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CHINA DAILY

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Xi calls for advancing bilateral ties with Grenada

By MO JINGXI
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President Xi Jinping called on Monday for China and Grenada to draw up a new blueprint for the long-term and high-level development of bilateral ties, after Beijing's relations with the Caribbean island country had developed successfully over the last two decades.

Xi made the remarks when meeting with Prime Minister of Grenada Dickon Mitchell, his first foreign guest in the new year. Mitchell arrived in Beijing on Saturday for a seven-day official visit, which will also take him to Zhejiang province and Shanghai.

Grenada, located in the eastern Caribbean Sea with an area of 344 square kilometers and a population of about 110,000, resumed diplomatic relations with China in 2005.

In recent years, China-Grenada relations have developed steadily, with the two sides consolidating political mutual trust and achieving fruitful results in practical cooperation in areas such as trade

and the economy, as well as education and agriculture.

The two countries signed a memorandum of understanding on joint construction of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2018. According to statistics from Chinese Customs, bilateral trade in 2023 exceeded \$24 million, up 13.1 percent year-on-year.

Xi told Mitchell that China is willing to work with Grenada to better align their development strategies and push for more outcomes of bilateral cooperation to better benefit the two peoples.

As China's development brings new development opportunities to Grenada and other countries, Xi said that China will provide assistance for the island country's socioeconomic development within the South-South cooperation framework and foster new highlights of bilateral cooperation in new energy, low carbon, the digital economy and other fields.

China supports Grenada in improving its capabilities in climate change response and disaster prevention and mitigation, and will continue to raise international

awareness of small island countries' concerns over climate change and their demands, he added.

Xi also urged the two sides to strengthen exchanges and cooperation in culture, education and tourism to promote mutual understanding between their peoples.

He noted that China has always attached great importance to its relations with Caribbean countries and will continue to provide assistance within its capacity to countries in the region to aid their economic and social development.

Mitchell said his country firmly adheres to the one-China principle, and China's sovereignty and territorial integrity must be respected.

Hailing China as the leader of the Global South, Mitchell said that China always upholds equality among all countries regardless of their size, respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries, and acts on its commitments to global affairs.

The Grenadian leader also extended sincere condolences to the Chinese government and people over the recent earthquake in Dingri

county in southwestern China's Xizang autonomous region.

Noting that the earthquake occurred in a high-altitude area, Xi said that China has completed rescue and temporary resettlement work in the shortest possible time and will carry out reconstruction work as quickly as possible.

The Chinese government is confident and capable of achieving victory in earthquake relief, Xi said.

Premier Li Qiang, who hosted a welcoming ceremony for Mitchell on Monday, said during their talks that China is ready to work with Grenada to maintain the good momentum of bilateral ties and keep expanding mutually beneficial cooperation in all areas to bring China-Grenada relations to a new level.

They witnessed the signing of several bilateral cooperation documents on jointly building the Belt and Road, economy and trade, green development and other areas.

Zhao Leji, chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee, also met with Mitchell on Monday.

Envoy invites US youths to visit China

Ambassador Xie Feng calls for more young Americans to take part in '50,000 in 5 years'

By ZHAO HUANXIN in Washington
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Beijing's top envoy in Washington has extended an invitation to young Americans to visit China, which will endow them with firsthand experiences in the country and enhance mutual understanding between the two nations.

"I invite more young Americans to be part of the '50,000 in five years' initiative, promote dialogue and cooperation, enhance people-to-people exchanges, and carry forward the goodwill between our two peoples," Chinese Ambassador to the US Xie Feng said on Saturday.

In his summit meeting with US President Joe Biden in San Francisco in November 2023, President Xi Jinping announced that, "China is ready to invite 50,000 young Americans to China on exchange and study programs in the next five years."

The program has so far hosted nearly 15,000 young Americans from all 50 states and the District of Columbia, surpassing its annual target, Xie said at the 2025 Spring Festival Gala for Chinese and American Youths on Saturday at the Chinese embassy in Washington.

The Spring Festival, or Chinese New Year, will fall on Jan 29 this year, kicking off the Year of the Snake, according to the Chinese calendar.

Xie noted that amid all the changes and turbulence in the international landscape, optimism and confidence are needed more than ever, that no winter could stop the arrival of spring, and people should gear up for the new year by taking action starting now.

"The Chinese words for youth, *qing chun*, literally mean a blooming spring. In the year ahead, I believe the youths from both our countries will instill more hope and vigor into China-US relations," the ambassador said.

Over the past year, young Americans traveling to China observed the country with their own eyes, and with those experiences, they have broken out of the echo chamber and shaken off misperceptions, becoming envoys of friendship and connecting both sides of the Pacific, according to Xie.

To illustrate how differences in language and culture have not stopped young people from getting to know each other better and from deepening friendship, Xie said both Chinese and Americans sang along at Taylor Swift's Eras Tour concerts, and avidly read *The Journey to the West* novel before playing the *Black Myth: Wukong* video game.

"Likewise, differences in history and national reality should not impede win-win cooperation between our two countries, to the benefit of both peoples and the world," he said.

The ambassador encouraged young people in both countries to view one another's development with a more open and inclusive mind, deepen exchanges and cooperation in a more innovative way, and jointly address new challenges like AI and climate change, so as to help find a right way for their countries to get along in the new era.

Xie joined more than 500 Chinese and American students and US educational representatives at a cultural fair, made dumplings and wrote the character *fu* (meaning happiness and good fortune) together with young friends.

Speaking at the gala, Tara Boyce-Hofmann, president and chief executive officer of American Field Service USA, or AFS-USA, said the Year of the Snake symbolizes wisdom and adaptability, "traits that are vital as we navigate from our increasingly interconnected world".

AFS-USA, formerly known as the

See *Youth*, page 3

A silver lining

Clouds of smoke rise on Sunday from a building destroyed in an Israeli airstrike at the Al-Bureij refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip. The attack killed seven people. Meanwhile, the United States and Arab mediators have reportedly made significant progress toward brokering a ceasefire in Gaza. Although a deal hasn't been reached yet, officials said the coming days would be critical for ending more than 15 months of fighting that has destabilized the Middle East.

EYAD BABA / AFP



NEW PROFESSIONS REDEFINING YOUNG PEOPLE'S WORK, LIFE, PLAY

Tech development, fresh demands creating wealth of nontraditional jobs

By CHENG SI
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After tiring of his previous job at an internet company, 35-year-old Chen Yunfei is living his second year as a digital nomad, traveling overseas, blogging, developing apps, and offering artificial intelligence consultancy services.

"I had worked for 10 years at companies following the rules, and felt I was stuck in a rut. I started to acquire some AI knowledge after ChatGPT hit the market around 2022. I gave up my previ-

ous job in March 2023 and started to try new types of work and a new lifestyle."

Chen said in the first month after he quit his job, he shared his experiences of learning AI knowledge on some online communities, and then posted them to platforms such as YouTube and Bilibili. "I earned money from these platforms, and got invita-

tions to give paid lectures," he said.

In November, with the use of AI tools he developed an app that provides camera flash fills. "I'm not a good programmer, but AI has helped me turn ideas into practice. I'm lucky, as what I'm doing are my interests and bring me income."

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Wang Dan, wife of Chinese Ambassador to the US Xie Feng, makes dumplings at a 2025 Spring Festival Gala for Chinese and American Youths at the embassy on Saturday. ZHAO HUANXIN / CHINA DAILY

Dialogue has put China-UK relations on firmer ground

The 11th China-UK Economic and Financial Dialogue, which was held in Beijing on Saturday, offered a great opportunity to reset the bilateral relationship and place it on a firmer footing. The two sides agreed to expand cooperation in key areas of mutual benefit and push forward development of bilateral relations.

During the talks, Chinese Vice-Premier He Lifeng said that China is willing to work with the United Kingdom to implement the important consensus reached by the leaders of the two countries, uphold their positioning as strategic partners, strengthen communication and dialogue, further expand eco-



nomical and financial cooperation, and provide more impetus for the development of stable and mutually beneficial China-UK relations.

British Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves said the UK is willing to strengthen practical cooperation with China in the fields of economy and finance, and develop a consistent, lasting and mutually respectful relationship between the two countries.

China faces domestic challenges

such as an overhang of local government and property-related debt. These may be exacerbated by tariff measures and sanctions from outside. During United States President-elect Donald Trump's first term, China sought self-sufficiency in technology, food, and energy and moved to its dual-circulation economic agenda — a new economic development pattern in which China's domestic market remains the mainstay with domestic and international markets reinforcing each other.

Now, the next stage of China's economic development points to the need to move up the value curve, with increased consumption

and higher value-added growth and innovation. The third plenary session of the 20th Communist Party of China Central Committee held in July reiterated a commitment to modernization and reform. This necessitates deeper and broader capital markets.

Cooperation fields

The Sino-UK dialogue is important to China, with five interrelated financial areas having been identified as critical to future economic success: technology, green finance, digitalization, financial inclusion and pensions.

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PAGE TWO

Professions: Expanding career prospects

From page 1

Chen spent almost two thirds of last year overseas, and has about 40,700 YouTube subscribers and 54,000 followers on Bilibili.

He is among the increasing community of Chinese youth, who are not confined to traditional career choices, and are expanding their career prospects in sectors related to new technology or that appeal to the public's real needs.

From drudgery to drones

In Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, Yan Ming, 27, changed his profession from a commercial photographer to a drone pilot doing crop protection work in the summer of 2023.

"I was attracted by the high pay of being a drone pilot at the very beginning, as some of my peers who have the relevant certificates told me they can earn over 20,000 yuan (\$2,732) per month. I decided to start professional drone pilot training courses in April and gained a certificate in June," he said, adding that operating a crop protection drone has a lower pilot entry threshold, which makes it easier for him to practice the required skills.

"Crop protection drone pilot pay is good, but the number of orders sees seasonal fluctuations. I was lucky, the summer after I gained my certificate it was a busy season and my monthly income reached 30,000 yuan during that period."

While winter is off-peak season for drone work, Yan doesn't regret jumping out of his comfort zone. "I believe the drone industry will be a new blue ocean (industry), so why not have a try when I'm still young?" he said.

Zhang Mengqi, a 31-year-old social worker, gets "fluffy comfort" from being a part-time "cat sitter" in Beijing, who feeds pets when their owners are not at home.

"I found some posts on Xiaohongshu platform in 2023 of people sharing their experiences of taking care of cats and dogs. I'm a cat person and have two cats myself. In February, I started to book after-work jobs online."

"Usually, we are allowed to visit the house for 15 or 20 minutes, but I can't help playing with the cats for longer as they are adorable and some of them are clingy!"

She said a sitter must do some homework on an individual cat's situation and temperament before paying a visit.

"We need to wear gloves and shoe covers for hygiene, give the cats food and water, and clean up their mess. I used to charge 30 yuan per cat within a 1-kilometer radius and I earned about 1,500 yuan last year. I raised the price to 50 yuan this year, and so far I've had several verbal bookings."

However, she won't be a full-time cat sitter in the future as she doesn't want to be constrained by rigid company rules such as not being allowed to play with customers' cats. "I may land a job in the pet industry if I plan to change jobs."

New professions

Due to the burgeoning digital economy and people's diversified needs, and more precise labor subdivisions, new professions have emerged in recent years, experts said.

Figures from the recruitment portal Zhaopin show that demand for new professions, such as livestreaming anchors and AI trainers, increased by 11 percent and 62 percent respectively from January to October last year. The demand for drone pilots surged by 177 percent over the period.

The life services platform 58.com recently released a report that said over 50 new professions have emerged and developed on its platform from 2021 to 2024. The demand for such professions is continuing to rise, it added. These professions include child companions, medical escorts and elderly care workers, and cover sectors of the platform economy, digital economy and smart manufacturing.

The demand for elderly care workers rose by 21 percent year-on-year in 2024, and 34 percent for child companions, a job that requires developing plans for activities such as learning, sport and play in accordance with parents' requirements. Companions also try to inspire children, and help them kick bad habits.

Zang Yunhe, 21, tried several new jobs including setting up a street stall to braid hair, before she decided to become a nurse for infants last August. She works in Jinan, Shandong province.

"I'm good at interpersonal relationships and have the patience for the work, so I think finding a job in the service industry a good choice for me," Zang said.

She has different "missions" to assist in the baby's growth and development. "For my current family, also my first client, I'm responsible for giving the baby her milk and cooking her food. It's also my job to let her listen to music, take her for walks and to get some sun, and give her some early childhood education."

"I've seen many young people doing baby nursing work and I'm happy that my client doesn't doubt my qualifications and work ability because of my younger age," she said. "I've also noticed that more of my company's new recruits are young people. Their work extends to escorting the elderly for medical services and home-based care for the elderly."



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

Feng Shuaizhang, dean of the Institute for Economic and Social Research at Jinan University in Guangdong province, said social professions have always changed with the times. A profession's decline or emergence is affected by people's needs and technological development, he said.

"Young people usually have the energy and interest to explore new professions, which is worth encouraging. Their explorations of new careers will also help boost economic development," he said.

To develop new job growth areas and better protect the rights of people working in emerging professions, authorities have stepped up efforts to improve the nation's profession classifications and work recognition in recent years.

In 2023, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security recognized 19 new professions, including biological engineering technician, dental hygienist, generative artificial intelligence system operator, and livestreaming anchor. About 74 new professions have gained official recognition from 2019 to 2022 after the ministry started profession classification and recognition work in 2019.

Future careers explored

"New professions are usually closely related to new technology development and new social trends, and appeal to youths' pursuits or are 'in-vogue,'" said Li Qiang, vice president of recruitment portal Zhaopin.

"Young people can get easier access to career promotion and faster self-growth serving new professions, as these professions are in an early development stage and have lighter competition. Also, some new

professions have great flexibility in work time and work space, fitting youths' desire for freer work and lifestyles," he added.

He encouraged potential employees to learn new work skills to enter emerging professions, as there is still a structural imbalance in the workforce. "Getting involved in new professions by grabbing new knowledge or work abilities can help optimize the human resources allocation and let talent flow to industries with potential."

2024
year in
Review

“

Young people usually have the energy and interest to explore new professions, which is worth encouraging. Their explorations of new careers will also help boost economic development.”

Feng Shuaizhang, dean of the Institute for Economic and Social Research at Jinan University

"The emergence and development of new professions may also increase innovation and entrepreneurship, and offer new choices to young people," he added.

Liu Long, a 35-year-old software developer for Nokia in Hangzhou, Zhejiang, hopes he can pursue a career in the AI sector. "Young people are facing pressure to land jobs, as are we as senior workers," he said.

He believes professions such as AI trainers and engineers have promising career prospects because of burgeoning technologies such as the internet, big data, cloud computing and AI. These technologies also have strong ties and applications to people's daily life. "It's important for us to learn new knowledge and skills and seek possible new self-growth and careers," Liu said.

He recently finished training courses and lectures at the Hangzhou Innovation Institute of Beihang University where he has gained knowledge about AI systems. "I will try new professions related to AI if I have the opportunity. It's a different life experience," he said.

Lin Tao, 27, a software developer from Hundsun Technology in Hangzhou, is very interested in AI and eager for a chance to get involved in new AI-related professions.

"I've learned some AI knowledge by myself and also took training courses at the Hangzhou Innovation Institute of Beihang University. I think it's necessary for us young people to jump out of our 'comfort zone' and keep fresh and curious about new professions."

Zhu Yanlin, 23, is in her second year of postgraduate study at Beijing Normal University. She is focusing on art therapy. She

said she may use her knowledge of film and images to work in psychological therapy after graduation.

"We have different healing ways. For example, for a patient with stress from academic study or family relations, we grab some film clips in which the characters have similar experiences to the patient and we talk about stress and help her or him to ease their psychological problems," she said. "Or we help the patient to shoot or record some video clips about him or herself and find the crux (of their problems) in the recorded films."

Although it's a very new and niche profession, Zhu hopes to explore it as her future career. "The public acceptance and higher cost of psychological consultancy and healing are still problems, but I'd like to have a try in the future," she said.

To encourage more people to get involved in new professions, experts called for clearer job definition and stronger work rights protection.

Li Qiang, from Zhaopin, said that many new professions lack official recognition, which may lead to ambiguity defining labor relations and work contributions. He suggested workers and those wishing to take up these new professions acquire basic knowledge of labor laws and sign contracts with employers that clarify work content, work hours, payments, and rights.

"They can use some digital tools or apps to record the work hours or contributions, and seek legal assistance whenever facing labor disputes," he said.

Fang Biling and Shi Yudian contributed to the story.

TOP NEWS

RMB stability to be further prioritized

Central bank governor pledges to steadfastly prevent risk of exchange rate overshooting

By ZHOU LANXU
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China's central bank governor vowed on Monday to resolutely guard against the risk of the exchange rate overshooting, which analysts said highlighted policymakers' growing priority of maintaining the general stability of the Chinese currency amid a strong US dollar.

"We will rectify pro-cyclical market behavior, firmly address actions that disrupt market order and steadfastly prevent the risk of the exchange rate overshooting, ensuring that the yuan exchange rate remains generally stable at a reasonable, balanced level," said Pan Gongsheng, governor of the People's Bank of China.

Addressing the Asian Financial Forum in Hong Kong, Pan said that non-US currencies have generally depreciated amid an elevated US dollar index. The yuan also felt the pressure, but has demonstrated strong resilience.

Regulators have "the confidence, the condition and the capability" to maintain the stable operation of the foreign exchange market, Pan said, adding that China's economy is expected to have achieved the annual growth target of around 5 percent for 2024.

Reinforcing Pan's policy commitment, the central bank and the State Administration of Foreign Exchange raised the macro-prudential adjustment parameter for cross-border financing of corporates and financial institutions to 1.75 from 1.5 on Monday.

By raising the parameter, which determines an institution's upper limit of outstanding cross-border financing, authorities have allowed more overseas borrowing, thus boosting onshore dollar liquidity and underpinning the onshore yuan against the dollar.

This followed the central bank's decision to issue central bank bills worth 60 billion yuan (\$8.18 billion) in Hong Kong on Wednesday, to help stabilize the offshore yuan.

"In a short period, regulators have repeatedly sent the policy signal of yuan stabilization, aimed at preventing any excessive accumulation of short-term depreciation expectations," said Wang Qing, chief macroeconomic analyst at Golden Credit Rating International.

Wang said that if the yuan exchange rate sharply deviates from economic fundamentals, regulators are poised to further tap into the policy reserves, such as macro-prudential management of overseas lending to contain capital outflows and a reduction of foreign exchange required reserves to boost dollar liquidity onshore.

Foreign exchange market supervision is also expected to be strengthened, analysts said. The China FX Committee, the guiding body of the self-discipline mechanism of China's foreign exchange market, pledged on Monday to promptly take measures against behavior that disrupts market order while requiring members of the mechanism to avoid exacerbating pro-cyclical behavior.

The Chinese currency modestly rallied against the dollar as of Monday afternoon, trading at 7.3320 per dollar, strengthening by 6 basis points from Friday's close, according to market tracker Wind Info.

