boost in supply once the lines are set up to distribute the power.

Noting the extensive damage to

power stations, substations and transmission lines across Syria, Abu Dei said the new administration is working to rebuild and adapt the grid.

Meanwhile, Oil and Mineral Resources Minister in the Syrian interim government Ghaith Diab said on Tuesday that engineers were using the downtime at Syria's largest oil refinery, the Baniyas refinery, caused by a crude oil shortage since last month after the fall of the previous government, to perform maintenance on equipment.

Diab expected crude shipments to arrive soon, at which point the facility can restart production and help meet the nation's fuel needs.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said on Tuesday that UN humanitarian and their partners have distributed food assistance to more than 2.5 million people in Syria since late November.

Meanwhile, French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said on Wednesday that European Union sanctions in Syria that obstruct the delivery of humanitarian aid and hinder the country's recovery could be lifted swiftly.

Three European diplomats, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the EU would seek to agree to lift some sanctions by the time the bloc's 27 foreign ministers meet in Brussels on Jan 27.

XINHUA—AGENCIES



A traveler is warmly embraced upon his arrival at Damascus International Airport on Tuesday. LOUAI BESHARA / AFP

### Briefly

#### GHANA Mahama sworn in after presidential comeback

Ghana's President John Dramani Mahama took the oath of office on Tuesday after winning the presidential election last month. A large crowd of Ghanaians, along with African heads of state and other foreign dignitaries, gathered at the Black Star Square in the capital Accra to witness the grand ceremony. Mahama said the inauguration marks a new chapter in Ghana's history and presents a rare opportunity to reset the country in various ways. He pledged his government would address youth unemployment by fostering strong partnerships with the private sector to create decent and well-paying jobs.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

#### AUSTRIA FM to take over as interim chancellor

Austria's Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg will serve as the country's interim leader while the far-right Freedom Party attempts to form a new coalition government, the president's office said on Wednesday. Schallenberg, 55, will take on the duties of outgoing Chancellor Karl Nehammer, who announced his resignation over the weekend after his efforts to put together a coalition without the Freedom Party collapsed. The current conservative-led government is serving in a caretaker capacity until a new government is formed.

### CHINA DAILY USA

#### NEW YORK HEADQUARTERS

1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036

Telephone: 212-537-8888

Fax: 212-537-8898

editor@chinadailyusa.com

readers@chinadailyusa.com

Subscription: 212-537-8899

Advertising: 212-537-8916

#### Follow us on:

x.com/chinadaily

facebook.com/chinadaily

usa.chinadaily.com.cn

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

#### WASHINGTON

National Press Bldg, Suite 1108

529 14th Street NW

Washington, DC 20045

Tel: 202-662-7249

Fax: 202-662-7247

#### SAN FRANCISCO

235 Montgomery Street, Suite 900

San Francisco, CA 94104

Tel: 415-348-8288

Fax: 415-348-8388

#### SEATTLE

800 Fifth Ave, Suite 4100

Seattle, WA 98104

Tel: 206-922-2868

#### HOUSTON

1001 South Dairy Ashford Suite 100

Houston, TX 77077

Tel: 713-595-7660

#### CANADA TORONTO

471 Yonge Street, 10th Floor

Toronto, Ontario, M2N 6K8

Tel: 416-481-5706

CHINA DAILY (ISSN 0748-6154) is published daily except weekends by China Daily USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036. Periodical postage paid at New York, NY and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to CHINA DAILY USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036.

Vol. 38 — No.1493

# S. Korea's Yoon faces new arrest attempt

SEOUL — South Korea's impeached President Yoon Suk-yeol faces a new and potentially more robust attempt to arrest him for insurrection after a top investigator vowed to do whatever it takes to break a security blockade and take in the impeached leader.

Acting president Choi Sang-mok urged authorities on Wednesday to "do their best to prevent any injuries to citizens or physical conflict between government agencies" while executing Yoon's arrest warrant.

Protesters supporting and opposing the embattled Yoon braved freezing temperatures to stage rallies on the streets around the presidential compound on Wednesday after a court reissued a warrant on Tuesday to arrest him.

The Presidential Security Service has been fortifying the compound this week with barbed wire and barricades, using buses to block access to the residence, a hillside villa in an upscale district.

Yoon is under criminal



People protest against impeached President Yoon Suk-yeol near the Constitutional Court in Seoul on Tuesday, as investigation authorities try to seek a new warrant to arrest Yoon. DANIEL CENG VIA GETTY IMAGES

investigation for insurrection over his failed attempt to impose martial law on Dec 3, a decision that stunned South Korea and prompted the first arrest warrant for a sitting president.

He also faces an impeachment trial in the Constitutional Court.

One of Yoon's lawyers said the president could not accept the

execution of the arrest warrant because it was issued by a court in the wrong jurisdiction and the team of investigators formed to probe the incumbent leader had no mandate to do so.

Yoon Kab-keun, the lawyer, also denied suggestions by some members of parliament that Yoon had fled

the official residence, saying he had met the president there on Tuesday. He described them as "malicious rumors" intended to slander Yoon.

On Tuesday, Oh Dong-woon, head of the Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials, which is leading the investigation, apologized for failing to arrest the president last week after a six-hour standoff with hundreds of Presidential Security Service agents, some of whom were carrying firearms, and military guards at the compound.

"We'll do our best to accomplish our goal by thoroughly preparing this time with great determination that the second warrant execution will be the last," Oh told a parliamentary committee.

He did not object when members of parliament called for tough action to overpower the presidential guards and military troops inside the compound, but he declined to discuss what options were being considered to achieve that.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

# WORLDUS



The Palisades fire burns a structure in the Pacific Palisades neighborhood of Los Angeles on Wednesday. ETIENNE LAURENT / AP

## Deadly wildfires rage in Los Angeles area

By HENG WELLI in New York  
hengwelli@chinadailyusa.com

Devastating wildfires fueled by high winds and dry conditions that swept through Los Angeles County starting on Tuesday continued to rage on Wednesday, with five people reported dead and more than 1,100 structures destroyed.

More than 100,000 people have been evacuated, and the fires were not controlled as of 6 pm Pacific time.

There were three main fires, but smaller ones also have broken out.

The Palisades fire, west of Los Angeles, had burned about 18 square miles (29 square kilometers) as of Wednesday afternoon. The Eaton fire, north of Pasadena, had burned about 16.6 square miles, and the Hurst fire, in the San Fernando Valley, burned about 0.8 square miles.

The five deaths all occurred in and around Altadena and Pasadena, where the Eaton Fire hit Tuesday night, the Los Angeles Times reported.

The powerful Santa Ana winds, which reached speeds of 70 mph (112 kph), have made fighting the fires difficult on the ground and from the air.

The coastal neighborhood of Pacific Palisades, which sits above the storied Pacific Coast Highway, was particularly hard hit.

Numerous fire hydrants in Pacific Palisades had little to no water flowing out, the Los Angeles Times reported. "The hydrants are down," said one firefighter in radio communications.

The Palisades fire destroyed the historic ranch house that belonged to Hollywood legend Will Rogers. California State Parks said in a statement that Rogers' house was among multiple structures destroyed by the fire at both Will Rogers State Historic Park and Topanga State Park. The Topanga Ranch Motel, built by William Randolph Hearst in 1929, also burned down.

"I just left the hellscape formerly known as Pacific Palisades, where I've

lived for 26 years," entrepreneur Wes Nichols wrote on X.com. "I'm mad at what I saw. Our politicians have failed us. Unprepared, unimaginative, understaffed, now overwhelmed."

The Pentagon will send 10 Navy helicopters to help fight the fires, said spokesperson Sabrina Singh.

The Chinese Consulate General in Los Angeles issued an emergency alert, urging Chinese citizens to be on high alert and pay attention to personal and property safety.

A California resident living in a wildfire-prone area described the situation to China Daily as a man-made disaster. "If the dead trees in the forests were cleared regularly each year, there would be no wildfires," the resident said. "However, a group of environmental activists opposes these cleanups. The forests in Nevada and California are connected, so why don't we see wildfires in Nevada every year?"

Many of the evacuation orders were in Pacific Palisades, but others were in parts of Santa Monica and Altadena. The evacuation orders were issued for some densely populated Santa Monica neighborhoods just north of the city's famous pier.

More than 320,000 customers were without power in the area Wednesday, according to the tracking site poweroutage.us.

President Joe Biden was in the Los Angeles area for an event Tuesday that the White House later postponed because of the fires. He issued a major emergency disaster proclamation for the area on Wednesday.

Governor Gavin Newsom, who appeared with Biden on Wednesday at a firehouse in Santa Monica said: "The situation in Los Angeles is highly dangerous and rapidly evolving. President Biden's swift action is a huge lift for California — as we throw everything we can into protecting residents with substantial state, local and federal resources."

The fires also prompted some anger and political backbiting.

"The fires in Los Angeles may go down, in dollar amount, as the worst in the History of our Country. In many circles, they're doubting whether insurance companies will even have enough money to pay for this catastrophe," President-elect Donald Trump wrote on Truth Social, before blaming Biden and Newsom.

"California has been prone to fires. And yes I believe ... changes to our environment play a part — but the gross mismanagement of forestry and water in California has greatly exacerbated this issue," wrote fitness expert Jillian Michaels to her 1.5 million followers on X. "1. New reservoirs weren't completed. 2. A large portion of the state's water is routed to big ag for almonds — thanks to hefty campaign contributions. 3. Millions of gallons of freshwater are dumped into the Pacific to protect smelt fish instead of prioritizing humans. Enough of this madness."

Peter Gleick, a hydroclimatologist at the Oakland-based Pacific Institute, told the LA Times: "There is no water shortage in Southern California — the state's reservoirs are all at, or above, levels normally expected for this time of year."

Bill Essayli, a state assemblyman representing a district southeast of Los Angeles, linked the lack of clearance of dead trees to the fires.

"California's forests, which cover a third of the state, are now choked with nearly 163 million dead trees," he posted on X. "California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and other regulatory policies limit the ability of local government and fire management services to clear dead trees and vegetation. (This is a big deal and prevents much of the controlled burns we desperately need.)"

