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CHINA DAILY

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Festive travel



Passengers pose for a group photo on Tuesday inside a train of the China-Laos Railway in Kunming, Yunnan province. The 40-day Spring Festival travel rush, or *chunyun*, kicked off on Tuesday. Nine billion interregional trips are expected during this year's travel rush. LI JIAXIAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE See more, page 4

Beijing, Brussels urged to build on achievements

Xi says 50 years of relations with EU should inspire continued commitment to partnership

By MO JINGXI
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President Xi Jinping told European Council President Antonio Costa on Tuesday that China and the European Union should work together to improve and carry forward their 50-year relationship, in order to bring greater benefits to their peoples and more stability and certainty to the turbulent international landscape.

In a phone conversation with the former Portuguese prime minister, who assumed his current post last month, Xi noted that this year marks the 50th anniversary of China-EU diplomatic ties, which he said is a greatly significant milestone that builds on past achievements and aims for the future.

The development of China-EU ties is proof that the two sides can promote cooperation and accomplish big things, as long as they respect each other with equality and engage in candid dialogue, Xi said.

Noting that seeking common ground while reserving differences is also a form of partnership, Xi said the key is to respect the social systems and development paths chosen by each other's people, as well as to respect each other's core interests and major concerns.

China always sees Europe as an important pillar in building a multipolar world and supports European integration and EU strategic autonomy, he said, stressing the need to take inspiration from the past and jointly maintain the political founda-

tion of China-EU relations.

Xi said that there are no fundamental conflicts of interest or geopolitical conflicts between China and the EU. The two sides are partners that have not only enabled each other's success over the past five decades, but also made important contributions to world peace and prosperity, he said.

Xi said that the more severe and complex the international situation becomes, the more it is necessary for China and the EU to keep their original aspiration for friendship in mind, strengthen strategic communication and mutual trust, and remain committed to their partnership.

China has confidence in the EU, and it is hoped that the EU can also become a trusted partner for cooperation with China, he said.

China and the EU, as important trading partners, are highly complementary in economic and trade cooperation and have formed a strong economic symbiosis. Despite increasing challenges, bilateral trade has demonstrated resilience, with volume exceeding \$523 billion between January and August last year, according to the Foreign Ministry.

Xi said that as China has been promoting high-quality development and expanding its high-level opening-up, more opportunities for China-EU cooperation will be created. He called on the two sides to further open to each other, consolidate existing cooperation mechanisms and foster new growth points for cooperation.

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WORLD WATCH

By Arjun Chatterjee

China, India should deepen exchanges, seize chance to revive multilateralism

With a gap of four years between terms, Donald Trump is the second president of the United States, after Grover Cleveland, to return to presidency. Speculations are rife on what the Trump 2.0 presidency will bring to the table, particularly when political pluralism and ideological diversity are emerging as the key fulcrums of the new international order.

Trump's second term and the future of global geopolitics in the next four years are "unpredictable", but there will be multiple windows of opportunity to revive multilateralism in a multipolar world.

This is, in fact, the moment of opportunity when two leading economies of Asia, China and India, can take a cue from their ancient wisdom and civilizational values and traditions to forge new partnerships, put into action robust trust-building measures, build strong camaraderie by enhancing people-to-people exchanges and tap into new areas of win-win collaboration. That could not only change the fate of over 3 billion people in the Global South, but would also have far-reaching positive ramifications for the world.

The Chinese people are accustomed to "harmonious consultative democracy", which has deep cultural roots in Chinese society over "competitive democracy", regarded as a Western phenomenon. There is a long-held philosophy of "harmony without uniformity" in China, and this found resonance when China's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said, "Our policy toward the US is consistent. We will continue to view and handle China-US relations in accordance with the principles of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation."

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US export control on AI tech draws criticism

By FAN FEIFEI
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The United States government's latest move to impose new export control measures on artificial intelligence technology will wreak havoc on global AI and semiconductor supply chains and impede international technological cooperation, while seriously hurting the interests of tech companies from around the world, said officials and experts.

They noted that such expansive restrictions will push Chinese companies to double down on indigenous innovation and pool more resources into research and development, in order to achieve breakthroughs in crucial AI chip technologies.

Their comments came after the administration of US President Joe Biden unveiled on Monday an export control scheme that gives 18 close allies and partners uninhibited access to AI-related chips, while placing strict licensing requirements on most other countries.

The move represents the US' latest attempt to further prevent China from obtaining advanced chips used for cutting-edge AI technology.

In a statement issued on Monday night, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Commerce said that China firmly opposes the Biden administration's announcement of restrictions on exports related to AI and will take necessary measures to resolutely safeguard

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its legitimate rights and interests.

These measures further tighten export controls on AI chips and model parameters, while expanding long-arm jurisdiction and creating obstacles and interference for third parties engaged in normal trade with China, the spokesperson said.

"This action severely hinders normal economic and trade exchanges between countries, seriously disrupts market rules and international economic and trade order, and significantly affects global technological innovation. It also severely damages the interests of enterprises worldwide, including those in the US," the spokesperson added.

On Tuesday, Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said the US has generalized the concept of national security, politicized and weaponized economic, trade and technology issues, abused export controls, and maliciously suppressed China.

He said the US move has seriously affected the stability of global industrial and supply chains, and that it harms the interests of both China and the US, as well as those of business communities around the world.

Zhou Mi, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of International

Trade and Economic Cooperation in Beijing, said the new restrictions on the export of advanced computer chips and AI technology will deal a heavy blow and bring uncontrollable risks to the global AI industry, given that China and the US take the lead in bolstering technological advancement and AI application.

Aimed at further decoupling from China in high-tech fields, these measures will not only have a negative impact on global economic growth and hamper international technological exchanges and innovation, they will also slow down the US' pace of progress in AI, Zhou said.

Xiang Ligang, director-general of the Zhongguancun Modern Information Consumer Application Industry Technology Alliance, a telecom industry association, said, "The export control on cutting-edge AI technology will motivate Chinese companies to step up investment in research and development, enhance their independent innovation capacity and achieve technological breakthroughs."

Xiang highlighted that the US government's intensified attempts to contain China's rise in the fast-developing AI sector by using political power is bound to fail in the long term and backfire.

The Biden administration's move has also drawn fierce criticism from industry organizations and high-tech companies in the US.

John Neuffer, president and CEO of the Semiconductor Industry Association, said, "We're deeply disappointed that a policy shift of this magnitude and impact is being rushed out the door days before a presidential transition and without any meaningful input from industry."



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STELLAR OLYMPIC PERFORMANCES SPARK CRAZE FOR EMERGING SPORTS

Chinese youngsters lead the way in adopting and excelling in novel events

By XING WEN
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All it took was a BMX ride in 2023 and He Miyao was hooked. So much so that on every single day of her recent winter holiday, the 9-year-old third grader from Shanghai left home before dawn with her father for a



more than two-hour-long car journey to Suzhou in Jiangsu province. Once there, she hit the tracks for five hours of practice on a BMX bike.

She pumped her bike up and down the rollers and berms, circling again and again, sometimes lifting the front wheel off the ground to execute a jump.

After completing her training, she made the long journey back home, arriving after dark, only to finish her homework for the day and go to bed around 9:30 pm.

But this was not just a holiday routine for the young girl. It has also been her weekend routine for the past year.

"Not all kids can persevere through this. It's tough," said her father He Wei, acknowledging his daughter's dedication.

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Road to recovery



Evacuees from the Eaton fire dwell among heaps of clothes displayed on the ground at a donation center at Santa Anita Park in Arcadia, California, on Monday. US President Joe Biden said the federal government will cover most of the costs associated with the wildfire devastation in Los Angeles for the next 180 days, but that it will take tens of billions of dollars to get the city fully back.

ETIENNE LAURENT / AFP See more, page 9

PAGE TWO

Sports: Youth embrace thrilling new disciplines

2024
year in
Review

From page 1

"However, she's really gotten into the habit of being disciplined."

For He Miyao, it's not just a sport. "Riding the bumps and curves on the pump track is super cool! I love the ups and downs, the speed — it's so freeing," she said.

And her talent is now being noticed.

Last year, she traveled to Suzhou, Huzhou in Zhejiang province, Beijing and Yantai in Shandong province, among other cities, to participate in youth BMX racing events.

In the national youth U-series racing championship held in Taizhou, Jiangsu province, on July 25-26, she ranked fourth in her category.

Just a few days later, she watched on TV the then-18-year-old cyclist Deng Yawen scoring 92.60 points in her second run to become China's first-ever Olympic BMX freestyle gold medalist.

At that very moment, the burning desire to represent China on the international stage as a cyclist surged within He Miyao's heart. The urge only grew stronger when she met Deng in person at the China Pump Track Series' stop in Suizhou, Hubei province, in September.

"She has developed a sense of national pride," said He Wei, adding that the family plans to support He Miyao in traveling abroad to take part in an international competition this year.

Youth power

Deng, after unexpectedly winning China's first BMX freestyle gold medal at Paris 2024, is determined to promote the sport among a wider audience in the country.

"Because in the Olympic family, this discipline is indeed very young," Deng said.

Though BMX racing made its debut in Beijing 2008, BMX freestyle became an Olympics event only at the 2021 Tokyo Games in Japan, with the participation of 18 athletes. Back then, no Chinese riders qualified for the event. BMX freestyle arrived late in China, with a national team being formed in 2018.

However, at Paris 2024, Team China consistently broke new ground in the "young" disciplines.

In speed climbing, a vertical racing event that made its Olympic debut as a stand-alone discipline for both men and women in Paris, China's speedster Deng Lijuan bagged the women's silver medal on Aug 7. The following day, her compatriot 22-year-old Wu Peng, claimed the silver medal in the men's event with a timing of 4.77 seconds, finishing just 0.02 seconds behind Indonesia's Vedriq Leonardo.

Similarly, Team China secured three Olympic slots in breaking, a new discipline in the Games program, with the 18-year-old B-girl Liu Qingyi clinching bronze.

With her powerful stage presence and distinctive technical style, Liu has repeatedly made it to the podium in some of the most important international breaking competitions.

Recently, she secured her spot at The World Games 2025 after winning the silver medal in the women's event at the 2024 WDSF World Breaking Championships on Dec 21 in Chengdu, Sichuan province. Her compatriot Wang Ruimiao, 19, seized bronze.

Breaking brings a distinctive atmosphere that sets it apart from the more traditional events at the Olympic Games. It builds up a vibe that is very different from that of other conventional events.

At the first-ever Olympic Breaking event held at Parc Urbain from Aug 9 to 10, the high-energy MC duo ignited the crowd with some interactive hype. Solo battlers, dressed in outfits that showcased their individuality and sporting trendy hairstyles, showcased their footwork, freezes and power moves on the circular stage.

The audience cheered and waved their hands in sync with the music. The event felt more like a lively party.

"Breaking won't follow a set pattern. I think that's what young people are all about — seeking limitless possibilities. It makes young people feel like it's a lot of fun, and I think that's what really keeps it attractive," said Yin Guochen, director of Chinese Dance Sport Federation.

Meanwhile, after making its debut at the Tokyo Games, skateboarding and surfing returned for its second Olympic iteration in Paris.

Fifteen-year-old Yang Siqi became



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

China's first-ever Olympic surfer. Also the youngest competitor in the surfing event, she became the first to represent China as an up-and-coming surfing nation.

Yang, initially considered an underdog, impressed many with her boldness and determination. Despite being repeatedly knocked down by the powerful waves in Teahupo'o, Tahiti, French Polynesia, she persisted in her efforts to catch the waves time and time again.

The gifted young surfer, who was raised in the mountainous areas of Daliangshan, Sichuan province, and had not seen the sea until the age of nine, made it to the top 16.

Among others, Cui Chenxi achieved fourth place in the women's street skateboarding final at Paris 2024, marking China's best-ever Olympic skateboarding result. This feat came less than a year after the wunderkind became China's youngest-ever Asian Games medalist by winning gold in the street skateboarding event in Hangzhou in September 2023 at the age of 13.

The inclusion of these "young" disciplines in recent Games reflects the International Olympic Committee's wider aim to engage younger audiences and diversify the Olympics program. These modern sports have injected a dynamic energy into the Olympic Games, which has rich history spanning over two millennia.

New vibes

For Zheng Haohao, a Chinese women's park skateboarder who competed at the youngest athlete at the 2024 Paris Olympics at the age of 11, her first Olympic journey was simply an opportunity "to play and make more friends".

The presence of some of the world's top skateboard riders was not at all intimidating for her. "Compared to skating near my home, the Olympics didn't feel that differ-

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Yin Guochen, director of Chinese Dance Sport Federation

ent to me. It was just a bit more crowded," she said. She was not too nervous as "staying relaxed helps reduce mistakes".

Her relaxed attitude may have partly stemmed from the sport's roots in street culture.

The sport's vibrant vibe is especially evident in a street skateboard event where athletes wear loose T-shirts and pants as they perform their own distinct tricks and maneuvers on quarter pipes, handrails and various obstacles, all set to the lively backdrop of hip-hop music. When an athlete successfully completes a routine, the crowd erupts in cheers and applause, showing support regardless of the team they represent.

"Skateboarding is also one of the rare competitions without the 'smell of gunpowder'. There is a lot of uncertainty, mistakes are very common. The athletes seem more like they are here to show

their own tricks rather than to compete for victory," said Yu Songwen, the mother of 10-year-old skateboarding enthusiast Guo Yu.

Initially, Yu wanted to cultivate an outdoor hobby for her son. The family's original choice was soccer, but the introverted boy did not adapt well to the intense physical contact required in the team sport.

In 2023, during a skateboarding charity class organized by the Shanghai Extreme Sports Association, Guo developed a liking for this sport, drawn by the cool quotient of the skateboarders and the relaxed atmosphere of the class.

"Skateboarding has tons of cool tricks to teach, and picking up new moves can make kids feel confident," said his mother.

"It's a solo sport where everyone has their own style, so there's no pushing or shoving. Training sessions are more about having fun together than worrying about scores or who's the best. Boys and girls of different ages play together, and just enjoy the chill, welcoming vibe."

Guo dedicated 10 hours a week to skateboarding and thanks to the inclusive environment, he gradually became more outgoing.

In August, when the X Games China 2024 Skateboarding returned for its U-pool tour final in Shanghai, Yu took Guo to watch the event. She was surprised to see the once shy boy confidently approaching the Brazilian skateboarder Iago Magalhaes and other world-class athletes to chat in English.

"The sport has opened a window for him to understand the world," said the mother.

"Despite being sweaty or bruised after riding the skateboard, whenever I ask him, 'Are you tired?' he always replies, 'Tired, but I still love skateboarding,'" the proud mother shared.

He Wei, father of BMX racer He Miyao, has also noticed his daughter's growth in the extreme sport. "She's become tougher and more determined. When she loses a race, she might cry at first, but after wiping away those tears, she's right back to giving it her all for the next one," he said.

Urban active

With the inclusion of new sports in international galas, the rise of Chinese sports stars in these disciplines, and the government's efforts to build China into a global sports powerhouse, the new sports are attracting a growing population of enthusiasts across various cities in China.

In Chengdu alone, there are over 500 street dance clubs and training centers, with a community of more than 200,000 street dance enthusiasts, according to the Chengdu Street Dance Association.

A report by the Chinese Mountaineering Association revealed that the number of sport climbing enthusiasts in the country surged from around 10,000 in 2012 to over 500,000 by the end of 2023. Additionally, there were 636 commercial climbing gyms operating across the Chinese mainland, a figure surpassing that of the United States for the first time.

Fan Yi, a 46-year-old sport climbing enthusiast from Changsha, Hunan province, has observed a rapid growth in the sport climbing scene in the city in recent years.

"More climbing gyms have opened up, attracting many families to experience the sport, and talented children can often be spotted," Fan said.

Fan started climbing in 2011, later turning it into a beloved hobby.

He now frequents local climbing gyms two to three times a week for training.

"After hitting 40, my body may not be what it used to be, but my love for rock climbing hasn't faded one bit. I actually treasure and enjoy the climbing experience even more now," Fan shared.

He believes that sport climbing, which needs skills, patience, resilience and strength in small muscles, is a sport that people of varied ages can enjoy.

For Zhou Ping, the founder of Amazing Elephant, a Shanghai-based sports company focused on cultivating BMX bike riders, biking has tremendous potential to become a long-term hobby for a wider population in China.

In 2020, as a cycling lover himself, he decided to launch the company and build several BMX bike training facilities in Shanghai.

"I began mountain biking as a hobby in adulthood and soon realized that for enthusiasts like myself, it's easy to get injured when your courage surpasses your skills," he explained.

"My goal is to assemble professional riders to provide systematic and scientific training for the next generation, ensuring that children do not face the same challenges I experienced."

He observed that after Deng Yawen won China's first-ever Olympic BMX freestyle gold medal at Paris 2024, more and more parents have shown interest in the sport.

"The victory has raised awareness about this sport among the public," he noted.

The Amazing Elephant, which has six training centers across Shanghai, has attracted over 1,500 active BMX learners, with the majority being concentrated in the preschool and elementary school stages.

On its part, the Shanghai Sports Bureau is promoting new sports by involving almost 8,000 community sports instructors in experiential activities for sports such as BMX biking, skateboarding, and sport climbing.

Around the time of the 16th National Fitness Day on August 8, the Shanghai Extreme Sports Association organized 36 experiential events for extreme sports in the city's shopping centers, outdoor squares and communities, said Bao Tingting from the association.

Zhang Xin, a former fitness trainer who started skateboarding in 2019, is among the community sports instructors.

He has witnessed the upgrading and expansion of skateboarding facilities in Shanghai in recent years and actively participates in experiential events to bring the fun of skateboarding to a larger group of people.

He has also found new career opportunities in this hobby.

In May, he opened a small skateboard shop in a local community with a pump track and some street skateboarding props. He now has around 50 young students.