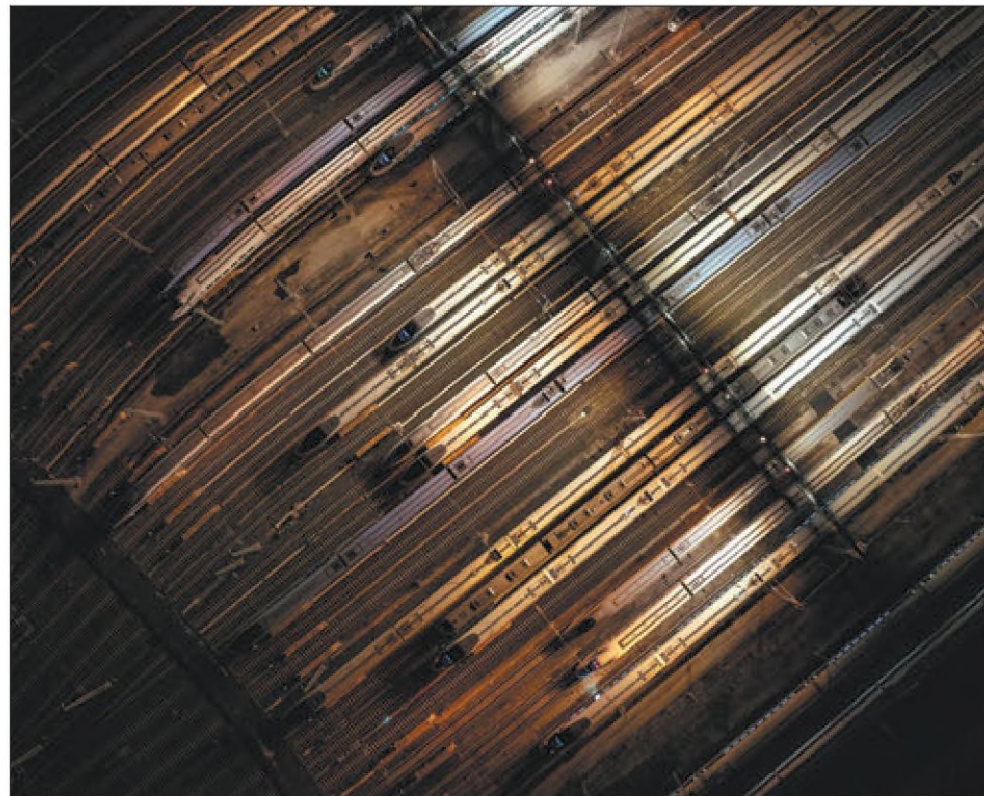
On Friday, the yuan touched 7.3328 against the greenback, the weakest since September 2023, amid a widened US-China interest rate differential as the United States slows down interest rate cuts while China is expected to see bigger cuts.

Zhong Zhengsheng, chief economist at Ping An Securities, said that steady economic growth serves as the fundamental force underpinning the Chinese currency.

"The market looks forward to countercyclical adjustments being front-loaded and increasing in intensity this year, further improving confidence and enhancing economic momentum. Coordination between more robust fiscal support and monetary easing will be essential to more effectively promote yuan stability," he said.

Pan, the central bank governor, vowed on Monday to correct the trajectory of economic growth, utilizing various tools to maintain an accommodative financing environment.

"We will continue to uphold the market's decisive role in exchange rate formation, effectively leveraging the function of exchange rates as an automatic stabilizer for the macroeconomy and the balance of payments," Pan said, adding that the share of national foreign exchange reserves allocated in Hong Kong will increase.



Holiday wheels

A photo taken by a drone on Monday shows high-speed trains lining up at a depot in Guiyang, the capital of Southwest China's Guizhou province, ready to transport passengers during the Spring Festival travel rush. The annual Chinese New Year migration, or *chunyun*, which starts on Tuesday this year, is set to break historical records with an estimated 9 billion trips expected to be made across China during the 40-day period.

LI XU / XINHUA

FROM THE GRASSROOTS

Beijing facilitates stays of surging foreign travelers

By DU JUAN and FELIX BACHAND

On a four-day transit to Beijing, two siblings from Poland who visited several places said they were very impressed by China after experiencing the city's advanced services for foreign tourists.

"We noticed we could pay with cash, card, or by scanning a QR code, and we were surprised to learn that facial recognition could also be used for payments," said Dagmara Paszkowska, who was visiting China with her brother Norbert.

As soon as foreign visitors arrive at the city's two major airports — Beijing Capital International Airport and Beijing Daxing International Airport — they will see Beijing Service counters, which are part of a new mobile payment and travel and transportation initiative that was launched on Jan 1 to facilitate visitors from abroad.

The Chinese capital's launch of the Beijing Service counters at the airports coincides with a surge in international arrivals propelled by China's extended visa-free policies, which offer transit visa-free access to travelers from 54 countries and exempts passport holders from 38 countries from

needing visas for short stays.

Wang Hongyan, deputy head of the Beijing Bureau of Culture and Tourism's external exchange and cooperation department, said at a news conference on Monday that a daily average of 252 foreign nationals now enter Beijing with a temporary 240-hour entry permit. Before the policies were extended, the maximum stay with such a permit was 144 hours.

In 2024, Beijing recorded 3.94 million inbound visits, up 186.8 percent year-on-year. The city's tourism foreign exchange income reached \$4.91 billion, an increase of 151.7 percent year-on-year, according to the bureau.

"We have been making efforts to improve the foreign visitors' overall experience in the city, including customer service, transportation, accommodations, sightseeing, shopping and payment," Wang said. "More service improvements will be carried out in Beijing, and we expect a 5 percent increase in inbound tourists in 2025."

At the international arrival zones at Beijing's two international airports, Beijing Service counters provide foreigners with one-stop service for a range of financial, communication, transportation,

cultural and tourism needs.

Some foreign visitors say they are amazed by China's convenient digital payment system, though they are not familiar with it upon their arrival.

The counters also offer assistance with cash withdrawals using foreign bank cards and currency exchange, and staff members can help visitors download mobile payment apps.

In addition, foreigners at the airports can purchase a Beijing Pass, which is a versatile, rechargeable transportation card issued by the Beijing municipal government. Cardholders can not only use public transportation services in 300 cities, but can also use the pass in designated commercial, cultural and tourism areas.

According to the bureau, up to 39,000 Beijing Pass cards have been issued to foreign visitors since the program's launch in July.

To better introduce Beijing's traditional culture, the city now even offers free half-day trips to international transit passengers at Beijing Capital International Airport, according to the bureau.

Katia Houle, a Trip.com representative, said that Beijing Express, a service that the company launched on

Dec 27, enables visitors to register for free tours in the city.

"We offer free tours every single day. You sign up on the spot, and our tour guides are there," she said.

The first tour, which runs from 7:30 am to 1:00 pm, offers a direct trip from the airport to the Badaling section of the Great Wall and then returns to the airport. The second tour, from 1:30 pm to 9:00 pm, takes visitors downtown, where they visit the Temple of Heaven and pass Tian'anmen Square before returning to the airport.

Recently, other Chinese cities, including Shanghai, have also attracted thousands of foreign visitors due to the visa-free policies. In recent months, for example, an increasing number of South Korean visitors have flocked to Shanghai because of the low flight ticket prices and the short flight distance.

"I love the Shanghai style, which is fancy and modern," one South Korean who visited Shanghai last week posted on social media. "I went to several sightseeing spots in the city and tried delicious cuisine."

Contact the writers at felix@chinadaily.com.cn

Holy dip



Pilgrims bathe at the confluence of three holy rivers in Prayagraj, northern India, on Monday, ahead of Mahakumbh Mela, a Hindu festival. At least 400 million people are expected to visit the city over the next six weeks, organizers said. IDREES MOHAMMED / AFP

Youth: 'Every smile' helps create connections

From page 1

American Field Service, is a nonprofit organization that offers international student-exchange programs in more than 80 countries around the world.

"As students and educators, we stand on the threshold of rich opportunities that lie in the cultural exchanges between American and Chinese communities," Boyce-Hofmann said.

Boyce-Hofmann, who oversaw the launch of AFS student programs with China in the mid-1980s, noted that visiting each other's countries is not merely a journey; it is an experience that opens people's hearts and minds.

"By immersing ourselves in different cultures, we learn to appreciate distinct perspectives, forge genuine friendships and celebrate our shared humanity," she said. "During these exchanges, every smile, every shared meal, and every heartfelt conversation creates lasting connections."

In a podcast interview with Foreign Affairs magazine on Thursday, US Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns underlined the importance of increasing the number of young Americans studying in China.

He said that number currently stands at 1,105, which is "modest progress" from a low base, as there were 15,000 a decade ago.

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Economy: Dialogue opens up multiple financial areas for cooperation

From page 1

The UK has clear expectations. The UK government looks set to take a strategic, longer-term approach, citing that there are areas where both countries will challenge, compete and cooperate.

The dialogue has opened up many financial areas in which to cooperate. Also, the UK is keen to see increased inward investment and restart the UK-China Joint Economic and Trade Commission, which last took place in 2018.

As one of the largest service sector economies and home to the world's

most international financial center, the UK hopes to benefit from stronger economic ties with China.

Six years ago, London's focus was on seeing the offshore renminbi market grow in London. This remains important. The global use of the renminbi is low, given China's share in world trade. But over the past year there has been a noticeable increase in China's trade invoiced in renminbi and a corresponding rise in its share of global payments. Yet there are significant regional variations in its use.

Offshore liquidity is still lacking in London, given China's overall capital

account management. For the UK's offshore renminbi market to grow would necessitate more "dim sum" bond issuance, increased renminbi deposits and loans, more trading and clearing, and higher cross-border renminbi transactions. Encouragingly the infrastructure is in place in London — including a bilateral swap line and clearing bank — for this market to evolve. Promoting cross-border use of onshore renminbi bonds as eligible collateral was cited in the last dialogue, but embedding this would be another plus.

In 2014, the UK became the first Western economy to launch a ren-

minbi-denominated sovereign bond. It was a positive signal for both the bilateral relationship and market development. Likewise, now, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank is deciding upon the location of its European funding and trading hub. There is a strong case for it to be in London, the success of which as a financial center reflects its regulatory environment, being the place where people and firms want to do business, and having the depth and breadth of financial markets.

London's focus is on boosting connectivity with China. The dialogue is expected to deliver on this

by improving two-way capital flows, with multiple benefits.

The Shanghai-London Stock Connect program boosts dual listings. UK-based asset managers and insurance firms also see opportunities for greater access to the Chinese market. There is continuous development in China's bond market, and opening this up further should see increased foreign interest and cement UK-China ties.

Another area for cooperation is the green agenda. The UK already sees investor appetite for green assets but needs a deeper liquidity pool. More investable renminbi

assets could help, with increasing renminbi bond listings in London, plus developing carbon market links, or even further innovation such as dual-currency green bonds. Indicative of improving ties, the Bank of China signed in September a renewed memorandum of understanding with the UK government on green and biodiversity finance cooperation.

There will be future work streams where both countries can collaborate. And this dialogue provided a great opportunity to reboot the UK-China economic and financial ties.

The author is an international economist based in London. The views do not reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA

Focus shifts to easing trauma

Memorial service held for quake victims, relief efforts continue

By **PALDEN NYIMA** and **DAQIONG** in Lhasa

A memorial service was held on Monday morning in Dingri county, Xizang autonomous region, to mourn the victims of the 6.8 magnitude earthquake that struck Dingri last week.

The disaster left 126 dead and hundreds injured.

At 9:30 am, hundreds of people, including government officials, rescue workers and local residents, attended the event in the county's Dramso township, the worst-hit area. They removed their hats and stood in silence for three minutes to honor the deceased.

On Jan 7, the earthquake hit Dingri, home to the northern base camp of the world's highest peak, Mount Qomolangma, also known as Mount Everest around the world.

In the aftermath, joint efforts from all sectors of society have carried out rescue and relief work in the affected areas. Mental health relief teams have also been working diligently to ease post-disaster trauma.

On Sunday, a special event was held at a resettlement site for quake victims in Changkar, Dingri. The Psychological Rescue Team of the Red Cross Society of China Sichuan Branch organized a group birthday party for six children born in January, which also attracted more than 30 children from three nearby resettlement areas.

Team members sang the birthday song, danced and cut a cake with the children inside a tent, creating a warm and joyful atmosphere despite the dusty and windy weather.

Changkar village in Dramso was one of the areas severely affected by the quake. Six villagers lost their lives, and most of the houses there were either severely damaged or destroyed.

Song Yao, head of the psychological relief team, said the birthday party aimed to help Changkar children recover from the trauma caused by the disaster and to bring



Above: People pay a three-minute silent tribute to people who perished in the earthquake in a memorial service in Dingri county, Xizang, on Monday.

Left: The psychological rescue team from the Red Cross Society of China Sichuan Branch holds a collective birthday party for six children who have birthdays in January in the Changkar village of Dramso township in Dingri on Sunday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

warmth to others in the surrounding areas.

Song's team also organized soccer games, singing sessions and painting activities for the village children on Saturday.

During the painting activity, the children were encouraged to express their dreams. Seven-year-old Tsering Putri painted a sun, a red cross and three mountains, explaining that the mountains represented her hometown and that she hopes the sun will always shine on it.

"We brought 10 sets of paintbrushes, and the children chose colorful hues — they rarely picked

black," Song said. "Their artwork reflects their bright and hopeful mindset."

Additionally, the team conducted a first-aid training session on Sunday, providing vivid and practical explanations to 55 local villagers and children. The training covered emergency response methods for common accidents, including head injuries, nosebleeds, heatstroke and fractures, enhancing their self-rescue and mutual aid capabilities.

As they dealt with altitude sickness, four members of Song's team began comforting affected residents

as soon as they arrived in the quake-hit areas on Friday night.

In addition to the volunteers' mental health relief efforts, other figures have also provided support for those affected by the disaster.

On Monday, Panchen Rinpoche, one of the most influential figures in Tibetan Buddhism, chanted scriptures and prayed with fellow monks for the earthquake victims, hoping that they recover quickly from the disaster and rebuild their homes, according to Xinhua News Agency.

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Hunan aims to improve travel for foreign tourists

By **ZOU SHUO** and **ZHU YOUFANG** in Changsha

Hunan province has introduced a series of measures aimed at making it easier for foreign tourists to explore the region, following China's recent extension of its visa-free transit policy from six to 10 days.

Eligible citizens from 54 countries transiting to a third destination can now enter China through 60 designated ports in 24 provincial-level regions, an increase from 39 ports in 19 regions. Changsha and Zhangjiajie, both in Hunan, are among the newly added ports.

Hunan received more than 3 million international tourists last year, a 180 percent increase year-on-year, according to Li Aiwu, director of the Hunan culture and tourism department. Changsha was ranked as one of the top 100 travel destinations globally, while Zhangjiajie welcomed over 500,000 foreign visitors through international flights last year, she said.

Starting this year, the province will allow group travel with a minimum of two people and limit customs clearance time for all inbound flights to less than 60 minutes, according to a guideline issued Saturday by 18 departments, including those overseeing culture and tourism.

The province also plans to add more direct flights to Asian cities, particularly in countries which are members of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. Comprehensive service centers for international travelers will be established at airports in Changsha and Zhangjiajie, offering one-stop assistance with payment, telecommunications, transportation and other travel needs.

To enhance the tourist experience, Hunan will equip major travel sites, hotels, transportation hubs, business centers, cultural

venues and restaurants with foreign-language signs and standard bathrooms. The province will also hire more multilingual tour guides during peak travel seasons in Zhangjiajie and Changsha.

Li said Hunan will launch promotional campaigns in sister cities and cities with direct flights, as well as conduct variety shows abroad to attract more visitors. International celebrities will also be invited to boost tourism.

"Through these new measures, we aim to ensure international travelers have a great experience in Hunan," Li said.

In Changsha, the number of international tourists soared 118 percent year-on-year last year, according to Chen Peng, head of the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China Changsha Committee. The city plans to further improve services for international visitors, open green booking channels for group travelers at major sites and launch more high-quality international hotels.

Zhangjiajie Mayor Wang Hongbin said 1.83 million international tourists from 183 countries visited the city last year, up 166 percent year-on-year.

The city aims to establish itself as an international tourist destination by expanding its global market, inviting foreign influencers and hosting high-profile international competitions. Efforts will also focus on developing high-end resorts and mountain sports tourism while enhancing services in customs clearance, payment, language assistance and accommodation, Wang said.

"We want to ensure visitors experience the unique natural beauty, folk culture and exciting tourism products that Zhangjiajie has to offer," he added.

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World's smallest sauropod footprints found in Xizang

By **YAN DONGJIE** yandongjie@chinadaily.com.cn

8.8-15.5 centimeters

The length of the footprints found in Xizang

Scientists have discovered the world's smallest known footprints of the sauropod dinosaur species in the eastern Xizang autonomous region, dating back approximately 170 million years to the Jurassic period, researchers announced Friday.

The footprints, found in a village in Chamdo city, range from 8.8 to 15.5 centimeters in length and are believed to have been left by at least six dinosaurs, identified as belonging to the *Parabrontopodus* track group, said Xing Lida, an associate professor at the China University of Geosciences in Beijing.

"These tiny sauropod footprints are quite rare," Xing said. "South Korea has a record of 12.2 centimeters, and Inner Mongolia in China has recorded footprints ranging from 11.5 to 13 centimeters. However, both were from the Cretaceous period, tens of millions of years after the Jurassic period."

The findings, published in the journal *Historical Biology* in late December, suggest the existence of small sauropod dinosaurs in the region. The team estimates the body length of the dinosaurs that left the tracks to be between 2 and 3 meters.

Xing explained that sauropod dinosaurs, which could grow to lengths of 20 to 30 meters, started life as hatchlings less than half a meter long. This significant size difference led to variations in behavior and diet between juveniles and adults, often resulting in age-based segregation within

sauropod groups.

In addition to the small footprints, researchers also discovered three large theropod dinosaur footprints measuring about 42 centimeters each. These prints, classified as the ichnogenus *Eubrontos*, suggest the presence of medium-sized carnivorous dinosaurs, potentially reaching lengths of 6 meters, he said.

The discoveries add to the understanding of the region's ancient environment.

The Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, the world's highest and youngest plateau, reflects the complex evolutionary history of the Tethys Ocean, an ancient body of water. During the Early Jurassic period, the area was transitioning from marine sedimentation to inland basins, said Chen Xinyu, a senior engineer with the China Geological Survey.

Xing said, "This new fossil evidence strengthens the hypothesis that eastern parts of southwestern China were once part of the ancient Tethys Ocean."

He added that the region holds significant potential for further dinosaur research, with implications for both science and education.

"These discoveries indicate there is still much to learn about dinosaurs in Xizang, and the findings underscore the importance of continued exploration," he said.

Li Shangyi contributed to this story.

Survivors move into warmer, safer temporary homes

By **DAQIONG** and **PALDEN NYIMA** in Lhasa and **CHEN MEILING**

Victims of the 6.8 magnitude earthquake in Dingri county in Shigatse, Xizang autonomous region, are moving from tents to temporary homes with improved living facilities.

Guring village in Dramso township, one of the areas most severely affected, has seen 80 temporary homes constructed just two days after the earthquake struck on Jan 7. All 200 villagers moved into these homes on Sunday, said Tsering Phuntsok, Party secretary of Guring.

Compared with tents, the homes offer better sealing and thermal insulation, making them resistant to fire, wind and earthquakes. Equipped with heaters and stoves, indoor temperatures can reach 20 C, a much warmer option in an area where temperatures can drop to as low as -18 C at night.

The 18-square-meter homes on unused farmland are also a big upgrade from the tents the survivors were using.

"The shelters are warmer and safer. Villagers feel more at ease facing aftershocks. There are beds, tables, electricity, Wi-Fi and television," Tsering Phuntsok said.

Nearby, there is access to tap water and public restrooms. Military personnel provide three meals a day for residents, and volunteers distribute food. Some locals also

“The shelters are warmer and safer. Villagers feel more at ease facing aftershocks. There are beds, tables, electricity, Wi-Fi and television.”

Tsering Phuntsok, Party secretary of Guring village

cook for themselves, Tsering Phuntsok said, adding that the tents are now being used to store supplies.

The earthquake, which struck the region that is home to Mount Qomolangma — known as Mount Everest around the world — has left 126 dead and hundreds injured. Disaster-relief efforts are currently focused on relocating affected villagers and initiating post-disaster reconstruction, according to local authorities. Approximately 47,500 people are now living in 224 resettlement sites after more than 3,600 houses collapsed.

As of 6 pm on Sunday, around 2,200 temporary homes have been built. Available supplies include quilts, blankets, heating equipment, winter clothing, lighting facilities,

rice, flour, oil, meat, vegetables, fruit, drinks and forage grass.

Pan Lin, director of the disaster-relief department of the Red Cross Society of China Yunnan Branch, said his team had transported 200 mobile restrooms to the earthquake-stricken area.

"The restrooms are easy to clean and suitable for use in high-altitude regions. They also help with epidemic control," he said, adding that they can serve about 10,000 people.

Previously, many victims had to relieve themselves outdoors, so the restrooms now provide much-needed privacy, he added.

To maintain sanitation at the relocation sites, Losang Tsering, an official from Phangyi township, and seven colleagues have been voluntarily collecting garbage in Tsoqo township since last Tuesday night.