Forecaster AccuWeather said damage and economic loss from Los Angeles wildfires are estimated at \$52 billion to \$57 billion.

Rena Li in Las Vegas and agencies contributed to this story.

## China voices concern over Syrian Army ranks

By MINLU ZHANG  
at the United Nations  
minluzhang@chinadailyusa.com

China's top ambassador to the United Nations on Wednesday stressed that China is "greatly concerned" over the Syrian Army "granting senior ranks to foreign terrorist fighters", including the leader of the Turkistan Islamic Party, also known as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM).

China calls on Syria to "fulfill its counter-terrorism obligations and to prevent any terrorist forces from using the Syrian territory to threaten the security of other countries," said Fu Cong, China's permanent representative to the UN. The ETIM was designated by China and listed by the UN Security Council as a terrorist organization.

"No matter how the domestic situation in Syria develops, the bottom line of zero tolerance for terrorism cannot be changed," Fu said, noting that the council recently issued a statement on Syria, making it clear that states should combat all terrorist organizations listed by the council

and deny safe haven for terrorists.

He said China supports a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process in accordance with the spirit and principles of Council Resolution 2254, a resolution adopted unanimously in 2015 that endorsed such a political transition to end the conflict.

The resolution also reiterates the call for member states to prevent and suppress terrorist acts carried out by individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with terrorist organizations designated by the Security Council.

The international community should "respect Syria's right to pursue a development path in line with its national conditions, and allow the Syrian people to decide their country's future based on their will," said Fu.

Fu pointed out that Syria has "one of the worst humanitarian situations, with more than 16 million people in dire humanitarian straits, and the prolonged illegal unilateral sanctions have further aggravated the suffering of the Syrian people".

He called on the international

community to increase its assistance to Syria. He said the UN should play a coordinating role, speeding up the implementation of humanitarian projects and prioritizing the needs of the population to survive the winter.

"All parties in Syria should abide by international humanitarian law, cooperate actively with humanitarian operations, and ensure humanitarian access and the safety of humanitarian personnel," said Fu.

Fu further said that the Golan Heights is internationally recognized as occupied Syrian territory. Resolution 497 (1981) adopted by the council determines the legal status of the Golan Heights and "makes it clear that the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan Heights is null and void".

China reiterates that the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria should be respected, that the council resolutions on the Golan Heights must be implemented, and that the 1974 agreement on disengagement of forces should be complied with, Fu said.

He said that China has "long pursued a policy of friendship and cooperation with Syria, and has never interfered in its internal affairs", he said.

"We stand ready to continue working with the international community for Syria to have a smooth transition and gradually embark on a path of peaceful development," said Fu.

## CES: Chinese digital health startups target US market

By LIA ZHU in Las Vegas  
liazhu@chinadailyusa.com

Chinese health and wellness startups have showcased innovative products ranging from AI-enabled smart rings to innovative hearing aids at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. Leveraging their technologies and competitive pricing, they are eager to establish a strong presence in the US healthcare technology sector.

Elehear, a Shenzhen-based smart hearing aid company, exemplifies the trend with remarkable market performance. Jeffery Teng, the company's marketing manager, said sales in the final two months of 2024 surpassed the previous 12 months' figures.

The company strategically positioned itself to target the US market from its inception, recognizing the strong demand and health awareness among US consumers.

"While prescription hearing aids in the US typically cost between \$3,000 and \$4,000, our over-the-counter solution is priced at just \$399 per unit, offering a compelling value proposition," Teng said.

Elehear's device, designed for people with mild to moderate hearing loss, combines advanced hearing technology with artificial intelligence capabilities to enhance speech clarity in noisy environments. It is also capable of seamlessly switching between hearing aid and Bluetooth functionalities.

Teng attributed the competitive pricing to what he called "Shenzhen speed" — the rapid pace of technological iteration in the Chinese tech hub. He said the company maintains complete control over its product development cycle, with in-house technology development and domestic manufacturing eliminating the need for outsourcing.

That approach enables the company to reduce the design-to-production timeline to less than a year, while maintaining frequent software updates, sometimes every



A Speediance team member demonstrates the use of "Gym Monster 2", the latest product from the Chinese smart-home gym company, at the CES Unveiled preshow event on Sunday in Las Vegas. LIA ZHU / CHINA DAILY

week, Teng said.

Similar success stories are emerging from other Chinese health tech companies, such as RingConn, a wearable device manufacturer. Its second-generation smart ring, measuring just 2 millimeters thick and 6.8 mm wide, incorporates photoplethysmogram sensors, temperature sensors, and accelerometers to monitor various health metrics, including caloric expenditure, respiratory rates, heart rate, and sleep apnea.

Liu Mengmeng, RingConn's public relations manager for overseas markets, said the company's health data have been certified by Shanghai Ruijin Hospital. While currently marketed as a nonmedical device, RingConn is pursuing certification from the US Food and Drug Administration.

The ring's distinctive feature is its improved battery life, achieved through the company's "eco power technology", which optimizes optical pathways and algorithms to reduce power consumption while maintaining performance.

"Our rings' batteries last 10 to 12 days, significantly outperforming competitors' five-to-six-day battery life," Liu said.

Since its establishment in 2020,

RingConn has achieved remarkable market success. Its first-generation product, launched in 2022, has sold about 100,000 units, generating sales of about \$13.7 million, with 60 to 70 percent coming from the US market. The second-generation ring, priced at \$299, generated \$4 million in sales within just 45 days of its online launch, according to Liu.

The success of the startups reflects the growing strength of China's health and wellness sector. The robust domestic market has provided a strong foundation for overseas expansion.

That competitive advantage is particularly relevant given the findings of a 2024 analysis by the digital health platform Calcium Health, which identified cost and financial constraints as major barriers to health tech adoption in the United States.

Speediance, a smart home gym manufacturer based in Shenzhen, has also capitalized on those market conditions. After two years in the US market, the company has seen remarkable growth, with US sales accounting for 60 percent of total revenue. Marketing manager Frank Han shared that the company's US sales grew from \$19 million in its first year to \$47.8 million in 2024.

40<sup>th</sup> سنة من الخبرة  
四十年经验

alshifa الشفاء  
— SINCE 1983 منذ —

New Look Same Essence  
全新的外观

SAUDI MADE

# COMMENT

## Editorials

### Firm resolve shown to reform anti-graft system to better meet the needs of times

The three-day fourth plenary session of the 20th Central Commission for Discipline Inspection that concluded in Beijing on Wednesday provides some food for thought on the progress in China's anti-corruption work.

The fight against corruption in the country since 2012 should leave no room for doubt that it has become an integral part of China's pursuit of high-quality development under the leadership of the Communist Party of China Central Committee with General Secretary Xi Jinping at its core.

As a testimony to that, in his speech at the conference, Xi called for the spirit of reform to be carried forward and a rigid standard applied to the management of the Party.

The fight against corruption represents the most testing challenge for the Party and it should be carried out as an institutionalized and conventional practice in a rule-of-law manner to ensure its precision, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability.

That's why Xi described the anti-corruption work as a "tough, protracted and all-out battle". The transformation of China's anti-graft efforts from a storm-style campaign to a norm of Party management and State governance, which involves not only the disciplinary departments and the judicial authorities, but also enterprises, media outlets and the whole society, represents a paradigm shift in the endeavor.

That necessarily has resulted in a fundamental change in the legal, institutional and social environment in which power holders exercise their power, particularly with the assistance of technology, such as big data, as it has become almost impossible to cover up the digital trails of corrupt behaviors once they are found.

After the previous plenary session of the 20th CCDI in January that targeted corruption in power-concentrated, capital-intensive and resource-rich sectors such as finance, State-owned enterprises, energy, medicine and infrastructure projects, which will continue to be key battlefields for the disciplinary watchdogs, the just-concluded meeting also put new types of corruption and hidden corruption appearing in emerging sectors, as well as grassroots corruption in the anti-corruption crosshairs.

The complicated challenges faced by China in its pursuit of high-quality development have made such a multipronged anti-corruption work layout imperative as it is conducive to preventing corruption from draining the dynamism from the development of new quality productive forces and preventing grassroots power holders from affecting the execution of policies of higher authorities at the county level that have a direct bearing on people's livelihoods.

Besides, according to the readout of the meeting, the future anti-graft efforts will also pay attention to rectifying the problematic work style of some Party members and civil servants, particularly those whose work is directly associated with industry, the market, the business environment and people's livelihood, and improve the effectiveness of the accountability system. These moves mean a marked expansion of the anti-corruption endeavors which will not only cover the corrupt officials but also those with blatant malfeasance misconduct and their superiors.

Compared with the corrupt power holders in key posts, the "crucial minority" referred to as "tigers", the corrupt lower-level officials, known as "flies", exist in a much broader sphere and in a much larger number. The corrosive effects of both the "tigers" and "flies" damage the governance system and undermine people's confidence in the Party.

As such, there is no doubt that the Party is trying to establish a full-coverage, lasting and balanced anti-graft system, and make the work an integral part of its endeavor to improve its internal management and the law-based governance of the country. Rather than hindsight punishment, the emphasis is on eradicating the soil for corruption so as to prevent it from taking root in the first place.

That Xi again stressed the CPC Central Committee's leadership of the anti-corruption work reflects its objective evaluation of the grave situation the Party still faces and its sober-mindedness, down-to-earth pragmatism and courage to lead the self-reform of the Party.

That should serve to inject confidence in the anti-corruption endeavor.

### Talks tried and tested way to keep ties on track

Under the Joe Biden administration, relations between Beijing and Washington may be described as having been frosty at best. Nonetheless, the two sides have demonstrated they have the ability to avert a crisis over the past four years. And with less than two weeks left before the changing of the guard in Washington, the outgoing Biden administration is leaving behind active channels of communication for the incoming administration.