Zhang also feels refreshed by this new business. "Back when I was a fitness trainer, most of my classes were one-on-one, and it just felt like a job to me. But now, hosting classes for these young riders feels like being a parent of a big family," he explained.

"And when they win awards in competitions, I am overwhelmed with pride."

TOP NEWS

TikTok users flee to Chinese app amid ban fears

Migration to Xiaohongshu seen as reflection of deep distrust of US government, tech firms

By HOU CHENCHEN
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As Chinese users settle into their nightly routine on Xiaohongshu, they are overwhelmed by a flood of English-language content. Tens of thousands of self-proclaimed "TikTok refugees" from the United States have arrived on this Chinese app, which, even lacking an official English name, has been dubbed "Red Note" by US users.

"Hello everyone, my name is Ryan. I'm a TikTok refugee. The American government is banning TikTok, so we're looking for an alternative. ... We're very sorry to interrupt you here. Hope we don't have to stay for too long," he said in a video posted on Monday, seemingly addressing the app's Chinese users.

The video, which includes a Chinese translation read by a robot voice, received over 75,000 likes in one day.

The growing belief in the US that the Supreme Court will uphold a law banning TikTok has left its 170 million US users frustrated. The ban is set to take effect on Sunday, unless TikTok is sold by its parent company, ByteDance, but a sale seems unlikely, as ByteDance has firmly stated it will not sell, despite interest from potential US buyers.

As US users tag themselves as #tiktokrefugees, they are flocking to the Chinese app. By Tuesday, there were over 114,000 posts using the hashtag, with more than 2 million discussions and 73 million views as of 6 pm Beijing time.

Xiaohongshu had become the most downloaded app on the US iOS app store on Tuesday. The second most downloaded app was Lemon8, another ByteDance-owned lifestyle platform, which is also experiencing a surge in traffic from "displaced" TikTok users.

The flow of "TikTok refugees" is seen as a strong social media protest against the anticipated ban on TikTok, with the excuse of the so-called "China threat" to US information security, experts said.

Dissatisfaction evident

Cui Di, an associate professor at Fudan University's School of Journalism, said the "refugee" label reflects TikTok users' dissatisfaction with the current political irrationality in the US.

TikTok's global headquarters are in Los Angeles and Singapore, and its physical servers are owned by Oracle, a US company based in Texas. But the US remains prepared to ban it or force it to be sold, citing so-called national security concerns.

"TikTok has become an integral part of infrastructure, deeply influencing social culture. Many users rely on it for their livelihood, and their strong attachment to the platform leads them to consider themselves 'refugees' displaced from their home," Cui said.

Xiang Debao, a professor of international communication at Beijing Foreign Studies University, said this collective online movement serves as a protest against US policies,

using satire to challenge US hegemony under the guise of "national security".

Zheng Chuang, a research fellow at Shanghai International Studies University, said the influx of US TikTok users also reflects a deep distrust of the US government and US tech companies.

"The TikTok ban or forced acquisition reflects a regressive cultural mindset," he said. "Even if TikTok disappears, more apps from China and elsewhere will rise in the global spotlight."

Technological nationalism is self-deception, Zheng added.

Many of the new US influencers are breaking the language barrier by sharing pictures of their pet cats and dogs, and it seems that animals are proving to be the key to opening the door of communication. Some Chinese Xiaohongshu users have jokingly quipped that the app's new US users who wish to "stay here" must pay a "pet tax".

"I heard the Chinese citizens of RedNote are asking for a pet tax from all new American refugees. Here's my submission to the pet tax. I hope it will suffice," said @El Vampiro, a US user on Xiaohongshu, alongside a photo of his cats.

"Well received. Here's your refund," replied a Chinese user under the post with her cat on the other side of the world.

Cultural shock

But not all cultural exchanges have a happy ending.

Beijing-based user Yuzijiang faced a backlash from several US newcomers for "perpetuating prejudice, stereotyping, and cultural appropriation" of African American culture after posting a video of herself dancing with her curly hair.

While many US users expressed support for her, criticizing that "America's cancel culture is already starting", the blogger ultimately wrote a long post in the comment section to apologize. She clarified that her hairstyle was not intended to offend, but was simply something she found aesthetically pleasing.

Many Chinese users, however, have expressed discomfort with such encounters, fearing that US-driven political correctness, US-dominated ideology and many "unhealthy" subcultures, such as porn, gambling and drug-taking, might take root in the Chinese online environment.

Cui from Fudan University said the influx of "TikTok refugees" may be temporary.

Since the political correctness landscape in the US differs greatly from that in China, in the long run, it would be difficult for US culture to take root in Chinese internet society and have a lasting impact on Xiaohongshu's ecosystem.

Whether or not Xiaohongshu plans to take measures to protect its core user base, the arrival of TikTok refugees presents an opportunity for the platform to reassess its international strategy and expand into English-speaking countries beyond the Chinese cultural sphere, Cui added.



Foreign travelers dressed in Chinese traditional costumes pose for a photo on Friday at the Forbidden City in Beijing.
WANG XIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Inbound visits surge with extended visa-free policies

By WANG QINGYUN
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China saw a spike in foreigners' visits in 2024, a year in which the country kept stepping up efforts to beef up cross-border travel, statistics from the National Immigration Administration showed.

Last year, immigration authorities across the country saw more than 20.11 million visa-free trips to China made by foreign travelers, more than double the figure in 2023, Lyu Ning, a spokeswoman for the administration, said on Tuesday.

The authorities reported a total of 610 million inbound and outbound trips in 2024, a 43.9 percent year-on-year increase, Lyu said, adding that of these trips, 64.88 million were made by foreign citizens, up 82.9 percent year-on-year.

They also issued about 2.6 million visas to foreigners, a 52.3 percent year-on-year increase.

A series of policies that the NIA has introduced over the past year to facilitate inbound travel have led to a significant increase in the number of foreign visitors, Lyu said.

In a recent move, the NIA improved the country's visa-free transit policy in December, extending the period of stay to up to 10 days, and increasing the number of visa-free transit ports and places foreigners can visit under the policy.

The NIA also contributed to the country's efforts to expand the unilateral visa-free entry policy and apply it to more countries, Lyu said, adding that the administration will continue to unleash the benefits of the country's visa-free policies.

Lyu's remarks came a day after the State Council, China's Cabinet, called for further expansion of the visa-free entry policy and further extension of visa-free stays to foster new growth points in the culture and tourism sector

and boost related consumption.

In November, China added nine countries to its unilateral visa-free entry list, increasing the number of such countries to 38, and extended the stay in China upon visa-free entry to 30 days.

These ongoing efforts have served as an impetus for inbound travel, tourist companies said.

Hu Jiyang, deputy general manager of CYTS International Travel Co, said these favorable policies, especially the visa-free entry policy, are a boost to the domestic tourism market.

The visa-free entry policy has spared potential foreign travelers the money, time and labor needed to apply for a visa, and improved China's attractiveness as a tourist destination, Hu said, adding that the extension of stay time allows foreign tourists to plan for longer trips and visit more places in the country.

Hu said she believes that China's favorable policies will continue to yield greater effects and further

strengthen the company's business in the coming year.

Trip.com Group, an online travel agency, said earlier this month that it has witnessed rapid growth in its inbound travel business as a result of the extension of visa-free transit stays and the continued expansion of China's visa-free entry policy.

The number of inbound travel orders it has received for the Spring Festival holiday — from Jan 28 to Feb 4 — saw a 203 percent year-on-year increase, the company said.

Lyu, the NIA spokeswoman, said that the administration will strengthen the monitoring of cross-border travel flows and the operation of ports, and issue travel advisories during the holiday.

It will also deploy sufficient workforce and open enough passage points to ensure that Chinese citizens spend no more than 30 minutes to pass through the ports during the holiday, she said.

Talks: EU willing to promote dialogue

From page 1

China and the EU should organize joint commemorative events to mark the 50th anniversary, enhance cultural and people-to-people exchanges, and encourage mutual visits between their people, among

other things, in order to cement public support for China-EU friendship, Xi said.

Costa said that the EU is ready to promote dialogue and communication, enhance strategic mutual trust and strengthen partnership with China, in order to create a better

future for the development of EU-China ties, according to a news release from the Foreign Ministry.

He also expressed the EU's willingness to settle differences properly through dialogue and consultation.

Noting that both the EU and Chi-

na uphold multilateralism, safeguard free trade and oppose bloc confrontation, Costa said the two sides should engage in cooperation instead of competition, especially in dealing with climate change and other global challenges.

The two sides also exchanged views on issues including the Ukraine crisis, and Xi elaborated on China's principled position on promoting peace talks.

Ties: Adoption of EVs should be on top of agenda

From page 1

Chinese President Xi Jinping congratulated Trump and said China and the US would gain from cooperation and lose from confrontation. It sends out a strong message that China is not interested in engaging in any conflict with the Trump 2.0 presidency. It also signals that confrontation, if unavoidable, will not only result in loss for China but will also cost the US dearly.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi took to social media to congratulate Trump, mentioning that he is "looking forward to working closely together once again to further strengthen India-US relations across technology, defense, energy, space and several other sectors".

The bond between Trump 2.0 and Modi 3.0 administrations could work well for both countries, but that should not work against the interests of a harmonious India-China relationship. The possibility of a collaboration between the two Asian countries has become more pronounced after the two neighbors reached an agreement on enhancing coordination and cooperation on the boundary question, aiming to resolve a four-year standoff that strain relations.

The meeting between Modi and

Xi in Kazan, Russia, on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit in October, reinstated the importance of border stability, mutual respect and peaceful resolution of differences through dialogue and diplomacy. Modi highlighted the need for cross-border payments in local currencies within BRICS, aiming to reduce reliance on Western payment systems. This could also lead to ease of doing business between India and China.

The adoption of electric vehicles should be on top of the agenda when it comes to exchange of cultural relations between India and China. One should not just look at this through the lens of technology transfer, trade and job creation. EVs are a way of life that can dramatically change the quality of life, lifestyle choices, speed of execution, thought processes, daily habits and energy awareness, and build a cleaner, greener environment. In a country like India, with the world's largest population, EVs can be a game-changer. Most importantly, the adoption of EVs presents an important opportunity for sustainable development and poverty alleviation.

As companies such as Stellantis and the CK Birla Group consider assembling EVs domestically with China's Leapmotor, India can leverage this shift to create job oppor-

tunities through assembly lines and localized production. Chinese electric vehicle company BYD is already expanding internationally and has an extensive portfolio including passenger cars, commercial vehicles and batteries. BYD has entered the Indian market and could potentially deepen ties through partnerships with Indian car companies, such as Tata and Mahindra, for manufacturing or co-development of EVs tailored to local needs.

With targeted government policies, such as the Production Linked Incentive schemes and an evolving EV policy framework, the Modi 3.0 government in India is actively working to streamline EV adoption. China needs to play an important role in what I call the "transfer of EV culture", compassionately taking care of India's domestic concerns. Assembling imported EVs in India could also reduce dependency on conventional fossil-fuel vehicles, lowering emissions and aligning with the Supreme Court's environmental mandates.

Additionally, increased penetration of electric buses and cars could make sustainable transport accessible to broader demographics, reducing transportation costs for low-income communities in India and improving the overall quality of life. To maximize this

impact, entry-level EV models that cater to middle- and lower-income households will be essential.

In the long term, hybrid or internal combustion engine vehicles could gradually be phased out as EVs gain market share. Overall, importing EV technology from China and other markets could catalyze India's economic growth, reduce poverty through job creation and establish India as a trendsetter in green mobility solutions.

Trump is known as a tough negotiator. He loves to strike deals. His first presidency stood out for not waging a global war. His transactional approach to international relations might see him renegotiating trade deals, with allies and adversaries, which can yield results that are difficult to predict. Global geopolitics is as much about this unpredictability as it is about global stability. It is time that the two ancient civilizations, China and India, take a cue from their past peaceful coexistence and forge future partnerships that are resilient, sustainable and future-oriented.

The author is a Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme award-winning scholar with Hong Kong Baptist University. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Smart friend



A robot dog called Rita greets visitors on Monday during Congreso Futuro 2025 in Santiago, Chile. The sci-tech outreach event, featuring workshops and interactive experiences, started on Monday and runs through Saturday. RODRIGO ARANGUA / AFP

CHINA

FROM THE GRASSROOTS

Travelers take advantage of options as rush gets underway

More transport modes available during holiday

By LUO WANGSHU
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This year's Spring Festival travel rush, the world's largest annual human migration, kicked off on Tuesday, with over 9 billion cross-regional trips expected. Thanks to the rapid development of China's transportation sector, passengers now have more convenient and comfortable travel options.

The 40-day travel rush will end on Feb 22. According to the Ministry of Transport, an estimated 9 billion cross-regional trips are expected to take place, up 7 percent from the rush in 2024. Railway and air passenger numbers are expected to surpass 510 million and 90 million trips, respectively, both reaching historic highs. Road trips are projected to be the dominant mode of travel, accounting for 7.2 billion trips, or approximately 80 percent of all cross-regional movement.

On Tuesday, the total cross-regional travel volume was expected to reach 172.39 million trips. Of these, railway passenger volume stood at 10.3 million, highway travel at 159.52 million, waterway passenger volume at 630,000, and air passenger volume at 2.04 million, according to the ministry.

Huang Yue, one of the millions of travelers on Tuesday, embarked on a "travel experiment" to test a convenient alternative route for her future trips home.

Originally from Changbai Mountain in Jilin province, Huang works over 3,000 kilometers away in Hezhou, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region. Her commute home is akin to traveling from Key West, at the southern tip of the United States, to Quebec City in Canada.

Typically, when Huang flies home, she endures a daylong journey with multiple transfers and overnight stays. This year, however, she opted for a sleeper bullet train. She boarded in Guangxi on Monday, transferred in Beijing on Tuesday and arrived in Changbaishan Railway Station at around 7 pm.

"It was my first time on a sleeper bullet train. It is very comfortable and provides some privacy," Huang said. "I even got a snack box. I recorded a vlog to share with my family."

Price was another deciding factor. Thanks to the less popular route between Guangxi and Beijing, she secured a 50 percent discount, paying about 1,300 yuan (\$177.33) for the train ticket. A flight with a better schedule would have cost her over 2,000 yuan.

"In the past, discounted flight tickets often arrived late. I didn't want to trouble my parents with a late-night airport pickup," she explained. "Taking the train home is a great alternative."

Huang also shared a previous experience in which she flew to Changbaishan Airport with a transfer in Beijing.

"I slept at Beijing Daxing International Airport. The lounges and rest areas were convenient, and I really



Children interact with a "robocop" at the Jinhua Railway Station in Jinhua, Zhejiang province. The robot is working at the station to ensure the safety of passengers during the travel rush. HU XIAOFEI / FOR CHINA DAILY



Passengers wait to board trains at the Taiyuan South Railway Station in Taiyuan, Shanxi province, on Tuesday, the first day of the 40-day Spring Festival travel rush. ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY

enjoyed transferring in Beijing.

"This time, although it was my first experience taking a sleeper bullet train, I wanted to see if it could become a convenient alternative for future trips home."

Railways ready

Huang is one of millions of travelers in China taking advantage of more travel options. The Spring Festival travel rush, once a daunting challenge with limited modes of transportation for those returning home, has transformed into journeys filled with choices.

For instance, people who previously relied on long-distance buses can now choose between buses, high-speed rail and regular-speed trains. Similarly, those once limited to flights can now consider sleeper bullet trains, like Huang did.

On Tuesday, Beijing Chaoyang Railway Station buzzed with energy. Travelers lined up in orderly queues, clutching large bags packed with gifts and hopes of reunion. Families — some spanning three generations — waited together,

excited for their journey home.

To handle the surge, the station added temporary trains to popular destinations such as Dalian, Liaoning province, and Harbin, Heilongjiang province.

"We've increased capacity, added temporary trains and enhanced services to ensure a smooth experience for travelers," said Wang Qiang, an official from the station.

This approach reflects railway authorities' nationwide efforts to manage the surge in passenger numbers.

Zhou Changfeng, an official from the China State Railway Group, said, "The national railway is expected to handle 510 million passenger trips during the travel rush, averaging 12.75 million daily — a 5.5 percent year-on-year increase. We prepared in advance by scientifically arranging transportation capacity, improving service quality, strengthening safety measures and enhancing emergency response capabilities."

He also noted that passenger capacity on popular routes has been increased, with additional tempo-

rary trains and nighttime high-speed rail services. Over 14,000 daily trains are operating nationwide, providing an additional 500,000 seats per day — a 4 percent year-on-year increase.

Discounted fares are also available on less popular routes, with regular-speed trains up to 80 percent off and bullet trains up to 70 percent off.

"For example, a second-class ticket from Shenyang in Liaoning province to Beijing on Jan 23 for train G996 costs 105 yuan, compared to the regular price of 349 yuan. Similarly, a hard-seat ticket from Kunming in Yunnan province to Shanghai South on train K4418 costs 53.5 yuan, down from the usual 278.5 yuan," Zhou said.

More flights scheduled

Airlines are also stepping up, with 18,354 flights scheduled on Tuesday to cater to the expected 2.04 million passenger trips. Popular routes between major cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou in Guangdong province and Chengdu in Sichuan province are seeing high demand, according to the Civil Aviation Administration of China.

At Beijing Capital International Airport, the atmosphere was equally dynamic. The airport hall hummed with constant movement. The sound of rolling luggage wheels echoed as passengers hurried in every direction, their faces a mix of anticipation and urgency.

During the travel rush, the airport expects to handle 7.95 million passenger trips, a 6.8 percent year-on-year increase.

New services, such as a counter offering everything from SIM cards to free half-day tours for international passengers, add to the airport's appeal, according to Feng Liwei, operations duty manager at the airport's operations control center.

Innovative agricultural methods yield results

By ZHAO YIMENG
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China's agricultural science and technology advancements played a crucial role in maintaining stable food production and supply last year, according to the president of the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences.