"We pick up trash along streets and dining areas, mainly beverage cans, instant noodle bowls, plastic packaging, toilet paper, water bottles and leftover food," he said.

Each day, five to six small trucks are filled with garbage. Altogether, 6 metric tons of trash have been collected in the past few days.

"We bought gloves and masks ourselves, while brooms and garbage trucks were provided by the township," he said. "Although we work at least four hours daily and sometimes soup stains our clothes, it's satisfying to see the streets clean

through our efforts."

To meet medical needs, mobile hospitals have been set up in the disaster areas.

Kelsang Yudron, director of the Xizang Health Commission, said during a news conference on Thursday that the goal is to ensure each resettlement site has at least one medical support team with prominent signage, medical staff, emergency medications and regular medical rounds.

Butruk, a surgeon from Shigatse Tibetan Hospital, said he treated patients with fractures and other injuries at the county hospital's emergency department last Tuesday night. After many patients had been discharged, he shifted to Kyiding village to focus on disease prevention. He also prepares Tibetan medicinal soup for the villagers to help prevent them from catching cold.

Jiang Yaowen, a doctor from the West China Hospital of Sichuan University, said his team brought a computerized tomography scanner in a mobile medical bus to assist at Tsoqo resettlement sites.

"Villagers who feel unwell can visit us, and our doctors will determine if a CT scan is needed. We also explain the CT results to them," he said, adding that patients requiring further treatment would be transferred to the county hospital.

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Breakthrough made in tapping potential of niobium

By **CHINA DAILY**

China has achieved a breakthrough in utilizing its niobium resources, unlocking the economic potential of nearly 930,000 metric tons of niobium ore in Hubei province, the China Geological Survey announced on Monday.

The development centers on

deposits in Miaoya, a village in northwestern Hubei, and was the result of a collaboration between the CGS and the provincial government.

"This discovery is equivalent to nine or 10 large niobium ore deposits, securing China's supply of this critical resource and enabling more efficient utilization of niobium and

rare earth elements," said Mao Jingwen, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Engineering.

Niobium, valued for its resistance to corrosion and high temperatures, is critical for the aerospace, defense and nuclear energy industries.

China, which holds the world's second-largest niobium reserves — estimated at 4.7 million metric tons

— has historically struggled to exploit these resources due to low ore grades and complex geological characteristics. Most of the country's annual consumption of 50,000 tons of niobium is imported, Mao said.

Research conducted over the past two years led to the development of an innovative separation technolo-

gy, according to Chen Bingyan, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Geological Sciences. The technology has increased niobium ore grades from 5 percent to 17 percent and boosted recovery rates from 20 percent to 50 percent, while also enabling the extraction of accompanying rare earth elements.

The large niobium deposit in Miaoya, discovered in the 1980s, had been underutilized until recently due to technical challenges, Chen said.

"With this new technology, the region's niobium resources could meet the country's needs for the next decade," Chen said. "This also opens up possibilities for exploiting niobium resources in other regions."

The breakthrough marks a significant step toward reducing China's dependence on imports and securing self-reliance in niobium, the CGS said.

Li Shangyi contributed to this story.

CHINA

Rise of a new manufacturing powerhouse

GBA sets sights on becoming hub for next-generation industrial revolution

By SHI XIAOFENG and ALICE ZHU in Hong Kong

"Made in China" once evoked images of low-cost, labor-intensive commodities. Many years later, the tag stands for advanced innovations such as electric vehicles and drones.

A major participant in this evolution is the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, a region in South China made up of 11 cities and 87 million residents. The GBA has not only mirrored the nation's transformation from a world factory to a smart manufacturing hub, but has also incubated 70 unicorn companies — startups valued at over \$1 billion each.

So influential has the rise of this particular region of South China been, that it has developed its own epithet — products made here are not just "Made in China" they're "Made in the GBA."

In Guangzhou's newly developed Nansha district, Kenny Oktavius, the young CEO of the tech startup PointFit Technology, showcases his company's latest innovation — a super-thin chip designed for use in sports.

"We can stick it to the skin without any adhesive. So, this will definitely be much (more) convenient, especially for athletes who don't like bulky wearables," he said.

The tracker, which monitors muscle health through sweat analysis, is designed and produced within the GBA.

An Indonesian from Jakarta, Oktavius came to the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology in 2015 for his bachelor's degree in chemical and biological engineering, later proceeding to postgraduate studies.

Mentored by professor Gao Ping, a chemical engineering specialist, Oktavius launched PointFit Technology in 2020 with two research partners, based on an idea of a sweat-sensing wearable device he had developed during his senior-year research.

The product quickly gained the industry's attention, winning several health tech awards and securing a spot on Forbes Asia's 100 To Watch list in 2022 — a roster for small companies recognized for their trailblazing solutions to global challenges.

The GBA's manufacturing expertise has been instrumental in the rise of the young team.

Initially, Oktavius sought out a Taipei manufacturer for production. While functional, the prototype's quality was subpar. Later, a better-equipped manufacturer in Shenzhen, offering a shorter production cycle and superior quality, proved to be the solution.

"Recently, we just produced 300 of these (chips) in one day," Oktavius said, clearly impressed.

Jack Chen, chief operating officer and co-founder of PointFit Technology, added that GBA factories are uniquely open to innovation.

"They are willing to accept new ideas and modify their machines if the existing ones cannot realize our



A researcher tests android "Walker X" at a science company in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, in June. MAO SIQIAN / XINHUA

demands," he said.

Professor Gao expressed full confidence in the practical application of the ultra-high-molecular membrane developed by her students, a material previously confined to laboratory research.

"In the GBA, we can look up at the sky, and work down-to-earth," she said, referring to the region's robust industrial supply chains that facilitate the industrialization of "dream big" research projects.

Ambitious scientists like Oktavius and Chen, thriving in Hong Kong's academically rich environment — home to five of the world's top 100 universities — are becoming a more significant driving force behind the region's innovative prowess. Supported by regional government funds, they are following in the footsteps of DJI and SenseTime — which both originated on Hong Kong campuses — in aiming for global enterprise leadership.

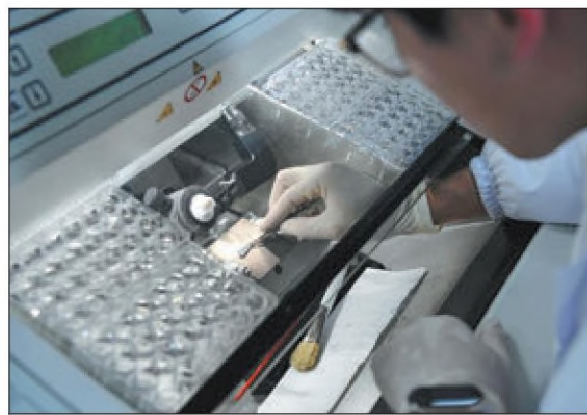
Furthering their ambitions, Oktavius' team has established a subsidiary in the Hong Kong & Macao (International) Youth Entrepreneurship Hub in Guangzhou's Nansha district, to better streamline their supply chain integration.

This hub is a cradle for about 74 startups across diverse sectors such as internet technology, healthcare, advanced materials, green energy and education.

Oktavius points out the region's potential as a global smart manufacturing powerhouse. "That's essentially the edge that the GBA startup community has."

Legacy continues

Li Chen, an associate professor at the Centre for China Studies of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, views the success of the GBA as a



From top: A researcher prepares samples for an experiment at the Brain Science Infrastructure in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, in November. LIANG XU / XINHUA Felix Choi Chun-kit, CEO of Hongrita Holdings, oversees the production line at the company in Cuiheng New Area, Zhongshan, Guangdong province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

natural outcome of its inherent strengths.

"The GBA has a large cluster of world-leading universities and research institutes. And we have a

very good innovative ecosystem," he explained.

In the meantime, he highlighted the GBA's strong cultural legacy — an enduring willingness to

embrace risk and pursue unconventional business avenues.

"There's a strong continuity in terms of the entrepreneurship culture in this sphere," he said.

Shenzhen and Zhuhai in Guangdong province were among China's first special economic zones established during the country's reform and opening-up in the late 1970s. Despite their transformative changes over the past decades, the spirit of urban pioneering persists.

Take the example of Felix Choi Chun-kit, a Hong Kong industrialist and CEO of Hongrita Holdings. His mold production company, founded in 1988 in Hong Kong, has witnessed the GBA's seismic shift.

In 1993, Choi moved his operations to Shenzhen, then a hub for labor-intensive industries.

He recalled the early challenges posed by Shenzhen's underdeveloped industrial supporting facilities.

"Even for something as simple as a screw, we had to source it from Hong Kong and bring it to Shenzhen," he said.

Today, the GBA's industrial capabilities are all-encompassing. "We can find all the components that we need locally with very competitive quality and price," he said.

Choi has since inaugurated a digital, intelligent workshop in his Zhongshan facility, where the production line operates autonomously, with high-end robots gliding along preset routes.

From 2018 to 2022, Hongrita's average annual production value per employee increased by about 37 percent, reaching an annual output value of 600 million yuan (\$86 million).

With manufacturing cycles aver-

aging 45 seconds, every second saved translates into an additional 4 million yuan in benefits.

The recent opening of the Shenzhen-Zhongshan Link, which cut travel time between the two cities from two hours to just 30 minutes, has further streamlined operations.

Technological advancements and process optimization have reinforced the confidence of manufacturers like Choi. "In the end, precision molds will be labeled 'Made in GBA,'" he said.

Looking ahead, Choi aims to transform Hongrita into one of the "lighthouse factories", a term coined by the World Economic Forum to designate benchmark manufacturing sites that integrate cutting-edge technologies with efficient and sustainable practices.

In 2023, the forum's "lighthouse factories" list included 62 Chinese factories, with eight located within the GBA.

Innovation investment

The stories of PointFit Technology and Hongrita reflect a common strategy in the GBA — adapting to change and investing to drive it.

In 2022, the GBA's annual research and development spending soared to 447.8 billion yuan, accounting for 3.4 percent of its GDP. This surpassed the figures of global tech powerhouses like Germany (3.14 percent) and Japan (3.26 percent).

According to the Global Innovation Index 2023, the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong technology cluster ranked as the world's second-most active cluster in terms of patents and scientific publications for four consecutive years.

These strides align with the strategic vision outlined in the recent resolution of the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, which supports leading urban clusters to serve as engines of the nation's high-quality development.

In the new development stage, CUHK professor Li highlighted the supply chain and new quality productive forces as a key concept for the GBA.

"Now we are seeing a new configuration of the supply chain that can capture more systematically, more efficiently the changing demands" of both Western and domestic markets, he explained.

Companies have been empowered to craft more efficient production systems, drawing on diverse resources spread throughout the region.

Regarding new quality productive forces, Li emphasized that they include novel technologies, new business models, and emerging industries.

He stressed that they also involve modernizing traditional industries through innovative operational methods, particularly in automation and digitalization.

"We should not only strengthen the development of emerging strategic, high-tech sectors, but also use the latest IT technologies, digital technologies, to increase the productivity of traditional industries, and traditional manufacturing," he said.

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Visa-free entry boosts outbound Chinese tourists

By HU YUYAN and LESLEY LIU in Hong Kong

Visa-free-entry policies for Chinese citizens have fueled a surge in outbound Chinese tourists, whose travel behavior has been shaped by their increased use of social media.

The increase in number of outbound Chinese travelers is expected to enhance people-to-people exchanges and cooperation in sectors beyond tourism, which will contribute to economic growth and stability, experts and officials said.

Chinese online travel platform Trip.com Group saw a year-on-year increase of over 40 percent in outbound bookings last summer, and countries that have implemented visa-free measures for Chinese nationals have risen in popularity. Malaysia, Singapore and Thai-

land, which have introduced mutual visa exemptions with China, form a "golden route" for Chinese travelers. Bookings for the three countries last summer increased by nearly 50 percent year-on-year, according to Trip.com.

Countries with visa exemptions such as Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates were popular choices for Chinese travelers during the Dragon Boat Festival holiday in June, with tour bookings on Trip.com increasing by 171 percent and 141 percent respectively.

This surge in Chinese tourists has been bolstered by the increased use of social media to consult travel reviews and share travel experiences.

According to a 2023 report by Beijing-based media analytics company Topklout, over 80 percent of Chinese travelers consult online

platforms when planning their trips.

"I go to Xiaohongshu for travel tips and recommendations, while using other social media platforms like Douyin for supplementary information," said Jin Dongkai, a Chinese tourist who visited Malaysia in May.

Zhao Hai, director of international political studies at the Beijing-based National Institute for Global Strategy, said there has been a generational change in Chinese travelers.

"The older generation traveled in groups. They went to Europe and visited eight or 10 countries all in one go. They went to Southeast Asia and visited Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand all in one go," Zhao said.

"The new way of traveling is very different, and that is what we call individual or family travel. This way,

tourists follow an itinerary that they have created based on online research."

Wong Ah Wah, a restaurant in Kuala Lumpur that has gained popularity on Chinese social media, has seen an influx of Chinese diners.

"They (some Chinese diners) said they learned about us from social media and they know very well what our signature dishes are," said Wendy Loke, who has worked at the restaurant for over 40 years.

Ouyang Yujing, Chinese ambassador to Malaysia, said in a New Year speech reported by Malaysian media that 3 million Chinese visited the country from January to November, a year-on-year increase of 155 percent and surpassing the 2019 prepandemic level.

He added that the increase in tourism will enhance bilateral cooperation in areas beyond tourism



Chinese tourists take photos at a scenic area in Malacca, Malaysia, last month. ZHANG WENZONG / XINHUA

such as technology, culture and education.

Zhao from the National Institute for Global Strategy said people-to-people exchanges can promote mutual understanding between Chi-

na and countries such as Malaysia, and their friendship will ultimately contribute to peace and stability.

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CHINA



Peng Guolong works in his studio at the China Nuo Culture Inheritance and Protection Base in Pingxiang, Jiangxi province.
PHOTOS BY FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

Master teaches mask carving to students

Instructor passing down Nuo culture through his art

By ZHAO RUINAN in Nanchang
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Thousands of years ago, across many parts of the vast Chinese landscape, people would perform an elaborate ceremony as part of a magical ritual to expel evil spirits.

As far back as the Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century-11th century BC) participants would don carved masks made of bone and shells and chant "nuo, nuo" to drive away the devil. Though a lot has changed since then, a special class in Lashi Middle School in Pingxiang, Jiangxi province, is taught where students can learn how to recreate these Nuo masks.

They draw outlines on a pumpkin or melon, then carefully carve out the eyes, nose and mouth. Their teacher, 59-year-old Peng Guolong, is one of the first-generation inheritors of Nuo mask carving at the China Nuo Culture Inheritance and Protection Base.

Peng said these exercises are essential for anyone who wants to be a Nuo mask maker. "Whenever I get a chance, I come to teach, starting with simple carving exercises and sometimes even using clay for practice. The kids are really into it," he said.

"Nuo is our traditional culture in Pingxiang. When we were young, we danced the Nuo dance. But it's hard to pass it on."

The good news is that Nuo masks, known for their intricate designs, are



Peng introduces his Nuo mask works in a showroom at the base.

gradually gaining popularity in the market, according to Peng. "These days, they aren't often used in rituals, but many people buy Nuo masks to display at home as art. I've got a bunch of them in my house, too," he said.

Peng is a master in making Nuo masks and has dedicated himself to the field for over 30 years.

The mask maker's home is decorated with a stunning display of Nuo masks on the walls: an imposing red face, the black face of a general or a kind-looking white face representing a prime minister. "I first discovered painting when I was 8. By the time I was 13, my father had taught me the arts of oil painting, Nuo mask carving and embroidery," Peng said.

At 25, he was hired by a company in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, to work in painting and design. In 1996, Peng returned to his hometown to establish a Nuo mask carving factory. "I have a deep passion for Nuo

carving, and it is my lifelong pursuit," he said.

Among those masks collected by Peng is an impressive piece of his won — a mask resembling a Tang Dynasty (618-907) general. "I've named it *Ancient Nuo Greeting Guests*," he said. "This piece took more than two months to sculpt and complete."

Made in 2008 for the Shanghai World Expo, the mask features two dragons playing with a ball and surrounded by Nuo dancers, all carved from a single piece of wood.

"Camphor wood is the main material used to make Nuo masks. It is chosen for its insect-repelling properties and symbolizes 'welcoming wealth,'" Peng said.

Making a Nuo mask is no easy job. It involves seven key stages: selection, measurement, initial carving, detail carving, final carving, polishing and painting.

"The most intricate step is carving.

It's a delicate job. Carving the round bead in a dragon's mouth can take several days," he added.

"Traditional Nuo masks can be quite intimidating. I've adopted a more rounded carving style to appeal to younger audiences."

At the 2010 Poyang Lake Ecological Festival held in Nanchang, capital of Jiangxi, Peng's Nuo masks were a huge success, selling out immediately, and even the masks he created on the spot were pre-ordered by customers.

Since then, his Nuo masks have gained popularity in cities such as Guangzhou in Guangdong province, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Beijing, and have even been exported to the United States and Japan.

"At that time, I made over 100,000 yuan (\$14,000) a year. One of my masks, *Zhong Kui Eating the Ghost*, was sold to a painter in Beijing for 20,000 yuan," Peng said.

He has been honored as one of the first Nuo Mask Carving Heritage Inheritors at the Nuo cultural heritage protection base, recognized as a Folk Craft Artist in Pingxiang, and awarded the title of highly skilled talent in the city's Xiangdong district.

Peng believes that ancient skills can only be inherited by passing them on to younger generations. So far, he has trained 30 apprentices.

"If my skills in making masks are lost, my life will have been wasted. So, I will pass them on to my apprentices and my sons, hoping they will continue the tradition," he said.

Some of his apprentices have established their own Nuo mask studios, while others are continuing their education under Peng's mentorship. As the demand for Nuo masks grows, he is embracing a larger volume of orders. For him, handmade production can no longer meet the increasing market demand.

"I hope that in the future, with the help of factories, we can increase production and allow more people to discover and appreciate Nuo masks."

Wu Chenrui contributed to this story.

Apples from Gansu find favor in global markets

LANZHOU — Ju Aiguo may have only completed first grade, but now at the age of 55 he is a successful apple farmer and an agricultural technician with a medium-grade professional title.

"Trimming, fertilizing, field management and plant protection are four vital steps of planting huanium apple trees," said Ju, who has been planting the huanium apple for more than four decades.

Ju lives in the city of Tianshui in Gansu province, which is located on the Loess Plateau and is known for its huanium apples. Named after a local village, the special apple variety has a ruby color and crisp texture.

The Loess Plateau offers optimum natural conditions for huanium apple farming, such as a deep soil layer, abundant sunshine and moderate annual rainfall. The planting area of Tianshui covers more than 35,000 hectares with yields totaling about 1.93 million metric tons last year.

Ju learned apple planting techniques through practice and years of training. Now he is often invited to give lectures to local farmers.

He is among 355 local farmers given medium-grade professional titles, along with another 13,000 with primary-grade titles, according to Xie Rui, an official with the local fruit industry office.

They include farmer experts and market information collectors. The variety of new business forms is breathing life into the decades-old industry of huanium apple cultivation.

At a fruit company in Qin'an county, huanium apples of varying sizes roll on the production line, which sends them into a sorting machine before being categorized by attributes such as weight and sweetness.

Wang Le, the machine operator, is affectionately known as the "apple doctor". "The imaging technology can easily recognize bad apples and sift them out, making sure that customers receive high-quality ones," Wang said.

Cai Quanbin, deputy general manager of the corporation, said, "With rising sales, quality control is increasingly important." He added that the automated line sorts 30 tons of apples every day.

Big companies also help accelerate the integration of the industrial chain, creating job opportunities and boosting incomes. During the buying season for huanium apples,

every household in Huaimiao village in the county has bright red apples piled up outside ready for sale. "It was a bumper year," Li Xiaosheng, a village official, said about last year's harvest. "More than 10,000 tons of apples were sold, including about 1,000 tons of huanium."

Deng Wen, an apple buyer from Hubei province, has been purchasing huanium apples in Qin'an since August.

"The huanium apple is distinctive in flavor and easy to store. It is quite popular in the high-end market," said Deng, who buys more than two trucks of apples every day during the peak season.