Chinese Vice-Premier He Lifeng talked with United States Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen on Tuesday via video link. The talks as usual encompassed Washington's grievances, ranging from alleged cyberattacks by Chinese hackers and Chinese industrial overcapacity to so-called Chinese support for Russia in its conflict with Ukraine, as well as Beijing's complaints about US economic and trade restrictions targeting China.

But, as both sides underscored, the highlight was on the importance of communication and contact. Both sides agreed "to maintain communication, manage differences and continue to stabilize China-US economic relations during the transition period", according to Beijing's statement.

Also on Tuesday, Chinese State Councilor and Director of the China National Narcotic Control Committee Wang Xiaohong spoke with Rahul Gupta, director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, via video link. After expressing their respective views surrounding alleged Chinese connections with the fentanyl crisis in the US, the two countries' chief drug-busters concluded their talks with a vow to continue to engage in dialogue and cooperation.

The China-US relationship has become what it is as both sides find themselves at odds on a widening range of topics in step with the changes, or simply perceived changes, in their comparative national strengths. In spite of Beijing's repeated assurances to the contrary, Washington politicians have identified Beijing as the US' foremost strategic competitor. Washington's subsequent claims of a noncoercive approach to the relationship, even its calls for "guardrails" to avoid a collision, have since been taken with a grain of salt by Beijing, which has learned that Washington's actions speak louder than its words.

Beijing rejects Washington's perception of the China-US relationship being defined by strategic competition, insisting such a definition carries an unnecessary layer of confrontational intent. Chinese diplomats have therefore kept appealing for Washington to "correct" its perception of China.

For all the unpleasant twists and turns in ties over the past four years, however, both sides have remained clear-eyed about the need to stabilize the relationship to ensure the stress points do not cause it to snap. Therefore, both sides are acutely aware of the significance of open, smooth communication channels. The most important recent progresses include the resumption of direct military-to-military contact, as well as those for economic and financial issues under He and Yellen's watch.

He and Yellen "spoke highly of the important role of China-US economic and financial working groups and other dialogue mechanisms", according to Beijing's account of their latest communication. Since their establishment in September 2023, each working group has held five face-to-face meetings, facilitating timely communication on key mutual concerns.

It remains to be seen whether or to what extent the existing channels of communication stay operational in Donald Trump's second term. After all, as some observers have pointed out, the first Trump presidency sidestepped most, if not all, of the over 90 communication channels it had inherited. But if Washington wishes to work with Beijing on key bilateral and global issues, such channels cannot be dispensed with.

US president-elect Trump is keenly aware of the benefit of the two governments working together. Just last month, he reiterated that the US and China could work together to solve global problems. In a Monday interview, he said he and Beijing had been engaging in exchanges through representatives.

"And I think we will probably get along very well," he predicted.

Subsequently, the Foreign Ministry in Beijing said China attaches "great importance" to Trump's remarks.

"China is willing to promote the stable, healthy and sustainable development of Sino-US economic and trade relations," said Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun, highlighting mutual respect and win-win cooperation as the essential underlying principles for that.

## CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

### Contact us at:

China Daily  
15 Huitun Dongjie Chaoyang District,  
Beijing 100029  
News: +86 (0) 10 6491-8365  
editor@chinadaily.com.cn  
Advertisement: +86 (0) 10 6491-8631  
ads@chinadaily.com.cn  
Subscription: +86-400-699-0203  
subscription.chinadaily.com.cn  
App: www.chinadaily.com.cn/mobile/daily.html

China Daily UK  
90 Cannon St, London EC4N 6HA, UK  
+44 (0) 207 398 6270  
editor@chinadailyuk.com

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

China Daily USA  
1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,  
New York, NY 10036  
+1 212 537 8888  
editor@chinadailyusa.com

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

Cai Meng



## Opinion Line

### Providing elder care services also a strong driver for growth

The inadequate development of elderly care services is becoming very obvious as China's aging population wants to lead a better life in their later years, and this is posing a challenge to the healthy development of China's economy and society.

By the end of 2023, the population aged 60 and above had already reached 297 million, accounting for 21.1 percent of China's total population. The country must attend to the needs of its aging population to advance its modernization.

This explains why the top leadership has not stopped exploring policy measures in this regard. A recently promulgated guideline document aimed at deepening the reform and development of elderly care services is the latest of such efforts.

Deepening the reform and development of elderly care services is an

urgent requirement for the implementation of the national strategy to actively respond to the aging population, and an important task to ensure and improve people's livelihood, which is related to the well-being of hundreds of millions of people and social harmony and stability, the document says.

According to the document, a network of elderly care services should be in place by 2029, and a well-established elderly care service system be formed by 2035 in which the services are better matched with the needs of elderly people.

While strengthening the role of the government in the development of elderly care services, the guideline also emphasizes the role of social elements and supports various market entities to participate in the provision of elderly care services

in accordance with market principles.

Funding for elderly care services is to be vigorously developed to support the construction of eligible old-age service infrastructure through local government special bonds and other funding channels, and actively meet the credit and financing needs of the providers of elderly care services. The necessary financing support for elderly care services will effectively promote the development of the sector.

China's elderly care service industry is entering a golden period with a large consumer market. Doing a good job in this regard by tapping the potential of the "silver-hair economy" will provide a strong driver of growth for China's economy at a time when it is facing downward pressures.

— WU YIXUE, CHINA DAILY

### Social security passport for free flow of labor

The central authorities have recently called for efforts to improve the national unified labor market and social security platform by completely eliminating the household registration restrictions on employment insurance participation in the cities where they are employed.

Eliminating policy barriers for various types of workers to get social security is beneficial for improving the overall welfare level of workers. According to data of 2020, the scale of the migrant population has reached 376 million, accounting for 26.64 percent of the total population,

and is still on the rise. Population migration has promoted economic development, changed industrial structures and layouts, and impacted the entire social governance system, making it necessary to establish a unified public service and social security system that adapts to and supports the large-scale migrating population.

In recent years, there has been rapid growth in the scale of flexible employment and new forms of employment, but giving these groups social insurance cover has become a challenge. It is also necessary to build

and improve a unified social security public service platform across the country, encourage workers, including those under new forms of and flexible employment, to participate in insurance, and improve the overall welfare for workers.

Facilitating the free movement of labor contributes to high-quality economic development, and enhancing social security levels can promote social stability and a virtuous economic cycle, serving as an important cornerstone for improving the overall welfare of society.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

## What They Say

### Visits highlight Sino-African solidarity and cooperation

Although some Western media have tried to portray Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's ongoing back-to-back visit to four African countries — Namibia, the Republic of Congo, Chad and Nigeria — as China's latest attempt to reach out to African countries to diversify its supplies of key mineral resources and oil, something other major economies are doing too, as long as China's cooperation with them is carried out on the basis of equity and according to fair market law there is no cause for criticism.

Wang's visit to Namibia concluded on Monday with the two sides agreeing to work together to promote the implementation in Namibia of the Ten Partnership Actions rolled out at the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in September, and to take advantage of their structural complementarity in economy, industry and trade to accelerate Namibia's modernization.

Wang's visit to the Republic of Congo the following day sent a similar message, with the two sides agreeing to set an example for build-

ing an all-weather China-Africa community with a shared future for the new era.

In particular, they have agreed to continue to bolster the influence of the FOCAC, which marks its 25th anniversary this year. As co-chairs of the forum, the two sides will focus on the Ten Partnership Actions, and outline a clear timetable and road map for the forum's development over the next three years. That will be of strong reference value to other African countries.

It is good to see that, despite the efforts of some Western countries that are trying to drive a wedge between them, China and African countries have reached a broad consensus on strengthening their comprehensive strategic partnerships, and they are continuing to solidify the Sino-African friendship and to stand firmly together on issues concerning each other's core interests such as sovereignty, security and development.

China-Africa relations go far beyond the bilateral sphere. China and African countries, as important

members of the Global South, are committed to upholding international fairness and justice.

As Wang told his hosts in Brazzaville on Tuesday, China appreciates the unique role the Republic of Congo assumes in international affairs and is willing to work closely with the country to support Africa in achieving peace and stability, addressing climate injustice, advocating for a balanced and orderly multipolar world, and promoting inclusive economic globalization, so as to jointly build a community with a shared future for mankind.

That being said, as Wang's ongoing Africa tour will continue to prove, China-Africa collaboration is not restricted to just natural resources and infrastructure, but also about their joint pursuit for a fair, just and inclusive international order and their shared impetus to promote the common development of the Global South, which accords with the common interests of the world, including the West.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

## COMMENT

Wu Jianxiang

## Disclosure keeps people alert to graft

Some people are worried that frequent public disclosures of corruption cases may create the impression that the more the government fights corruption, the deeper corruption spreads its roots. But the public disclosures of these cases show the effectiveness of the fight against corruption. The successes of the anti-corruption campaign are achievements of the nation. However, no place should be out of bounds, no ground left unturned and no tolerance shown to corrupt officials in the fight against corruption.

Take the widely-known football corruption cases as an example. Li Tie, the former head coach of China's national men's soccer team, was sentenced to 20 years in prison by the Xianning Intermediate People's Court in Hubei province on Dec 13 for giving and taking bribes. Li's case and other soccer-related anti-corruption cases demonstrate the government's resolve to eradicate corruption in order to safeguard the development and advance Chinese modernization.

Though Li has made immense contributions to Chinese soccer, his greed led him to commit crimes. According to the indictment, from 2019 to 2021, Li, illegally received more than 50.89 million yuan (about \$7 million) to abuse his power in matters such as player selection for the national team, match outcomes, and signing contracts with clubs.

The severe punishment for Li's crimes sends a clear warning to those who wield public power. The fight against corruption must always maintain high pressure on corrupt officials, attach importance to facts and abide by the law, leaving no room for corrupt practices.

The authorities have shown the determination to take painful measures to eradicate corruption. And the investigation against some corrupt soccer officials reflects the deepening fight against corruption in key areas. Their crimes reflect the deterioration of the political ecology and the spread of systemic corruption in the field of soccer.