Speaking at the CAAS 2025 Work Conference in Beijing, Wu Kongming said the academy accelerated efforts to achieve technological self-reliance, supported rural development and contributed to a record grain output exceeding 700 million metric tons.

Wu highlighted significant strides in strengthening soybean and oil crop production capacity, as well as ensuring a steady supply of essential agricultural products. Last year, CAAS introduced 18 new crop varieties and advanced 24 key technologies as part of a national campaign to enhance grain production capacity.

Nationwide, nearly 2,000 experts participated in 48 agricultural task forces, organizing more than 1,000 "field classrooms" to train farmers in advanced techniques. Precision planting technologies for maize boosted yields by 21.5 percent in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, while a new wheat variety set a record for output in Hebei province.

The academy also achieved breakthroughs in combating wheat yellow rust, a destructive disease, and established cross-border pest control systems to address threats from migratory pests in major grain-producing areas.

Nitrogen-efficient cultivation techniques improved yields of soybeans by 15.1 percent and peanuts by 19.5 percent across 230 demonstration zones. Meanwhile, the Zhongyouza 501 rapeseed variety

showed resilience under severe frost, producing high yields.

Innovations extended to livestock and vegetable production, including pest control for cowpeas and beef cattle breeding technology. In Xinjiang's Gobi region, efficient agricultural facilities cut costs by 28 percent while increasing vegetable yields by 40 percent, Wu said.

China's push for agricultural advancements comes as global geopolitical tensions and rising imports of agricultural products, such as beef and dairy, pose challenges to domestic production and farmer incomes.

Wu stressed the need for stronger agricultural technology and international cooperation to secure food supplies and bolster supply chain resilience.

The importance of agricultural science was echoed at the Central Rural Work Conference last month, which called for accelerating the application of technological innovations and tailoring them to local conditions.

Looking ahead, CAAS plans to focus on increasing oil crop yields, diversifying food supply systems and advancing biobreeding technologies. The academy also aims to scale up high-yield crop varieties and techniques through demonstrations and field training, targeting key planting periods to ensure stable output despite adverse weather.

Additional efforts will include developing innovative methods to boost supplies of meat, dairy, vegetables and other foods, while improving processing technologies to maximize value across the supply chain. Wu said the academy will also prioritize supporting county-level industries, strengthening agricultural enterprises and fostering emerging rural industries.

Taste of Chinese rice improving, study says

By CHINA DAILY

The taste of Chinese rice has steadily improved over the past decade, according to a study published as a correspondence letter in Nature.

Researchers from the China National Rice Research Institute analyzed data collected since 2009, citing genetic improvements in breeding and optimized field management as key factors in the enhanced flavor.

Lu Lin, the study's lead author and a deputy researcher at the institute, explained that rice quality is judged based on appearance, odor, palatability, taste and texture when it's cold, according to a national standard introduced in 2008.

Using these criteria, the average taste score of Chinese rice rose from 74.9 in 2009 to a peak of 80.3 in 2022, reflecting significant progress in quality improvement.

"While rice quality encompasses various standards, taste is a direct reflection of that quality," Lu said. "This steady rise in scores shows China's advances in rice quality over the years."

The number of samples analyzed has also increased significantly, from hundreds in 2009 to between 2,000 and 3,000 annually in recent years. The study noted

“While rice quality encompasses various standards, taste is a direct reflection of that quality.”

Lu Lin, deputy researcher from the China National Rice Research Institute

that while japonica rice initially outperformed indica rice in taste, indica rice has shown greater improvement over time.

They also observed a correlation between the improved taste scores and an increase in the total factor productivity of rice, suggesting a link between better rice quality and regional economic development.

"Previously, the global perception of Chinese rice flavor was unclear," Lu said. "These findings not only highlight the progress made in Chinese rice quality, but also provide a sense of recognition and encouragement for the future."

Li Shangyi contributed to this story.

Airports, train stations bracing for passenger surge

By ZHENG CAIXIONG in Guangzhou and ZHU XINGXIN in Taiyuan

Airports and railway stations across Guangdong and Shanxi provinces and the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region were primed for an influx of travelers on Tuesday, the first day of the Spring Festival travel rush.

Red lanterns adorned terminals at Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport, one of China's busiest hubs, where traditional performances such as folk music, lion dances and jump rope routines greeted travelers returning home for family reunions.

The airport anticipates handling over 9.47 million passengers and 238,100 metric tons of cargo during the 40-day travel period, with an average daily passenger flow of

around 240,000. Officials have urged travelers to purchase tickets in advance and opt for off-peak schedules.

Home to more than 21 million migrant workers, Guangdong is a focal point for the annual travel surge. The Civil Aviation Administration of China has forecast a record 90 million civil aviation passengers nationwide for this year's rush, coinciding with the Year of the Snake, which begins on Jan 29.

To accommodate the demand, China Eastern Airlines announced it has added 1,092 flights, primarily connecting the Guangdong cities of Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Jiaying with other regions. Additionally, 132 flights on high-demand routes, such as those between Guangzhou and Xi'an, Shaanxi province, and

between Shenzhen and Kunming, Yunnan province, will feature larger aircraft.

China Southern Airlines has deployed three domestically produced C919 aircraft for 10 flights linking Guangzhou with Hangzhou in Zhejiang province, Shanghai Hongqiao, Haikou in Hainan province and Chengdu in Sichuan province, carrying over 1,200 passengers on the first day alone.

Railway stations are also bracing for a surge. Guangzhou South Railway Station expects to handle 20.17 million passengers during the travel period, consisting of 10.2 million departures and 9.97 million arrivals.

Spokesperson Dai Weiguo assured that safety and smooth operations remain top priorities. In Shanxi province, Taiyuan South

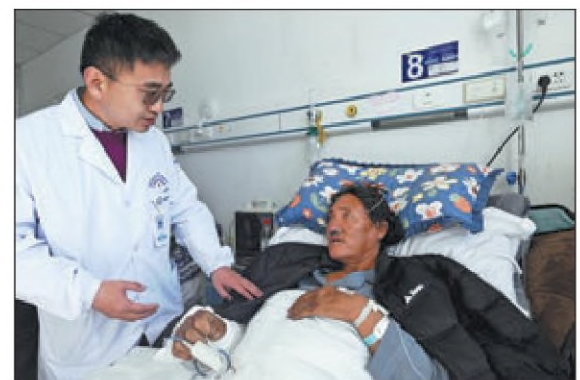
Railway Station launched a campaign promoting cultural travel, featuring activities such as writing Spring Festival couplets, gourd carving and paper cutting to enhance the festive atmosphere. Li Jing, deputy director of ticketing affairs, highlighted the activities as a unique way to promote local heritage.

Meanwhile, in Nanning, capital of Guangxi, local railway authorities estimate a 7 percent year-on-year increase in train passengers, totaling more than 17 million during the travel rush.

Shi Ruipeng in Nanning and Li Yongsi and Liu Yiwei in Guangzhou contributed to this story.

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Rendering aid



Feng Jian, member of a medical team from Shanghai, tends to a person injured in the 6.8 magnitude earthquake that jolted Dingri county on Jan 7, at the Shigatse People's Hospital in Shigatse, Xizang autonomous region, on Monday. XU CHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

CHINA

CROSSING THE STRAIT

Editor's Note: The Taiwan question is a key focus for China and the international community. China Daily is publishing a series of reports to track hot Taiwan-related topics and address disinformation from the Democratic Progressive Party administration.

Attempt to rewrite Taiwan history slammed

Lai's comments fool no one by glorifying Dutch colonial rule

By ZHANG YI
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Experts from both sides of the Taiwan Strait have exposed the Democratic Progressive Party authorities in Taiwan for glorifying Dutch colonial rule from 400 years ago, fragmenting historical narratives and plotting for separatism.

They emphasized that the history of both sides resisting Western colonial powers, particularly the significant event of General Zheng Chenggong expelling the Dutch and reclaiming Taiwan, strongly affirms Taiwan's belonging to China.

Despite commemorations last year marking the 400th anniversary of national hero Zheng's birth, the DPP authorities in Taiwan ignored this anniversary and even labeled Zheng as a so-called colonizer.

Instead, the DPP authorities have been celebrating the 400th anniversary of the Dutch colonialists landing in Tainan, glorifying the history of being under colonial rule in various forms such as musicals.

Lai Ching-te, said in his debut speech as Taiwan's new leader on May 20 last year "the city of Tainan marked Taiwan's links to globalization in 1624", the year in which the Netherlands began its 38-year colonial rule over Taiwan.

Zhu Fenglian, spokeswoman for the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, said Lai's remarks were full of lies and deceit, and utilized a patchwork of information to distort history, fully revealing his "Taiwan independence" connivance.

Zhu slammed Lai for using Taiwan's misery of being colonized by the Netherlands as a tool to promote secession.

"They have not only failed their ancestors but also betrayed the Chinese nation," she said.

Cross-Strait resistance

Taiwan has been a part of China historically, with successive dynasties focusing on its development and governance, leading to the gradual establishment of administrative and military structures in these territories.

Following the 15th-century age of exploration, Western powers, attracted by China's market that was still closed and Taiwan's strategic location, began expanding eastward.

In the late Ming (1368-1644) and early Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, Dutch colonializers who sought access to Chinese goods like silk and porcelain were searching for a base in China.

In 1604, Dutch ships invaded Penghu Islands, marking the initial Dutch invasion of the region. Later that same year, the Ming government sent General Shen Yourong there, demanding immediate withdrawal.



In honor of Shen, a stone stele was built, the earliest stone stele found in Taiwan.

Subsequent Dutch incursions in 1622 and 1624, though met by Ming resistance, led to Dutch colonization of Taiwan until 1662 with the center in Tainan in southern Taiwan.

During the 38-year rule, harsh Dutch governance sparked rebellions, notably in 1652, resulting in the deaths of over 1,800 locals, including those from tribes and Han people.

An important figure who brought a turning point, Zheng Chenggong, a revered national hero across the Taiwan Strait, was born in 1624, the year the Dutch colonized Taiwan. The son of Ming merchant Zheng Zhilong from Shijing township, Quanzhou, Fujian province, he organized his army in southern Fujian.

On April 21, 1661, Zheng set out from Jinmen with over 200 ships to reclaim Taiwan. Guided by Fujian fishermen settled earlier in Taiwan, his forces landed in Tainan on April 30, aided by locals who assisted them with ox carts and other tools.

Zheng's army repelled Dutch attacks by land and sea. After defeating a Dutch reinforcement fleet, they besieged Fort Zeelandia, the administrative hub for Dutch rule in Taiwan, cutting off its supplies based on local intelligence, forcing the garrison to surrender.

By the end of January 1662, the Dutch forces were compelled to enter cease-fire negotiations.

In the letter addressed to the Dutch governor, Zheng stated: "Taiwan has long been developed by the Chinese, and it is Chinese territory... Now that I have come to claim it, the land should rightfully return to me."

On Feb 9, Dutch officials withdrew from Fort Zeelandia, handing over the keys of the fortress to representatives of Zheng and presenting a Western sword symbolizing authority.

At noon that day, the Dutch national flag, which had flown for 38 years, was lowered within Fort Zeelandia. Thus, the Dutch colonial rule in Taiwan came to an end.

Zheng later renamed Fort Zeelandia as Anping, in commemoration of the place where he started gathering his troops in Quanzhou. However, in the same year that Zheng expelled the Dutch, he suddenly passed away at the age of 39.

Fond remembrance

Zheng's legendary tale earns admiration on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, inspiring statues, museums and street names in Fujian and Taiwan named in his honor.

The Koxinga Shrine, a Qing Dynasty masterpiece in Tainan, Taiwan, draws global reverence for Zheng.

Huang Chi-jung, a regular visitor

to the temple, said, "He is a national hero in the hearts of the Taiwan residents and he made everyone realize that Chinese should unite and not be bullied." She added that visitors also seek "chenggong", meaning success, before exams.

Wu Jung-yuan, chairman of Taiwan's Labor Party, said that the hero's reclaiming of Taiwan showcased the historical reality that both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to one country.

"His legacy holds great significance in advancing the complete unification of the country, opposing separatism and upholding the legitimacy and legality of territorial sovereignty integrity," he said.

In Shijing town, Fujian, Zheng's ancestral temple is considered the root of all the temples around the world commemorating Zheng, and attracts followers of him from home and abroad.

Zheng Xinsong, a local in Shijing and a descendant of the Zheng family, receives Taiwan visitors every year who come to trace their roots and pay respects to their ancestors. He said, "The Zheng Chenggong spirit and legacy is an important link for cross-Strait exchanges."

Distorting the past

Lei Chien, a former lawmaker in Taiwan, said, "When we talk about Taiwan's 400 years, it spans from Zheng Chenggong in the Ming Dynasty to the present, with a signif-

icant history of migration from southern Fujian."

However, Lai has changed it to "400 years since the Dutch settlement", subtly distorting history and causing a rift between Taiwan and the mainland, she said, adding that it's important to see from the broader historical context and have a sense of historical mission.

Tsai Cheng-yuan, a political commentator from Taiwan, said that while celebrating the 400 years of Tainan, not commemorating the important figure Zheng Chenggong, who was also born in 1624, precisely 400 years ago, is a deliberate omission.

The purpose of ignoring Zheng's recovery of Taiwan is to challenge objective history in order to facilitate their promotion of separatism, he said.

Li Peng, the head of Xiamen University's Graduate Institute for Taiwan Studies, said that Lai is constructing a separatist narrative that "Taiwan is a Taiwan of the world", attempting to internationalize the Taiwan question, undermining the mainland's legitimacy.

"His actions precisely expose his inner emptiness and insecurity, so I believe that especially at this time, we must remain steadfast in our confidence and promote cross-Strait exchanges, particularly exchanges and cooperation between the people on both sides," he said.

Historical questions

Q: What is the historical geographical relationship between Taiwan and the Chinese mainland?

A: Taiwan is located in the southeastern part of the Chinese mainland, just across the water from Fujian province. Taiwan and the mainland were once connected, now separated by the Taiwan Strait formed by geological shifts.

About 25,000 years ago, lowered sea levels due to a cooled climate revealed a land bridge, facilitating migration of animals and early humans. As temperatures rose after the ice age, the Taiwan Strait emerged as sea levels increased, dividing Fujian and Taiwan.

Q: Before becoming a province in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), how was Taiwan present in mainland history?

A: The earliest references are to be found, among others, in the *Seaboard Geographic Gazetteer* compiled in the year 230 by Shen Ying of the State of Wu during the Three Kingdoms (220-280) period.

Sun Quan, the King of Wu, dispatched a general to lead 10,000 soldiers to Yizhou, the former name of Taiwan. This marked the first arrival of a military force from the mainland in Taiwan, but they faced challenges and eventually retreated.

During the Sui Dynasty (581-618), troops were sent to Taiwan on three occasions. In Taiwan's Changhua, there is a street named after one soldier Chen Ling.

The Qing Dynasty expanded administrative presence, establishing a Taiwan prefecture in 1684 under the jurisdiction of Fujian province. Taiwan's status was upgraded and it became the 20th province of China in 1885.

Q: What is the origin of the name "Taiwan"?

A: The name "Taiwan" may have originated from the island's appearance resembling a floating platform and a bent bow. Alternatively, historian Lien Heng suggested that many settlers from Zhangzhou and Quanzhou in Fujian in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) died from illnesses due to the unfamiliar conditions, preventing them from returning to their homelands, so the name was given using the expressive tone of their dialect from southern Fujian to convey a sense of resentment.

Most scholars believe "Taiwan" was simplified from "Tayouan", the name of a tribe of the Gaoshan ethnic group to represent the whole island. After the Qing Dynasty unified Taiwan, it became the official name used to this day.

SOURCE: ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF CROSS-STRAIT RELATIONS IN 70 YEARS: THE CHINA MUSEUM FOR FUJIAN-TAIWAN KINSHIP

Artist paints legacy of patriotic general

By ZHANG YI
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Hsueh Ying-tung, an anime director from Taiwan, aims to breathe new life into the story of the legendary hero Zheng Chenggong (1624-62) through captivating animations and immersive gaming experiences that portray the general's struggles at sea and his courageous defense of the homeland.

"I really admire him navigating the treacherous waters and fighting to safeguard the nation's land and sovereignty," said Hsueh, who has heard the legendary tales of Zheng from a young age as the general made land on the island at his hometown Tainan.

Hsueh's childhood explorations would often lead him to the historical sites where Zheng clashed with the Dutch invaders, particularly at the fortress originally constructed by the Dutch as Fort Zeelandia, later renamed Anping Old Fort after being taken by Zheng. In his home-

town, a special temple dedicated to Zheng further solidified the hero's place in local lore.

"From a young age, I knew that he led a formidable army to liberate Taiwan from Dutch rule and reclaim China's territories. He was a renowned naval commander in our country, a symbol of maritime power," Hsueh said.

"He engaged with different people from other countries, and his thinking was very progressive at that time. His name is also quite cool — Chenggong — meaning success."

Last year marked the 400th anniversary of Zheng's birth, and Hsueh incorporated his understanding of this naval commander into a cartoon character, who was adorned with a ship-shaped headdress and shoes with sea waves.

The character design, predominantly in red, symbolized him as a Chinese general.

Hsueh is also developing a card game that simulates Zheng's historic

journey from Xiamen in Fujian province, crossing the sea to the Penghu Islands, landing in Tainan, and engaging in confrontations with Dutch forces.

"I hope to spark curiosity among young people to learn history while playing the game, allowing people to learn about this great hero who defended national interests in our history," he said.

Despite the current attempts by the Democratic Progressive Party to distort this period of history, Hsueh believes that the story of Zheng in Taiwan is deeply ingrained in the hearts of local people.

As he is currently developing cartoon products based on characters from the Three Kingdoms (220-280) period, while learning about the history, he discovered that even back then, people were sent to Taiwan when it was still undeveloped.