Wu Zhengquan, manager of a local farmers' cooperative specializing in huanium apple planting and marketing, said, "Thinking ahead of the market is key to making more money."

He said that the cooperative holds meetings on technological production, organizing apple buyers to share their market information, such as which size sells better and what taste is most popular with customers. "The information guides us in planting," he said.

These days, huanium apples are being embraced by a broader market. In September, 7.6 tons were exported to the Maldives for the first time. In the opinion of Yan Gang, general manager of an agricultural export enterprise, there is big international market potential to be tapped. "We have received orders from many foreign countries and areas since August. The apple is well-liked by foreign customers," Yan said.

Xie disclosed that 18 leading enterprises in Tianshui have been approved for direct export of their apples, with the annual export value reaching 200 million yuan (\$27.3 million).

In the first three quarters of last year, the export value of apples in Gansu exceeded 430 million yuan, up 22.4 percent year-on-year, according to local customs.

A diverse range of products based on huanium apples is making its way to overseas markets.

Tianshui Great Wall Fruit Juice is increasingly important." He added that the automated line sorts 30 tons of apples every day.

Big companies also help accelerate the integration of the industrial chain, creating job opportunities and boosting incomes. During the buying season for huanium apples,

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Huanium apples are sorted on a production line at a fruit company in Qin'an county, Gansu province. WEN JING / XINHUA

Ancient logbooks charted course for fishermen

HAIKOU — In China's southernmost island province of Hainan, local fishing families still keep their cherished heirlooms: worn sea route manuals known as *Geng Lu Bu*. For centuries, far before the invention of satellite navigation and modern mapping technologies, fishing families relied on these handwritten books for directions and navigation guidance in the South China Sea.

The Chinese characters "Geng Lu Bu" mean "seaway manuals"; "Geng" in Chinese is a unit of length equal to 10 nautical miles, while "Lu" means "routes" and "Bu" translates to "books" or "manuals". Some fishing families still own their unique *Geng Lu Bu*, yellowed with age, despite having long since switched to modern fishing methods.

In Tanmen township, a famous fishing port in Hainan's Qionghai city, stands a *Geng Lu Bu* museum. The museum offers an insightful glimpse into the local history of discovering and sailing to the islands in the South China Sea. Numerous *Geng Lu Bu* are exhibited in the museum, along with compasses, fishing spears and other fishing tools.

Wang Zhenzhong, founder of the

museum and owner of a local handicraft factory, was born into a fishing family in 1977. Both his grandfather and father were skilled fishing boat captains, and he has also sailed to Nansha Qundao.

On a wrinkled, broken page of his family manual, his ancestors wrote a note: "Da Tan to Chuan Yan Wei goes in the direction of Qian Xun for 15 gongs."

Da Tan is a deep pool outside the Tanmen port, and Chuan Yan Wei is now known as Xishazhou, an island of Xisha Qundao. Qian Xun is a direction marked on the ancient Chinese compass, and 15 gongs is about 150 nautical miles.

The manual covers sea routes, weather conditions, wind directions and ocean currents for different times of the year. For example, it warns against setting sail on certain days, including the third day of the third lunar month and the 19th day of the sixth lunar month.

Wang remembers that in the late 1980s, his father set out to sea on one of these dates only to find the ocean

was truly treacherous. "He barely made it back to shore," Wang said.

These manuals were exclusive to fishing boat captains, and were edited and rewritten every generation, according to Wang. With a *Geng Lu Bu*, a compass and an incense burner, fishermen could set sail across the South China Sea.

At the bow of each fishing boat, a stick of incense would be lit inside a wind-protected burner. The incense would take about two hours to burn out, allowing seafarers to track the time. They also had a unique method to measure sailing speeds: they would throw a jar attached to a rope into the water, and the captain would hold on to the rope to gauge the speed by feeling the force exerted on it.

Wang learned the art of fishing in coral reefs from his father and other seasoned professionals. Wearing masks and breathing tubes, they would dive 20 to 30 meters below the surface of the water. Experienced divers can hold their breath for up to five minutes. With fishing

spears or just their bare hands, they would catch sea cucumbers, lobsters and abalone hiding in the reef.

Valuable fish such as groupers cannot be speared, as any injury reduces their market value. Divers would therefore use a natural anesthetic extracted from the stems and leaves of a plant to stun the fish, which then float to the surface and are collected by people on boats above. "In Tanmen, unless you're very timid or in poor health, everyone heads out to sea," said Fu Minglin, a fisherman-turned-B&B-owner in his 40s.

Fu has more experience sailing and fishing than Wang, having regularly sailed to Meiji Jiao and Zhubi Jiao, two major reefs of Nansha Qundao. He has also sailed to Huangyan Dao and Zengmu Ansha, China's southernmost territory.

Fu's uncle, a skilled captain who could navigate the seas using only his *Geng Lu Bu* and a compass, taught him a great deal, including how to observe the color of the clouds to locate islands and reefs.

Shallow and deep waters reflect light on the clouds differently, creating subtle color variations that reveal what lies below.

Long ago, fishing journeys usually lasted several months, depending on the monsoons. Fu said that according to the *Geng Lu Bu*, fishing boats would ride the northeast wind to the south during the 12th month of the lunar calendar each year, and they would return during the fourth month of the lunar calendar the following year.

During their voyages, fishing crews would either remain aboard their boats or settle temporarily on islands, leaving behind traces of development and habitation that are still preserved today.

"The South China Sea is where our great-grandparents journeyed, so we journey there too," Fu said.

In recent years, *Geng Lu Bu* have been increasingly recognized as important historical documents. In 2008, *Geng Lu Bu* were included in China's national intangible cultural heritage. Later that year, Wang's

father, Wang Shubao, was honored as an official inheritor of this heritage.

For Wang, the manuals document how his ancestors and other fishermen and women mapped the routes across the vast, unmarked South China Sea, where they discovered, named, were stationed at and developed many islands and reefs.

Yan Genqi, a professor at Hainan University and a *Geng Lu Bu* expert, said the paper-based manuals were created no later than the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), while orally relayed sailing directions had already begun to take shape in the Hainan fishing community as early as the Song Dynasty (960-1279).

Since 1974, researchers have discovered 52 *Geng Lu Bu*, in which more than 100 islands are named in the Hainan dialect, according to Yan. On some of the islands mentioned in these *Geng Lu Bu*, people have found wells, houses and temples built by Hainan fishermen.

Geng Lu Bu are among the historical evidence that the Chinese were the first to discover, name, develop and administer the islands of the South China Sea, Yan said.

XINHUA

BUSINESS

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Biomass, hydropower set for long term plays

By ZHENG XIN
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The biomass and hydropower industries are emerging as key sectors with significant growth potential, and are expected to become long term investment hot spots by 2025, according to industry experts.

As China enters a new phase of economic development, the energy sector is playing a crucial role in stabilizing the broader economy, according to the Forecasting & Prospects Research Report on Energy Economy released by the Center for Energy and Environmental Policy Research of Beijing Institute of Technology.

Wind and solar power have proved to be essential in optimizing the nation's energy supply-demand balance, yet biomass and hydropower are gaining momentum due to their long-term viability and environmental benefits, it said.

Biomass refers to material derived from living organisms that are utilized for bioenergy production, including wood and wood residue, energy crops, agricultural byproducts such as straw and organic waste from both industry and households.

"While wind and solar power continued to lead China's low-carbon energy transition last year, biomass and hydropower are being increasingly recognized for their sustainability," said Tang Baojun, a professor at the Center for Energy and Environmental Policy Research.

"These sectors will become more prominent in China's energy mix, driven by advances in technology, increased policy support, and a



A wind farm seen in Rongcheng, Shandong province. LI XINJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

growing emphasis on sustainable development," she said.

Biomass power generation has grown rapidly in recent years, with grid-connected biomass power in the country reaching 44.14 million kilowatts in installed capacity by the end of 2023, a fourfold increase since 2013, according to the Biomass Energy Industry Promotion Association.

Nonelectric biomass applications are also expanding, with significant developments in biogas, biomass heating and bio-liquid fuel industries, it said.

Chinese companies have made significant progress in biomass development in recent years. The country's home-built C919 aircraft completed a test flight last year powered by bio-jet fuel that was developed by China Petroleum & Chemical Corp, the world's largest refiner.

According to Tang, biomass energy stands out for its potential to tap into agricultural waste and forestry residue, offering both environmental and economic benefits. This

renewable energy source is poised to address pressing issues like waste disposal and carbon emissions, while also fostering regional economic growth.

Hydropower, the most established form of renewable energy, continues to play a foundational role in China's energy transition, thanks to its reliable, large-scale generation capacity, she added.

Despite these promising prospects, Tang cautioned that China's energy sector must further enhance its dynamism and ensure balanced, high-quality development.

As the global energy landscape evolves, China will need to address both internal challenges and external pressures to fully realize the potential of biomass and hydropower. The shift toward a cleaner, more balanced energy system will require ongoing investments in infrastructure, innovation and policy frameworks, she said.

According to the report, while global carbon capture technology has developed rapidly in recent years, the sector still faces signifi-

cant challenges, including high costs, energy consumption, technological lock-in risks, and insufficient policy and financial support.

China has been coordinating efforts in fundamental research, technology development, equipment manufacturing, and integrated demonstration projects, according to Wei Yiming, a professor at the center.

These measures are intended to boost China's core competitiveness in carbon capture technology and accelerate the growth of the CCUS (carbon capture, utilization and storage) industry, according to the report.

China's CCUS technology has made remarkable progress in recent years, with 126 CCUS projects planned for operation in the country so far, which is 77 more than in 2020. The government believes that CCUS technology is not only a technical method that can achieve net-zero emissions in fossil energy usage, but also a feasible technical solution for achieving deep emission reductions in the carbon emission reduction industry.

Digital biz expansion prioritized

By end-2025, new computing power in major hubs to account for over 60%

By FAN FEIFEI
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China will step up efforts to promote the construction of digital industrial clusters, accelerate the digital transformation of cities and cultivate a national integrated data market in 2025, as part of its broader push to facilitate the high-quality development of a digital economy and advance the building of a "Digital China," said the country's top data governance regulator.

Liu Liehong, head of the National Data Administration, said the transaction scale of China's data market is expected to exceed 160 billion yuan (\$21.8 billion) in 2024, up more than 30 percent year-on-year.

Liu said that in 2025, the administration will continue to vigorously press ahead with the mega data project dubbed the "east-data-west-computing" and speed up the establishment of an integrated national computing network. By the end of the third quarter last year, the total number of data center racks in use surpassed 2.11 million, surging more than 100 percent year-on-year.

Liu made the remarks at a national data work conference in Beijing that concluded on Friday, saying that by the end of 2025, new computing power in major computing hubs will account for more than 60 percent of the country's total, and the use of green electricity is expected to exceed 80 percent.

The administration will make greater efforts to improve the basic systems for data to remove the bottlenecks that hinder the circulation and utilization of data elements, further promote the development and utilization of data resources — including public data and enterprise data — and expand the application scenarios for data in more fields this year.

The NDA also stressed the significance of promoting the in-depth integration of the real economy with the digital economy, developing new quality productive forces based on local conditions, bolstering the construction of data infrastructure, and deepening international cooperation in the data domain.

Ouyang Rihui, assistant dean of the China Center for Internet Economy Research at the Central University of Finance and Economics, said deepened reforms related to the market-oriented allocation of data should fully unleash the value and potential of massive data resources in 2025.

"As a new type of production fac-

tor, data have been rapidly integrated into various areas like production, circulation, consumption and social services, and are playing an increasingly vital role in bolstering industrial upgrades," Ouyang said, adding that data elements own the attributes of commodities, which could be effectively allocated through market evaluation and trading, so as to create huge economic and social value.

He said the country's latest push to promote high-quality growth in its data industry, as a crucial part of the digital economy, is conducive to accelerating the establishment of a national integrated data market, propelling the sharing, circulation, transaction and utilization of data, and fostering new growth drivers.

The NDA said China's total data output reached 32.85 zettabytes in 2023, up 22.4 percent year-on-year, while the added value of core digital economy industries accounted for 10 percent of GDP.

The NDA, the National Development and Reform Commission and two other government departments on Monday issued a guideline on boosting the development of the data annotation industry.

By 2027, the professionalism, intelligence and technological innovation capacities of the data annotation industry will be improved significantly, with the average annual compound growth rate of this sector surpassing more than 20 percent, said the guideline.

The data annotation industry is an emerging field including data selecting, classification, marking and quality inspection. Cultivation of the data annotation sector is of great importance in improving the quality of data supply and promoting the innovative development of artificial intelligence.

The National Industrial Information Security Development Research Center said revenue derived from China's data elements market is projected to rise to 198.9 billion yuan in 2025, with the compound annual growth rate surpassing 25 percent during the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) period.

Zhu Keli, founding director of the China Institute of New Economy, said the country's accelerated layout in the data element market will provide solid support for the sustainable and healthy development of the digital economy, generate new business forms, models and services that are based on data, create more job opportunities and inject new momentum into economic growth.

FORUM

HKSAR vows to beef up competitive advantages

By OSWALD CHAN in Hong Kong
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The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region's competitiveness as a global asset and wealth management center will be strengthened, officials from the mainland and Hong Kong vowed on Monday.

In his opening remarks at the 18th Asian Financial Forum, Hong Kong Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu said the HKSAR government has exempted stamp duty on the transfer of shares and units of real estate investment trusts, and has boosted the profit tax exemption regimes for funds and single family offices.

"We are also expanding our mutual access programs with the mainland's financial markets, such as enhancing southbound trading under the Bond Connect that would allow greater participation by mainland nonbanking financial institutions like securities firms and insurance companies," he said.

Hong Kong managed about \$4 trillion worth of assets in 2023, with net fund inflows up well over three times. The city is also home to 2,700 single family offices, with more than half of these set up by ultra high net-worth individuals, each with a net

worth of at least \$50 million.

The forum, themed "Powering the Next Growth Engine", has attracted some 3,600 business and financial leaders from more than 50 countries and regions.

At the opening session, Pan Gongsheng, governor of the People's Bank of China, said that the central bank will focus on four key areas and continue to fully support the development of Hong Kong as an international financial center.

These measures include significantly increasing the national foreign exchange reserves' asset allocation proportion in Hong Kong, further optimizing the Cross-boundary Wealth Management Connect program and Qualified Domestic Institutional Investors system, and implementing the optimized arrangement of Mutual Recognition of Funds so as to attract more mainland and international fund flows into Hong Kong.

The finance ministers of several countries said they will leverage Hong Kong's bond market and initial public offering market to access market funds.

In the plenary session of the 18th AFF, Pakistan's Federal Minister of Finance and Revenue Muhammad



Participants speak at a plenary session during the Asian Financial Forum in Hong Kong on Monday. ADAM LAM / CHINA DAILY

Aurangzeb said the Pakistan government intends to issue euro-denominated bonds in Hong Kong, and that Pakistani companies are interested in listing in Hong Kong to raise funds.

The minister added that Pakistan's Belt and Road infrastructure project with the mainland is currently in the second phase, and the country has a favorable location and could become a corridor for the Middle East and Central Asia.

Luxembourg's Minister of Finance Gilles Roth said that the country has strong ties with the Chinese mainland, with many mainland banks setting up their presence

there, involving insurance and reinsurance businesses and that it also has a long-standing relationship with the Hong Kong SAR.

"There are about 2,000 green bonds listed in Luxembourg. If they can be cross-listed in Hong Kong, it can strengthen the relationship between Luxembourg and Hong Kong, and connect the European and Asian markets," Roth said.

Liu Zhenmin, the nation's special envoy on climate change, said Hong Kong can leverage its advantages to empower Asia's energy transformation through climate finance, and make greater contributions to the continent's energy transformation.

AI dominant in funding investments

By MIKE GU in Hong Kong
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Artificial intelligence is dominant in funding global investments, according to speakers participating in the "Funding the Future of Emerging Technologies" panel discussion under the 2025 Asian Financial Forum that kicked off in Hong Kong on Monday.

Funding the Future of Emerging Technologies, a session with global perspective under the 2025 AFF, aims to explore the evolving application of emerging technologies and the latest investment appetite of venture capitalists, as a new wave of technologies poised to disrupt the world emerges with the acceleration of AI.

Abdulrahman A. Alolayan, founder and managing partner of Beta Lab, which is a venture capital firm based in Saudi Arabia, said during the panel discussion that AI is currently dominant in global investments, with over \$100 billion being poured in AI-driven sectors around the world.

Talking about Saudi Arabia's investment in AI, Alolayan said that the Saudi leadership has taken AI investment very seriously by launching a national strategy to promote AI, not only in the region but also on a global scale. Saudi Arabia aims to make substantial investments in emerging technology fields based on AI over the next 20 years, including areas such as biotechnology, he added.

Johnny Chan, chief investment officer of Hong Kong Cyberport Management Co Ltd, said that he has witnessed AI permeating every aspect of global investment, particularly in funding the sectors driven by emerging technologies, like biotech and fintech.

AI-driven autonomy and mobility are rapidly on the rise, bringing significant changes to people's lives, Chan added.

Ronald Simorangkir, chief executive officer of Mandiri Capital Indonesia, said that their primary strategy for AI investment focuses on various payment solutions, aiming to bring dynamism to investment through AI technologies. The government of Indonesia is also keen on advancing digital currency

through the help of AI, he added.

The key to enhancing investment value lies in leveraging technologies, especially those driven by AI, Simorangkir said. Back in 2015 and 2016, peer-to-peer lending gained traction, but now challenges have come to the forefront, particularly in the fintech space, he said.

In terms of investment, companies in Saudi Arabia now have a wider array of options for fintech, and the innovation landscape is evolving toward survival with the support of AI, rather than merely focusing on growth. Investment is undoubtedly maturing with the integration of AI, he explained.

Aysar Tayeb, executive managing director of Prosperity7 Ventures, said that eventually, all financial managers will be using AI that will help them to make a big leap in various kinds of investments.

Briefly

Central bank conducts reverse repos

China's central bank conducted 24.8 billion yuan (\$3.38 billion) of seven-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 1.5 percent on Monday. The move aims to keep liquidity in the banking system at an adequate level, the central bank said. A reverse repo is a process in which the central bank purchases securities from commercial banks through bidding, with an agreement to sell them back in the future.

Development index of SMEs picks up

China's small and medium-sized enterprises saw improved business performances between October and December 2024, according to a report from the

China Association of Small and Medium Enterprises released on Sunday. The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Index, based on a survey of 3,000 SMEs across eight major industries, stood at 89.0 in the fourth quarter of last year, 0.1 point higher than in the third quarter. The index also contains multiple subindexes to gauge the performances and expectations of SMEs. The subindexes for industrial production, construction and transportation all showed improvement, while the subindex measuring SMEs' confidence in the macroeconomy remained stable compared to the third quarter, according to the report. SMEs saw a gradual improvement in both confidence and market demand, leading to a surge in development vitality.

BUSINESS

Flooring sector seen on steady growth track

Industry showing strong momentum riding on tech innovation, green efforts

By LI JIAYING
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China's flooring industry is expecting robust growth and to provide the international market with more high-quality products and services, foreign executives said.

The flooring market in China has shown strong growth momentum over the past year and achieved notable progress in technological innovation and sustainable development, further enhancing its competitiveness in the global market, said Arno Reich, senior vice-president of German trade fair company Deutsche Messe AG.

"We believe that in China, and also in the Asia-Pacific region — which is about 30 percent of the global flooring market — will lie growth in the future," Reich said.

"China is a very huge market for flooring solutions. It doesn't only consume but also produces several flooring products," said Sonia Wedell-Castellano, global director at Deutsche Messe AG.

"I believe in the past couple of years, China has almost overhauled European producers because they are very innovative, very fast, with very advanced technologies," Wedell-Castellano said, adding that China-made products are usually more price competitive and also cater to the needs of the European market.

Eyeing the potential of the country's flooring industry, Hannover Milano Fairs Shanghai — the joint venture of Deutsche Messe and Fiera Milano in China — announced on Wednesday the establishment of DACF Exhibitions Shanghai Ltd by joining hands with local fair company Globus Events.