The criminal sentencing of more than 10 former national soccer officials shows the authorities have to make tough decisions to achieve success in the campaign against corruption by identifying and addressing the problems responsible for the proliferation of corruption. Hence, the government needs to continuously investigate both typical and influential cases, and use these cases to promote reform, improve people's legal awareness and professional ethics and pro-

te the healthy development of Chinese soccer.

The soccer corruption cases show how influential officials use power as a tool for personal gain. Since absolute power corrupts absolutely, the authorities need to take measures to ensure that power comes with responsibility and people who abuse power are held accountable. In this regard, the investigation against and sentencing of corrupt soccer officials are an apt example of how power can be put in an institutional cage.

The lack of proper resource allocation mechanisms and supervision is an important reason for the proliferation of corruption. And the widespread corruption in

the field of soccer shows the use of power has to be supervised and the mechanisms to find and address problems optimized. The public disclosure of corruption cases also serves as a reminder to individuals, particularly officials and entrepreneurs, to uphold professional ethics and comply with the law.

Over the past decade, China has sustained the anti-corruption campaign, marked by investigations against a record number of high-ranking officials and their broad impact on various sectors of society.

China's pursuit of national rejuvenation has reached a critical phase, where corruption will have a massive impact on the

country's politics, economy and society. Corruption leads to the abuse of power, and can undermine democracy and rule of law. It can also lead to unfair allocation of resources and disrupt the market order, even trigger social conflict.

Hence, the joint efforts of the whole of society are needed to eliminate the soil breeding corruption.

*The author is director of the China Anti-Corruption Judicial Research Center, China Against Corruption Law Association, and dean of the Discipline Inspection Institute, Xiangtan University.*

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



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

Chi Fulin

## RCEP can release potential of region's blue economy

Establishing smooth marine economy connectivity between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations will facilitate the sustainable development of both sides and foster the new regional maritime cooperation paradigm of "leading governance through collaboration".

In March 2023, the China Institute for Reform and Development, in collaboration with some think tanks based in ASEAN member states, launched the "Initiative to Promote China-ASEAN Blue Economy Integration". Accelerating the process of establishing maritime-economic connectivity between China and ASEAN and promoting the efficient allocation of marine resources will unlock the growth potential of the regional blue economy, helping build a new pattern of blue economic integration between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

The deepening trade cooperation between China and ASEAN has strengthened the demand for better, smoother marine economy connectivity between the two sides, especially because maritime transport accounted for more than 94 percent of China's foreign trade and over 60 percent of ASEAN's foreign trade, and 65 percent of China-ASEAN trade in 2023. Hence, the marine economy has become particularly crucial for the sustainable development of both China and ASEAN.

Since the marine economy contributed only 7.9 percent to China's GDP compared with about 20 percent to ASEAN's GDP, the two sides need to leverage connectivity to use their complementary advantages to develop a "blue engine" for economic growth.

However, ASEAN member economies lag in infrastructure development. For instance, ASEAN economies account for only three of the world's top 20 ports. Limited port accessibility, the absence of cooperation mechanisms, inefficient customs and border management, below-par logistics service quality are

**Using the RCEP well and allowing marine products and services to enjoy the benefits of the RCEP agreement will reduce the costs of blue economy cooperation between China and ASEAN.**

some of the challenges facing ASEAN members.

The marine economies of China and ASEAN are highly complementary, with China enjoying technological advantages in ocean fisheries, infrastructure construction and renewable energy development, while most ASEAN member states enjoy resource and cost advantages. Also, the two sides have similar marine environments and face some common challenges including climate change and marine pollution.

For example, while about 625 million people in ASEAN depend on the sea for their livelihoods, fish stocks in the South China Sea have declined by 70-95 percent since the 1950s. Against this backdrop, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership has unified many trade rules and standards, including those pertaining to the blue economy.

As such, promoting regional maritime connectivity, establishing channels for China-ASEAN marine industry cooperation, and unleashing the potential of the marine economies under the RCEP framework will contribute to the sustainable use of marine resources.

The two sides should also jointly advance port infrastructure construction, renovation and upgrading, establish a China-ASEAN port network for information sharing, unify standards and recognize each other's regulations. They should also provide financial and technological assistance for less-developed ASEAN members to help them improve their port infrastructure and standards, build a

"customs cross-border cooperation platform" to enable the exchange of information on inspection, quarantine and certification processes, and develop "smart ports" at key locations.

Establishing regular "multi-stop" international cruise routes, developing specialized tourism projects and expanding regional route networks, using the RCEP's rules on investment to promote investment in fisheries, developing deep-sea and offshore fishing operations and modern aquaculture, setting up joint deep-sea technology laboratories and R&D centers for marine biomedicine and new materials, and advancing marine technology trade liberalization are some of the other areas that call for greater attention from China and ASEAN.

Besides, by the end of 2022, the installed offshore wind energy capacity of ASEAN as a whole accounted for only 0.3 percent of its total installed energy capacity. In sharp contrast, China's offshore wind power grid-connected installed capacity is more than half of the global total.

Therefore, the two sides should explore the possibility of "zero-tariff" transition periods under the RCEP framework for generating offshore wind power, and trading in wind power materials and equipment. The two sides should also leverage RCEP rules to ink bilateral and multilateral free trade agreements to jointly develop free trade energy processing zones and industrial parks and establish environmentally friendly fishing technology standards.

Using the RCEP well and allowing marine products and services to enjoy the benefits of the RCEP agreement will reduce the costs of blue economy cooperation between China and ASEAN.

However, there is a need to upgrade the RCEP's rules of origin from partial to full accumulation for maritime products, recognize the authorized economic operator status of marine enterprises to enable preferential inspection and timely disposal of time-sensitive cargo such as fresh seafood.

China, being a major tourism market, is opening up its marine tourism market and supporting both domestic and ASEAN enterprises to develop South China Sea cruise routes and products primarily targeting Chinese consumers. It is also promoting cooperation in fishery operations, aquaculture technology exchanges and marine biological resource development. The focus is on strengthening aquaculture collaboration, leveraging Chinese capital and technology to explore the joint development of ecological, high-value deep-water cage systems and large-scale intelligent farming operations.

In this context, the island province of Hainan enjoys a strategic position at the "8-shaped" intersection between China's massive domestic market and the Southeast Asian markets. Its geographical advantages, industrial base, cooperation foundation and policy and institutional advantages make it suitable to serve as a vital hub for China-ASEAN regional marine economy connectivity. So China should leverage the Hainan Free Trade Port's zero-tariff policies for inland sales of processed and value-added goods to encourage ASEAN enterprises to invest in seafood processing facilities, build on Yangpu Port's special policies, strengthen cooperation with ASEAN ports and build it into a transportation hub between the two markets.

The key practical measures include establishing ASEAN-oriented "offshore warehouses" at Yangpu Port to reduce the relatively high China-ASEAN maritime logistics costs through coordinated warehouse and distribution models and establish a China-ASEAN marine expo to build the Hainan Free Trade Port into a crucial platform for trade and cultural exchanges between China and ASEAN.

*The author is president of the China Institute for Reform and Development.*  
*The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

Kong Qingjiang

## Trump's tariff policy sword with double edge

With Donald Trump set to be sworn in as the US president for a second time and given the partisan nature of US politics, many observers have been asking what the new Trump administration's China trade policy will be like.

The US' trade relations with China have always been shaped by the administration's perception of the Sino-US relationship. It was during Trump's previous tenure that the US began to view China as a rival that has both the will and ability to challenge American interests on a global scale, and characterize Sino-US relations as one of strategic competition.

Hence, the long-term trend of the US' economic and trade policies will be to serve Washington's needs of strategic competition against Beijing.

In this context, irrespective of whether Trump, like some of his close aids, is obsessed with anti-China ideology, the incoming US administration's perception of bilateral relations will not change.

A second factor that will shape the US administration's China policy is Trump's sense of history and accountability to voters. While Trump may tend to honor the promises he made during the presidential campaign, as a US president nearing his 80s he may be eager to leave behind a "good" political legacy.

**Relying too heavily on tariffs could lead to elevated living costs and heightened inflationary pressures, ultimately jeopardizing the overall health of the US economy.**

Intensifying the trade war against China on the pretext of reducing the huge trade imbalance between China and the US might serve him well in this regard — the huge trade deficit in the US is what prompted Trump to launch the trade war in 2018 in the first place. Yet the US' trade deficit against China further increased in recent years because of high economic interdependence. In 2023, China's surplus in goods trade was \$608 billion, the second-highest in history. To a mercantile businessman-turned politician, such a huge trade deficit is a thorn in the flesh.

As a matter of fact, during his election campaign Trump promised to impose up to 60 percent tariffs on all imports from China after taking office. If he does impose punitive tariffs on Chinese goods, it might help Trump "honor his words" but will in fact deal a blow to the US consumers by exacerbating US inflation.

Given that the Republican Party also won the majority seats in both the Senate and the House of Representatives in November, it won't be a surprise to see Trump use his influence in the Republican Party and Congress to push forward the legislative piece, which is similar to the US Tariff Act of 1930, so as to leave behind his legacy in the field of trade.

A third factor is that US domestic laws provide the needed support or ammunition for the Trump administration to impose new, more drastic trade measures against other countries. In addition to antidumping and countervailing measures that can be easily used against imports from other countries, the Trump administration may also use measures under Section 301 to address so-called unfair trade practices, Section 232 to address self-perceived national security threats and Section 201 to cater to global safeguard needs.

Moreover, it can use the Foreign Investment Risk Review Modernization Act of 2018 to screen foreign investment in the US, and the Export Control Reform Act of 2018 to prevent the export of targeted technology to certain countries. It can also use the CHIPS and Science Act of 2022, Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and Inflation Reduction Act to build barriers to deny targeted countries access to advanced technologies and products.

As such, the incoming Trump administration may adopt an even more treacherous trade policy.

However, even US economists have debunked tariff hike justifications as exaggerated, unsubstantiated, and logically flawed. In reality, the tariffs did not succeed in stimulating US manufacturing and, instead, resulted in a net loss of jobs. Relying too heavily on tariffs could lead to elevated living costs and heightened inflationary pressures, ultimately jeopardizing the overall health of the US economy.