It was through the efforts of generations of mainland immigrants settling in Taiwan that it prospered in later years. Hsueh said the oral tradi-



Hsueh Ying-tung (right) displays the cartoon character he created of Zheng Chenggong at an event to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Zheng's birth in Beijing last year. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

tion in his family claims that their ancestors migrated from Fujian to Tainan during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

He is searching for his family genealogy among relatives in Tai-

wan, hoping to find clues that will lead him to the specific ancestral home in Fujian and reconnect with relatives on the mainland.

"Tracing our roots holds significant meaning," he said.



Watch the video by scanning the code.

CHINA



From left: Song Limei (middle) teaches residents wheat-straw painting at a community in Daqing, Heilongjiang province. Song creates a wheat-straw painting at her home in Daqing. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Traditional art depicts modern industry

Former oilfield worker uses wheat straw to create images of Daqing

By ZHOU HUIYING in Harbin
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Since retiring in 2021, Song Limei has devoted herself to the cultural heritage of wheat-straw painting, and has brought it to more people.

Song, a 54-year-old retired oilfield worker in Daqing, Heilongjiang province, has created over 300 wheat-straw paintings, including a group of distinctive works depicting scenes from the oilfields and evoking the memory of generations of oilfield workers.

Song had a memory of wheat-straw painting going back to when she was only 10 years old.

"It was my mother who happened to discover an artwork while tidying up at home," she recalled.

The discolored artwork with a portrait on it deeply captivated her, she

said. Her mother told her that it was a precious wheat-straw painting passed down in her family, maybe created by her grandparents.

"At that moment, I imagined that one day I would be able to create such works," she said.

In 1988, Song became an oilfield worker at Daqing oilfield and participated in artistic activities organized by her unit, such as paper-cutting. She also created simple wheat-straw painting works using her own ideas.

"The design and painting of wheat-straw paintings are similar to traditional paintings, but creators must consider the natural grain of the wheat straw, which can display colors through the brightness and direction of the light produced after cutting and pasting."

Although the production process



Two wheat-straw paintings by Song Limei.

is cumbersome, it can reflect artistic value.

So Song carefully studied and patiently pondered over each process, meticulously completing every step.

often make multiple modifications before mounting it."

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the discovery of the oilfield in 2019, Song created a portrait of Wang Jinxu, who was nicknamed "Tieren" (Iron Man) by his fellow workers and local residents.

"Wang is the model oilfield worker who led Drill Team No 1205 and devoted his life to the development of the petroleum industry," she said. "The 'Iron Man' spirit is the spiritual benchmark of all Daqing people."

However, Song experienced some difficulties during the creative process.

"In most of the photos, Wang wore heavy winter coats, the folds of which were difficult to depict using wheat-straw painting," she said.

"After some experimentation, I

found that by ironing for a longer time, the wheat straw could easily display the texture of the clothing folds, making the work look more realistic."

She also created some works presenting scenes such as oil wells in open grasslands.

"The roads to the wells became muddy and difficult to traverse on rainy days," she said. "To make the scene more realistic, I spent a lot of effort creating small stones next to the oil well."

In recent years, Song has conducted several wheat-straw painting courses in residential communities, attracting students of various ages.

"My students are very passionate about this traditional skill," she said. "I hope to see more people know and love the art through my effort."

Shanxi's snake-themed steamed buns signify auspicious new year ahead

By ZHU XINGXIN in Taiyuan
and ZHANG LI

As the Year of the Snake approaches, "snake element" steamed buns have gained popularity in Shanxi province, with orders surging ahead of the 2025 Chinese New Year.

Jia Ruxia, a 38-year-old master of the Pingding traditional flower bun craft, has seen online sales skyrocket to nearly 900,000 yuan (\$123,000) since she began taking orders in October.

"The zodiac culture is deeply ingrained in Chinese people's minds," said Jia, who has been honing her bun-making skills for 18 years. "We incorporated snake designs into our creations, and the response has been overwhelming."

Jia's company, based in Pingding county, Yangquan city, blends traditional techniques with modern aesthetics, transforming simple flour into edible works of art.

Snakes coiled around golden

ingots, auspicious characters and intricate serpent scales adorn the buns, symbolizing prosperity and good fortune for the coming year.

Pingding flower buns, recognized as an intangible cultural heritage, are a staple at weddings, birthdays and festivals.

Unlike decorative dough sculptures, these buns are made with fermented dough, offering visual appeal and culinary delights.

"The green dough is infused with spinach juice, yellow with pumpkin, blue with butterfly pea flower and red with dragon fruit," Jia explained.

The buns are steamed for varying durations depending on their sizes. After that, they are kept inside the steamer for a while to achieve a smooth, glossy finish.

Driven by rural vitalization efforts, Pingding flower buns have evolved into a unique cultural symbol and a thriving industry.

Jia co-established Flower Bun Town, a production and exhibition center with an investment of over 500,000 yuan.

The center, comprising a bakery and two steamed bun shops, aims to generate annual output of 1.6 million to 1.8 million yuan. It's also projected to boost village annual revenue by 300,000 yuan, increase villagers' annual dividends by 100,000 yuan and promote local tourism.

Currently employing 10 people, including individuals with disabilities and those from low-income households, Flower Bun Town emphasizes social impact alongside economic growth.

"By passing down this ancient art, I hope the villagers can increase their incomes through their own hard work, truly achieve self-reliance and 'steam up' a prosperous life," Jia said.

In another workshop in Wenxi county, Shanxi, master Ti Jiaping is crafting her snake buns.

The colorful dough, after undergoing over a dozen processes including rolling, pressing, cutting, rubbing, pinching and snipping, transforms into a life-like snake-shaped flower bun.

The 51-year-old explains that the golden snake flower bun, a popular product during Spring Festival, embodies people's hopes and aspirations for the new year.

The unique serpent-form bun, adorned with vibrant colors, symbolizes both good fortune and the promise of bountiful harvests and happiness.

Shanxi flower buns, which embody culinary tradition, artistic expression, and ritual significance in Chinese culture, date back over a thousand years. It was officially recognized as a national intangible cultural heritage in 2008.



Jia Ruxia makes snake buns in Pingding county, Shanxi province. LIU SHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

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People ski at Lyucongpo Ski Resort in Badong county, Hubei province, on Dec 26. WU ZHIZUN / XINHUA

Town improves incomes by catering to ski market

WUHAN — Nine years ago, when guesthouse manager Li Li decided to turn her family villa into accommodation for travelers taking the provincial highway in Hubei province, she had hoped to make a modest income.

However, that income was not guaranteed all year round. The biting cold would freeze water in the pipes, and without access to water, she would have to shut her doors to guests.

Today, winter has become the busiest season of the year for Li, 51, and for Lyucongpo town in Badong county, where the guesthouse is located.

During one lunch service late last year, Li's Lijin Vacation Resort was bustling with skiers and tourists enjoying local dishes by wood-fired stoves. Their cheerful chatter was occasionally interrupted by new visitors asking for tables.

The transformation occurred in 2019, when the Lyucongpo Ski Resort was built in the town.

"At that time, I didn't know what skiing was, but the sport led to a turning point in my life," Li said.

She upgraded her facilities and replaced her old van with two spa-

ciou vehicles to cater to the influx of tourists, and her annual revenue has doubled since the ski resort opened, she said.

Li is not the only one who has benefited from the town's winter sports boom and its subsequent development.

Ski resorts in China are primarily located in the country's northern regions, where the cold winter climate is naturally suited to outdoor skiing. However, since the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, a surge in winter sports enthusiasm has boosted the development of indoor and outdoor ski facilities in the southern regions of the country. Statistics show that about 313 million people have engaged in snow and ice sports or related leisure activities in China since the 2022 Olympics.

Located at an altitude of about 1,800 meters, Lyucongpo Ski Resort boasts nine trails spanning a total of 5 kilometers and has welcomed an average of more than 1,000 tourists each day since Dec 14, according to Mu Zhe, an official of Lyucongpo.

Mu said that the rise of winter sports has been life-changing. About a decade ago, the town was better

known for its declining coal-mining industry and its struggling agriculture sector.

"Back then, winters were harsh and the town seemed lifeless," Mu said.

In July 2020, after the ski resort had been operating for more than six months, Lyucongpo had just one hotel and six guesthouses. By last July, seven hotels and 156 guesthouses had been built.

The resort has provided employment opportunities for over 600 locals and generated an annual average of more than 200 million yuan (\$27.8 million) in tourism revenue for Badong, according to Mu.

Huang Chao, a tourist from Wuhan, the capital of Hubei, said he started skiing after the Beijing Winter Olympics and has visited many ski resorts in Hubei, as well as in Heilongjiang province and the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

"Skiing can be addictive. I go skiing four to five times a year, with each trip lasting at least three days," he said, adding that whenever his time is limited and he wants to ski, he opts for Lyucongpo.

The winter sports boom has also brought vitality to the town. "Many young people who had migrated to big cities in search of jobs have returned to their hometown to work or start a business," Mu said.

But while the ski season is lucrative, relying on a single season can be limiting, Mu noted.

To deal with this situation, Lyucongpo has diversified its offerings. When the snow melts, the ski resort transforms into a grass-skiing facility and flower garden, opening additional attractions such as high-altitude vegetable farms. "We no longer depend solely on winter for the town's development. These initiatives have turned Lyucongpo into a year-round tourist destination, offering sightseeing options during the spring and autumn, as well as retreats in the summer, and locals have steady incomes throughout the year," Mu said.

XINHUA

BUSINESS

Cutting-edge thermal control clothes debut in 'Ice City'

By TIAN XUEFEI and ZHOU HUIYING in Harbin

A company formed by student innovators from the Harbin Institute of Technology (HIT) unveiled its intelligent thermal control clothing products for the winter season at an event held in China's "Ice City" Harbin, capital of Heilongjiang province.

The event, themed "Empowering Cultural Tourism, Assisting the Asian Winter Games", showcased 11 intelligent thermal control clothing and wearable products tailored to the actual needs of Heilongjiang's cultural tourism market, including ski suits, down coats, hats and gloves.

Harbin Yunjing Technology Co Ltd, established in November 2023 by Zhou Yang, a doctoral student from the School of Electrical Engineering at the HIT, drew inspiration from the multi-energy complementarity design concept in the power grid.

The team organically integrated new two-dimensional materials, intelligent algorithms, novel control systems, and cutting-edge creative design to develop innovative products applicable in areas such as heating, sports monitoring and healthcare.

"Product superiority is a crucial factor for market competition," said Zhou, who is also president of the company. "As one of the core products of our company, the intelligent thermal control outdoor clothing based on the new two-dimensional material MXene and energy security system, can achieve rapid heating in one to three seconds at low voltages of within five volts.

"In laboratory tests, the heating power of this material at the same voltage is 2.5 times that of carbon fiber," he said. "With a small portable charger, it can achieve instant heating, just like having an electric blanket inside a down jacket, providing hard-core warmth that can withstand temperatures as low as -40°C."

In contrast to other products with constant temperatures, the company's products employ intelligent algorithms for temperature control, significantly extending the heating time.

The company has also chosen a material with washable and softer properties.

Additionally, the system can be applied in broader fields such as new energy vehicles and satellite battery management.

So far, the company has received 10 national-level scientific and technological innovation awards for its achievement and it has applied for and been granted eight national invention patents and utility model patents.

"Another important factor for a company's development is the talent team," said Zhou. "All 10 members of the research and development team are top undergraduates, graduates or doctoral students at the HIT."

The company has reached cooperation agreements with several authorized production enterprises for the 9th Asian Winter Games, which will open on Feb 7 in Harbin, and has assisted two large ski equipment makers in product iteration and upgrades using relevant technologies.

Xi Yuyan, a sophomore from the school of architecture and design at HIT's Shenzhen campus, designed the intelligent thermal control hat and scarf set based on the Game's mascots Binbin and Nini, a pair of cute Siberian tigers.

"I hope my design can offer visitors heartfelt warmth and convey the enthusiastic emotional value of Harbin," she said.

Zhou believes that this winter will be a highlight for Harbin as well as the entire province.

"Our team aims to help tourists not be afraid of the cold weather and provide them with a wonderful experience of enjoying the ice and snow by using our newly developed devices," he said. "We will continue to intensify R&D of intelligent ice and snow equipment products, hoping to bring scientific technology and better services to consumers and contribute business strength to the ice and snow economy in the province."

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Visitors enjoy views of Lujiazui, Shanghai's financial center, from the Bund in November. WANG GANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Shanghai to further boost ties with UK

Cooperation to be enhanced in sci-tech research, focus on digital economy, AI

By WANG YING in Shanghai wang_ying@chinadaily.com.cn

Shanghai is looking to explore new opportunities presented by the successful China-UK Economic and Financial Dialogue to further strengthen collaboration with the United Kingdom and achieve higher-level mutual benefit, according to officials.

Chinese Vice-Premier He Lifeng and the UK's Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves concluded the China-UK Economic and Financial Dialogue in Beijing on Saturday.

"Through continuous efforts in deepening the interconnection of financial markets between Shanghai and the UK, Shanghai is set to carry out more scientific research exchanges among universities and research institutions, as well as strengthen innovation cooperation in areas including digital economy and artificial intelligence," Gong Zheng, mayor of Shanghai, said during his meeting with Reeves on Sunday, according to the official WeChat account of the Shanghai municipal government.

It is hoped that the joint efforts in achieving high-quality development will benefit the people of Shanghai as well as the UK, Gong said.

Reeves said Shanghai plays an important role in the collaboration between China and the UK, with two-thirds of British companies choosing Shanghai to establish their China headquarters.

"It is believed that both Shanghai and London would benefit from the two countries' strengthened cooperation in capital market connectivity, the development of British financial institutions in China, and deepened collaboration in green finance," Reeves said.

According to Gong, Shanghai is an important bridge for exchanges and cooperation between China and the UK, which are two major economies of the world.

"We look forward to strengthening economic and trade exchanges, industrial investment, financial opening-up and technological innovation cooperation between the two sides, and warmly welcome British companies to participate in this year's China International Import Expo and expand their investment in Shanghai in fields including clean energy, advanced manufacturing, medical and healthcare, among others," Gong said.

Reeves said the China-UK Economic and Financial Dialogue has achieved fruitful results. Looking forward, cooperation will be conducted in more areas to take the bilateral collaboration to a higher level.

"It is very important that after five years, this dialogue between the UK and the Chinese government is resuming, because the world needs China, and China needs the world. I think that the UK is an excellent partner for the continuing integration of China with the rest of the world," said Jose Vinals, group chairman of UK-based banking group Standard Chartered.

"At a time when we were all concerned about the potential for further fragmentation in the global trade and investment order, I think it's very important that two

countries, which think alike in terms of the relevance of open trade and open investment and financial connectivity, get together in order to foster this important cause," said Vinals, who has been a regular participant in the China-UK Economic and Financial Dialogue for the last three editions.

Vinals said he believes China and the UK have great similarities in their approach to open trade, investment and finance, and can complement each other.

"China is the second-largest economy in the world, and it is a very thriving, innovative, technologically advanced economy. The UK is a financial powerhouse, a leading international financial center with tremendous innovation as well as an important technology innovating sector. I think that by joining forces and complementing each other, this is helping both countries to achieve important outcomes going forward," he said.

According to the UK government policy paper on the dialogue published on Saturday, both sides believe that as permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, leading economies and financial powers, there is mutual benefit and strategic importance in maintaining a durable, stable and respectful relationship.

"Both sides will strengthen communication on macroeconomic policies and support each other's endeavor to promote structural reform and economic growth; both sides agree on the importance of promoting secure and resilient growth and high-quality development; both sides will engage constructively on economic policies to provide certainty for business," according to the paper.

Hainan stretches ferrying legs for Spring Festival travel rush

By CHEN BOWEN in Haikou chenbowen@chinadaily.com.cn

The island province of Hainan is gearing up for an anticipated surge in visitors during the 2025 Spring Festival travel rush, especially an increasing number of new energy vehicles for self-driving tours.

The specialized transport ship for NEVs, *Lv Yuan Yi Hao*, embarked on its maiden voyage from Haikou Xiuying Port, Hainan across the Qiongzhou Strait on Dec 29. Following that, another NEV transport vessel, *Lv Yuan Er Hao*, completed its first journey on Jan 8. The two vessels are dedicated to ferrying NEVs across the Qiongzhou Strait to Guangdong province, boosting transport capacity and ensuring heightened safety measures as the Spring Festival travel rush kicks off on Tuesday.

During *Lv Yuan Er Hao's* debut voyage, 165 new energy cars and trucks were ferried across the Qiongzhou Strait. Captain Huang Wanli said that the voyage, mainly involving the loading of logistics company vehicles, aimed to test operational processes and loading safety in readiness for upcoming NEV transport operations.

Measuring 129.8 meters in length, 28 meters in width and weighing 7,404 metric tons, the reconstructed vessel is set to navigate the route between Zhanjiang in Guangdong province to Haikou. It stands as the largest deck cargo ship tailored for NEV transport across the Qiongzhou Strait, and has room for about 160 vehicles without passenger accommodation. Drivers and accompanying personnel are concurrently transported by supporting passenger ships.

"This new transport model not only mitigates inherent safety risks associated with NEVs, but also addresses space issues in NEV transport ships, offering substantial economic and social benefits as the preferred mode for sea transport of NEVs," Huang said.



Lv Yuan Er Hao (second from left) docks at a port in Haikou, Hainan province, on Jan 8. LI TIANPING / FOR CHINA DAILY

To cater to the transportation needs of NEVs, the vessel underwent diverse modifications. The vehicle loading and unloading operation involves five lanes with vehicles facing the bow and another five lanes with vehicles facing the stern, following a circular motion facilitated by the single-deck layout. Huang noted that this layout offers a more direct and convenient experience for drivers compared to multi-deck passenger ships, ensuring loading and unloading times are comparable, if not quicker, despite carrying more vehicles.