The new JV will focus on expanding business opportunities in flooring sectors within China and across the broader Asia-Pacific region through carpet and floor-covering show DOMOTEX Asia.

"It's a reflection of our long-term commitment and confidence in the Chinese market. We hope this move will deeply integrate the unique advantages of both parties in industry resources, professional knowledge and market influence, to jointly make new achievements in the broader exhibition sector," Reich said.

Through the JV, the German company is also aiming to strengthen forces with local partners in organizing a flooring show that caters to special visitor and customer structures of the Chinese market, as innovation in sustainability and eco-friendly products are the new trends in the country's flooring market.

"We have noticed opportunities provided by the world's growing demand for sustainable and eco-friendly products here, which is the core of how we can cater to the markets of tomorrow," Reich said.

In its 26th year, DOMOTEX Asia will be launched in Shanghai from May 26-28, and is expected to host over 1,600 exhibitors from both domestic and international markets.

"By bringing together participants from around the world to this most relevant Asian flooring platform, we invite everyone to not only showcase the latest trends, but also look for new developments and innovations in the flooring industry," he said.

"After being introduced to China, our flagship exhibitions have attracted the active participation of high-quality enterprises and buyers and achieved great success. This is inseparable from the huge consumption vitality and potential of the Chinese market," Reich said.

Through the company's interactions with exhibitors and visitors, he said they have found widespread optimism about the potential and development of the Chinese market.

According to market consultancy Mordor Intelligence, China's floor covering market is expected to register a compound annual growth rate of more than 7 percent during 2024-29, with the continuous development of the real estate industry and the increasing acceptance of aesthetic needs likely to boost demand for flooring in China.

As a foreign-funded enterprise, Reich said Deutsche Messe will strengthen its collaboration with local partners and offer more shows to Chinese visitors in the future.

"Besides major shows in top-tier cities such as Shanghai and Shenzhen, we also aim to extend more events to more lower-tier cities for more possibilities," he said.



The world's first metro train made with carbon fiber material debuts in Qingdao, Shandong province, on Friday. DENG WANGQIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Metro train using carbon fiber material makes debut

By ZHAO RUIXUE in Jinan
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The world's first metro train constructed using carbon fiber material made its debut on Line 1 in Qingdao, Shandong province, on Friday, heralding a more environmentally friendly future for subway systems.

Developed by CRRC Qingdao Sifang and Qingdao Metro, the metro train, dubbed CETROVO 1.0, offers advantages such as weight reduction and energy efficiency.

"By employing carbon fiber composite materials, the train achieves an impressive 11 percent weight

reduction compared to traditional metal trains, leading to enhanced energy efficiency with a 7 percent decrease in operational energy consumption," said Liu Jinzhu, a senior designer at CRRC Qingdao Sifang.

This reduction equates to an annual decrease of around 130 metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions, Liu said.

The lighter weight of the CETROVO 1.0 results in reduced wear on wheels and tracks, lowering demand for maintenance.

The metro train also incorporates advanced digital twin technology through an intelligent operation platform.

The smart system enables intelligent fault detection, health status assessment and optimization of maintenance schedules, reducing maintenance costs. The adoption of new materials and technologies is expected to lower the train's total lifecycle maintenance expenses by 22 percent.

In addition, passengers can enjoy a more comfortable ride due to the superior vibration and noise isolation effects of the carbon fiber composite materials, said Liu.

The exterior design of the carbon fiber train is based on charcoal black, with blue and yellow lines symboliz-

ing the waves and sunlight, showcasing the coastal features of Qingdao.

"The seats are more comfortable. It is also less noisy than other subways. I won't feel cold when holding the uprights," said Jia Xiaobei, a passenger.

Line 1 serves as a crucial route in Qingdao's urban rail transit network, spanning 60 kilometers and featuring 41 stations. With a daily passenger volume exceeding 400,000, Line 1 is a vital transportation artery for the city. Currently, the CETROVO 1.0 train operates on a section of the line and will progressively extend its service to the entire route.



Arno Reich

4-seat fixed-wing aircraft adds choice for winter sports fans

By ZHANG YU in Shijiazhuang
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As Zhangjiakou, a renowned winter tourism destination in Hebei province, welcomes visitors from around the world during the peak season for winter sports, the increasing popularity of low-altitude flights is expected to inject new momentum into the local tourism industry.

A four-seat fixed-wing aircraft from Zhuhai, Guangdong province landed at Zhangjiakou Ningyuan Airport at 5:25 pm on Jan 5, marking the inaugural flight of the nation's first cross-provincial low-altitude route, customized for ice and snow tourism.

Upon arrival in Zhangjiakou, passengers were shuttled to ski resorts in Chongli district, which hosted most of the snow events during the 2022 Winter Olympic Games. They were scheduled to enjoy a three-to-five-day skiing and tourism experience in Zhangjiakou.

During the flight, there were stop-over airports that provided essential services such as refueling, safety monitoring, maintenance, meals and accommodation, while a low-altitude flight service station in Zhangjiakou offered comprehensive services including flight plan approvals and aviation meteorological information.

"The route will leverage the cultural and tourism resources of both Zhangjiakou and Zhuhai, exploring a new format of integrated development through low-altitude travel," Zhang Minghai, an official with the Zhangjiakou municipal transportation bureau, was quoted by local media Zhangjiakou Daily as saying.

The city boasts abundant ice and snow tourism resources and favorable airspace conditions with three navigable airports, making it an ideal destination for such initiatives, Zhang said.

Furthermore, the Zhangjiakou

low-altitude flight service station has been designated by the Civil Aviation Administration of China's North China regional administration as a pilot project for distinctive low-altitude flight services in the region, offering users "one-stop" services such as flight approvals, aviation meteorological information, alerts and assistance for rescue operations.

The launch of this customized route is expected to attract more skiing enthusiasts from the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area to Zhangjiakou, enriching their winter sports experiences.

"We aim to leverage Zhangjiakou's winter sports advantages to promote low-altitude applications and explore the Fixed Base Operator (FBO) operational model for low-altitude scenarios," said Zhou Ge, chairman of Yuxiang Shengtai General Aviation Co, one of the main organizers of the flight.

According to Zhou, the FBO

model provides integrated services such as flight plan applications, route and meteorological information support, coordination at general airports, refueling, maintenance and ensuring safe aircraft operations, serving as aviation service stewards for low-altitude aircraft.

"While the FBO operational model is well-established for domestic business aviation, its application in general aviation, especially for low-altitude flights, is still developing," Zhou said.

He added that the complexities and challenges of low-altitude flight procedures exist, particularly for long-distance flights, underscoring the need for a support system to ensure smooth and worry-free flights for aviation enthusiasts.

Except for tourism, low-altitude aircraft have been widely used in various scenarios in China, including for performance, agriculture, logistics, medical and for emergency search and rescue.



The Belt and Road Initiative

Connectivity, Openness and Inclusiveness

BUSINESSFOCUS

Trade, trains, tech drive Sino-European biz

Rail freight lines linking continents have served as key transport since 2011

WARSAW — Weekday mornings hum with urgency at the GD Poland shopping complex on the outskirts of Warsaw. Electric scooters laden with crates of Chinese goods dart between warehouses and loading docks, as merchants race to load shipments brought thousands of kilometers by China-Europe freight trains into vans bound for stores across Central and Eastern Europe.

What appears to be a chaotic delivery hub is, in reality, the final stop in an intricate supply chain connecting Chinese factories to European storefronts. It is a network that turns global trade routes into local livelihoods, fueling cross-continental cooperation.

Among the swift-moving scooter drivers at GD Poland is Lin Jiangliang, a Chinese merchant who, alongside with his wife Hong Meili, has spent the past decade running a lingerie business there.

Drawn to Poland in 2014, three years after the launch of China-Europe freight trains, the couple saw opportunity in a country fast becoming Europe's logistical gateway, as most trains entering the European Union from the east pass through Malaszewicze, a critical border town in Poland.

"We soon realized that reselling factory-made products wouldn't set us apart," Hong said. Instead, they created their own brand, designing styles based on emerging fashion trends and customer preferences.

China-Europe freight trains quickly became the backbone of their operation. Digital sketches sent to factories in China are transformed into samples and shipped within two weeks, allowing their shelves to stay stocked with the latest designs.

To meet growing demand, Lin hired a local porter and a salesperson, relying on scooters to shuttle goods. Orders averaging dozens of kilograms per shipment are packed and delivered with speed, demonstrating the resourcefulness and hard work that small-scale merchants need to survive and thrive.

Their story mirrors a broader picture of commerce at GD Poland, where about 900 businesses specialize in textiles, appliances and household goods — 90 percent of which are sourced from China, according to Wang Qi, the center's deputy general manager.

Similar trading hubs have flourished across Europe over the past few decades, from Aubervilliers in France to Fuenlabrada in Spain. In 2023 alone, China exported \$169 billion worth of light industrial products to the EU and Britain, supplying affordable goods to consumers while supporting jobs on both sides of the supply chain.

"What keeps me optimistic about the future is how connected we are — suppliers, distributors and us. It's not just business — it's a shared rhythm that keeps products and ideas moving," Lin said.

Thirteen years ago, the idea of



A view of the 100,000th China-Europe freight train service, departing from Tuanjiecun station in Chongqing in November. WANG QUANCHAO / XINHUA



A person rides a scooter to deliver goods at the GD Poland shopping complex on the outskirts of Warsaw in July. ZHANG KUN / XINHUA

freight trains crossing the vast Eurasian continent seemed "crazy" to many, recalled Markus Bangen, CEO of Duisburger Hafen AG (Duisport). Today, it is a reality reshaping cross-continental trade and logistics.

Since 2011, when the first China-Europe freight train left the southwestern Chinese city Chongqing, for Duisburg, Germany, the network has grown to connect 227 European and 100 Asian cities. Over the past

13 years, more than 11 million twenty-foot equivalent units of goods worth more than \$420 billion have passed over the transcontinental track network.

In Duisburg, a former industrial stronghold, freight rail has spurred reinvention. The port now handles 4 million containers annually, with over 100 Chinese logistics and e-commerce firms establishing operations around it. Similar transformations have turned Malaszewicze and Spain's Valladolid into thriving logistic hubs.

The network continues to grow. In November, a shipment of electric vehicles made its way from Chengdu, Sichuan province, to Georgia's Tbilisi via rail, sea and road, traversing Kazakhstan and the Caspian Sea region. This new route launched in July runs through the Middle Corridor — a vital trade link across Central Asia and the South Caucasus — providing a reliable alternative to

traditional shipping lanes amid geopolitical uncertainties.

For Fan Yuliang, a warehouse manager of AUKLogis GmbH, a German subsidiary of Chinese logistics firm Western Post, the China-Europe freight trains have redefined what's possible. "I thought I'd handled all kinds of cargo, but seeing an entire vehicle loaded into a shipping container still amazed me," he recalled.

By 2023, China-Europe freight trains had transported more than 50,000 types of goods, ranging from Chinese exports like textiles and industrial machinery to European exports such as motorcycles, medical equipment and agricultural produce.

Bangen described the service as a transformative transportation model that replaces traditional shipping routes and unlocks trade opportunities once out of reach.

As freight trains bridge continents, Chinese and European firms are joining forces to shape the future of mobility — this time, on wheels of electric vehicles.

In Berlin, Chinese EV manufacturer NIO has established a research and development center focused on smart driving technologies and energy solutions. Its engineers are working on adaptive driving systems, battery-swapping infrastructure and integrated power grids to meet

European standards.

"Our goal is to adapt rapidly to European markets while driving the next wave of innovation," Wei Hezeng, head of NIO Europe's Smart Driving Technology Center, told Xinhua News Agency.

His vision is echoed by Patrick Stumfol, senior system engineer at NIO Europe. "The combination of German engineering precision and Chinese tech innovation creates a very dynamic environment here," Stumfol said.

Though the EU seeks to shield its market with protectionist tariffs, European carmakers are opting for collaboration over confrontation.

The collaborative momentum extends beyond Berlin. In Spain, Chery has teamed up with Ebro to develop EVs, while BYD is building manufacturing plants in Hungary. European automakers are embracing the trend likewise — Volkswagen has invested \$700 million in XPeng for joint EV development, and Stellantis committed 1.5 billion euros (\$1.56 billion) to Leapmotor for research, production and overseas expansion.

Carlos Tavares, Stellantis' former CEO, captured this partnership approach, saying the best way to compete with China is to partner with their automakers and "hop on their train".

XINHUA

China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway set to enhance regional connectivity

KASHGAR — The China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway, scheduled to begin construction this year, will create a new shortcut between China and Europe, while elevating Central Asia's status in the global supply chain, executives and experts said.

With a designed speed of 120 kilometers per hour, the railway is a key connectivity project between China and Central Asia and is expected to become a new demonstration project for cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative.

The route will begin in Kashgar, in Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, and pass through the mountainous terrain of Kyrgyzstan to reach Uzbekistan.

Jiang Zhidong, chairman of the Kashgar-based Xinjiang Jiujixi International Trade Co Ltd, looks forward to the railway's operation, which he said will reduce freight transport times between

China and Europe by about a week.

"Our coal imports from Kyrgyzstan will see a significant surge in quantity, while transport costs will be cut by a third," Jiang said, adding that products made from the imported coal, including activated carbon, can then take this route to reach European markets in shorter timeframes.

Currently, land transport between China and the two Central Asian nations relies on road-rail routes or must detour through Kazakhstan. Once operational, the railway will not only cut transport times, but also exempt goods from multiple reloading tasks, thus making it easier and cheaper to transport perishable goods such as farm produce.

Moreover, the railway is expected to offer landlocked Central Asian nations access to the sea by connecting to the sprawling railway network in China that extends

to Pacific Ocean ports.

"The railway allows local resources and products to enter the global market rapidly. This will make Central Asia more important in the global supply chain," said Ravshan Nazarov, a senior researcher at the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan, highlighting the railway's benefits to the region's logistics, mining, energy and agriculture sectors.

In 2023, trade between China and the five Central Asian countries rose 27 percent year-on-year to \$89.4 billion.

Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan experts have also highlighted the railway's catalyst effect for regional development and its benefits for local livelihoods.

Sergei Ponomarev, president of the Association of Markets of Kyrgyzstan, said Kyrgyzstan will see a large increase in the transport of goods with the help of the railway.

The expert said the project presents an interesting opportunity to not only create jobs and boost infrastructure development, but also improve economic conditions. "In general, the main goal of the project is to improve the lives of citizens of Kyrgyzstan, China and Uzbekistan," Ponomarev said.

Mederbek Shermetaliyev, director of the Kabar News Agency of Kyrgyzstan, said apart from strengthening Kyrgyzstan's transit potential, the railway will also make the country more attractive to investors.

"Opening a factory will become more economical in Kyrgyzstan, which boasts abundant human resources and skilled labor," said Shermetaliyev.

Zhong Feiteng, a researcher at the National Institute of International Strategy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said the railway highlights the vitality of the BRI and will play a crucial role in enhancing regional



A view of Torugart port in Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region in November 2023. DING LEI / XINHUA

connectivity between Europe and Asia.

"The construction of the railway demonstrates China's commitment to aligning its development with the

interests of other countries to foster a win-win situation through greater openness," Zhong said.

XINHUA

WORLD

Trudeau urges US consumers to ponder over tariff damage

VANCOUVER — Canada's outgoing Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Sunday suggested that US President-elect Donald Trump's remarks about Canada becoming the US' "51st state" have distracted attention from the harm that steep tariffs would inflict on US consumers.

Trump has threatened to impose 25 percent tariffs on all Canadian imports.

"The 51st state, that's not going to happen," Trudeau said in an interview with MSNBC. "But people are talking about that, as opposed to talking about what impact 25 percent tariffs (has) on steel and aluminum coming into the United States."

Trudeau said: "No American wants to pay 25 percent more for electricity or oil and gas coming in from Canada. That's something I think people need to pay a little more attention to."

Trump has also said if Canada merged with the US, taxes would decrease and there would be no tariffs.

"I know that as a successful negotiator, he likes to keep people off balance," Trudeau said of Trump's threats to use economic force to turn Canada into the 51st state. Trump has also erroneously cast the US trade deficit with Canada — a natural resource-rich nation that provides the US with commodities like oil — as a subsidy.

Canadian officials say that if Trump follows through with his threat of imposing tariffs, Canada would consider slapping retaliatory tariffs on US orange juice, toilets

and some steel products. During Trump's first term in the White House, Canada responded to Trump's tariffs on Canadian steel and aluminum with its own on US products like bourbon, Harley-Davidson motorcycles and playing cards.

"He got elected to try and make life easier for all Americans, to support American workers," Trudeau said of Trump. "These (tariffs) are things that are going to hurt them."

Trump said last week that the US doesn't need oil, or anything else from Canada. But almost a quarter of the oil that the US consumes each day comes from Canada. The energy-rich western province of Alberta exports 4.3 million barrels of oil a day to the US.

Figures from the United States Energy Information Administration show that the US consumes 20 million barrels a day, and produces about 13.2 million barrels a day.

Canada, a founding partner of NATO and home to more than 40 million people, is also the top export destination for 36 US states. Nearly \$2.7 billion worth of goods and services cross the border each day.

With the challenge of Trump's second administration looming and Trudeau's party trailing badly in the polls, the Canadian prime minister announced his resignation last Monday. He will be replaced on March 9, when his Liberal Party is set to pick a new leader.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Big catch



A fisherman unloads his catch from a traditional boat at Kedonganan Beach, Badung Regency, on the resort island of Bali, Indonesia, on Sunday. SONNY TUMBELAKA / AFP

Briefly

JAPAN
Quake strikes Kyushu; tsunamis observed

Japan's weather agency warned that another strong earthquake was possible after a magnitude 6.9 quake struck the Kyushu region of southwestern Japan at 9:19 pm on Monday. There were no immediate reports of injury or damage. The epicenter, at a depth of approximately 30 kilometers, was located in the waters of Hyuga-nada in Miyazaki prefecture, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency. Tsunami activity was observed near Miyazaki as well as Kochi prefecture after the agency issued tsunami advisories for the two prefectures. People were warned to stay away from the waters, including rivers.

SOUTH KOREA
Radioactive waste discharge probed

South Korea's nuclear safety agency has launched an investigation into the abnormal discharge of liquid radioactive waste from a nuclear reactor in the southeast of the country. Yonhap news agency said on Sunday. The Nuclear Safety and Security Commission received a report from Korea Hydro & Nuclear Power, or KHNP, the operator of nuclear power plants, on Sunday that the liquid waste from a radioactive storage tank in the Wolsong No 2 nuclear power plant in North Gyeongsang Province, was discharged into the ocean without going through a sample analysis.

XINHUA



Firefighters work to clear a firebreak as the Palisades Fire, one of several simultaneous blazes that have ripped across Los Angeles, burns in Mandeville Canyon on Sunday. RINGO CHIU / REUTERS

Fire-scarred LA faces new destructive gusts

Residents frustrated with lack of measures to prevent blazes; volunteers help neighbors

By RENA LI in Los Angeles
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As the fire-ravaged Los Angeles area braced on Monday for threatening winds, criticism has mounted over the state of California's preparedness and response, while residents and volunteers have stepped up.

Those living in high-risk zones have voiced frustration over what they said were insufficient fire-prevention measures and delayed evacuations. Emergency shelters are at capacity.

"We've been here before, and it's devastating every time," an evacuee, John Allen, said on social media. "We need better infrastructure, better prevention and faster responses. This can't keep happening."

The Los Angeles area is struggling with three major blazes that have consumed more than 40,000 acres (62 square miles, 160 square kilometers) — an area larger than San Francisco — and claimed at least 24 lives. More than 150,000 people have been displaced.

The National Weather Service issued warnings on Monday for severe fire conditions the next two days, with sustained winds of up to 75 mph (120 km) across portions of Los Angeles and Ventura counties.

"Extremely critical fire weather conditions continue across coastal Southern California through Tuesday," the weather service website said. "Not only will these extreme and dangerous conditions make fighting ongoing fires much more difficult, but these will make new ignitions much more likely. New fires that do develop will have the potential to grow and spread rapidly, adding to the danger of the situation."

As of Monday afternoon, the large Palisades Fire, which burned almost 27,000 acres, was 14 percent contained. The Eaton Fire, which burned more than

14,000 acres, was 33 percent contained, according to Cal Fire. The Hurst Fire, which burned 779 acres around Sylmar, was 95 percent contained as of Monday morning.