The US president-elect should think twice.

*The author is the dean of the School of International Law at the China University of Political Science and Law.*  
*The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

## GLOBAL VIEWS

ONG TEE KEAT

## Keys to stability

Ensuring peace in Southeast Asia through the upholding of the ZOPFAN Declaration

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, having pronounced its centrality in addressing regional security concerns and development priorities, remains steadfast in observing its non-aligned commitment amid the Sino-US geopolitical face-off.



This reminds the world of its consistency in endeavoring to make the region a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality (ZOPFAN), as was underscored by the ZOPFAN Declaration inked in Kuala Lumpur in 1971.

The signatory parties, comprising the then foreign ministers of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and the special envoy of the National Executive Council of Thailand, publicly stated their intent to keep Southeast Asia "free from any form or manner of interference by outside powers" and "broaden the areas of cooperation". It stood as a bold and defiant move against the prevailing tide of rallying behind the United States-led West when the specter of a "domino effect" was riding high across the region. The overture to Beijing by Kuala Lumpur that culminated in the fostering of bilateral ties between Malaysia and China set in motion the momentum of engaging with China for the entire bloc in its collective pursuit of peace and coexistence. It marked a bold shift toward equidistant diplomacy by ASEAN during the Cold War years of ideological confrontation.

It is this tradition of non-alignment that underpins the much-touted ASEAN centrality. The concept, first brought to light in the ASEAN Charter in 2008, underscores the notion that ASEAN should be the "primary driving force" in shaping the bloc's external relations and multilateral cooperation in an open, transparent and inclusive regional architecture.

ASEAN's role in creating development opportunities through trade and investment ties with its regional partners, including China, has been impressive. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, endeavored by ASEAN, stands out as a monumental achievement of inclusive multilateral economic cooperation that helped break the gridlock in the fostering of a much-awaited trilateral free trade agreement between China, Japan and the Republic of Korea. Three years on, the 15-signatory mega pact looks set to catalyze further the regional economic integration across the region amid rising economic protectionism and fragmentation.

Meanwhile, the various dialogue

fora initiated by ASEAN, namely the ASEAN+3 (the 10 ASEAN member states plus China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea), ASEAN Regional Forum, and the East Asia Summit continue to manifest ASEAN's relevance and capacity in managing and addressing the rising risks and security concerns across the region.

While ASEAN centrality has been greeted with broad political buy-in by both the US and China, alongside the European Union, the ASEAN-skeptics notably political pundits in the West, never cease to cast aspersions upon the effectiveness of ASEAN centrality in addressing the protracted South China Sea maritime disputes.

Time and again, the outstanding disputes on overlapping maritime territorial claims in the South China Sea are cited to prove the point. The inconclusive Code of Conduct in the South China Sea is in the crosshairs of the hostile Western narratives that dismiss the protracted negotiations as chelonian, and ASEAN centrality as nothing more than mere rhetoric.

The venting of frustration by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. of the Philippines over the purported inaction of ASEAN to the standoff between vessels of China and the Philippines in the disputed waters at the recent ASEAN summit in Laos, was widely seen as a brazen move to put ASEAN cohesiveness and centrality to the test. Prior to the summit, the international media controlled by the West had been earnestly instigating ASEAN to take issue with its top trading partner, China, over the standoff in the name of solidarity. When the outcome turned out otherwise, ASEAN centrality was made the immediate target of scorn by the West.

Yet, intriguingly, both their state actors and the media seem to have coincidentally turned a blind eye to the fact that Manila has in the first place reneged on its decades-old commitment to ASEAN's ZOPFAN Declaration when it gave the US the liberty to meddle with the territorial row between China and the Philippines.

From the Western perspective, there has been a stereotype impression that Southeast Asia needs the US military presence, if not the existence of its military bases, in the face of Chinese growing assertiveness on its territorial claims on the South China Sea. The logic of troop deployment by the US in Southeast Asia purportedly to thwart the possible influence of China is no different from that of collective defense in Southeast Asia created by the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty signed in 1954 in Manila, at the height of Cold War ideological confrontation.

In retrospect, the demise of the

Southeast Asia Treaty Organization in 1977 following its dissipation of traction is in itself a clear proof that the Western-inspired military deterrence has never been a viable option to address regional security concerns. Instead, it has proved that the peace dividends accrued from inclusive engagement and peaceful coexistence provide a conducive environment to development that brings about common prosperity benefiting the region. This development-driven security model provides a viable option in the contemporary context, notably in Southeast Asia where pursuit of peace and stability is the common agenda.

Against the present scenario of economic fragmentation and political distrust, the timely emergence of the Belt and Road Initiative followed by the Global Development Initiative and the Global Security Initiative presents a refreshing hope to reset the ailing global order.

Being the initiator of such ground-breaking initiatives, China, alongside ASEAN, its top trading partner since 2020, has presented to the world a successful template of multilateral cooperation through economic integration in the ASEAN-China FTA and the RCEP. This bodes well for development-driven security collaboration between the two parties representing a total population of over 2 billion, so long as their existing disputes are allowed to be resolved through positive engagement without the interference of non-stakeholders from outside the region.

Alongside this, ASEAN should also be watchful to not slide into triumph-induced complacency. Indeed, it was no small feat for ASEAN — a subregional grouping made up of small and middle powers of diverse cultures — to evolve from the modest goal of managing security challenges to claiming an undisputed spot at the center of the regional multilateral architecture after the end of Cold War.

Knowing that ASEAN will not be spared from the major powers' rivalry, the 10-member bloc must therefore uphold its autonomous strategic diplomacy at all times. In this context, the ZOPFAN principle remains relevant in the collective interest of preserving peace and stability across the region. No single member state should ever be allowed to defy the spirit of ZOPFAN Declaration merely to serve the narrow interests of its state actor.

*The author is president of the Belt and Road Initiative Caucus for Asia Pacific (BRICAP). The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

YANG YAORYUAN

## Push back against the thin end of wedge

China and Vietnam should work to create a sound political environment for cooperation that can withstand the machinations of the US

Donald Trump will return to the White House in late January. Amid global political and economic turmoil, China-Vietnam relations are facing challenges and have come to a critical juncture. The two countries need to recalibrate the mode of their



cooperation to stabilize bilateral relations and seek further development. On Dec 24, Vietnam's Ministry of Industry and Trade decided to impose an anti-dumping levy of 97 percent for five years on wind power equipment originating from China, starting from the beginning of January 2025. The measures will apply on almost all Chinese companies, with an exception for Jiangsu Zhenjiang New Energy Equipment Co Ltd as it was not found to have any dumping activity during the investigation period.

Vietnam's latest measure may seem to the outside to be catering to the policy direction of the new US government, which will inevitably add some uncertainty to the stable development of China-Vietnam economic and trade relations. China and Vietnam have made it clear that they will promote the role of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area to promote the export of key goods of one country to the other. But Vietnam's recent move is like tearing down bridges.

China is one of Vietnam's largest trading partners. In 2023, the bilateral trade volume reached \$229.8 billion. Vietnam's imposition of high anti-dumping duties on China's wind towers may trigger a chain reaction, putting China-Vietnam economic and trade relations into tensions and damaging long-term cooperation between the two sides. It will pose challenges to both countries in terms of trade complementarity and industrial coordination, and will do harm to the joint effort of building convenient business operation.

At the diplomatic and strategic level, Trump had close relations with Vietnam in his first term and visited Vietnam twice when in office. And in his second term, Trump may once again use Vietnam as a counterbalance to China's influence in Southeast Asia.

Under such circumstances, Vietnam may face growing pressure to take sides in major-country competition, which may affect

the political mutual trust and strategic cooperation between China and Vietnam, increase the difficulty of bilateral coordination and cooperation in handling regional affairs, and interfere with the building of a China-Vietnam community with a shared future.

In the field of security, the US has been trying to establish a forward military presence in Vietnam. Trump is likely to step up efforts in this regard after taking office, which will directly threaten China's national security, complicate the security situation in the South China Sea and other areas, and pose challenges to China and Vietnam's efforts to strengthen maritime security cooperation and maintain regional peace and stability through the "3+3" strategic dialogue mechanism, which may result in destabilizing factors such as a regional arms race.

Amid profound changes, how to rise to the challenges and continue to write a new chapter of China-Vietnam relations has become an important topic of common concern for the two countries.

In terms of the anti-dumping duties imposed by Vietnam on Chinese wind power equipment, it is imperative for China to actively negotiate with the Vietnamese side. For example, through detailed market research data, the positive role that Chinese wind towers and related products have played in the Vietnamese market can be shown, such as helping Vietnam's wind power industry to increase the installed capacity, reduce power generation costs and optimize the country's energy structure.

In addition, the two sides can explore cooperation opportunities in emerging areas and Vietnam can learn from China's rich experience and successful models in the field of cross-border e-commerce.

China's cross-border e-commerce imports and exports have shown rapid growth in recent years, by virtue of its advantages in sound e-commerce platforms, efficient logistics system and diversified payment means. China and Vietnam can make use of this experience to jointly build cross-border e-commerce platforms, build more convenient trade channels for small and medium-sized enterprises from both sides, reduce trade barriers and costs, and reduce the impact of trade frictions.

At the same time, the two countries can further beef up cooperation in the construction of infrastructure and industrial

parks. In terms of the construction of transport infrastructure, the two countries should enhance connectivity and provide more convenient logistics conditions for trade. In the construction of industrial parks, through reasonable planning of their industrial layout, the two countries should realize more effective docking of upstream and downstream industries to promote deep integration of bilateral trade and two-way investment, so as to enhance the collaborative efficiency and value-added creation ability of both sides in all links of the industrial chains.

The two countries can jointly promote industrial upgrading and trade and investment facilitation, and carry out projects to support emerging industries. In terms of infrastructure construction, they should jointly advance cross-border transportation, energy and other projects to enhance connectivity. In cultural and people-to-people exchanges, they should actively organize cultural, educational and tourism activities to promote exchanges between the two countries.