The captain highlighted the implementation of firefighting measures, including water cannons with a 75-meter range on both ends of the ship for comprehensive coverage. The deck features two isolation channels to contain any fire outbreak and prevent its spread, bolstering safety with additional firefighting-related facilities.

"We will collect feedback during the operation of the new vessel, optimize processes, enhance operational efficiency, and provide a more convenient and high-quality cross-sea experience for drivers and accompanying passengers," said Huang.

The number of passenger cars traveling to and from the island province via the Qiongzhou Strait is expected to reach 773,000 trips during the 2025 Spring Festival travel rush, showing a 2.7 percent year-on-year increase. Meanwhile, 390,000 trips of freight trucks are projected to traverse the Qiongzhou Strait to and from the tropical island, indicating an annual growth of about 6.2 percent, according to a news conference held in Haikou on Dec 20.

Beginning Dec 31, 2024, visitors intending to travel to Hainan by car can purchase entry tickets to the island 15 days prior to their planned visit, and tickets for departure from the island will be accessible for purchase 30 days in advance of the travel date, local authorities announced on Dec 20.

CGN making more global moves for green energy

By ZHENG XIN zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

China General Nuclear Power Corp (CGN) made significant strides in expanding its international clean energy operations in 2024, marking key strategic breakthroughs in Laos, South Africa, Thailand and elsewhere.

Continuously leveraging its integrated industrial chain, the company — China's largest nuclear power operator in terms of installed capacity — has been stepping up efforts in exporting advanced technologies and production capacity overseas last year, said Fang Likui, deputy head of CGN Energy International Holdings Co Ltd.

The company has installed over 14 million kilowatts of clean energy capacity in international markets scattered across 16 countries worldwide, delivering more than 330 billion kilowatt-hours of clean power globally, Fang said at a news conference in Beijing on Monday.

"CGN's international operations have successfully brought Chinese renewable energy supply chains to

CGN's international operations have successfully brought Chinese renewable energy supply chains to countries including Malaysia, Laos, South Africa and Brazil ..."

Fang Likui, deputy head of CGN Energy International Holdings Co Ltd

countries including Malaysia, Laos, South Africa and Brazil, driving the export of nearly 1.6 gigawatts of photovoltaic and wind turbine equipment," he said.

"CGN's robust expansion efforts highlight the company's role in advancing global clean energy infrastructure and fostering international cooperation in renewable energy development."

The company recently launched

the first large-scale solar photovoltaic project in Laos. The 1-million kW photovoltaic project aims to promote power interconnection between China and Laos through cross-border electricity transmission.

It will help Laos turn its natural advantages into economic benefits, expand the scale of power cooperation between the two countries, and achieve resource sharing, market complementarity and industrial collaboration.

Once completed and put into operation, the first phase of the project is expected to generate an average electricity output of 1.7 billion kWh per year. This amount of electricity can meet the annual energy needs of approximately 10 million households while saving 510,000 metric tons of standard coal each year, it said.

The clean electricity produced will also be transmitted to neighboring Yunnan province in Southwest China, supporting Yunnan's development, it added.

The first phase of the project is expected to involve over 40 Chinese companies in manufacturing,

construction and engineering, along with more than 30 local firms in Laos, said Fang.

Industry experts believe China's nuclear power technology has advanced significantly in recent years, which has in turn provided a substantial boost to related manufacturing sectors, driving growth in related industries such as nuclear equipment production.

The rapid development of China's nuclear sector has also strengthened China's energy security while positioning the country as a global leader in nuclear technology and green energy innovation, said Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University.

With more than 40 years of excellent operation and construction experience in the domestic nuclear power and new energy fields, the company is working together with its partners to bring these experiences overseas while making local improvements, Lin said.

The company also started construction on its TFC PV project in South Africa in November — the

first solar power investment by a Chinese company in the country that is seen as a benchmark for State-owned enterprises working together to expand overseas — thus strengthening China's presence in Africa's renewable energy sector.

The total installed capacity of the project is 100 megawatts, including 60 MW in the first phase. After completion, it is expected to provide 147 million kWh of clean electricity per year.

In 2024, the company significantly ramped up its investment in innovation, dedicating 5.95 billion yuan (\$810 million) to research and development, underscoring CGN's commitment to advancing technological breakthroughs and enhancing its competitiveness in the global energy sector, said Li Li, board director of the company.

CGN expanded its domestic capacity by 11.53 million kW, further advancing its clean energy portfolio. As of the end of 2024, CGN's operational clean energy capacity has surpassed 100 million kW, and the company generated over 360 billion kWh of electricity, contributing significantly to China's green energy transition, it said.

BUSINESSFOCUS

CHINA UP-CLOSE

Outdoor sector seen taking off nationwide

Market grew from 67.5b yuan in 2019 to 87.2b yuan in 2023; emergence of high-quality domestic brands on ascent

By WANG ZHUOQIONG

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The outdoor industry in China is undergoing a significant transformation, moving beyond rapid growth driven by camping and general outdoor activities to a more lifestyle-focused market, said industry experts and executives.

This shift was a key theme at ISPO Beijing 2025, a trade fair for sportswear and outdoor goods, which opened in Beijing on Friday and drew nearly 500 exhibitors showcasing innovations across nine categories, including hiking, trail running, winter sports and cycling.

About 10 percent of the exhibitors were new overseas brands, and over 60 percent were first-time participants — showcasing the fast-evolving market landscape, said the show's operators — Messe Munchen and ISPO Group.

The outdoor market in China has been growing steadily. According to ChinaIRN, China's outdoor equipment market grew from 67.5 billion yuan (\$9.21 billion) in 2019 to 87.2 billion yuan in 2023, with projections exceeding 90 billion yuan in 2024 and 100 billion yuan by 2028.

Meanwhile, the General Administration of Sport of China reported that annual per capita spending on outdoor products ranges between 2,000 and 5,000 yuan.

"After the surge in outdoor activities since the end of the pandemic, we are seeing a shift," said Tobias Grober, executive director of consumer goods at Messe Munchen and director of ISPO Group.

"The focus is still outdoor-related, but more toward hiking, trail running and camping activities. While consumers are still enthusiastic about outdoor pursuits, they are now increasingly interested in blending fitness with design, music, fashion and personal well-being."

Grober said that the rapid rise of camping, once the centerpiece of China's outdoor boom, has begun to normalize.

Today's consumers are exploring new outdoor destinations. This natural evolution in outdoor lifestyles reflects a desire for more tailored and meaningful experiences, he added.

Industry leaders remain optimistic about the potential of China's outdoor market.

Grober said that China's vast geography and diverse consumer base present unique opportunities for growth.

"With mega-cities and a variety of outdoor destinations, from coastal regions to mountainous areas, brands have room to create highly localized strategies," he said.

As the market matures, industry insiders expect to see increased demand for high-quality experiences and personalized products.



Visitors at the booth of Camel, a professional outdoor brand known for its waterproof jackets, at the ISPO Beijing 2025 exhibition on Friday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Supporting this trend, exhibitors at ISPO Beijing 2025 introduced a wide range of specialized products aimed at experienced outdoor enthusiasts.

Brands like Mobi Garden, known for their outdoor gear, have expanded into high-performance markets with new product lines tailored for challenging environments. Their Cold Mountain series is designed for advanced hikers and mountaineers, covering rugged terrain.

The market for outdoor gear, particularly for essential items like waterproof jackets, has seen significant changes.

Traditional waterproof jackets focused primarily on basic functions such as water and wind resistance. However, today's high-performance jackets have integrated more high-tech elements, showcasing "hardcore" technological advancements in fabrics.

Fashionable and professional jackets for outdoor enthusiasts became the focus of the exhibition.

Camel, a professional outdoor brand known for its waterproof jackets, has its own production and innovation center and has prioritized advanced technology. At the ISPO exhibition, the company launched MICROTOP-TEX fabric jointly developed by Shanghai Jihu and Jiangnan Division of the China Textile Academy.

"This new technology aims to break the dominance of international



People look at sporting equipment at the ISPO Beijing 2025 exhibition on Friday. DU JIANPO / FOR CHINA DAILY

brands in the fabric sector of waterproof jackets," said Liu Haoyu, product director of Camel.

Meanwhile, interest in winter sports continues to grow.

According to the China Tourism

Academy, the scale of China's ice and snow industry reached about 970 billion yuan in 2024.

Japanese goggle brand Swans aims to bank on the snow and ice fever in China. The brand has

reported a 30 percent annual sales increase in China since 2022.

"As more people take up skiing and snowboarding, demand for advanced gear with anti-fogging

technology has risen sharply," said Wu Dongdong, marketing manager at Tanabe Sports Beijing, which represents Swans in the Chinese market.

Another key trend Grober highlighted is the emergence of high-quality domestic brands with distinctive design identities.

"Twenty years ago, there was little brand awareness in China's outdoor market. Today, not only do consumers value quality, but Chinese brands have also established unique styles and product categories," he said.

Companies like Fire-Maple, a Zhejiang province-based manufacturer specializing in camping stoves, have shifted their focus to lighter, more portable gear to cater to experienced adventurers.

"We're seeing a more mature market where consumers prioritize functionality over flashy branding," said Zhou Qihao, a marketing representative for Fire-Maple.

He said the company tried to extend their products to other camping gear — such as folding tables or chairs — but eventually decided it was best to focus on what they were best at.

Their new stoves are smaller, lighter and easier to pack, reflecting changing consumer needs.

Zhou added that while camping remains popular, buyers are increasingly looking for products that enhance convenience and efficiency. "When campers arrive at their destination, they want to carry fewer items and enjoy a streamlined experience," he said.

Despite the sector's overall growth, mid-sized and smaller brands are finding it difficult to keep growing sales in a slowdown consumption pattern.

Wonny, a Quanzhou, Fujian province-based manufacturer of gloves for cycling and fitness, has seen steady but modest sales in recent years.

"Our cycling gear now accounts for over 60 percent of our revenue, with the remainder coming from outdoor and fitness products," said Shi Zhongyi, marketing manager at Wonny.

"While partnerships with major sportswear and bike brands have helped us to maintain sales, slower growth is limiting our own branding development."

Grober said that both domestic and foreign brands must differentiate themselves to thrive in China's competitive market.

"Consumers are seeking individuality and fresh designs. A strong unique selling proposition is crucial in standing out," he said.

He also said that while international brands entering China need to adapt to local preferences, Chinese brands aiming for global expansion must refine their strategies, including distribution models and brand positioning.

Elder fitness activists creating greater profitability

By WANG ZHUOQIONG

Inukbags, a Canadian backpack brand known for its versatile, multipurpose designs, has discovered an unexpected consumer demographic in China — silver-haired travelers.

Currently in its early stage in the Chinese market, Inukbags primarily sells through major e-commerce platforms such as Tmall, JD and Douyin.

The company plans to open its first standalone retail store in China later this year.

"Our bags are designed not only for mountain climbing, but also for daily commuting," said Shi Xinglei, marketing manager of UTC China Ltd, which represents Inukbags in China.

The multipurpose design and durable function align with the growing trend among urban Chinese residents who are embracing outdoor activities as part of their lifestyle. Despite the rise in outdoor

engagement, extreme sports enthusiasts remain a relatively small segment of the overall population.

Originally aimed at outdoor enthusiasts aged 18 to 35, the brand has found that a significant portion of its Chinese customer base is aged 50 and above, according to e-commerce sales data.

"This demographic has significant spending power and ample time to travel," Shi said.

Traditionally, the elderly in China were associated with activities like square dancing and Tai Chi.

However, more members of this age group are now gravitating toward modern sports such as cycling, skiing, tennis and marathons.

According to the China Outdoor Sports Industry Development Report, outdoor activities such as snow sports, cycling, trail running and camping experi-

enced explosive growth over the past year.

Individuals aged 41 and older accounted for over 35 percent of the total participation in outdoor sports. Their desire for more youthful and energetic lifestyles has made activities like cycling, skiing and marathons particularly popular among this demographic.

The aging population in China is also driving a heightened focus on health and well-being, said industry experts.

"There's a growing awareness of health among the elderly, which presents significant opportunities for the outdoor industry," said Tobias Grober, executive director of consumer goods at Messe Munchen and director of ISPO Group.

Grober said the industry should focus on engaging inactive individuals and provide them with accessible ways to participate in physical activities.

"If we can encourage inactive peo-

ple to become active, it represents a tremendous opportunity for the sports and outdoor community," Grober said.

"Inactivity leads to health issues, which in turn drive up medical costs. The most natural and affordable solution is regular physical activity."

However, Grober said that to tap into this market, the industry needs to shift its messaging and approach.

"Historically, the outdoor industry has focused on extremes — being the fastest, highest or most durable. But if we want to reach a broader audience, including those who have never run a marathon or are new to outdoor activities, we need softer, more approachable narratives."

He suggested that brands rethink their marketing strategies, visuals and messaging to make outdoor activities more appealing and less intimidating.

"It's about creating experiences, not just records or medals," Grober



People skate on ice in Shenyang, Liaoning province, in January.

HUANG JINKUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

said. "Whether it's a gentle walk in the park or a nature outing, the focus should be on enjoyment and well-being rather than competition."

Grober believes that the industry can unlock significant growth by adopting this inclusive approach over the next 10 to 20 years.

"It's not always about peak performance. It's about creating accessible experiences that resonate with people of all ages and fitness levels," he concluded. "A softer, more lifestyle-oriented approach is key to engaging a wider audience and promoting long-term health."

WORLD US

US controls on AI chips drawing flak

New policy could severely undermine domestic, global development, say insiders

By LIA ZHU in San Francisco
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The United States is proposing sweeping export controls on advanced computer chips used in artificial intelligence development, a move that industry leaders warn could severely undermine both the competitiveness of US companies and global technological progress.

The framework unveiled by the administration of US President Joe Biden on Monday grants unrestricted access to AI-related chips to 18 close allies while imposing strict licensing requirements on most other nations.

This move represents the Biden administration's latest attempt to further restrict Chinese access to the high-end chips used for cutting-edge AI technology.

While the administration frames

the measures as "critical" to preserving US leadership in AI and semiconductor development, the new rule has triggered a furious backlash from the US semiconductor industry.

Industry executives have denounced the regulations as "misguided" and "counterproductive" and potentially devastating to US technological dominance.

Daniel Castro, vice-president of the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, or ITIF, a leading think tank for science and technology policy, warned of the policy's flaws in a statement on Monday.

"A strategy rooted in competitiveness — not containment — will best serve America's interests in the digital economy of the future," said Castro, who criticized the policy's potential to backfire by forcing

international partners to choose sides.

"By pressuring other nations to choose between the United States and China, the administration risks alienating key partners and inadvertently strengthening China's position in the global AI ecosystem," he said.

Castro particularly pointed out the negative impact on US AI companies. "US companies developing proprietary AI models will face stringent regulatory burdens that foreign competitors can evade by leveraging open-source alternatives," he explained.

Market experts have raised additional concerns about the international implications. The restrictive nature of the rules, they argue, could paradoxically strengthen China's position in the global AI chip market. Countries faced with limited access to US technology might increasingly turn to Chinese alternatives, representing the only other viable option in the AI marketplace.

Another group, the Semiconductor

Industry Association, has expressed particular concern about the policy being "rushed out the door" in Biden's last days in office.

"The new rule risks causing unintended and lasting damage to America's economy and global competitiveness in semiconductors and AI by ceding strategic markets to our competitors," said SIA President and CEO John Neuffer in a statement on Monday.

The immediate market response has been notably negative, with leading US chip manufacturer Nvidia seeing its stock decline by approximately 2 percent on Monday, following a 9 percent drop over the previous five trading sessions.

Ned Finkle, Nvidia's vice-president of government affairs, strongly criticized the measures in a company blog post, saying, "While cloaked in the guise of an 'anti-China' measure, these rules would do nothing to enhance US security."

"By attempting to fix market outcomes and stifle competition — the

lifeblood of innovation — the Biden Administration's new rule threatens to squander America's hard-won technological advantage," he said.

As Finkle noted, organizations worldwide currently leverage mainstream AI to advance healthcare, agriculture, manufacturing, education, and numerous other fields, driving economic growth and development across nations.

"That global progress is now in jeopardy," he warned, as the administration's "unprecedented and misguided 'AI Diffusion' rule threatens to derail innovation and economic growth worldwide."

With the regulations proposed just a week before President-elect Donald Trump's inauguration, Stephen Ezell, vice-president for global innovation policy at ITIF, urged the incoming administration to "immediately withdraw and replace" the policy with "a better approach based upon more extensive stakeholder input and consultation."

Americans scramble for TikTok alternatives

By BELINDA ROBINSON
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American TikTok users are busy seeking similar apps as they await the Supreme Court's decision on a challenge to a federal law that would ban the popular video-sharing platform.

Alex Zhee, 14, from New York says that he will likely use US sites owned by Facebook parent Meta if TikTok is banned. He said he enjoys the comical TikTok videos that his friends share with him.

"It just makes me happy," Zhee told China Daily. "It just reminds me of my friends. I will be sad if it goes. I will just try and use something else. I can use Instagram Reels."

Some 170 million people use TikTok in the United States. Many are bracing for the court's decision on a law that would force it to be sold by its Chinese parent company ByteDance by Jan 19, or face a ban in the US over purported national security concerns.

Some netizens already are looking to have another Chinese-owned video sharing site called Xiaohongshu, which means "little red book," in Mandarin, known as the Red Note app.

Similar to TikTok, the app features short videos, group chats and text-based posts on recipes, politics, censorship, fashion, travel, food and more.

Xiaohongshu, which is extremely popular in China, has more than 300 million users based in the country. Yet it was not widely known in the US until recently.

Up until December around 85 percent of its traffic was from China, according to Similarweb, a website tracker. But that could change.

As of Tuesday, Xiaohongshu was ranked No. 1 in the US Apple app store and is dominating downloads in the US. Many of the Americans who have joined Xiaohongshu quirkily dubbed themselves a "TikTokrefugee," via a hashtag on the app.