More than 3,000 firefighters are on the front lines, supported by aircraft dropping water and fire-retardant chemicals.

Investigations into the causes of the fires continue, with preliminary reports suggesting possible equipment failures or human activity as factors.

One man's desperate battle to save his home with a garden hose has drawn widespread attention.

John Carr, 65, defied evacuation orders to protect his Pacific Palisades home — a property his parents built and left him as an inheritance. With firefighters stretched thin and no resources available, Carr found himself fighting the advancing flames alone.

"Some things in life are worth fighting for," Carr said, telling how he climbed fences and hurt his rib while battling the blaze. The flames had reached his backyard, creeping close to his house.

While Carr's heroic efforts saved his house, many of his neighbors' homes were reduced to ashes. Residents fleeing the fire had to abandon their cars and evacuate on foot.

Experts have long warned that underfunding fire-prevention programs, delayed emergency responses, and insufficient resources in high-risk areas have compounded the devastation caused by wildfires.

A Chinese American couple, the Zhangs, lost their home to the Eaton Fire. They said that they had worked tirelessly their entire lives to finally afford a new house. After completing renovations, they had happily moved in, only to see their dream home destroyed by the massive wildfire.

"We moved in just two months

ago," Zhang wrote on social media. "Now it's all gone. We are utterly heartbroken."

Local organizations and volunteers have mobilized to support those in need.

Cai Chenghua, president of the All-American Chinese Association, said his organization is raising donations for the disaster-stricken communities.

The Beijing Association has raised \$15,000.

"Our efforts to spread love and support continue," Cai told China Daily.

Li Xiaoyan, president of the Southern California Chinese Women's Association and a regular volunteer distributing food every weekend in Monrovia and Arcadia, said that many of the volunteers themselves have been affected by the wildfires.

"Despite their own losses, they hold back their tears and continue to volunteer, dedicating themselves to helping those in even greater need," Li said.

The Santa Anita Park thoroughbred racetrack in Arcadia has been transformed into a donation center.

"The community has come together during this challenging time, and we've received a variety of supplies and food donations, which is incredibly moving," said Sophia Wang, a resident of Arcadia. "I hope we can rebuild our homes and lives soon."

Steven Cooper from the San Gabriel Area Food Bank reported a surge in demand for meals. "We typically provide food to around 200 families and 500 individuals in the community, but we're now distributing food to more than 800 people, with over 5,000 pounds of food in a single day," he said, expressing gratitude to the stores and individuals who have donated.

Authorities said that shifting weather patterns later in the week could offer some respite. Sea breezes and cooler temperatures may allow some evacuees to return to their homes, but a curfew remains in effect for now.

Father and daughter stay behind to offer help

SEATTLE — As the fire roared down a hillside toward their Altadena home, Vanessa Prata and her parents hurried to pack their car. They focused on saving irreplaceable items, like family photographs and a baby doll from Vanessa's childhood.

But they didn't leave. Instead, the Pratas have remained in their family home of 27 years, which is somehow still standing amid widespread devastation from the Los Angeles wildfires, even as homes just over a block away burned. As residents who did flee were kept away by police or military barricades, Vanessa and her dad took it upon themselves to check on their neighbors' homes.

"They're sitting in these shelters. They're not sure whether their house survived or didn't survive," Vanessa said. "Once you know what the situation is, you have (the) ability to regroup and see what you're going to do moving forward."

The fires raging around Los Angeles have consumed an area larger than San Francisco.

Vanessa, a 25-year-old nursing student, had stopped at a hardware store on her way home from dinner on Tuesday night when she saw the flames approaching the home she shares with her parents, two cats and a dog. She called her dad.

However, Vanessa's father, Aluizio Prata, who teaches electrical and computer engineering at the University of Southern California, didn't want to leave. He didn't think the fire would reach them, but if it did, he wanted to stay and help fight it.

As the toll from the wildfires became clear, Vanessa saw many people doing what they could to help those who lost their homes.

Vanessa remained at home, with her family occasionally running a borrowed generator to check the news and keep the freezer cold. She wanted to help, too.

So, on Friday morning, she posted to an Altadena community group on Facebook, offering the one thing she could think of that would help.

"We are more than happy to drive around and take a picture for any person who would like to see their home or, God forbid, what is left of their home," Vanessa wrote.

The requests came pouring in — as many as 45 by Saturday morning. She and her dad set out on Friday, checking addresses written in a small notebook. They slowly made their way past fallen trees, downed wires and the husks of burned-out cars.

Of more than two dozen homes they visited on Friday and Saturday, fewer than half were still standing. At the end of a cul-de-sac, reached only after getting out of the car and walking past fallen trees and utility poles, the ruins of one home were still smoldering.

"Those are devastating when you get to the person's house and it's gone, and you know that you're the one who's going to break the news," Vanessa said. "You're looking at the burnt ashes and then they send (a photo of) the house, how beautiful it was prior. And it's, there are no, there are no words. You just say, you know, I'm sorry. I wish there was more that I could do for you."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Croatia's incumbent president secures election win

By JULIAN SHEA in London
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Croatia's incumbent President Zoran Milanovic has been returned for a second five-year term of office after comprehensively beating his conservative rival Dragan Primorac at the polls.

With 99 percent of votes counted, Milanovic, who has previously served as prime minister and president of the center-left Social Democratic Party, or SDP, had won more than 74 percent of the vote, compared to just 26 percent for Primorac, from the governing Croatian Democratic Union party, or HDZ.

Although the role of the president is largely ceremonial, the mass rejection of the ruling party has dealt a heavy blow to the

authority of Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic, whose party has dominated Croatian politics since the country achieved independence in 1991.

In his victory speech, Milanovic said the result was a declaration of trust in him by the electorate, but was also sending a message to the government "about the state of affairs in the country ... I am asking them to hear it. That is what the citizens wanted to say. This is not just support for me."

The second round of voting was only necessary because Milanovic fell just short of securing 50 percent of the vote out of a field of eight candidates in the first round, at the end of December, necessitating a second vote involving just the top two candidates.

In his concession speech, Primo-

rac said: "Zoran Milanovic and I share completely different spiritual, moral, professional values and thoughts about the future of our homeland."

"The decision was made by citizens, democratically, and as such it must be respected," he added.

However, neither Plenkovic, the prime minister and head of the HDZ, nor Primorac congratulated Milanovic for Milanovic's reelection, a move criticized by former prime minister Jadranka Kosor and many others in Croatia.

Croatia, which has a population of 3.8 million, is the most recent member state of the European Union, having joined in 2013, and adopted the euro as its currency in Jan 2023.

Milanovic, born in 1966, was elected president for the first time

during the presidential runoff held five years ago. Prior to that, he served as a Croatian diplomat to the European Union and NATO, and he was Croatian prime minister from December 2011 to January 2016.

Some Western media labeled Milanovic as a NATO critic because he has opposed sending officers to participate in NATO training for Ukrainian soldiers. He has also said that the United States and NATO were engaged in a proxy war against Russia through Ukraine, and slammed Western sanctions on Russia as absurd and useless.

A Croatian president serves a five-year term and can seek reelection once.

Xinhua contributed to this story.



Croatian President Zoran Milanovic and his wife celebrate victory with supporters after winning the presidential runoff in Zagreb on Sunday. The sign reads "Thank You". ANTONIO BRONIC / REUTERS

COMMENT

Editorials

Chip curbs show that for Washington it's a case of devil take the hindmost

To further strangle the development of China's high-tech industry, especially in the artificial intelligence sector, the Joe Biden administration has announced plans to impose a range of additional restrictions on China so as to cut the country off from the world's most advanced technologies, no matter the collateral damage done.

The move, which represents "the strongest controls ever enacted by the US" to dent China's ability to make advanced chips, not only bans the sale of advanced chips and semiconductor-making machinery to China, but also places more than 100 Chinese companies on a restricted Entity List. All on the pretext of safeguarding the national security of the United States.

The restrictions, which serve as another example of the Biden administration's abuse of export controls against China, are built on measures the administration had already issued over the past several years to crack down on China's chip industry. They belie Biden's previous statements that the US does not seek to contain China's development. They also pose "a significant threat" to the stability of global industry and supply chains, the disruption of which has been repeatedly cited by the International Monetary Fund as a major factor affecting global economic growth.

Given its absurdity and preposterous nature, even some US high-tech companies have criticized the restrictive policy of the outgoing administration, with industry leader Nvidia — which controls 90 percent of the AI chip market — pointing out last week that the "last-minute policy" will not achieve its claimed purpose of safeguarding US national security but only push countries to develop alternative technologies.

The restrictions are reported to be conducted in tiers, with the harshest ban to be imposed on China while granting the US' allies continued access to AI chips and imposing limits on much of the Middle East and Africa. Nvidia and other tech companies have argued that the rules could backfire by driving buyers in the Middle East, Southeast Asia and elsewhere to Chinese companies such as Huawei.

"We would encourage President Biden to not preempt incoming President Trump by enacting a policy that will only harm the US economy, set America back, and play into the hands of US adversaries," Nvidia Vice-President Ned Finkle said in a statement. The policy "will be criticized by US industry and the global community" because it will disrupt the availability of standard computing technologies across the globe without meaningfully advancing national security, he added.

The remarks reflect growing dissatisfaction within the industry over Washington's ideologically driven anti-China chip policy, with abuse of regulatory measures that not only undermine market rules and the international economic and trade order, but also pose a threat to the stability of the global industry and supply chains. Given that the semiconductor industry is already highly globalized, the tightening of sanctions on China's high-tech sector will also hinder global technological development and, as a result, lead to damage that will be inflicted on the global semiconductor industry including US companies.

For years, China hawks in Washington have overstretched the concept of national security, depicting China as "the most consequential threat" to US national security while abusing state power to suppress the development of Chinese high-tech companies. Yet, as the world's sole superpower, the US is arguably the most secure power in history. All its moves have done is sown the seeds of conflict.

More worrying is the fact that the US is stepping up pressure on China on all fronts, including the military. In a speech on Friday, the US deputy secretary of defense, Kathleen Hicks, again harped on the old string of a "China challenge". Although she said competition does not mean conflict — given no one should desire the global devastation such a war would bring, she pledged to "do our utmost to out-think, out-manuever, and out-strategize them (China)".

Such misguided and bellicose remarks will do nothing to help build mutual understanding between the two countries, but instead risk placing the two countries on a collision course. If they really want to out-think, out-manuever, and out-strategize China, then the political circle in Washington might want to give a little more thought to how to promote global peace and stability as China has done with the global initiatives it has proposed for development, security and civilizational dialogue.

Biden out of the picture in Middle East

Even in the readout issued by the White House on US President Joe Biden's telephone call with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday, the latter's indifference to the plight of the Palestinians is evident.

After the outgoing US leader made his points about the immediate need for a ceasefire and a surge in humanitarian aid to the enclave, Netanyahu simply "thanked the President for his long support of Israel and for the extraordinary support from the United States for Israel's security and national defense".

That thank-you note can be taken as not only a Dear John message, but also an indirect rebuff of Biden's enough-is-enough call.

To sell his points, Biden urged Netanyahu to recognize "the fundamentally changed regional circumstances following the ceasefire deal in Lebanon, the fall of the Assad regime in Syria, and the weakening of Iran's power in the region" in a bid to comfort Tel Aviv that these "achievements", as Washington obviously thinks, suffice for its closest ally in the Middle East to stop fighting.

That, to a certain extent, serves to provide some clues on the exchange of interests between Washington and Tel Aviv in the Middle East crisis ostensibly initiated by Hamas' attack on Israel on Oct 7, 2023.

Hamas' attack was undoubtedly a tragedy for Israel and the region. But it provided the opportunity for Netanyahu and Biden to escape some of the domestic pressure they were under.

That explains why the two could so easily reach a tacit understanding to scratch each other's back after the Hamas' attack on Israel, with Israel doing the dirty work as the US' hatchet man to advance their common agenda targeting Iran.

But the Netanyahu government going off the US script in seeking to annex the Palestinian enclave has irked the Biden administration.

So since Biden thinks the US-Israel mission has largely been accomplished, he doesn't see any gain in the latter stubbornly pressing ahead with its own Gaza plan, which has no marginal benefits at all but instead become a negative property to their alliance.

Netanyahu on the other hand believes the US has made a comparatively small input in realizing its objectives with regard to Iran, which should be attributed to Israel's successful military operations. So the US is obliged to support its Gaza campaign, even if the US doesn't benefit from it directly.

So while the readout said the two leaders discussed the ongoing negotiations in Doha for a ceasefire and hostage release deal based on the May 27, 2024, arrangement described by the US last year and endorsed unanimously by the UN Security Council, the zeal for a deal is only on the US side.

Even if the director of Israel's Mossad foreign intelligence agency, David Barnea, and Biden's top Middle East adviser, Brett McGurk, are both in the Qatari capital of Doha, a sign many believe indicates a breakthrough is on the cards, a real deal remains tantalizingly elusive.

Biden's national security advisor, Jake Sullivan, also told CNN's "State of the Union" that he would not predict whether a deal can be reached by Jan 20, the day of the inauguration. "We are very, very close," he said. "Yet being very close still means we're far, because until you actually get across the finish line, we're not there."

Fundamentally, neither Israel nor Hamas has made meaningful concessions on core issues as the former's aim of eliminating the latter remains unchanged, while Hamas insists on Israel's withdrawal from Gaza, which Tel Aviv refuses to do.

The Biden administration should be well aware that the Netanyahu Cabinet will now effectively ignore it, as it has already been assured that it can count on the next US administration supporting its land grab.

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Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Progress in Beijing-Colombo ties also good for the whole South Asia

Sri Lanka's President Anura Kumara Dissanayake is paying a state visit to China from Tuesday to Friday.

His first visit to China since taking office is expected to not only renew the long-cherished traditional friendship between the two countries, but also inject a new source of power into their ties in the new era.

The historical ties between China and Sri Lanka date back to the 4th century, when Chinese explorer and monk Fa Xian visited Sri Lanka. In the 20th century, despite the trade embargo imposed by Western countries against China, Sri Lanka demonstrated its foresight and pragmatism by signing with it the 1952 Rubber-Rice Pact. Since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1957, China-Sri Lanka relations have

been marked by sound and steady development despite changes in the international landscape.

China has always helped Sri Lanka when it faced economic challenges; in 2013, China promoted the development of Colombo Port City. A patrol ship presented by China in 2019 was named after Sri Lanka's historically popular King Parakramabahu. China has also donated school uniforms, diesel fuel and medical supplies to Sri Lankan farmers and fishermen, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

China's Belt and Road Initiative has played an important role in Sri Lanka's infrastructure construction. A network of highways, seaports and airports built with aid from China and connecting major cities has opened more opportunities for its commerce and

trade. Thanks to Chinese investment, the Colombo International Container Terminal has become one of the busiest ports in the world.

For some time now, India has used China's cooperation with Sri Lanka to play up regional security issues, even hyping up Sri Lanka taking sides between China and India. As a sovereign state, Sri Lanka has the right to develop relations with any country based on its own interests, and its closer ties with China do not mean its alienation with India.

China has never used its development of closer ties with Sri Lanka to target a third party. The continuous progress of China-Sri Lanka ties will benefit peoples of the two countries and contribute to overall peace and stability in South Asia.

— WU YIXUE, CHINA DAILY

Sino-EU economic relations of mutual benefit

The EU Chamber of Commerce in China and the China Chamber of Commerce to the EU have mentioned in their reports, respectively released in Brussels last December and in Beijing this January, the effect that politics has had on bilateral trade.

The annual report from EU states that political factors pose a challenge to Chinese enterprises operating in Europe, while calling for reducing the impact of politics on business. On Jan 9, the report from the China Chamber of Commerce to the EU noted that geopolitical factors and the tense trade situation between China and Europe have, to some extent, increased the economic costs for European companies in China.

China and the EU are each other's second-largest trading partners. The bilateral trade volume between China and Europe in 2023 was €740 billion (\$756.88 billion), while the trade structure between China and Europe continues to optimize.

The largest increase in imports from China to the EU has been of motor vehicles, with an import value of €12.9 billion, while the largest rise in exports from the EU to China is also of motor vehicles, with an import value of €19.4 billion.

Chinese electric vehicle companies continue to rapidly expand their market share in Europe, with more than 20 Chinese brands having entered or planning to enter the

European market. Some analysts predict that China will continue to be the world's largest automobile exporter this year.

On that basis, it is necessary to strengthen effective cooperation between China and the EU. It is essential for both parties to maintain further communication, eliminate unnecessary interference, and truly benefit consumers on both sides.

On the 50th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the EU in 2025, we look forward to both sides continuing to make steady progress on the broad road of economic and trade cooperation.

— ZHANG ZHOUIXIAN, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Acting out of the Greenland farce is worrying

Following the incoming US leader once again showing his interest in the United States "taking" Greenland via exerting economic pressure on Denmark, Copenhagen has reportedly proposed that the US boost security in Greenland, including increasing the US military presence on the island, in its private messages to the US president-elect's team.

Reportedly, the Danish government wants to dissuade the incoming US administration from seizing the island, which covers an area of 2.17 million square kilometers, three times as large as Texas, with a population of 56,860 by making the offer.

But Greenland has not seen any imminent security threat in history, particularly since it became an autonomous region of Denmark in 1979 after being under the country's control for about 300 years, except global warming's threat to its biosecurity in recent years.

Although Denmark's offer is apparently intended to serve as a face-saving move to both sides avoiding a political clash, it represents a compromise on the Danish side. Call-

ing on the US to strengthen its protection of the island after the incoming US leader newly warned all allies that the US' protection has an inflated price tag means Copenhagen is technically offering to "buy" the US side temporarily suppressing its coveting of Greenland.

Although 81 percent of Greenland is covered with ice and classified as uninhabitable, its strategic position in the Arctic, its sizable untapped mineral reserves, and its rich fishing resources all make the island an arena for the geopolitical game among major countries.

Greenland is assuming increasing strategic importance as the melting of the ice cap within the Arctic circle dramatically accelerates as a result of global warming, which will put Greenland at the crossroad of an emerging global maritime logistics hub.

It is these factors — along with some local residents' long-term pro-independence stance — rather than the limited protection fee Copenhagen tries to offer that attract the US. So the incoming US

administration will not be satisfied with Copenhagen's offer.

Interestingly, Greenland had not become a focus between the two sides before the incoming US leader touched upon the topic in a recent news conference at his private property. Denmark's recession makes it look as if the North European country has been indebted to the US over Greenland. Which is not true.

This is more worrying than the farce over Greenland itself. It seems as long as the US side makes public an intention of "taking" a foreign territory by military means or economic coercion, irrespective of the illegitimacy of so doing, it assumes relevant countries bear a moral duty to help it fulfill the intention at their own cost.

This is nothing but a de facto robbery combining daylight talk, initial trial, effective intimidation and final bargaining process. If that is allowed to become a conventional practice in handling international relations, there will not be any justice, fairness or basic norms in the world order.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

COMMENT

Anthony Moretti

New US president ought to reset ties

Donald Trump has been elected as the next president of the United States and will be sworn into office on Jan 20.

One of the first responsibilities he could shoulder is to stabilize and improve relations with China. Let's not mince words, no country is as important a global partner of the US than China, home to the world's second-largest economy, and the only country with which the US can work together to address some of the world's biggest challenges.

Unfortunately, the US spends far too much time and effort bashing China. At the most basic level, such hostile action hinders the building of trust necessary for the two countries to identify solutions to climate change, global public health issues and food insecurity. The list is much longer, but it is fair to say that solving the three problems mentioned above is necessary to ensure a positive shared future for humankind.

There are three immediate steps he should take in order to improve relations with China. Though none of them is especially complicated, all of them require a kind of leadership that has been woefully lacking in recent years. The choice is Mr Trump's, so please make the right one.

Another thing Mr Trump needs to do is to lift the tariffs on Chinese products, many of which have been in place for more than half a decade. Yes, imposing extra tariffs on imports makes the US president appear tough, but as a policy, punitive tariffs are bad for free trade.