The two sides should enhance candid exchanges on major issues of mutual concern and the regional situation. Through various types of diplomacy such as head-of-state diplomacy, China and Vietnam can enhance mutual trust, dispel misunderstandings and jointly create a sound political environment.

In the field of security, China and Vietnam should deepen multifaceted cooperation to cope with complex regional and global situations. In terms of maritime security, China and Vietnam need to improve the "3+3" strategic dialogue mechanism, and improve joint law enforcement actions.

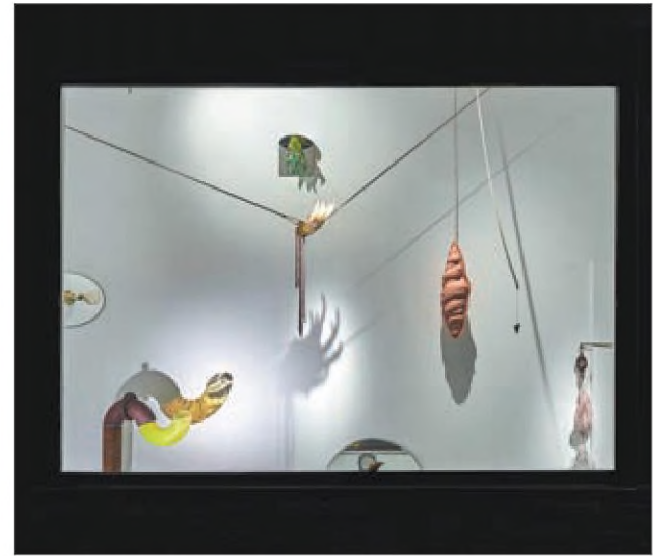
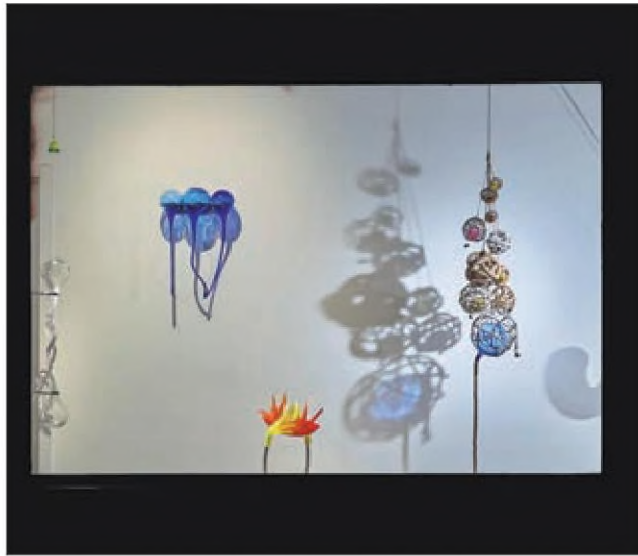
The two sides can also hold joint military exercises, promote exchanges and cooperation between their military academies. In the meantime, the two countries can advocate the establishment of a better security dialogue and cooperation mechanism, strengthen policy coordination in regional platforms, and jointly rise to the regional security challenges.

*The author is vice-dean of and a lecturer at the School of Political Party Diplomacy at Beijing International Studies University. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

## LIFE



Artist Xie Wendi's installation, *Nothing New Under the Sun* (left and right), a collection of 20 objects inspired by everyday items, is on show in two display cases that resemble "windows" at the Gravity Art Museum in Beijing. Xie (center), in a factory in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, creates *Breathing*, a piece with transparent glass balls placed in a glass box.

For Xie Wendi, glass is a fascinating material with a contradictory nature. It can be fragile or resilient, transparent or opaque, rigid yet malleable. It may look light, but is actually quite heavy.

"The more I work with glass, the more I feel like it: fluid and solid. When heated, it flows and takes different shapes, and when it cools, it is strong in compression, as am I," the 35-year-old artist says.

These paradoxical properties are on full display in her latest installation, *Nothing New Under the Sun*, which is on show in two display cases that resemble "windows" at the Gravity Art Museum in Beijing. The collection of 20 objects inspired by everyday items have been positioned in a "mischievous" way, and cannot all be seen at a glance.

The objects are designed to fill the windows, some interlocked with others in spirals, breaking the boundaries between heavy and light, soft and hard. As sunlight passes through the windows, captivating illusions are created. "You have to move about to change your angle to discover all the pieces," Xie says.

Her work has been exhibited in the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, Germany, and the United States.

Among the first group of people to work with glass as an artistic medium in China, Xie started studying the material in 2006 at the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, the first year a glass art course was introduced. "I feel it was not me choosing glass, but glass choosing me. What I learned at school was more like traditional sculpture using glass as a medium," she says, adding that at the time, it was a lesser-known major, and due to the lack of facilities, she didn't learn techniques like glassblowing at school.

Xie later studied in Britain, and received a Master of Arts degree from London's Royal College of Art in 2012. "During my time there, I realized for the first time that I didn't want to be a glass artist, but rather an artist who works with glass as a medium," Xie says.

During her second year in London, she began to find her creative footing in the world of art. She started working with two or three materials together, allowing them to influence each other, and used contrasting black and white colors to confuse the perception of weight. Through techniques such as glassblowing, casting, shattered glass, as well as incorporating other materials like black clay and ceramics, she explored the ambiguity arising from the technical versatility of glass as an artistic medium.

One of her graduation pieces, *Journey*, was nominated for the 2012 Stanislav Libensky Award, an international competition that

recognizes outstanding glassworks by art college graduates. The piece was inspired by the sight of a lone plastic bag swirling in the air during a train ride to Edinburgh, which resonated with her as a student studying alone overseas.

"Memory is always changing and intangible, and reflects the past, but not the actual past. I try to capture this through my art," Xie says.

After graduating in 2012, she got a job at the Shenzhen Art Museum in Guangdong province, because she didn't know how to "become" an artist, and glass art was a comparatively new concept in China. During her six years at the museum, Xie spent most of her holidays taking part in glass workshops in the United States. In 2016, a public art work of hers, a large piece of stained glass titled *Bridge the World*, was displayed at the Shenzhen airport metro station.

In 2017, she was invited for an artist-in-residence program in Shenzhen. For its three-month duration, Xie worked at the museum during the day, and made art at the craft factory at night. Her subsequent solo exhibition *Form Form Form* explored form in daily life. In another piece called *Breathing*, several transparent glass balls were squeezed into a glass tank, creating subtle tension, a reflection of her state of mind at the time, a mix of repression, self-denial and a yearning for life.

Xie quit her job in 2018 to become an independent artist. For the first few years, she had to make her art in factories that produced everyday objects or industrial goods, as she didn't have her own

## Romantic with a heart of glass

Duality and complexity of material allows artist to cast its different qualities, Wang Qian reports.



Top: Another sculpture from Xie's series, *In Her Own Body*, which was inspired by her encounter with female silk workers. Above: Xie (right) making her recent piece, *Spring*, with workers at a glassblowing studio in Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

studio. This was also partially why she participated in artist-in-residence programs.

Her experiences resulted in the exhibition *Strength Factory* in 2023. "Strength" is a common topic that Xie has explored in her art, and "factory" referred not only to a workspace, but also to a place for her to observe life and interact with people.

Her relationship with factory workers influenced her art to varying degrees. One of the best examples is *Floating Thread*, which Xie created during her stay at the Nanhai Silk Factory in Foshan, Guangdong province, in 2022, where she saw female workers standing in front of large machines, their fingers rapidly moving over silk fibers thinner than a human hair.

These movements intrigued her, and she wanted to express their juxtaposition of lightness and strength; for example, she saw the women as sensitive, fluid, soft and tough. She made plaster casts of dozens of hand movements commonly used at the factory, and then in a glass factory in Zhongshan, Guangdong, she blew glass into the casts. After they cooled, a transparent hand was created.

Yang Xin, curator at Shanghai Museum of Glass, says that *Floating Thread* opens a window onto rarely

seen parts of these workers' lives.

Between last September and November, an improved version of a piece related to the silk workers, *In Her Own Body - Mei*, was part of a group exhibition in Norway called *Still in Love*. The exhibition's organizers said that Xie had "turned her serendipitous encounter with these female silk workers into elegant glass bubbles that encapsulate the hand gestures used in reeling silk from cocoons".

Xie explains that the form and color of the glass bubbles represented the shape of the body and the innate strength of women. She used three steel wire ropes to make it appear to be floating in the air, allowing visitors to feel the tension between the rope and the glass bubbles, each of which weighs about 5 kilograms. The ropes, art and the surrounding space became intertwined

as a whole, Xie adds. Working in factories has gradually become a way of creation, and her pieces are often about connections built between people. She has explored other materials besides glass. One piece that resulted, *Spring*, is being displayed at an exhibition of the luxury brand Bvlgari between Thursday and Feb 16 in Shanghai. The piece — two intertwined ring structures which form an infinity symbol from certain angles — was inspired by the appearance of a flexible gas pipe. At each end, there is a piece of blown glass that hangs down or curves slightly upward, which resembles a flower.

"This latest piece is important to me, as it takes what I want to express a step further: the concept of force and the interaction of forces," Xie says. She does not view her career as an artist as a job, but as a way of life. She enjoys residency programs — every year she participates in at least one or two — that take her to new places and keep her inspired. She also enjoys the nomadic lifestyle, and is always ready to go, with her daily necessities packed in her car. Her next artist-in-residence program is in May in Longquan, Zhejiang province, where she will try her hand at ceramics.

"Just like my art, I want to go with the flow of life and see what it brings," Xie says.

"Just like my art, I want to go with the flow of life and see what it brings," Xie says.

"Just like my art, I want to go with the flow of life and see what it brings," Xie says.

Contact the writer at wangqian@chinadaily.com.cn

## World's smallest cat fossil unearthed in eastern China

Archaeologists have unearthed the smallest known cat fossil at a site inhabited by archaic humans in eastern China. This diminutive feline, which has been identified as an extinct species of leopard cat, was so petite that it could comfortably fit in the palm of one's hand.