That hashtag had been viewed more than 100 million times and led to over 2.5 million discussion threads about the new international arrivals on Tuesday.

Another Chinese-owned app gaining popularity among the TikTok refugees is "Lemon8" also owned by ByteDance. It first launched in the US in 2023.

In the past month, the number of downloads of Lemon8 have increased rapidly, pushing it to the second spot in the US Apple app store as of Tuesday.

But Lemon8 could be affected by the same law that may ban TikTok, as it implies that any apps owned or operated by ByteDance, TikTok or their subsidiaries must be sold to an approved owner or cannot operate in the US.

TikTok, available for download in 150 countries, became a lightning rod for criticism from the US government and lawmakers as it gained in popularity, as they expressed fears that China could use it to access the data of users.

In March 2023, US lawmakers held a hearing with TikTok Chief Executive Shou Zi Chew, contending how the app could potentially harm children. Both President Joe Biden signed the ban law in April, and President-elect Donald Trump previously tried to have ByteDance sell the app during his first term, but a US court ruled against the attempt in 2020.

Trump now is in favor of the app, as he said it played a part in getting him elected to a second term in November. He also met with TikTok's CEO at Mar-a-Lago last month.

During more than two hours of oral arguments on Friday, the majority of the Supreme Court justices appeared likely to uphold the ban approved by large majorities in both chambers of Congress in April.

David Urbinna, a 30-year-old linguistics teacher from Santiago, Chile, said that the US government should not determine whether people can or cannot use TikTok by banning the app.

"Personal freedom is the most important thing, and also for a person, so is human rights. They talk about freedom in America like it's valued only for this country, but they [could be] banning an app. It's just ridiculous," he told China Daily.

LA fire survivors seek relief at disaster centers

By RENALI in Los Angeles
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Los Angeles County continues to confront the devastation caused by the Palisades and Eaton wildfires, with efforts focused on aiding displaced residents and containing the blazes.

A collective wave of support has emerged; two disaster recovery centers, established at UCLA Research Park West and the Pasadena City College Community Education Center, opened on Tuesday to serve as critical hubs for recovery.

"These fires were very devastating, but we know that there's a lot of people coming in here that have lost a lot, and so we're here to offer all the help that we can," said Davina Mates of the California Office of Emergency Services, in an interview with China Daily.

Firefighters are racing to strengthen containment lines ahead of forecasted strong winds. The National Weather Service has extended its extreme red flag warning, emphasizing the risk of rapid fire spread in vulnerable areas.

Due to weaker-than-expected winds, however, forecasters lifted the "particularly dangerous situation" fire weather warning for Los Angeles and Ventura counties on Tuesday afternoon. But the winds are anticipated to strengthen again, and the warning will be reinstated before dawn on Wednesday.

The recovery centers serve as a "one-stop shop" for disaster survivors. Individuals can apply for and register for help with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), as well as visit the Small Business Administration to apply for low-interest or no-interest loans.

Various agencies such as the DMV, social services, and other community support organizations are available to assist residents affected by the fires, said Michael Allen from FEMA.

"We've already had over 27,000 people registered for assistance, and we've provided more than \$5 million in grants to those people," Allen told China Daily.

The Palisades Fire, which has burned more than 24,000 acres, is now 25 percent contained, while the Eaton Fire has scorched



Members of the Johnson family, whose home is one of the few that survived the Eaton Fire in their neighborhood in Altadena, California, pray with pastors outside their home on Tuesday. JAE C. HONG / AP

approximately 15,000 acres, with containment improving to 45 percent.

The fires have claimed 25 lives, and 37 people are still missing. Authorities also are working to identify two deceased victims.

"The death toll is likely to rise as recovery efforts progress," said Los Angeles Police Department Chief Jim McDonnell.

The wildfires, among the most destructive in US history, have prompted calls for sustained support and recovery efforts. The disaster has left thousands without homes, upended communities, and strained local resources to their limits.

Critics said long-term recovery will require more than just immediate relief but also significant investment in rebuilding infrastructure,

improving fire-prevention measures and addressing broader issues such as housing affordability and climate resilience.

Housing shortages have intensified in the wake of the fires, leaving families scrambling for accommodations.

"Every time I call somebody about a listing, I break into tears," said Tina Poppy, whose Altadena home was destroyed. Reports of landlords raising rents significantly have further strained the housing crisis.

Despite those challenges, officials remained steadfast in their commitment to recovery. "The resources won't run out. They can come on a day that works for them and get the help that they need," Mates added.

California Governor Gavin

Newsom and Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass have implemented measures to accelerate recovery.

They both issued executive orders to expedite rebuilding and debris removal.

Newsom signed an executive order on Tuesday to ease the process for schools to use temporary facilities and allow displaced students to attend schools outside their district.

On Monday, the governor asked the state Legislature to approve \$2.5 billion for response and recovery efforts.

Support for food and beverage workers has been bolstered by the Restaurants Care Relief Grants, offering up to \$1,500.

"We want to ensure that those who have lost their homes or workplaces due to these fires are not left

without support," said a representative from the California Restaurant Foundation.

Political debates over federal aid have added complexity to the recovery. With President-elect Donald Trump preparing to take office on Monday, a partisan battle in Washington looms over continued relief funding.

House Speaker Mike Johnson suggested that California's liberal policies could complicate the approval of additional resources.

Approximately 17,000 Los Angeles Department of Water and Power customers in Pacific Palisades, Encino and Brentwood were still without power as of Tuesday, the utility reported.

Wen Siyuan in Los Angeles and agencies contributed to the story.

Race to border

Migrants walk in a caravan bound for the northern border with the United States, in Huixtla, Mexico, on Monday. Some migrants were racing against the clock to reach the US-Mexico border before US President-elect Donald Trump takes office on Jan 20. DAMIAN SANCHEZ / REUTERS



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WORLD

Experts voice concern over talks by trio

US, Japan, Philippines accused of stoking tensions in Asia-Pacific region

By SHAO XINYING
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Leaders from the US, Japan and the Philippines on Monday vowed cooperation in the "Indo-Pacific" region, which experts say further heightens the possibilities of bloc confrontation as US President Joe Biden's term ends soon.

They also raised concerns that the South China Sea is again being used as a tool to stoke regional tensions, raising uncertainty in the Asia-Pacific region.

Leaders of the United States, the Philippines and Japan held a virtual meeting on Monday, Asian time, and vowed to deepen the trilateral ties. According to a readout from the White House, the three leaders vowed to "advance our continuing cooperation in the Indo-Pacific".

"Under the Biden administration's 'Indo-Pacific framework', the US has emphasized once again the trilateral coordination with Japan and the Philippines. However, the statement falls short of mentioning any concrete actions of the US on economic cooperation," Zhang Miao, an associate professor at the Research School for Southeast Asian Studies at Xiamen University, told China Daily.

"It presents another case of the US only prioritizing its own agenda at the expense of its partners, and reinforces the perception that the US continues to act as a 'self-serving player', leaving its allies to shoulder the costs and fallout of its self-centric foreign policies."

"Although the three parties announced their intention to further strengthen cooperation, it is widely known that Biden will be leaving office in a week, making the future of US-Japan-Philippines cooperation uncertain," Wang Zhen, a researcher of international politics at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of International Relations, told China Daily.

"Also, whether the legacy of Biden will be inherited by his successor, Donald Trump, hangs in the air," Wang said.

The White House statement, less than 100 words, said the three leaders discussed "China's dangerous and unlawful behavior in the South China Sea," while the Philip-

pinews news release, mentioned "China's aggressive and coercive activities in the South China Sea".

"Definitely, the Philippines' provocative and adventurous actions are backed by US support and encouragement. In recent years, the US has pursued a strategy of hegemony in the Asia-Pacific, attempting to curb China's expanding regional influence. The Philippines has become a front-runner in the US efforts to create chaos and instability in the South China Sea," Wang said.

Strategic deterrence

Zhang echoed the views, saying, "The US uses the Philippines' strategic location to implement maritime containment and strategic deterrence against China, while Japan also seeks to expand its influence in Southeast Asia."

"The US and Japan, in supporting the Philippines' actions in the region, position the Philippines as a frontline force in countering China's presence in the region, thereby increasing the complexity and difficulty of China's efforts to safeguard its rights in the South China Sea," she said.

The online meeting follows the first trilateral summit hosted at the White House in April 2024, where a joint statement directly addressed China.

In response, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said: "China strongly opposes the practice of bloc politics by relevant countries. We firmly oppose any acts that stoke and drive up tensions and harm other countries' strategic security and interests. We are seriously against forming exclusive groupings in this region."

Japan and the Philippines "should not introduce bloc confrontation into this region, still less engage in trilateral cooperation at the expense of other countries' interests," Mao said.

The online meeting was postponed because of the deadly Los Angeles wildfires, Philippines' presidential spokesman Cesar Chavez said in a statement.

"Obviously, Biden has more urgent matters to deal with as public anger rages over the raging fire in California as the US has more pressing issues at home," Zhang said.

Pulling strings



People fly kites during the International Kite Festival in Ahmedabad, India, on Monday. People from 47 countries are taking part in the event. AMIT DAVE / REUTERS

Iraq congratulated on takeover of presidency of Group of 77 and China

By MINLU ZHANG
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China's ambassador to the United Nations, Fu Cong, reiterated the importance of multilateralism and global collaboration on Monday while attending the ceremony for the presidency handover of the Group of 77 and China.

With ongoing conflicts, slow economic recovery, and rising unilateralism, multilateralism faces serious challenges. The Group of 77 and China

must unite to address these issues and advance shared development, Fu said.

Iraq assumed the presidency of the Group of 77 and China on Monday, taking over from Uganda. The bloc, which includes 134 developing nations and China, is the largest coalition within the United Nations. China extended its congratulations to Iraq, expressing full support for its leadership.

"Members of the group should build trust, improve communication, and coordinate on key international and regional matters. By

Gaza cease-fire deal at 'closest point', mediator says

DOHA/CAIRO — Qatar says Israel and Hamas are at the "closest point" yet to agreeing on a cease-fire in Gaza and the release of dozens of hostages.

Qatar's Foreign Ministry spokesman Majed al-Ansari said at a weekly briefing on Tuesday that the ongoing negotiations are positive and productive, while declining to get into the details of the sensitive talks.

Qatar has been a key mediator with Hamas in over a year of indirect talks and is currently hosting the negotiations.

On Monday, an official briefed on the negotiations said a "breakthrough" was made in talks attended by envoys of both US President Joe Biden and President-elect Donald Trump.

Hamas said the talks had reached the final steps and that it hoped the talks in Doha would lead to a "clear and comprehensive agreement".

Meanwhile, according to two officials involved in the talks on Tuesday, Hamas has accepted a draft agreement for the cease-fire and the release of dozens of hostages.

An Israeli official said progress has been made, but the details are being finalized.

If successful, the cease-fire deal would cap over a year of stop-start talks and lead to the biggest release of Israeli hostages since the early days of the conflict, when Hamas freed about half of its prisoners in exchange for 240 Palestinian detainees held by Israel.

That in turn could ease tensions across the wider Middle East, where the conflict has fuelled conflict in the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen and Iraq, and raised fears of all-out conflict between Israel and Iran.

An Israeli official said the deal's first stage would see the release of 33 hostages, including children, some female soldiers, men above 50, and the wounded and sick. Israel would gradually and partially withdraw some of its forces.

The Palestinian source said Israel would free 1,000 Palestinian prisoners during the first phase, which would last for 60 days.

Israel launched its assault in Gaza after Hamas fighters stormed across its borders in October 2023, killing 1,200 people and



Above: Palestinians, who were injured in Israeli attacks, are taken to hospital for treatment in Gaza City on Monday.

Left: Part of a missile reportedly fired from Yemen is lodged on the roof of a house in the Israeli village of Mevo Beitar west of Jerusalem on Tuesday.

MENAHEM KAHANA / AFP

taking more than 250 hostages.

Fighting has meanwhile raged on, focused in recent months on Gaza's northern edge where Israel says its forces are trying to prevent Hamas from regrouping and Palestinians say the Israelis are trying to permanently depopulate a buffer zone.

Health officials in the Gaza Strip said on Tuesday that Israeli strikes killed at least 27 Palestinians in the past day, including one journalist.

Wider conflict

The fighting has already upended a wider region of the Middle East.

A missile fired by Yemen's Houthi forces targeted central Israel early on

Tuesday, causing sirens to blare and people to flee into bomb shelters.

The Israeli military said it made several attempts to intercept a missile launched from Yemen and "the missile was likely intercepted." The Magen David Adom emergency service in Israel said there were no injuries from the missile or falling debris, but some people suffered injuries when running to shelters.

Israeli police said several homes outside Jerusalem were damaged by fallen debris and released a photo of what appeared to be a missile casing on the roof of a house. Israel's military also said an earlier missile was intercepted

before it entered Israeli territory.

Figures released by the Israeli military earlier this month indicated that Houthi forces have launched about 40 surface-to-surface missiles and 320 drones toward Israel since October 2023. Most of them were intercepted, the figures showed.

Experts have warned that the maritime security situation has evolved into a more complex challenge than initially anticipated.

"The current trajectory suggests we may witness a broader regional conflict," said Yemeni military observer Abu Al-Badreen.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Nippon deadline extended as new bid emerges

HARRISBURG, Pennsylvania — The bid by Japan's Nippon Steel to buy US Steel may have a new lease of life after the US administration extended a deadline for the Japanese steelmaker to abandon plans to acquire US Steel.

The new deadline, now in mid-June, was viewed by US Steel — and investors, apparently — as an opportunity for the companies to complete the acquisition, even though President-elect Donald Trump, who takes office in a week, also opposes the deal.

US President Joe Biden blocked the deal this month, citing a potential threat to national security, though the US Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States failed to reach a consensus on the security issue.

Both Nippon Steel and US Steel have insisted that the deal presents no national security problem for the US, and said Biden's decision to block it was a violation of legal due process and a political calculation.

Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba said on Monday that "strong" concerns have been raised over the blocking of Nippon Steel's takeover bid, local media reported.

"I said that strong voices of concerns are being raised not just in Japan but also in the US business community, and I urged (Biden) to dispel these feelings," Ishiba said after a call with Biden and Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos.

Zhang Miao, an associate professor at the Research School for Southeast Asian Studies at Xiamen University, told China Daily: "In substantive economic cooperation, Japan has not received preferential treatment. On the contrary, the US has repeatedly obstructed significant investment and acquisition projects."

"The painful lessons of the Plaza Accord and Japan's Lost Decade serve as a stark reminder of how the US consistently prioritizes its own interests above all else. When necessary, it will sacrifice the interests of its allies," Zhang said.

At allies' costs

"This has long been a hallmark of US foreign policy, often leaving its allies to bear steep and unilateral costs," she added.

Wu Zelin, an associate research fellow at the Institute of International Relations at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, said cross-border acquisitions by multinational corporations are not purely business matters. When they involve a country's core pillar industries, they often escalate into so-called "political and security issues".

The proposed deal between Nippon Steel and US Steel kicked up an election-year political maelstrom across the US industrial heartland and quickly drew vows from Biden and Trump from the campaign trail in a critical battleground state to block the deal.

Even after the election, Trump wrote on social media in December that he was "totally against" US Steel being bought by a foreign company and said he would block the deal as president. He reiterated that stance after it was blocked by Biden.

In a development that may further complicate the situation, a new bid for the storied Pittsburgh steelmaker began to emerge on Monday.

Lawrence Goncalves, the chief executive officer of Ohio-based steelmaker Cleveland-Cliffs, said in a news conference on Monday that he wanted to make a new bid for US Steel, which accepted the buyout offer from Nippon in 2023 after it rejected an offer by Cleveland-Cliffs.

Goncalves declined to give financial details about the bid but said in a news conference at a Cleveland-Cliffs plant in western Pennsylvania that it is an "all-American solution" to save US Steel. He said he would relocate Cleveland-Cliffs' headquarters to Pittsburgh, keep the US Steel name and make Cleveland-Cliffs part of US Steel.

Commenting on this, Wu said the new rival bid by Cleveland-Cliffs has further complicated the situation, and much will be left to Trump, who will take office within a week.

Shao Xinying in Beijing contributed to this story.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Briefly

SWITZERLAND

Iran, European powers hold nuclear talks

Iran and European powers met in Geneva on Monday under a shroud of secrecy to discuss Teheran's nuclear program. They were the second round of talks in less than two months, following a discreet meeting in Geneva last November between Teheran and the three European powers, Britain, France and Germany, known as the E3. "The talks were serious, frank, and constructive. We discussed ideas involving certain details in the sanctions-lifting and nuclear fields that are needed for a deal," Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran's deputy foreign minister for international and legal affairs, wrote on X on Monday.

DPRK

Pyongyang fired missiles, Seoul says

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea fired several short-range ballistic missiles into the sea on Tuesday, according to Seoul's military. The launch comes as Japanese Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya visits the Republic of Korea for a series of meetings with top officials. Seoul's military said the launch took place around 9:30 am near Ganggye area in the DPRK, with the missiles flying 250 kilometers before landing in the sea.

UKRAINE

Kyiv says it launched 'massive attack'

Ukraine has launched a "massive attack" that hit multiple targets in Russia's Engels, Saratov, Kazan, Bryansk, and Tula, a senior Ukrainian official said on Tuesday. Andriy Kovalenko, the head of Ukraine's Center for Countering Disinformation, told Ukrainian TV that the strikes had targeted weapons production plants, oil refineries and warehouses.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

COMMENT

Editorials

Biden's eulogy to his alliance-building efforts reveals how out of touch he was with reality

In his swan-song speech on foreign policy on Monday, US President Joe Biden's audience was actually his successor that will take office in less than a week.