The Financial Times, perhaps the best Western newspaper that



The relationship between China and the US is akin to a partnership. Working together toward healthy and honorable goals, partners support each other.

helps readers understand all things money, recently outlined why tariffs are disastrous. Consider just this statement: "tariffs are higher taxes. Worse, they are inefficient, regressive and nigh on certain to cause retaliation".

Besides, the Tax Foundation said that continued tariffs on Chinese products will reduce the United States' GDP by 0.2 percent and eliminate about 142,000 jobs. In other words, yes, if the next US

president wants to continue driving the US toward economic doom, then keep announcing new tariffs. Logic would say that you do not want to do that.

The other item on the agenda should be to clearly, and powerfully, affirm that the US will not undermine the one-China principle. One US president after another has often said that the US acknowledges that Taiwan is an integral part of China, and yet has gone on to arm the island — to the tune of billions of dollars — which is a slap in the face of such a claim.

Related to this, the visits by US politicians to Taiwan suggest there is no legitimacy behind the US administration's endorsement of the one-China policy. Much like the tariffs, such visits allow those politicians to tout their presumed strength. But the visits to the island needlessly antagonize Beijing. Remind all US politicians, regardless of their party affiliation, to think less about selfishly boosting their anti-China bona fides and more about selflessly strengthening US-China relations.

Also, keep the doors to US colleges and universities open for Chinese students and scholars. The "China Initiative", launched in 2018, was a terrible idea.

So nothing like it should be implemented in the future. The effort was supposed to uncover Chinese scholars "spying" for China. The fact is, no such spy ring existed.

What was the fallout from this mess?

One leading Chinese American said it best: the initiative "fueled racial animosity, xenophobia, and suspicion toward the (Asian American and Pacific Islander) community and Chinese Americans in particular".

Along the same lines, Mr Trump can forcefully say that the detention of Chinese students entering the US through its airports will stop. When such activities became news in recent years, there was no way to square these bigoted and discriminatory acts with the US commitment to welcoming people from all over the world to learn or work in the country.

The relationship between China and the US is akin to a partnership. Working together toward healthy and honorable goals, partners support each other. Of course, there are differences, but compromise and common sense allow for the rough spots to be smoothed over. Beginning early in 2025, Mr Trump will have the choice to either set a new tone to this partnership or continue to push obnoxious rhetoric and questionable policies.

For the good of the world, do the right thing.

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



Kang Bing

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Time to help build an environment which has no place for tuos

My wife recently showed me a message in the WeChat group of our neighborhood in Sanya, Hainan province, inviting residents interested in visiting a real estate sales center to enjoy free coffee and cakes. "Come and do nothing else but enjoy yourself at the center for one hour or so and each of you will be paid 35 yuan (\$4.77)," the message said.

We moved our eyes from the message, looked at each other and exclaimed in unison: "So they are hiring a tuo?"

In Putonghua, the character *tuo* means a wooden or metal tray or plate used to carry tea cups or other drinks and foodstuff. Nowadays it is more often used to describe people who help clients to cheat others for a commission. In the case of the sales center, it apparently had hired a *tuo* to give potential buyers an impression that sales are booming with many people waiting to sign contracts. But its real purpose is to instill in potential buyers a sense of urgency, pushing them to open their wallets.

When you want to find a life partner and pay a few thousand yuan to a matchmaking agent, the latter promises to arrange for you appointments with a number of women or men based on your requirements. In the next few weeks, you might be busy chatting in coffee shops with your dream date and possible life partner, without realizing that all of the people you meet might be part of a *tuo*. We call such groups of people *hun tuo*, or marriage *tuo*. They work for a commission and can always find a good excuse to bid goodbye to you. At the end of the day, you might find yourself cheated out of a big amount of money.

While the contest is on, you might receive a link sent by some relative or colleague, asking you to vote for a certain candidate.

While waiting in a hospital to see a doctor, you might be approached by a person, or some persons, who might tell you how efficient a particular doctor in a certain hospital is in curing the kind of disease troubling you. After you seek his or her help to get an appointment with the said doctor, he or she might reluctantly lead you to the doctor or the hospital. After collecting his/her commission behind you, the person will vanish, leaving you in the hands of an unprofessional doctor in a poorly equipped hospital. We call such people *yi tuo*, or medical *tuo*.

Or take a vegetable market. You might find a shop flocked by a group of people, busy "buying" vegetables. They might be talking to each other loudly, saying the vegetables in the shop are not only fresh but also organic. What a good bargain, you might think, to get organic vegetables by paying just a bit more than the price of normal vegetables. If you stay a bit longer in the market, you would see the same group of people "buying" vegetables in the same shop through the day. "They are *tuo* and the vegetables are not organic at all," the neighboring shop owners might tell you.

The disgusting culture of *tuo* is now clothed in a modern outfit. Since a lot of contests are held online, viewers' comments play a decisive role in the results. While the contest is on, you might receive a link sent by some relative or colleague, asking you to vote for a certain candidate. You might vote for the candidate thinking you are helping your relative or colleague without even reading or watching the content of the message and end up becoming a *tuo* yourself.

Simply put, *tuos* are cheats. *Tuo* culture survives, rather continues to expand, because many people don't consider their activities as criminal. They hate *tuos* but might think they are smart enough to avoid being cheated by a *tuo*.

People who work as *tuo*, full time or part time, might think their actions are a minor legal offence. And since they can change from *tuo* to regular consumers or warm-hearted citizens instantly, there is little chance of them being caught and punished.

Given the existing circumstances, we should be on high alert against such cheats and help build a social environment in which *tuos* have no place.



LIMIN / CHINA DAILY

Du Jifeng

China, Vietnam are vital but different FDI destinations

Some foreign-funded enterprises have relocated their factories from China to Vietnam or built new factories in Vietnam, giving rise to speculation that the Southeast Asian country is fast becoming a new hot spot for investment.

Initially, it was the trade war the United States launched against China that prompted foreign investment to relocate to Vietnam.

China's shrinking advantage in labor cost is another major reason for foreign investment to relocate to Vietnam. China's labor cost has been rising due to rapid growth and increasing wages, making many labor-intensive foreign-invested enterprises relocate to countries with lower labor cost and other demographic advantages. These countries, including Vietnam, have implemented preferential policies in terms of taxation, land use and employment to attract foreign investment. Also, Vietnam has signed several regional and international free trade agreements in a bid to provide favorable conditions for foreign investment.

The shifting of foreign investment to Vietnam can also be attributed to market demand. China's consumer market demand has become more refined as the Chinese people seek quality products and services. The fact that some foreign low-end manufacturing companies could not adapt to China's rapidly developing market prompted them to shift to countries like Vietnam.

Yet Vietnam is far from replacing China

Despite foreign investment flowing into Vietnam, the country will continue to catch up with China in terms of industrial chain integrity, innovation capability, and infrastructure construction.

as the first choice for foreign investment mainly because China still offers a much better investment atmosphere than Vietnam.

First of all, China has a larger consumer market than Vietnam thanks to its relatively abundant manpower, 1.4 billion population and 9.6 million square kilometers of land area. Vietnam, in contrast, has a population of just over 100 million and land area of about 331,000 sq km. Neither its market size nor market potential can be compared with China's.

What's more, China has a more comprehensive and balanced industrial chain than Vietnam, — along with a high-end and diversified industrial structure. Besides, Vietnam's manufacturing industry is mainly reliant on low-end and labor-intensive enterprises that are adept at processing textiles, clothing, footwear and electronic products but not at high-end manufacturing.

And although Vietnam is nurturing

some emerging industries such as information technology, bioengineering and automobile manufacturing, they are smaller in scale and less developed than their Chinese counterparts.

China is capable of conducting independent research and producing raw materials, whole machinery as well as parts and accessories, while Vietnam's manufacturing supply chain is highly dependent on foreign countries. Vietnam's manufacturing industry is mainly export-oriented, and the country still needs to import key components from countries such as China which occupy the upstream supply chains. This means Vietnam's manufacturing orders and production would suffer a serious blow if there is a problem with upstream supply chains.

Although China no longer enjoys the advantage of low labor cost, it is more technologically advanced and has a more efficient talent pool than Vietnam. Plus, China allocates huge amounts every year for scientific and technological innovation, making it a global leader in fields such as high-speed railways, 5G and new energy.

Moreover, a large number of high-quality Chinese talents and scientific research institutions are still facilitating the industrial upgrading of China, while Vietnam's investment in technological research and high-level professionals and talent pool are still incomparable to China — and it still relies on technology transfer from foreign investment.

China not only has a comprehensive

transportation network, but also 4G and 5G communication networks that cover most parts of the country. And its developed and complete infrastructure provides efficient and fast logistics services and stable energy supply for both domestic and foreign enterprises, while Vietnam's infrastructure is relatively backward and faces a shortage of electricity during the peak summer months.

If the incoming US administration intensifies the trade conflicts with China, Vietnam, whose production chain is heavily dependent on China, is likely to suffer as well, because the US may impose more tariffs on Vietnamese goods too, with Vietnamese electronics exports being the first to be affected.

Despite foreign investment flowing into Vietnam, the country will continue to catch up with China in terms of industrial chain integrity, innovation capability, and infrastructure construction. In other words, Vietnam may not be able to replace China as the preferred investment destination for foreign investors in the short term. However, for China, Vietnam's rapid development will serve to complement each other in manufacturing and service cooperation. Good neighbors can develop together for mutual benefit.

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

GLOBAL VIEWS

ZHANG YUN

Testing times

Japan's change of stance toward China is motivated by its need to focus on the real domestic challenge rather than a fabricated external threat

Japanese Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya visited China on Dec 25, 2024. This was the first official visit to China by a Japanese foreign minister since the start of April 2023. Both sides agreed to resume high-level economic and security dialogues, and a 10-point consensus was reached during a meeting of the China-Japan high-level consultation mechanism on people-to-people exchanges.



The visit came after Chinese President Xi Jinping held talks with Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba during the APEC summit in Lima, Peru, in November 2024, the first meeting between the two leaders since Ishiba took office as prime minister over a month earlier. And in early November 2024, Takeo Akiba, Japanese national security adviser, visited China and held high-level political dialogues with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

The series of engagements took place against the backdrop of Donald Trump's imminent return to the White House and the intensifying strategic competition between China and the United States.

Some of the US' allies in the Asia-Pacific region, such as Australia, have shown positive changes in their relations with China.

As the most important ally of the US in East Asia, Japan's rapid rapprochement with China is particularly noteworthy.

What is the driving force behind Japan seeking to enhance its relations with China? Is it sustainable? Many analysts suggest that the "Trump factor" is the primary cause of the change in Japan's stance toward China. During his campaign, Trump said he would impose not only a 60 percent tariff on China, but also tariffs of up to 20 percent on Japan and other allies. This change can be seen as a microcosm of the evolution of strategic thinking among the US' allies.

First, the new Trump administration will initiate and accelerate the cognitive awakening of the US' allies, including Japan, that their primary challenge comes from within, specifically from the decline in their economic competitiveness, rather than external military threats. Last year was a major election year for many of the US' allies. In the United Kingdom, the Conservative Party was voted out of office, ending its 14 consecutive years of rule. In France, the ruling party alliance lost one-third of its seats in parliamentary elections, leaving it at a disadvantage in the parliament. In September, far-right parties won in local elections in three eastern German states, and in mid-December, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz lost a vote of confidence in the Bundestag, leading to early elec-

tions in February. The current three-party coalition government in Germany is accelerating its fragmentation, and the political situation there is becoming increasingly unpredictable. Japan's Liberal Democratic Party managed to retain its ruling position, but failed to secure a majority in the parliament, resulting in a minority Cabinet for the Ishiba administration.

The root reason for the defeat of the ruling parties in the countries mentioned above lies in public disappointment and anger at domestic politics. A surge in living costs caused by high inflation rates has become the main challenge faced by the developed economies. In 2022, after Liz Truss took office as the UK prime minister, she implemented aggressive stimulus policies such as substantial tax cuts and central bank interest rate hikes, which led to worsening inflation and the dumping of government bonds, making her the shortest-serving prime minister ever. Similarly, a public opinion poll conducted in Japan after the October 2024 election showed that more than half of the voters identified the economy and countermeasures against high prices as their top concerns. At the same time, as the electric car industry has grown rapidly, the core of competition in the automotive market has shifted from engines to software, including artificial intelligence, and Japan's traditional competitive advantages are diminishing rapidly. The substantial devaluation of the yen over the past two years is essentially a reflection of the weakening competitiveness of the Japanese economy.

Second, a significant increase in military spending cannot solve the biggest challenges faced by the US' allies, including Japan, and the inherent need for rational allocation of prioritized resources has mobilized their willingness and motivation to improve relations with China and build a favorable surrounding environment. Taking Japan as an example, in recent years, it has defined China as an unprecedented strategic challenge or even a threat over a period of time, so it enhanced its defense capabilities and strengthened its military alliance with the US. At the end of 2022, Japan announced its intention to outlay a total of 43 trillion yen (\$272 billion) on national defense from 2023 to 2027, bringing defense spending to 2 percent of the GDP in fiscal 2027. On Dec 27, 2024, the Japanese Cabinet approved a record 115.5 trillion yen draft budget for fiscal 2025, with the rising expenditures for social security and national defense as the main reasons for the increase. Among the amount, the medical and social security expenses go up to 38.3 trillion yen, and defense spending reaches 8.7 trillion yen, both setting new records.

Considering the substantial depreciation of the yen, the costs of purchasing

and maintaining expensive US-made military equipment will continue to rise. According to the Japanese government estimates, the country's economic growth rate for 2025 is projected to be just 1.2 percent, making it difficult to sustain the big surge in military spending. Additionally, with the Bank of Japan beginning to raise interest rates, the annual cost of repaying the principal and interest on government bonds will also spike.

Healthcare, pensions and the principal and interest of national debt are already straining the budget. If defense spending continues to rise without restraint, Japan's investment in technological research and development will be reduced, and its economic competitiveness will be further weakened. Japan must allocate its limited resources to areas where they are truly needed, and its military expenditures must be kept within a rational range. This requires Japan to improve its international relations in the surrounding areas to extricate itself from this dilemma, and the core of this extrication is to reconstruct its perception and discourse regarding China.

Although Japan's positive shift in diplomacy toward China has its internal stimulus and inherent momentum, there are still uncertainties and reversibility in the aforementioned trends. First, if Trump exerts ultra-high pressure on China after taking office, and urges core US allies such as Japan to take sides, it is yet to be observed whether Japan can withstand the test. Second, the domestic and intra-party political foundations of the Ishiba administration are unstable, and it is still unclear whether domestic political struggles will lead to a drift in Japan's strategic cognition and direction.

However, the general enhancement and positive signals in China-Japan relations may not change in the long term. This is essentially determined by the main driving force of the new era of international relations represented by China and the strategic posture of the Global South's collective rise. It is important to adhere to the direction of comprehensively advancing the China-Japan strategic and mutually beneficial relationship, as agreed upon by the two leaders, and actively build the bilateral ties that are constructive and stable, in line with the requirements of the new era. Reshaping their strategic relationship will also provide important references and experience for China in dealing with its relations with other US allies.

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ZHANG TING / FOR CHINA DAILY

WANG MINGGUO

Weight gain

With the collective rise of the Global South, a hybrid international order is taking shape

Global political and economic power is undergoing a subtle shift toward the Global South. In terms of economic, military, demographic and cultural strength, the Global South is increasingly gaining weight, emerging as a



new force in the global governance structure. The collective rise of the Global South has propelled the growth of international institutions such as the BRICS and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, while also reviving and transforming institutions such as the G77 and the Non-Aligned Movement.

Geographically, the divide between the Global North and the Global South roughly extends along the Tropic of Cancer. The Global South includes Mexico and the Caribbean, most of South America, Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, East Asia and Oceania (excluding Japan, Australia, and New Zealand). The Global South accounts for more than 85 percent of the world's population and nearly 40 percent of the global GDP. It is projected that by 2030, three of the world's four largest economies, namely China, India and Indonesia, will come from the Global South and the BRICS countries' combined GDP will surpass that of the G7. Global South countries share similar historical experiences and struggles and have common development aspirations, converging on a new consensus for South-South cooperation, which has helped to establish a new political-economic connection based on solidarity, cooperation, and a sense of belonging.

The growing influence of the Global South countries has brought into question the legitimacy and transparency of the Western international system and the so-called rule-based Western order, revealing its inherent contradictions and weakening efficiency. The United States has established a system of institutional hegemony that seeks private interests through its political system, alliances, technologies, currency, and market economy. These institutions often carry out the US agenda, unfairly distribute international public goods, and protect Western interests by marginalizing the Global South's demands.

The distribution of international power is accelerating its shift from a unipolar to a multipolar pattern, with the formation of a multipolar world political landscape continuously gaining speed.

For example, the International Monetary Fund has failed to complete the reforms of quotas and governance mechanisms on schedule, and the World Bank also faces issues of legitimacy and transparency in the selection and accountability mechanisms of its senior executives, leading to unfair treatment of the Global South. Global South countries need to work together to advance reforms in these institutions to reflect their demands and interests. Fortunately, organizations under the liberal international order are adapting to these challenges and are gradually being replaced by institutional types that reflect the new international power structure.

In addition, the US is increasingly inclined toward exclusive unilateralism rather than inclusive multilateralism. And the North-South rivalry in numerous issues is escalating, particularly in the China-US competition. As the Western norms are being challenged, the world is likely to be dragged into an ideological competition by the Western countries to maintain their dominance over the Global South through international systems and political-economic power. This includes imposing various restrictions on the Global South through their norms such as human rights, democracy, liberalism and big power responsibility.

This brings South-South cooperation to the center stage of world politics, an independent pole in shaping the international order. Currently the Global South is promoting the construction of a new international system to address issues such as poverty reduction, food security, development financing, climate change and the digital economy. With the diversification of actors, authorities and institutions, a

hybrid international order involving multiple actors is likely to gradually replace the US-led one. The functional differentiation in issues will lead to a more pronounced demand for international systems from various countries under the hybrid international order.

In contrast to the West, the Global South advocates for international norms such as sovereign equality, non-interference in internal affairs, the democratization of international relations, international cooperation, and multilateralism. To better promote these norms, the Global South countries persist in their efforts to call for North-South dialogue on the basis of unity and cooperation, engaging in multi-level, multi-field, and multi-channel communication, exchanges, and dialogue regarding internationally accepted norms and national behavioral standards.

The distribution of international power is accelerating its shift from a unipolar to a multipolar pattern, with the formation of a multipolar world political landscape continuously gaining speed. The Ukraine crisis and the containment and blockade actions of the US-led West against Russia marked the political awakening of the Global South. More than 50 Global South countries voted against sanctions on Russia. At the same time, the Global South is actively seeking to build a resilient partnership with leeway between China and the US. In addition, it is also actively mediating the Ukraine crisis and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, becoming an important pole affecting the international political order. After the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis, the vast majority of Global South countries have called for a ceasefire and talks, and are pushing for a de-escalation of the situation. For example, six African heads of state, formed an African mediation group for the Ukraine crisis, highlighting the growing political confidence of the Global South and a new understanding of the shaping of a new international order.

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MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

LIFE

Homing in on the great outdoors

As the climate heats up, tourists search for the ultimate holiday or retirement locations. Establishing sites for 'mobile' accommodation is a priority in many areas, **Wu Yanbo** and **Hu Dongmei** report in Guyuan, Ningxia Hui autonomous region.

Yang Hongming, a 72-year-old retired teacher from Chengdu, Sichuan province, has made the Recreational Vehicle campsite in Xinhe village in Longde county of the Ningxia Hui autonomous region in Northwest China his home in recent summers.

"Sichuan is a great place, but I am so content living here that I don't want to go back," beamed Yang as he stood in front of his RV at the campsite in August.

Longde county is located in the southern part of Guyuan city, on the northwest side of the main peak of the Liupan Mountains. With elevations ranging from 1,720 meters to 2,942 meters, it boasts unique geographical elements. The forest area rate is 33.94 percent and the comprehensive vegetation coverage of grasslands is 86.6 percent.

The area enjoys a suitable humid level, pleasant winds and a mild climate throughout the year, with a comfortable climate period lasting seven months. It was awarded the title of "China's Natural Oxygen Bar" in 2023 by the China Meteorological Administration. During the hottest months, it boasts 100 days of the most comfortable climate, making it an ideal summer retreat in China.