It was comparable in size to the two smallest existing feline species — the rusty-spotted cat and the black-footed cat, which are much smaller than the modern leopard cat.

Researchers from the Institute of

Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology under the Chinese Academy of Sciences unearthed the fossil in a cave at the Hualongdong site in Anhui province.

The new species has been named *Prionailurus kurteni* or *P. kurteni*, according to a study published online in the peer-reviewed journal, *Annales Zoologici Fennici*.

Molecular biological research has long supported the notion of a common ancestor for the leopard cat, the domestic cat, and Pallas's cat. However, no fossil evidence had

been identified before the discovery. Forest habitats where leopard cats live are not ideally suited to bone preservation.

The fossil shows evidence of an inclined first molar, providing evidence from its jawbone and teeth that support the notion of a common ancestor for all three cat species, according to the study.

Chinese scientists have previously discovered dozens of archaic human fossils at the site, dating back 300,000 years. These are the earliest fossils found so far in East Asia that

are part of the evolutionary process of *Homo sapiens*, or modern humans, which first appeared in Africa some 315,000 years ago, but were not present in eastern Asia until around 45,000 years ago.

"The food scraps these archaic humans left at the Hualongdong site might have attracted rats and small leopard cats as well," says Jiangzuo Qigao from the Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology, the first author of the paper.

"It's unclear whether these cats

constituted part of the cave dwellers' diet, due to the absence of butchery marks on the fossils," he adds.

The identification of *P. kurteni* suggests a potentially high diversity of leopard cats during prehistoric times, according to the study.

The discovery of animal fossils at the Hualongdong site may help shed light on the environment, diet and potential threats faced by archaic humans, he says.

Researchers from the Swedish Museum of Natural History and the Northeast Forestry University in

China also participated in the study. Discovered in late 1988, the Hualongdong site has yielded remarkable finds since excavations began in 2013.

Approximately 20 individual archaic human fossils, including a relatively complete skull, over 400 stone artifacts, numerous bone fragments with evidence of cutting and chopping, and more than 80 vertebrate fossils have been unearthed at the site.

XINHUA

## LIFE



# Wonders of time travel spur jaunts of discovery

China's younger generations seek better exhibition experiences through rare works, digitalization and interaction, **Xu Lin** and **Wu Yong** report.



A long line winds its way around the corner as people eagerly await their turn to view *Rui He Tu* (Auspicious Cranes), a legendary traditional Chinese painting masterpiece created by Zhao Ji (1082-1135), also Emperor Huizong during the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127).

The painting features 20 white cranes against an azure sky above the palace gate draped in magical clouds to mark an auspicious event that occurred on the 16th day of the first month on the Chinese calendar in 1112.

Among the bustling crowd, 30-year-old university teacher Wu Xinying from Kaifeng, Central China's Henan province, patiently waits for a second time, enduring 50 minutes in line to catch another glimpse of the artwork.

The Liaoning Provincial Museum in Shenyang city showcased the treasured painting for one month, concluding at the end of October. It hadn't been on display since 2020.

Renowned for its excellence and the rare chance to view it, the masterpiece has drawn many tourists like Wu from other cities. After the exhibition, the painting will sit in the warehouse for three years as the museum strives to balance utilizing and preserving its cultural treasures.

## Visually touching the heart

"The painting describes a scene from ancient Kaifeng, once the capital of the Northern Song Dynasty. The city where I work and live still maintains the inheritance of Song culture, emphasizing the importance of China's cultural heritage. This visual encounter touches my heart more deeply than reading or hearing about it," Wu says.

"When you view the original artwork with the naked eye, you can see the techniques used, such as color layering and brushstroke applications that digital replicas can't convey."

According to her, as Chinese calligraphy and paintings age over time, cracks and fading intertwine with the vivid original colors to create an enduring artistry that transcends the boundaries of time. "I'm fascinated by these changes. It's a way to experience the beauty inherent in history," she says.

The museum lover takes one or two days off in addition to the weekend to embark on short trips to other cities to see exhibitions she's interested in.

"Every museum highlights the special aspects of its region. Chinese culture is rich and diverse with a long history. Some cities were former capitals of dynasties, allowing for a historical retrospective into those periods," she says.

"Visiting exhibitions in new places feels like unwrapping a blind box. I enjoy life's surprises, and merging travel with exhibitions is a double delight."

She recommends that travelers prepare by reading relevant materials and books and watching documentaries to enhance the effectiveness and rewards of their visits.

Zhang Yue, 34, an office worker from Shanghai, recently traveled to Anyang, Henan province, to visit the Yin Xu Museum.

The museum displays the archaeological findings of the Yin Xu Ruins, the remains of the ancient city of Yin, one of the capitals of the late Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century-11th century BC).

Zhang is impressed by Shang's wine culture showcased through the museum's wide collection of bronze wine vessels featuring elegant shapes and intricate patterns.

She also learned about how the diviners of Shang used oracle bones to tell fortunes. They engraved small holes and notches on tortoise shells or ox scapulae, and then burned them in a fire, interpreting the burned cracks as omens.

"Visiting museums enhances one's understanding of history and art, and you can connect different pieces of knowledge the more you see. When you see artifacts, you can delve into the stories behind them. It's more engaging than reading books and gives deeper insights into ancient customs and traditions," Zhang says.

Her exhibition preferences include Chinese calligraphy, paintings from both China and abroad, and Buddhist statues. She often hires an experienced museum guide to tour the exhibitions and provide detailed explanations.

"When I visit art exhibitions, I'm often captivated by discovering new pieces. It deepens my understanding of art and the historical background of the works," Zhang says.



**Top left:** A sculpture that dates back to 710-705 BC is seen at the ongoing exhibition *I Am Ashurbanipal: King of Assyria* at Suzhou Museum, Jiangsu province, in November. **Top right:** A brick with fresco dates back to 875-850 BC at the exhibition. **Top:** Visitors enjoy the exhibition, a collaboration between the Chinese museum and the British Museum on Nov 3. **Above:** Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127) Emperor Zhao Ji's *Rui He Tu* captivates visitors at Liaoning Provincial Museum on Oct 3.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY  
**Left:** A group of foreign professionals appreciate relics at the Yin Xu Museum, Anyang, Henan province, on Nov 5.  
KAN LI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

More Chinese people, especially the younger generations, are traveling to other cities specifically to visit museum exhibitions that pique their interest.

Museums have become important tourist attractions and draw a large number of visitors during holidays. According to the National Cultural Heritage Administration, museums across the country received 74.88 million visitors during the 2024 National Day holiday.

## Visitor preparations

More tourists mean that museums need to take measures to ensure a smooth experience for everyone. The Liaoning Provincial Museum trained its staff by conducting emergency drills the day before *Rui He Tu* was displayed. Visitors were allowed to line up until the museum's 5 pm closing time

and the staff worked overtime to ensure those in line could view the painting.

"When there is visitor overflow, it's crucial to manage the long line, prevent people cutting in, keep those in line satisfied and treat everyone fairly. Also, our staff members clean the glass in the exhibition hall more frequently for a clear view of the artifacts," says Dong Baohou, the museum's deputy director.

"We kindly remind the audience not to linger too long. Everyone wants to stay a bit longer, but more visitors are waiting."

During the recent winter and summer vacations, a lot of large luggage was stored at the museum. Since last summer, there hasn't been enough storage space. They expanded the area by renovating a vacant room and setting up temporary storage with shelves for better organization.

"It's a direct indicator that more out-

town tourists are visiting the museum," Dong says.

"Curating an exhibition is like directing a film. The cultural relics serve as actors selected based on the narrative you wish to convey," he says. Sometimes, they borrow artifacts from other museums to complement their collection.

He says museums should also focus on educational tours, academic lectures and cultural creative products relevant to an exhibition, catering to the diverse preferences of visitors.

"It's vital for museums to create a comfortable environment for visitors, such as clear signage. Museums must display artifacts in a way that ensures easy understanding for all visitors, supported by informative tour guidance, digital technology and interactive experiences," he says.

"We respond quickly to online comments from visitors and offline feedback in the guest book, working to implement suggestions that are sensible and achievable. Such reactions can leave a favorable impression of the museum, which is a calling card for Liaoning province."

## Overseas relics build interest

With more international cooperation between museums from China and abroad in recent years, visitors can now view various overseas exhibits without leaving the country, making museum travel more attractive.

In 2021, Suzhou Museum in the eponymous city in East China's Jiangsu province, launched a long-term collaboration to present a series of exhibitions on ancient civilizations, such as Roman and Greek, showcasing the enviable collection from the British Museum.

The ongoing exhibition *I Am Ashurbanipal: King of Assyria*, which will end in August 2025, sheds light on the lesser-known civilization of Assyria (9th century-6th century BC).

"Each exhibition lasts a year, ensuring that visitors are constantly attracted to and engaged by our offerings. By attending the exhibitions, they achieve a unique experience," says Xie Xiaoting, the museum's curator.

Suzhou Museum has conducted three surveys on these exhibitions. Data showed that about 60 percent of the visitors came from regions outside Suzhou, with about 40 percent coming from Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces and Shanghai, which are adjacent to Suzhou.

"Young visitors prefer interactive experiences and have higher expectations for exhibitions, rather than passively receiving information. We try our best to inspire them to delve deeper into the stories behind the exhibits as we curate them," Xie says.

For instance, visitors can smell the scents of common flowers and spices from the Assyrian period at the exhibition.

According to Xie, digitalization offers a potential solution to visitor overcrowding by allowing people to see a digital version instead. When the museum reaches a certain number of visitors, an alarm will be triggered to prompt staff members to take measures to manage the flow.

## Museum tourism booms

"The rise in museum tourism is making more people aware that China has many to explore. A museum's display can elevate the profile of a city, offering visitors insights into its culture and history," Xie says.

She attributes the popularity of museums among young Chinese people to several reasons.

"Governments at all levels pay great attention to museums, issuing relevant policies and regulations to guide our work," she says.

Economic advancement has led to an increased demand for cultural consumption and experiences. Therefore, there has been a shift in habits from merely sightseeing to seeking out cultural and museum institutions.