The more the outgoing US president tries to brag about how the United States has become stronger thanks to his alliance-building policy, aimed at outcompeting China, the less confidence he is showing in his Republican successor carrying that baton onwards.

After Donald Trump's first term in office, anyone in Biden's position would be able to boast of enhancing relations with the US' allies, just by engaging with them as such. But Biden has done more than that. By remodeling and misleading the US alliance network, he has produced an unnecessary and unwelcome blast from the past by reviving bloc confrontation.

The Biden administration has tried to justify its antagonistic stance toward China and some other countries by attempting to resurrect the zero-sum Cold War mentality with talk of "shared values". Yet none of the US' allies truly shares its view that China is a threat, or its concern that some "evil forces" will fill the vacuum if the US loses its global leadership. In other words, Biden's either-or policy, which has in effect tried to divide the world, reshuffle the global industry and supply chains, and thwart joint efforts to respond to global challenges, has left the US allies in as awkward a position as that it has tried to create for China be it on security, trade or high technology.

The Biden administration's China-targeted policies in these fields have not left US allies or US companies unscathed, which is evidenced by the continuous outcries of affected entities criticizing these boomeranging US practices as shortsighted and irrational. Not to mention that such US bills as the CHIPS and Science Act have put the US' allies as well as China in the crosshairs at the same time, an actual desired effect Biden intended to consolidate the US' leadership.

Except for a pat on the back, Washington has not offered its allies any remedial solutions after pressuring them to weaken their rewarding and productive economic and trade ties with China, their major trading partner, under the excuse of "de-risking". The successive visits of leaders to Beijing since the Democrats lost the US presidential election in November show the extent to which Biden's foreign policy ignored the interests of the US' allies.

That the Biden administration has been taking the last few days before it leaves office to markedly intensify such blind economic bullying and coercion just exposes a worrying absence of a self-correction mechanism for US policymaking. The administration unveiled a basket of China-targeted harsh artificial intelligence semiconductor export restrictions on Monday, which ostensibly classify its allies into different ranks to treat accordingly, and it is mulling a probe into Chinese-made logistics, port and shipbuilding equipment that is expected to be announced soon before it leaves office.

President Biden claimed that he would deal with the US' complicated and consequential relations with China in a "responsible" way since his first day in office. But over the past four years he has stuck stubbornly to a highly irresponsible way.

When President Biden innovatively proposed his competition-cooperation-confrontation China policy four years ago, Beijing still believed that as long as cooperation was there the two countries could leverage it to continuously expand their common interests and deepen their mutual trust, and so avoid the other two. That understanding is behind Beijing's repeated reiterations that its US policy remains unchanged. But Beijing's policy is now more about showing its earnestness and good faith in responsibly handling US relations than outlining specific measures to that end, because Biden has used competition to kill cooperation and avoid confrontation.

It is to be hoped that the incoming US administration will fully heed the lessons of the Biden administration's China policy, and work together with the Chinese side to breathe life back into substantial Sino-US cooperation and exchanges on various fronts. By ending the talk for talk's sake, the two sides can refocus their attention from competition and confrontation to cooperation that is not only in line with their common interests, but also conducive to them better fulfilling their common global responsibilities.

Three parties need to show shared wisdom

Addressing the Boao Forum for Asia New Year Outlook event for 2025 on Jan 8, Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister Sun Weidong reiterated Beijing's view that to maintain peace and stability in Asia and promote its economic development requires countries in the region to pool their wisdom, and make joint contributions and concerted efforts to make it a better common home.

The virtual meeting of United States President Joe Biden, Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba and Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr that was held on Monday morning Asian time showed the necessity for such remarks.

According to a readout issued by the White House after their talks, the three leaders discussed trilateral maritime security and economic cooperation, as well as China's "dangerous and unlawful behavior in the South China Sea" and they agreed on the importance of "continued coordination to advance a free and open 'Indo-Pacific'".

The outgoing US president made clear the intention behind the meeting when he said, "Simply put, our countries have an interest in continuing this partnership and institutionalizing our cooperation across our governments so that it is built to last. I'm optimistic that my successor will also see the value of continuing this partnership, and that it is framed the right way," President Biden said. So basically it was a call for his successor to continue to orchestrate "provocations" of China in the South China Sea.

Indeed, apart from agreeing to further deepen their trilateral economic, maritime and technology cooperation, the three leaders also discussed what they alleged to be China's "dangerous and unlawful behavior in the South China Sea", and to work together to uphold international law in the waters.

There is nothing more hypocritical and absurd than this: Out of their own strategic calculations, the three countries have been making malicious accusations concerning China's strengthened law enforcement in its territorial waters; actions that have been necessitated by the provocative moves of the Philippines, which has been emboldened by the support of the US and Japan to gravely infringe upon China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests in the South China Sea.

If the US wants to talk about dangerous and unlawful behavior in the South China Sea, it should first start with the Philippines and then look in the mirror. When it comes to "aggressive and coercive activities", it is the US that has militarized the waters and is encouraging its two regional allies to beef up their military posture targeting China.

China's law enforcement activities in relevant waters are lawful, justified and beyond reproach, as China's sovereignty and rights in the South China Sea are solidly grounded in history and international law. The territory of the Philippines is defined by a series of international treaties, and so defined it does not include Huangyan Island and the Nansha Islands.

The US, Japan and the Philippines are peddling a false, misleading narrative that portrays China as a bully and the Philippines as a victim bravely standing up to it. This narrative has been fabricated by the US as a means to whitewash its formidable military deployment in the region and to encourage its allies, both regional and extra-regional, to employ their military assets alongside it to contain China.

Sensing an opportunity to cement its land grab, the Philippines has foolishly allowed itself to be used as a bridgehead for the US' "Indo-Pacific" strategy.

If it accepts the legacy of the Biden administration's South China Sea destabilization initiative, the incoming US administration will only further disrupt and even undermine regional efforts to build peace and stability in the waters, which will have a detrimental impact on the dynamism of the regional economy, of which the US is also a beneficiary.

Like an old Chinese saying goes, before correcting others, one should correct his or her own behavior first. What the current US administration has done in the past year in the South China Sea with its encouragement of the Philippines' lawless antics and its soliciting of Japan to act as a brazer is more than enough to establish the fact that it is the warlock conjuring troubles in the South China Sea. Any forces who work hand in glove with it are putting themselves on the opposite side of peace-loving people in the region and beyond.

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Cao Yi



Opinion Line

China-UK dialogue outcomes will enable them to reboot relationship

The 69 outcomes reached at the 11th China-UK Economic and Financial Dialogue are expected to place the development of Sino-UK relations on a more sound footing.

At the dialogue on Saturday, the two sides expressed their common willingness to uphold multilateralism and economic globalization, and stay committed to maintaining the rules-based multilateral trading system with the World Trade Organization at its core. At a time of rising protectionism and ever-intensifying attempts by the United States to promote de-globalization, "de-risking" and the building of "small yards with high fences", such a consensus between China and the United Kingdom will help maintain the safety, stability and smooth flow of global industry and supply chains.

The two sides agreed to create a fair, just and nondiscriminatory business environment, expand two-way trade and investment, strengthen cooperation on fiscal policies and financial regulation, promote two-way opening-up and connectivity of financial markets, and deepen cooperation on the Shanghai-London Stock Connect. China agreed to issue its first renminbi-denominated green sovereign bond in 2025 and list it in London. While supporting the development of new renminbi-denominated financial products by UK-Chinese financial institutions, supporting the development of London's offshore RMB market and promoting RMB payment and settlement in London, the two sides also agreed to establish a new working group to combat

financial crimes, and strengthen policy cooperation to combat illicit cross-border financial flows and reduce the impact of illicit financial flow on the two countries.

For a long time, the UK has toed the US line on economic, trade and industrial policies with regard to China, affecting bilateral cooperation. China has always hoped that the UK, as an important player in the world, can frame its policies, especially with regard to China, without being influenced by the US.

The decisions taken at the latest Dialogue, if effectively implemented, will promote broader practical cooperation between China and the UK, inject new impetus into bilateral relations, and add new dynamism to the lackluster world economic growth.

— WU YIXUE, CHINA DAILY

Diversification can help cushion possible tariff impacts

China's foreign trade continued to demonstrate resilience last year.

Demands from emerging markets continue to rise, with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and Latin America being the key regions giving China's exports a boost. From January to November 2024, driven by the deepening cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative, China's exports to ASEAN and Latin America recorded year-on-year growth rates of 12 percent and 13 percent respectively.

Exports of automobiles and auto parts achieved year-on-year growth of 15.4 percent and 5.8 percent, respectively, in 2024. Additionally, the value of China's cumulative exports of integrated circuits

increased by 16.7 percent year-on-year. Overseas restocking demand saw exports of home appliances grow by 12.8 percent year-on-year in 2024.

In 2025, the potential risk of increased US tariffs may pose some challenge to China's exports but China's trade has diversified into other markets, which might help offset the impact. The proportion of exports to developed economies such as the United States and the European Union has declined since US-China trade frictions began in 2018; but the share to emerging markets has steadily increased. In 2024, the US and EU accounted for 14.7 percent and 14.4 percent of China's exports, down 2.1 and 2.7 percentage points, respectively, from the end of

2019. Meanwhile, ASEAN and Latin America accounted for 16.4 percent and 7.7 percent of China's exports, up 2 and 1.7 percentage points, respectively, from the end of 2019.

China's share in the US import structure has been dipping since 2018, while its position in the EU import structure has remained stable. The exports share to ASEAN, the EU, and Mexico has increased by varying degrees. China's position in the EU import structure has remained stable, with its share hovering around 21 percent since 2022. It would thus be feasible for Chinese enterprises to mitigate the possible impact of US tariffs through overseas expansion and reexporting.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

What They Say

Local action needed in cat-and-mouse game

The Central Political and Legal Work Conference held in Beijing from Sunday to Monday urged law enforcement and judicial departments to take more concrete measures to crack down on telecommunication frauds and other crimes that pose immediate threats to people's life and property.

Criminal gangs engaged in telecom frauds have developed a complete industry chain spanning China, Myanmar, Thailand and the Philippines, and other countries. Under the cover of "information service industry", there are telecom fraud "industry parks" on a large scale in some Southeast Asian countries operated by Chinese people and their local accomplices.

The victims are mostly Chinese living on the Chinese mainland. The fraudsters take advantage of leaked personal information to fabricate various kinds of customized cheating, ranging from e-commerce "refunds" and freezing accounts to combat money laundering to making investments and fake cyber roman-

ces, to ensnare their prey with the purpose of wiring money to their accounts.

Although China has cooperated with relevant countries to address the issue, once the crackdown pressure is eased, the gangs pop up again. Some have even become major economic engines, job-creators and taxpayers to their localities, if not a cash cow for some corrupt officials, forming complicated nepotistic connections with local communities. As the crime does not cause perceivable damages to the local society, local law-enforcers have no motivation to tackle it unless instructed to do so by their superiors.

Since the fraudsters need to be fluent in Chinese and familiar with the Chinese culture to do their job, many jobless Chinese people, after being cheated by well-paid job vacancies in foreign countries, have fallen prey to the organized crime gangs, which also engage in human trafficking and other crimes. After finding it is almost impossible to flee from their "office", which is heavily guarded by

private armed forces, some of them just choose to succumb to becoming a swindler.

Ironically, rather than the damages caused to society, it is often the thrilling tales told by the few lucky runaways that grab public attention, which prompts the authorities to carry out a storm-style crackdown campaign.

Many believe as long as the telecom companies and banks act as gatekeepers the lifeline of the industry can be severed. But, in practice, it is hard to coordinate the actions of these actors in different countries, and it is also difficult to discern normal communication and transactions from those between a fraudster and a victim — not to mention the gigantic amounts of data so doing will entail for the telecom and banking system operators. Such oversight has its private rights violation implications too. Before the de facto local protection umbrella for the industry disappears, the efforts to crack down on the gangs will continue to be a cat-and-mouse game.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

COMMENT

Zeng Gang

Why stabilizing housing market matters

China's real estate market has been fluctuating in recent years, leading to a decline in market confidence, reduction in transaction volumes, and price adjustments. These developments have impacted economic growth and social stability.

As such, stabilizing the real estate market has become crucial for China to achieve high-quality, sustainable development.

The central leadership has reiterated the need to stabilize the real estate market. That the Central Economic Work Conference in December also decided to sustain efforts to stabilize the real estate market indicates that supportive policies will continue to be implemented.

The importance of stabilizing the real estate market cannot be overstated. First, a stable real estate market facilitates growth. The real estate sector is a pillar of China's economy, with extensive links to industries such as construction, home furnishing and finance. A stable real estate market can drive the development of related industries, boost investment and consumption, and promote steady economic growth.

Second, stabilizing the real estate market is crucial to prevent systemic financial risks. The real estate market is tied to the financial system, with mortgages and land transfer fees significantly affecting banks' and local governments' revenues. As a result, severe market fluctuations could trigger financial risks and threaten social stability.

Third, by stabilizing the real estate market, the authorities can advance urban renewal and coordinated regional development. Stable policies not only ensure short-term market stability but also promote long-term development.

To stabilize the market, both the central and local governments have implemented a series of measures both the supply and demand sides. On the financial front, the People's Bank of China reduced the reserve requirement ratio twice last year, while releasing 2 trillion yuan (\$273.15 billion) in medium- to long-term funds.

Additionally, the authorities have cut one-year and five-year loan prime rates (LPRs) by 35 and 60 basis points, respectively. Looking ahead, monetary policy is expected to remain accommodative, with further reductions in the five-year LPR anticipated for 2025 lowering homebuyers' costs.

Optimizing mortgage policies is another key financial measure. For first-time homebuyers and those seeking better housing, the government has introduced policies to reduce payment requirements and mortgage rates, easing financial burdens. For example, in Zhuzhou, Hunan province, the local government has fixed the minimum down payment for first and second homes at 15 percent, and reduced existing mortgage rates.

Additionally, the government is exploring the possibility of "old-for-new" financial support, where homeowners selling old property with outstanding loans can convert existing mortgage balance into new home loans, reducing costs and boosting the demand for better housing.

On the fiscal side, local governments are issuing more special bonds, allocating funds for purchasing land and housing stock, which can be used as project capital and help reduce inventory. Many local governments are offering purchase subsidies and tax relief measures, providing financial support for homebuyers and reducing transaction costs by reducing taxes and optimizing housing standards.

The government has also implemented a 300-billion-yuan loan policy for affordable housing, and is promoting the conversion of existing commercial housing into

affordable units, meeting both inventory and low-income housing needs.

Besides, the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development has announced an additional 1 million units for renovation, extending the scope to 300 cities at the prefecture level and above, using a monetized resettlement approach. In the future, the scale and intensity of the revitalization of urban villages will further increase, with plans to combine housing vouchers and acquisition of existing commercial housing for resettlement aiding inventory reduction.

The government is also issuing special bonds to acquire idle land and commercial properties, optimizing land supply and improving urban renewal plans. But to boost demand, the government needs to relax purchase and loan restrictions. In fact, major cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen have relaxed purchase restrictions, lowered social security

requirements, and removed the distinctions between ordinary and non-ordinary housing, releasing pent-up demand. And many regions have reduced down payment requirements and mortgage rates, optimizing loan policies to make homebuying easier.

Overall, the sustained efforts to stabilize the real estate market are beginning to show results. Since late September 2024, the market has seen a phase of stabilization, with transaction volumes in key cities leveling off and market confidence gradually recovering. As policies continue to be implemented, the real estate market is expected to gradually recover in 2025, laying a solid foundation for China's high-quality economic development.

The author is director of the National Institute for Finance and Development. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

Liu Yue

New quality productive forces revitalize 'old' sectors

New quality productive forces can be a new momentum to boost high quality development. The central authorities have reiterated that new arrangements should be based on local conditions, emphasizing the need to coordinate the cultivation of new economic drivers and the upgrading of old economic drivers.

How to deal with the relationship between the new and traditional economic drivers? To further cultivate new quality productive forces and facilitate the transformation and upgrading of traditional economic drivers, it is necessary to view the relationship between them from a dialectical perspective. Since the two economic drivers are not opposed to each other, they should promote each other and pursue integrated development.

Emphasizing new quality productive forces does not mean that traditional drivers have become dispensable, nor does it mean that traditional industries should be phased out as "low-end industries". Instead, China should continue promoting the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries and empowering them with new-quality productivity.

In many fields, traditional industries often serve as the matrix or elemental support for the development of new quality productive forces. For example, the traditional electroplating industry is characterized by high energy consumption and emissions.

But electroplating is one of the basic processes in manufacturing. Despite the development of the electronics, automobile, aerospace and other industries, as well as the industries' high-end and green transformation, the electroplating industry still has considerable room for devel-

China will make international standards a benchmark for future development, promote trade and investment liberalization, and improve business efficiency.

opment. And we should know that there are no backward industries, only relatively backward products, technologies and capacities.

How to support scientific and technological innovation and the upgrading of industries?

First, to provide a solid foundation for innovation, there is a need to expand domestic demand by increasing the incomes of urban and rural residents, expanding the size of the middle-income group and the domestic market, and optimizing the consumption environment. China has a large, fast-growing and vast market. With a population of more than 1.4 billion and a middle-income group of over 400 million people, China is the second-largest and most promising consumer market for goods globally. As for online retail sales, it has crossed 13 trillion yuan (\$1.78 trillion), making China the world's largest online retail market for 10 consecutive years.

Second, there is also a need to ensure smooth factor mobility and concentration in advantageous fields by expeditiously building a unified national market, breaking down all forms of local barriers and de-segmenting the market, guaranteeing smooth factor resource mobility, improv-

ing factor allocation, and stimulating the endogenous motivation and innovation vitality of businesses.

Third, measures should be taken to promote the new national system, implement high-quality development initiatives for key manufacturing industry chains, strengthen quality support and standard leadership, and make the industry and supply chains more resilient.