Cooler summers

Since retiring, Yang and his wife have traveled around the country by RV. In past summers, they had driven to Longmenshan town in Pengzhou city near Chengdu to escape the heat, but while the area was cooler, there were many rainy days, leaving them feeling consistently damp.

"Longde has many sunny days in the summer, it's not humid, the air is good, and the temperature is perfect — around 22 C. Last summer, I drove the RV to stay in Xinhe village for nearly three months. This year, I plan to stay longer as I suffer from asthma, but I feel much better here."

In July, Yang and his wife parked their RV in a campsite with pavilions named after the country's 56 ethnic groups. Their neighbors come from across China, including Ningxia, Jiangsu, Guangdong and Fujian provinces. The oldest camper is 83 from Jiaozuo city of Henan province who was driven by her son.

Yang says: "Xinhe village is picturesque. The RV campsite has water, electricity and charging stations. The surroundings are flat and, if it rains, it doesn't get muddy. There are bathrooms and a shared kitchen and the village also built a fish pond. There is a bus that can take us to town and the county seat for shopping, so we are happy living here."

Xinhe village is located 8 kilometers from Longde county, with an average elevation of 2,650 meters, with the Yuejiaxia Forest Park and a small river flowing from east to west across the village.

Zhao Xiaolong, the Xinhe village Party secretary responsible for the RV campsite, says that since 2015, the village has aimed to develop characteristic rural tourism, improving the living environment by constructing sewage treatment systems, parking lots, and more.

Establishing a national-level intangible cultural heritage base for "Gaotai Ma Shehuo" (performing on stilts and horses with ancient Chinese cosplay) and developing projects such as ecotourism, farmhouse stays and water parks, the village was selected in the first batch of national key rural tourism villages in 2019. In 2023, the Yuejiaxia Forest Health Base was designated as a national pilot forest health construction site.

"In the past, we aimed to attract more tourists during traditional holidays like Spring Festival through traditional shehuo performances, but the efforts were limited. In August 2019, experienced RV traveler Zha Haiyong came to our village and noticed the natural environment and well-leveled parking lots but few tourists," Zhao says.

Zha suggested and guided the village to establish the RV campsite to attract more self-driving and RV tourists. Currently, the village's RV campsite covers nearly 40,000 square meters with the capacity to serve over 300 RVs at the same time.



Seeking respite

Zha, 68, is the former deputy director of the rural science and technology development center of the science and technology department of Ningxia and serves as a volunteer adviser for the Xinhe village RV campsite.

After retiring, he and his wife began traveling around in their RV. He says: "The world is so vast, we want to see more of it." During the spring and autumn, they stay in places like Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Sichuan provinces, living the RV life. In winter, they head to Yunnan and Hainan provinces.

"One summer before retiring, I visited Mohe city in Heilongjiang province, the northernmost part of China. It was a great place to escape the heat and see blue skies with white clouds and vast expanses. But it is far from Ningxia. In the following years, I sought respite from the heat in different places but wasn't successful."

In August 2019, Zha and his friends traveled by RV to Longde county. Following the locals' recommendations, they arrived in Xinhe. In his travel blog, he described it as "a misty, small mountain village, dreamlike and enchanting, with a unique charm. In the past, one could only experience such feelings through movie scenes or novel descriptions. Now, Xinhe has stepped to the forefront of new rural construction."

"The village had relatively well-developed tourism infrastructure. Along the tourist routes where campsites could be established was access to water and electricity and the roads were in good condition, requiring only minor modifications for parking areas."

After the layout for the first phase of RV campsites was finalized, Zhao led the villagers to build the RV campsite in the winter of 2019 and, by the following spring, it was ready for use.

Zha says: "The villagers are hospitable and Zhao is very efficient and eager to develop the village. Many members of our RV team also volunteered to help with the construction and operation of the RV campsites."

Li Zhifeng, a friend of Zha who worked in environmental planning and design, assisted in the specific designs of the RV campsite, including the color and orientation of the pavilions, ensuring they harmonized with the style of the existing ancient architecture.

Another RV camper, Huang Yunzhong, who works in hotel management, provided training for local villagers on accommodation services processes, encouraging them to open farm stays to increase their income.

"Chen Jianzhen, the Party secretary of Chenjin town, strongly supports the village's RV campsite construction and granted us the title of 'Honorary Villagers'. Living here truly feels like home," Zha says. To date, the RV campsite has attracted over 20,000 tourists and



From top: Aerial view of Longde county in summer. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY A street corner in Longde county in August. The Recreational Vehicle campsite in Xinhe village, Longde county, Guyuan city in Ningxia Hui autonomous region. PHOTOS BY WU YANBO / CHINA DAILY Zha Haiyong travels to the Qinghai Lake via his RV in 2017. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

involved 79 local households in rural tourism. It has also spurred the development of nearby campsites like Qingliang Village RV Campsite and Gaoyang Huagu RV

Campsite. It also attracted neighboring towns to learn from Xinhe village's experience.

Currently, the daily rental fee for the Xinhe campsite is 40 yuan (\$5.5),

the electricity fee is 0.75 yuan per kilowatt-hour, and the monthly rent is 720 yuan. During the off-season, the daily rental fee is 20 yuan. In 2022, the village experimentally constructed four cave campsites with independent bathrooms, kitchens and heated floor systems, each covering 64-square meters, available for a five-year lease at 5,000 yuan per year.

Integrated facilities

From June 2022 to September 2023, Zha and his wife stayed in one of the cave campsites for 16 months and spent Spring Festival there. "It's warm in the winter, too. We experienced over 20 heavy snowfalls in the mountain village and it was cozy to sit in the cave eating hot pot and watching the snow. This year, we decided to lease the cave campsite for five more years."

Zhao says, starting this year, the site is offering relatively independent RV campsites for five years, 250 sq m for 2,000 yuan per year or 350 sq m for 3,000 yuan, allowing guests to build their own "summer courtyard". Currently, 15 independent campsites are leased and four more have been built.

In 2017, over 70 households in Xinhe village were mobilized to invest in and establish a tourism company. In addition to the government's investment of over 10 million yuan, the tourism company also invested over 10 million yuan.

Zhao says: "Developing rural tourism requires high investment but has slow returns, even though the campsite is almost fully booked in the summer. In the future, an additional investment of about 20 million yuan is needed to build facilities like eco-restaurants along the mountain roads to meet the dining and accommodation requirements of tourists."

Zha believes that the RV campsite has already played a role in attract-

ing more tourists. Located between the major cities of Xi'an in Shaanxi province, Lanzhou in Gansu province, and Yinchuan in Ningxia, the area benefits from convenient transportation. These large cities have a significant market demand from retired individuals seeking summer retreats. The unique climate and natural conditions provide substantial space for development and market potential in summer leisure tourism.

From Zha's perspective, to seize the opportunity for summer leisure tourism, it must attract more visitors by building summer apartments and encouraging more locals to open homestays.

RV tourism, on the other hand, is increasingly favored, and its market is gradually expanding. The standardized and scaled construction of RV campsites requires attention from local governments interested in developing integrated tourism. RV campsite construction in provinces such as Hainan, Yunnan, Sichuan, and Zhejiang is relatively mature.

"In 2017, when we traveled by RV to Xishuangbanna in Yunnan province, we couldn't find campsites and were forced to stay in parking lots, which was awkward and chaotic. Now, the local government not only emphasizes RV campsite construction but also strictly regulates RV parking and campsite management. The northwest region is just starting in this regard," Zha says.

Yang says: "The unique natural geographical environment and climate of Longde cannot be replicated. I hope the local government will develop this area into a summer resort that more people from the south will visit."

The Liupan Mountains were the last mountains crossed by the Red Army during the Long March (1934-36), so the area is rich in Red (revolutionary themes) Tourism resources. Guyuan city is an important international city on the ancient Silk Road, with a rich historical and cultural heritage.

Zhang Shuai, of the business development department of the China Tourism Association, states that the construction of RV summer campsites in the Liupan Mountains area can not only fully utilize its unique climate advantages to develop high-end summer leisure tourism, improve the living environment and increase incomes for the residents in the old revolutionary base, but also attract more tourists to explore its diverse cultural and tourism resources.

Guyuan has the potential to be comparable to Hainan's island-wide RV campsites, Zhang adds.

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LIFE

Reviving classics to retell timeless stories

Beijing People's Art Theatre has launched an ambitious plan to bring back some of the most iconic works in Chinese stage history, **Chen Nan** reports.

In the heart of Beijing, where the hum of modernity meets the echoes of tradition, a stirring movement is unfolding at the legendary Beijing People's Art Theatre. It's a movement that reverberates with nostalgia, cultural pride and artistic ambition — a plan to revive some of the most iconic works in Chinese theater history.

Through its latest initiative, the Classic Revival Plan, the Beijing People's Art Theatre is not only bringing back old plays but it is rekindling the very soul of Chinese drama, ensuring that these masterpieces continue to inspire and captivate new generations, said Feng Yuanzheng, a veteran actor and director who is also the president of the theater, in Beijing on Wednesday.

"The theater has more than 300 plays, which can be called 'treasures of the theater'. They are valuable assets passed down through generations, much like our family fortune," says Feng. "After reviewing the extensive repertoire, we chose 20 to 30 plays. In the next three years, we will revive one or two classic works every year, bringing them back to the stage with modern reinterpretations.

"The goal of the plan is to preserve and pass on the artistic and historical significance of these works to contemporary audiences, while also introducing them to new generations of theatergoers," he adds.

The first play mapped out in this initiative is *Returning Home on a Snowy Night*, a coproduction with the National Centre for the Performing Arts. Back in 2012, Ren Ming, the former president of the Beijing People's Art Theatre, directed this Chinese play, and Feng was one of the actors.

Originally penned in 1942 by playwright Wu Zuguang, the play was first performed in the 1950s and revolves around famed Peking Opera actor Wei Liansheng. Wei goes through both the peak of fame and the depths of despair. His tragic love affair with Yuchun, a concubine of a bureaucrat, costs them both their lives.

"We decided to revive this play because it's very beautiful and captures the emotional complexity of beauty intertwined with sadness," says Feng.

This classic will return to the stage at the Capital Theatre — the home of the Beijing People's Art Theatre — at the end of April, offering a fresh take that speaks to contemporary audiences.

The second major restoration is Lao She's *Rickshaw Boy*, which will be restaged in July. This production will serve as a symbol of the Beijing People's Art Theatre's ability to keep its classic works dynamic and relevant for new generations.

Feng also notes that the artists of the theater have started reviewing old videos and materials about Lao She's *Rickshaw Boy*, which premiered at the theater in 1957.

"We will take our young actors to Beijing's hutong areas to learn about the history of the work. The revival will be loyal to Lao She's original piece and presented based on the theater's first edition of *Rickshaw Boy*," Feng notes.

"The theater, with a history of



Top: A scene from *Enigma Variations*, a Chinese stage adaptation of the 1996 novel by French author and dramatist Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt, featuring actors Feng Yuanzheng (right) and Yan Nan, that premiered at the Beijing People's Art Theatre on Dec 27. **Above:** The Beijing People's Art Theatre holds its training program for young actors, including a script reading session on Dec 28 last year. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

over 70 years, is now going through a critical transition between old and new actors, with many senior actors retiring and young actors joining us," Feng says. "Through restaging, we want to provide opportunities for younger actors and directors to engage with these iconic works, allowing them to work with established artists, reinterpret, and continue the traditions of Chinese theater."

Last year, the theater had a successful season, with 35 productions and 509 performances staged in and outside Beijing.

On Wednesday, the theater unveiled its highly anticipated lineup for this year. Besides restoring classics, it will stage new productions, kicking off 2025 with *Romulus der Grosse*, a new play directed by Feng, starring Lu Lu and Yang Mingxin. The production, made for the experimental theater of the troupe,



Feng Yuanzheng (right) and the theater's vice-president Qin Xinchun announce the theater's plan for this year in Beijing on Wednesday.

will premiere on Saturday. It blends comedy with seriousness and will take the audience through a unique "amusement park" experience.

For the upcoming Spring Festival — the biggest traditional Chinese festival — the theater will stage its *Family Reunion*, setting the stage to entertain audiences during the holiday. The play tells the story of a family spanning five decades. The Wang family lives in a traditional courtyard in a hutong alley in downtown Beijing and, for generations, they have been committed to the maintenance and repair of historical buildings. Since the play premiered in 2005, it has become one of the most popular plays in the Beijing People's Art Theatre's repertoire, especially during Spring Festival. *Beneath the Red Banner*, a play adapted from the Lao She novel of the same title, will also be staged during the festival season.

A special performance of *Thunder-*

The goal of the (Classic Revival) plan is to preserve and pass on the artistic and historical significance of these works to contemporary audiences, while also introducing them to new generations of theatergoers."

Feng Yuanzheng, veteran actor and director, president, Beijing People's Art Theatre

storm, directed by Pu Cunxin and Tang Ye, will take place in September to commemorate the 115th anniversary of playwright Cao Yu's birth. The renowned playwright was the first president of the theater, and *Thunderstorm* is considered one of China's most enduring 20th-century dramas. Since 1954, the Beijing People's Art Theatre has staged five versions of this classic play.

In September, a new production of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by Xu Ang, will bring together young creatives in a modern reinterpretation.

In November, *Xiao Jun Zhi Qiu* ("the autumn of a small town"), a new work directed by Tang Ye and Gong Lijun, adapted from the American play and film *August: Osage County*, will be staged, exploring themes of family and relationships in a domestic setting.

To commemorate the 120th anniversary of playwright Jiao Juyin's birth, the theater will host an exhibition celebrating his legacy. *Teahouse*, one of the theater's most popular and iconic works written by Lao She, will also be staged.

This year also marks a milestone for the theater in terms of cultural exchange. It plans to increase its international presence, participating in the 11th Silk Road International Arts Festival in Shaanxi province. In October, it will organize the 2025 Beijing People's Art Theatre International Drama Invitation Exhibition, an annual event bringing together acclaimed international and domestic drama troupes to Beijing.

Another major focus for the Beijing People's Art Theatre in 2025 is expanding its public service role. With initiatives such as community theater performances and educational outreach, the theater is committed to making the arts more accessible to the public. In the new year, the theater will recruit students from universities in Beijing, Hebei province, and Tianjin. Through theater workshops and lectures, it will host activities to strengthen the connection between the theater and students.

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Carter's biggest legacy was his selfless devotion to others

The recent passing of former United States president Jimmy Carter at the age of 100 was a stark reminder that, despite the myriad changes the world has seen since Carter's term in the White House



James Healy
Second Thoughts

(1977-81), developments in two key areas — Sino-US ties and the situation in the Middle East — are just as important now as then.

Carter's diplomatic achievements in both areas sealed his legacy: US diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China were established on his watch, a monumental milestone whose impact continues to resonate today, and he helped broker the first peace treaty between Israel

and an Arab neighbor (Egypt).

Beyond the global arena, however, the Carter presidency did not fully deliver what the American people hoped for at the time, which the White House Historical Association concedes in its biography of the 39th president.

"Jimmy Carter aspired to make government 'competent and compassionate,' responsive to the American people and their expectations," the biography says. "His achievements were notable, but in an era of rising energy costs, mounting inflation, and continuing tensions, it was impossible for his administration to meet these high expectations."

To be fair, history was a bit unkind to Carter and his rather unremarkable predecessor, Gerald Ford, by sandwiching them as it did between standouts Richard Nixon

and Ronald Reagan.

Yet, after his single term as president, Carter truly stood up and stood tall. In the ensuing decades, his dedicated efforts in the service of mankind proved that he was, without a doubt, a very decent, highly principled and widely influential man.

Indeed, Carter's winning of the 2002 Nobel Peace Prize recognized his tireless work to "find peaceful solutions to international conflicts, to advance democracy and human rights, and to promote economic and social development," the White House Historical Association bio notes.

Carter's driving sense of purpose reminded me of the stated mission of the all-boy, Jesuit-run Catholic high school I attended, which was to build "men for others".

At Christmas each year, under a

program called Operation Others, we would participate in preparing and delivering meals to dozens of families in the community who, due to poverty or misfortune, might otherwise have gone hungry on that special day.

The idea was for us to personally deliver the meals to the homes of the local poor and interact with them, so we could not only see how they lived, but also have the chance to engage with them as equals.

Carter, a selfless and hardworking community man, was a kindred spirit.

He quite literally rolled up his sleeves and worked for decades with Habitat for Humanity, a charity that sprouted in his home state of Georgia in the early 1940s as a Christian service group whose aim was racial reconciliation.

Habitat for Humanity volunteers work side by side with people who need shelter to build a home for them. And Carter volunteered every year starting in 1984, with a hammer and nails in hand, to construct homes in the US and beyond.

"Habitat has successfully removed the stigma of charity by substituting it with a sense of partnership," Habitat for Humanity quoted Carter as saying. "The people who will live in the homes work side by side with the volunteers, so they feel very much that they are on an equal level."

This acknowledgment of "equal level" was a reflection of the deep humanity of Carter, the humble man who rose from the grassroots to defeat the only US president who was born a king. (Gerald Ford, the 38th US president, went by that

name from about the age of 4, but in fact his name at birth was Leslie King, Jr.)

According to Habitat for Humanity, over the course of more than 35 years, Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, who passed away in November 2023 at the age of 96, "worked alongside nearly 104,000 volunteers in 14 countries to build, renovate and repair 4,390 homes".

The memory of Carter as a sincere and caring man who personally helped build better lives for others should last as long, and provide just as much inspiration, as his legacy for playing a pivotal role in establishing the ties that have long since cemented the friendship between the US and China.

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LIFE



At the Shanxi Grand Theater in Taiyuan, Shanxi province, dancers put on a synchronized show of hands during *Qianshou Guanyin* (thousand-hand bodhisattva).

Dance drama sets scene for year ahead



Performers have intricate makeup applied backstage.

Old favorite returns in a new format that is still guaranteed to thrill audiences

Photos by Zhu Xingxin | China Daily

Dance drama *Qianshou Guanyin* (thousand-hand bodhisattva) has long been etched in the hearts of the Chinese people as a brilliant cultural symbol. On New Year's Eve, a revamped version of this famous performance premiered at the Shanxi Grand Theater in Taiyuan, Shanxi province, accompanying the audience in welcoming the arrival of 2025.

Originally introduced to the public in 2005 during China Central Television's Spring Festival Gala, the dance quickly captivated viewers from home and abroad. By 2011, it had gained international acclaim, both versions being the brainchild of renowned director Zhang Jigang.

When discussing the inspiration behind the dance, Zhang highlights the influence of his hometown, Shanxi. The exquisite Thousand-Hand Guanyin at the Jingde Temple in Wutai Mountain and the Thousand-Hand



Long-nailed hands, like a wheat field in the wind, depict the care, compassion and outreach of *Guanyin*, the all-seeing goddess of compassion, during the iconic stage drama *Qianshou Guanyin*.



The troupe receives warm applause after their performance.

Thousand-Eye Guanyin at Chongshan Temple in Taiyuan served as creative inspirations for the dance's iconic imagery.

The newly reimagined dance continues to convey the original's message of harmony, compassion and selflessness inherent in Chinese culture.

Guanyin, a goddess of compassion, is often depicted with a thousand arms, having an eye in the palm of each hand, to symbolize an omnipresent mother figure always witnessing the pain of humanity with endless amounts of mercy, extending out one of her many arms to lend a helping hand.

From Dec 31, 2024, to Jan 4, the performance at the Shanxi Grand Theater consisted of seven shows. Audience member Li Yang says that the show was not only captivating but also moving.

This new rendition maintains the essence of the original while daring to innovate and break new ground. It places greater emphasis on detailed choreography and emotional expression, allowing the audience to better feel the power inherent in the dance.

"We should be like lamplighters, not only illuminating ourselves but using the light of art to brighten the hearts of all our audience," director Zhang says.

Following its run in Shanxi, the show will go on a national tour.



Director Zhang Jigang (center) meets performers and the audience.



A performer undergoes a rare moment of tranquil reflection during the play.



The exquisitely decorated hands seem to give the impression of having a life of their own, each with an eye.



Audience members take souvenir photos of the troupe.