"Free admission at most museums reduces the cost for audiences and they are more willing to visit. Meanwhile, museums provide diversified cultural experiences, such as exhibitions using digital technology, educational activities and cultural creative products," she says.

Wu Liyun, a professor at the Beijing International Studies University's China Academy of Culture and Tourism, agrees.

"In recent years, China has focused on protecting cultural and intangible heritage. So museums now offer more cultural products. Younger Chinese people are more interested in traditional Chinese culture. The variety of museum offerings along with entertainment shows featuring museums are attracting them," she says.

"When museums become major attractions, the public pays more attention to the importance of cultural resources. Tourists can encourage museums to further preserve artifacts and develop varied products."

Wu Liyun suggests that museums fully explore local cultural relics and exhibits to enrich their displays. Smaller museums can enhance their appeal by borrowing exhibits. A hit cultural creative product can quickly boost a museum's popularity, so museums must intensify that efforts to develop such offerings.

Contact the writers at  
xulin@chinadaily.com.cn

LIFE

# China's chess queens see opening

Promotion of game at home critical part of long-term gambit to cement growing prowess on the board, **Wang Mingjie** reports in London.

**J**u Wenjun, the newly crowned Women's World Blitz Chess Champion, believes the growing success of Chinese players on the global stage could inspire a new wave of enthusiasts at home.

"I hope that by excelling in international competitions, we will motivate more young people in China to take up chess," she says.

Her historic victory at the 2024 FIDE World Rapid and Blitz Championships, held on Wall Street in New York on Dec 31, marked a significant milestone in her career, and underscored China's growing stature as a global chess powerhouse.

"This competition was incredibly exciting for me," Ju tells China Daily. "It was my first time competing on Wall Street, and the atmosphere was electric, with fans from around the world. Performing well in such a prestigious setting was truly thrilling."

Blitz chess, which is known for its fast-paced nature, gives players only three minutes each to complete their game, with an additional three seconds added per move. This contrasts with rapid chess, where players start with 15 minutes and gain 10 seconds for each move.

Ju's triumph in the high-pressure format highlighted her ability to think quickly and strategically under tight time constraints.

Her victory holds special significance.

"Chinese women have won the Women's Rapid Chess Championship before," the Shanghai native says. "But this is our first Blitz title. It's a moment of immense pride for us."

Ju's journey to the championship has been filled with intense, memorable moments, including her final match against longtime teammate, Lei Tingjie.

"Lei and I have known each other since we were young," she says. "Competing against her was unique; a mix of seriousness and mutual encouragement. Even in a high-stakes match, we found moments to laugh, which created a positive atmosphere."

The camaraderie reflects the spirit of the Chinese chess community, which has undergone remarkable growth and success in recent years.

"In just a few decades, China has achieved so much in chess, from



**Clockwise from top:** Ju Wenjun (left) faces Lei Tingjie in the final of the Women's World Blitz Chess Championship, held in New York on Dec 31; Ju (second from left), the Women's World Blitz Chess Champion, and Lei (left), the runner-up, receive their awards at the championships in New York; and Timur Turlov, founder of Freedom Holding Corp, the sponsor of the event. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

individual world championships to team victories," Ju says. "Chess is not just a competition; it's a way to connect with others and develop strategic thinking."

Looking ahead, she stresses the importance of engaging with young players.

"Introducing chess in schools and organizing youth events are fantastic ways to spark interest," she says. "Chess helps develop critical-thinking skills and fosters meaningful connections."

As the runner-up in the Women's World Blitz Championship,

Lei echoes these sentiments, highlighting the need for a solid infrastructure to nurture young talent.

"Building a proper talent development system is essential," she says. "We need more high-level coaches and clear development pathways to strengthen our nation-

al team and lay a foundation for the sport's growth in China."

She also emphasizes the intellectual benefits of chess for children.

"It enhances their cognitive abilities, and participating in competitions broadens their horizons," Lei

In just a few decades, China has achieved so much in chess, from individual world championships to team victories. Chess is not just a competition; it's a way to connect with others and develop strategic thinking."

**Ju Wenjun**, newly crowned Women's World Blitz Chess Champion

says. "With the right support, I believe more Chinese players will rise to the top in the years ahead."

Timur Turlov, founder of Freedom Holding Corp, the sponsor of the 2024 FIDE World Rapid and Blitz Championships, praised the remarkable achievements of Chinese players, particularly in women's chess.

"We have Chinese women players securing first and second places in the Blitz chess championships here in New York. In 2023, Ding Liren became China's first men's world chess champion, a powerful symbol of China's growing dominance in the game," Turlov says.

He also drew parallels between chess and other sports in which China has excelled, including swimming and tennis, and said the chess victories could have a similarly profound impact.

"Winning championships can inspire younger generations," Turlov says, emphasizing that chess is not only intellectually enriching, but also a "fun and cool" pursuit that aligns with the country's intellectual heritage.

He expressed confidence the recent accomplishments will lead to meaningful change.

"These huge achievements will also inspire many more Chinese players to participate internationally," he says.

Contact the writer at wangmingjie@mail.chinadailyuk.com

# The man who tasked himself with bringing back the dead

TAIPEI — For Liu De-wen, who is from southern Taiwan, the weight of a life is precisely 12 kilograms.

On the third day of 2025, the 58-year-old from Kaohsiung boarded a flight to Nanjing in Jiangsu province, carrying two urns, each weighing 12 kg — one strapped to his chest and the other secured to his back.

Over the past 21 years, Liu has carried the cremated remains of more than 300 veterans from Taiwan back to the Chinese mainland, to fulfill their dying wish to return home.

They were among the soldiers who arrived in Taiwan with the Kuomintang in 1949 during China's civil war. For decades, as the two sides of the Taiwan Strait were trapped in protracted political confrontation, they were unable to return to care for aging parents or reunite with siblings or wives.

Many of the men, considered outsiders on the island, remained unmarried and childless.

Liu, a native of Taiwan's Pingtung county, did not know much about these veterans until 1997, when he moved to an old military housing community in Kaohsiung.

It was home to more than 4,000 veterans at its peak, and when Liu moved in, around 1,800 were still living there.

"They often sat for hours during Chinese New Year, gazing toward the mainland. On Tomb-Sweeping Day, which falls each year between the fourth and the sixth of April, they would perform rituals in the direction of their hometowns to honor parents they hadn't seen in decades," Liu says. These scenes resonated deeply



**Left:** Liu De-wen walks out of Ningbo Lishe International Airport, carrying urns containing the cremated remains of veterans who passed away in Taiwan, back to their hometown in Zhejiang province, in March last year. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY **Right:** Liu (third from left) attends a ceremony to bury the cremated remains of a Taiwan veteran in Ningbo, Zhejiang province, in March last year. ZHANG LANG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

with him, and over time, he became their confidant, listening to stories of separation and longing.

Although the Taiwan authorities lifted the ban on visiting relatives on the mainland in 1987, many veterans were unable to make the trip due to age or health. Those who did mostly did not move back to their hometowns.

In 2003, an 87-year-old veteran originally from Hunan province named Wen entrusted Liu with his dying wish. "Can you take my ashes back home to be buried beside my parents? I've never fulfilled my duties as a son," a tearful Wen told Liu.

After Wen's death, Liu honored his promise, delivering the urn to Wen's

ancestral village in Hunan.

Word soon spread, and other veterans began reaching out for his help. As the requests multiplied, Liu began to devote himself entirely to this mission, undeterred by the physical and financial challenges it entailed.

"I don't treat the urns as luggage. They hold the veterans' souls," Liu says, explaining why he often bought seats or beds for the urns, treating them as if the deceased were still alive.

In later years, Liu began receiving requests from families on the mainland to locate the remains of relatives in Taiwan and bring them home.

The missions were often uphill battles. Liu has combed through military cemeteries, untended graves, and even

abandoned temples across the island, piecing together clues from decades-old records and scattered memories.

The search for Chen Bi-shou, for instance, took months. Chen's family in Jiangsu had not heard from him since the early 1980s, and contacted Liu in 2018.

It was only through unwavering determination and meticulously checking cemetery records and archives that Chen's grave was finally located, 25 years after his death. Liu personally accompanied the veteran's ashes back to Jiangsu.

Liu has suffered from heatstroke while searching remote cemeteries, slept on train station floors, and once fractured his ribs after falling into a

pit during a search. Yet, he perseveres. "Doing good brings blessings," he says simply, attributing surviving the fall to the unseen support of the veterans.

The reunions he facilitates are often emotional. In Yunnan province, an elderly man whose father left for Taiwan when his mother was pregnant wept as he held his remains. "I finally have a father," he said, overwhelmed with emotion.

In Shandong province, a 90-year-old man knelt three times before Liu in gratitude for bringing his brother home.

In every case, Liu stays to ensure the ashes are buried properly. Having been to over 20 provinces and

regions, with only Xizang autonomous region, Qinghai province, and Ningxia Hui autonomous region left unvisited, he has rarely taken the time for sightseeing, viewing his work as a solemn mission. "I am here to bring them home, not to tour," he says.

As technology advanced, he began documenting the graves, building a database and publishing the information online to enable families to locate lost loved ones more efficiently.

His efforts have garnered recognition across the Strait. Families on the mainland, once strangers, now call him "uncle" or "big brother."

"This is why I do what I do," Liu says. "We are one family, bound by the same roots and culture. Blood ties can never be severed."

He lives a modest life. His office, a converted shipping container, displays the motto: "Do good and keep a kind heart." Despite growing public recognition of his work, he continues to live frugally, saving every penny to fund his missions.

"I've learned the essence of humanity through this work," Liu says. "It's about bringing closure and peace to those who've waited a lifetime to go home."

As the veterans pass away and their stories fade, he races against time to complete their final journeys. Last year, he escorted 47 urns, the most ever. This year, he has already scheduled trips for more than 20 veterans.

"I have to walk faster," Liu says. "Their children are getting older too. They shouldn't have to wait any longer."

XINHUA