Fourth, it is also necessary to promote coordinated regional development and cultivate new-quality productivity based on local conditions. Since China has vast territory with different regions at different development levels, different regions should maximize their comparative advantages according to their resource endowments, industrial bases and scientific research levels, and expeditiously develop a development pattern with distinctive features and complementary advantages in new-quality productivity.

And fifth, measures should also be taken to expedite the green transformation of development modes and promote green productivity. The key to solving the challenges of green development lies in technology.

The biggest challenge facing the world today is how to promote sustainable global economic growth. Given the different development levels and resource endowments of different countries, it is necessary to use the complementary advantages, while pursuing mutual benefit and win-win cooperation, jointly building an open world economic system, seizing the opportunities created by the digital economy, artificial intelligence and low-carbon technology, and creating new drivers of growth.

Pursuing high-quality opening-up to promote reform and development is

necessary to ensure China makes new achievements in its modernization drive. High-quality opening-up helps stimulate innovation potential, and promote conceptual, institutional and technological innovation. China will continue to further open up its economy as it welcomes the participation of foreign industries, academia and research communities in the development of new-quality productivity.

China will make international standards a benchmark for future development, promote trade and investment liberalization, and improve business efficiency. Also, by adapting to the trends of a new round of technological revolution and industrial transformation, according to the Action Plan for Promoting High-level Opening-up to Attract and Utilize Foreign Investment, China aims to include foreign investment in fields such as integrated circuits, biomedicine and high-end equipment in the list of major and key projects.

Moreover, China will continue to cooperate with other countries in order to boost traditional industries, develop emerging and future industries, cultivate new growth drivers, and jointly promote the sustainable development of the world economy. China is always open to cooperation with other countries with a positive attitude, and will continue to promote common development and prosperity worldwide.

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Fu Suixin

US must respect China's core interests on Taiwan

The Taiwan question is at the core of China's core interests and the defining red line in China-United States relations. During Joe Biden's presidency, provocative incidents such as former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan have heightened tensions.

President-elect Donald Trump is set to return to power on Jan 20. It is hoped that the provocative actions witnessed during his first term will not be repeated. In 2016, he broke diplomatic norms by taking a congratulatory call from then Taiwan leader Tsai Ing-wen, reportedly at the urging of anti-China hardliners within the Republican Party. His administration sold over \$18 billion in arms to Taiwan, and signed legislation such as the Taiwan Travel Act, TAIPEI Act, and Taiwan Assurance Act, which deepened Washington-Taipei official ties and allowed cabinet-level visits to the island.

Ironically, the US president-elect doesn't genuinely value Taiwan, often mocking it as a mere tip of a Sharpie compared to the Chinese mainland's Resolute Desk. However, the Chinese mainland should always be prepared because Washington has been using Taiwan separatists as a pawn to counter Beijing.

Trump's past behavior and recent statements offer clues about how his Taiwan policy might unfold during a second term.

The reliance of "Taiwan separatists" on US support to pursue independence is a futile gamble that will ultimately backfire.

The first is economic demands on Taiwan. The US president-elect, after being sworn in, will likely press Taiwan for significant concessions in trade. Obsessed with tariffs and trade deficits, he previously accused Taiwan of unfair trade practices. Unlike Biden's more lenient US-Taiwan initiative on 21st century trade, Trump could demand a direct reduction in Taiwan's trade surplus with the US.

The second is semiconductor and supply chain pressure. Trump has repeatedly blamed Taiwan for "stealing" US semiconductor jobs, linking Taiwan's success to US' manufacturing decline. He may coerce Taiwan into relocating advanced semiconductor production to US soil while imposing strict restrictions on the island's exports to the mainland, all in the name of supply chain security.

The third is urging Taiwan to increase defense spending. Emphasizing his "America First" mantra, Trump has argued that US allies should pay more for their defense. He might push Taiwan to raise its defense budget from 2.4 percent of GDP to 3 percent or even 5 percent, primarily through expanded US arms purchases. These demands could favor traditional heavy weaponry over Taiwan's asymmetric warfare strategies, prioritizing US profits over Taiwan's defense needs.

The fourth may be heightened deterrence against Beijing, which the next US president should avoid. Republicans favor direct deterrence over coalition-building. Trump may use the island as leverage in negotiations with Beijing, potentially escalating US military deployments in the Indo-Pacific and increasing naval presence in the Taiwan Strait. This aggressive posture aims to bolster US deterrence but risks inflaming tensions further.

While Trump's views on Taiwan are often transactional, his policies could be heavily influenced by China hawks within his party. Figures like Mike Waltz, Marco Rubio, and Pete Hegseth, poised for senior roles in Trump's national security team, advocate for more extreme measures. It is crucial whether Trump could control those figures instead of being manipulated by them. Because coupled with a Republican-controlled Congress, the hawks could pressure Trump to deepen Washington-Taipei ties.

Ultimately, US policy on Taiwan is increasingly shaped by Beijing's actions. Beijing's strong countermeasures following Pelosi's visit have underscored the dangers of escalating tensions. During the recent meeting between the Chinese and US leaders in Lima, Peru, the Chinese president reiterated that the Taiwan question is the red line for China and emphasized that maintaining peace in the Taiwan Strait requires recognizing the separatist nature of Lai Ching-te and Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party.

For Trump, Taiwan is merely a tool for economic gains and the strategic containment of Beijing. This reality is not lost on Taiwan residents. The reliance of "Taiwan separatists" on US support to pursue independence is a futile gamble that will ultimately backfire.

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

GLOBAL VIEWS

KOSTAS GOULIAMOS

With a friend like this

The EU should recognize that its interests are expendable as the US pursues its primacy via a new Cold War agenda

The intra-capitalist antagonism between the European Union and the United States is set to be extended with Donald Trump's return to the White House. Even greater and harsher intra-capitalist contradictions between the two economies will be made in the coming years, due to his predilection for tariffs. For instance, the Federation of German Industries, which represents 39 German industry associations of 100,000 businesses with 8 million employees, has concluded in a recent statement that Trump's tariffs "would harm not only Germany and the EU but also US economy".



In the same announcement, the Federation of German Industries has noted that Trump's "plans for new sweeping tariffs, as high as 10 or even 20 percent on all imports and 60 percent on imports from China, are a significant concern for German industry". Similarly, the Cologne Institute for Economic Research has estimated that Trump's tariff plans could cost the German economy up to 180 billion euros (\$184.4 billion) from 2025 to 2028. In addition, Germany's Kiel Institute for the World Economy has accentuated the fact that there will be "profound economic losses", as it estimates a fall of over 0.5 percent in EU GDP and a decline in German output of 3.2 percent. In total, the earnings among a cluster of Europe's major corporations could fall by more than 5 percent in 2025.

Certainly, Trump's second term will affect EU policy as he will likely impose tariffs on every bit of European product entering the US market. Overall, he plans to implement a political agenda full of tariffs and protectionism, which is estimated to cut global GDP in 2025. It is worth noting the fact that the US' share of the global economy has shrunk from 26.12 percent in 1990 to 15.56 percent in 2023 in terms of purchasing power parity. According to Statista, a global data platform established in Germany, the US accounted for 15.56 per-

cent of global GDP after adjusting for purchasing power parity. This share is expected to decrease to 14.72 percent by 2029, which is roughly one-seventh of the global total. In 2023, China's share was about 18.75 percent and it will be 19.64 percent by 2029. The US' ephaptic dwindling and/or shrinking share of the global GDP has prompted (among other things) to Trump's tariffs and, consequently, his policy of protectionism. As the new Trump administration resorts to protectionism with the aim of imposing strict US conditions on international competitiveness in the industrial and high-tech sectors, it is therefore not accidental that Trump's protectionism will weaponize tariffs against numerous nations. He even warns the BRICS nations that if they move away from the dollar policy, he will impose a 100 percent tariff in the US market. In the same way, he has warned the EU to buy more US oil and gas as a means of reducing its \$208.7 billion trade surplus vis-a-vis the US; otherwise the EU will face high tariffs in the US market. Trump has also proclaimed that there will be a 10 percent tariff on global imports into the US as well as additional 25 percent tariffs on Mexico and

Canada, and a 60 percent tariff on Chinese goods. Trump has also specified — via his Truth social media platform — that tariffs will be part of his first executive orders on Jan 20, the date of his inauguration, although he didn't detail the legal basis for these tariffs.

It is worth noting that in Davos in 2017, President Xi Jinping stressed among other things: "No one will emerge as a winner in a trade war." And he ended his speech in Davos with a call for cooperation in turbulent times.

Besides, the Trump administration is expected to transfer to the EU nations the responsibility for military support for Ukraine and war preparations for a broader NATO-Russia conflict. Brussels is already moving cautiously in this direction. The recent report by Mario Draghi, former European Central Bank president, urges EU nation-states to focus on their own arms industries instead of buying weapons from the US; at present, about 63 percent of Europe's arms come from the US. Meanwhile, the new Trump administration may require NATO members to boost military expenditure to 5 per-

cent of their GDP; this means more than doubling NATO's current 2 percent spending target. Such a requirement implies and/or fortifies a war economy. The US controls — through NATO and other means — over 55 percent of all military spending worldwide. Besides, the US has 750 military bases in an estimated 80 countries. Furthermore, the US military presence is profoundly concentrated in bordering regions and/or buffer zones surrounding China. Within this framework, opposing China's economic influence is central to the new Trump administration's economic agenda and, thus, it will also affect EU-China economic relations, not least, by the US coercing the EU's high-tech industries to decouple from parts of the Chinese market and infrastructure. In any case, Trump's second presidency will be more aggressive on China, not just in terms of tariffs.

Overall, the consequences of the new Trump administration will also have a massive effect on politics, emboldening far-right parties globally, namely the "Alternative for Germany", the Netherlands' "Freedom Party", France's "National Rally" and the "Brothers of Italy" in Europe, which adopt his viewpoint on immigration and national identity. In short, Trump will additionally weaken consensuses pertinent to the global equilibrium, multilateralism, energy and the environment, the Paris Agreement and transatlantic relations. His "America First" slogan is politically a synonym for US primacy and its hegemonic agenda via a new Cold War apparatus. The EU should recognize the dangers of this and work with China to build a global community of shared future.

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ZHANG TING / FOR CHINA DAILY

The EU should recognize the dangers of this and work with China to build a global community of shared future.

LEI SHAOHUA

New line of work honing competitive edge

Focal point of major-power competition has shifted to industrial policy

Before Joe Biden leaves the White House, the US Department of Commerce has once again strengthened sanctions to restrict China's ability to develop advanced artificial intelligence by adding 140 Chinese semiconductor companies to its export control entity list. The move came despite the US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo's comment that chip export controls were merely "speed bumps", and that "trying to hold China back is a fool's errand".



At the same time, the "Indo-Pacific" strategy, which aims to contain China through military encirclement, may be inherited by Donald Trump as a key foreign policy legacy of the Biden administration.

Although geopolitics, arms races and national security remain the main areas of major-country competition, the devastating effects of nuclear weapons have kept direct military conflicts between major powers within manageable limits since the end of World War II.

In a world dominated by advanced technologies, competition between major powers is not only about military strength and GDP, but also about innovation capacity and its industrial application. As a result, the priority in major-power competition has changed from preventing wars to ensuring industrial security and prominence. As globalization has reshaped the industrial structure of the world, the focal point of major-power competition has also shifted to industrial policy.

Speaking at the Brookings Institution on April 27, 2023, the US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said that the US should rethink its development model that has privileged the financial sector, and advocated a state-sponsored industrial policy to reinvigorate the manufacturing industry and build a new international economic partnership that moves beyond traditional trade deals.

When market liberalization fails to support technological innovation and commercial application on a super-massive scale,

some major countries have realized that only industrial policy can support advanced manufacturing. That's why developed economies have rolled out their industrial policies in recent years. Today, technological development has reached a new fault line, where breakthroughs in research require massive investments, cooperation and commercial application.

Globalization has reshaped the industrial structure of the world, and the US' industrial base has been hollowed out since the Cold War ended. Washington's strategic anxiety is a testament to the claim that "manufacturing is essential to prosperity".

When the hollowing out of medium- and low-end industries coincides with a technological fault line, when "Moore's Law is dead" in many areas, and when the high-end sectors of the US lack strong market support due to a change in its industrial structure, the only viable strategy for the US is to bring manufacturing back home and to curb the industrial growth of competitors.

In the long term, the lack of support from a whole industrial chain and the lack of motivation for commercialization will seriously threaten the development of the US military industry, and undermine the US' global hegemonic status. In this context, industrial policy has emerged as the focus of major-country competition.

The First Industrial Revolution shaped the basic structure of the developed world, which has not changed much despite the two world wars in the 20th century. After the Cold War ended, as globalization accelerated, the global division of labor gradually took shape. China is the only developing country that has seized the opportunity brought by the round of industrial revolution in the post-Cold War era, and it is also the only developing country that is likely to reshape the structure of the developed world formed since the First Industrial Revolution.

China's industrial policy is not designed to support an arms race, or to replace the US as the sole superpower, but rather to gradually move the country up the global value chain in a well-planned manner based on its economic strength and technological capabilities.

There are differences between the industrial policies of the US and that of China, including the objectives they pursue. While China's industrial policy aims to facilitate a shift from labor-intensive industries to capital-intensive industries, and then to technology-intensive industries, the US' industrial policy is designed to revive the country's labor-intensive industries, maintain its strength in capital-intensive industries, and consolidate its control over technology-intensive industries.

Therefore, the structural contradiction between the two countries is not just about a technology war, but about the US trying to regain its dominance in the whole global industrial chain. This is because labor-intensive industries can provide enough jobs, capital-intensive industries can catalyze technology commercialization, and technology-intensive industries can lead the way to future development.

Today, international relations have entered an era in which the rise of emerging countries cannot be stopped by wars. Instead, it is an era in which the country that controls the whole industry chain can dominate the global industrial structure. Against this background, major countries are adopting various policy tools and striving to improve the efficiency of their industrial policies. It is fair to say that major-country competition has reached the stage of industrial policy competition.

Central to major-country competition is building a whole industry chain across geopolitical barriers. The development of high-end industries relying on cutting-edge technologies can only be sustained by massive employment and technology commercialization.

When a reigning power cannot stop the rise of emerging nations up the industrial chain by war, it can only enhance industrial development at home, and remove the "ladder" by which emerging countries climb



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

toward the higher rungs of the global value chain through trade barriers, restrictions on technology and knowledge transfer, and restrict the commercialization of technology of emerging countries in the global market.

In the coming decades, building whole industrial chains will become the main target of major countries. Countries that lose out in this round of competition will find it almost impossible to climb up the global value chain.

US senator Marco Rubio released a report titled "The World China Made: 'Made in China 2025' Nine Years Later" in September 2024, which reviews China's industrial policy.

The report finds that "China has reached, or is near to reach, the technological cutting edge in most of the sectors it has targeted". The report has some influence on US politics, and should Rubio become the next top US diplomat, industrial policy is expected

to be a focus of US-China competition.

The incoming Trump administration is likely to introduce a US industrial policy 2.0, which may focus on three main areas — manufacturing, energy and the high-tech sector. The Trump administration may push for the return of manufacturing to the US through trade protectionism, give more support to fossil fuel energy, while providing more subsidies to fields such as AI, semiconductors and low orbit communications to keep the competitive edge of US tech sectors. The US' allies and other countries need to be fully prepared for new challenges ahead.

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Z WEEKLY

All about Gen Z

Z WEEKLY

Social Media Digest

Cuddly companion

At the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas from Jan 7 to 10, a fluffy and stylish AI robot pet caught the spotlight, transforming the stereotypical image of a cold, high-tech machine into a warm, adorable companion that brings joy and comfort.

This cuddly AI robot, named Ropet, was created in 2022 by Verity Ventures Partners. It has a round, plush body with chubby arms and a face adorned with large, starry eyes.

One of Ropet's standout features is its ability to serve as a personalized companion. By using visual recognition and an expansive language model, it adapts to the user's personality, much like a living pet.

For example, Ropet can react to hunger and emotions. When it's hungry, it makes a stomach-grumbling sound to indicate a craving for food, such as bananas or apples. When food is placed in front of it, the robot pet detects it via a camera in its nose and responds with a chewing sound. When its owner appears bored, Ropet will look up and signal for a hug.

As of Jan 14, Ropet has raised HK\$2,041,701 (\$262,301.11) on Kickstarter, the world's largest crowdfunding platform, exceeding its initial fundraising goal of \$1,285 by 204 times.

The rising demand for emotional companionship reflects the growing population of people living alone and the lack of social connection. "At CES, we're proud to demonstrate how Ropet is reshaping relationships between humans and AI," said He Jianbin, CEO and co-founder of Ropet, in a statement to PR Newswire.



Ropet has a round, fluffy body and large, starry eyes. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Cheers to sobriety

Instead of raising a toast while hanging out with friends, young people are increasingly opting for zero-alcohol beverages. This shift has fueled the rise of the "sober curious" movement.

The movement originated from "Dry January," a campaign launched by the Alcohol Concern charity in the UK in 2014, which encouraged people to abstain from alcohol for the month of January.

Today, it extends beyond just one alcohol-free month to a lifestyle that embraces more periods of sobriety.

This emerging trend reflects a growing focus on health and wellness among young people, who are looking to improve concentration and performance in their studies.

"I was happy to spend my evenings doing yoga or focusing on self-care instead of drinking," said Nora, 23, in an interview with Teen Vogue.

As the sober curious movement resonates with more young people, it has also spurred significant growth in alcohol-free and low-alcohol products. According to a survey by IWSR, which tracks the global beverage industry, the overall volume of zero-proof drinks in the United States rose by 29 percent in 2023.

"With the availability of sophisticated non-alcoholic alternatives, people can fully participate in social rituals while making choices that feel right for them," said Morgan McLachlan, co-founder of De Soi, a non-alcoholic beverage brand, in an interview with USA Today.

GUO JIATONG



More and more young people are opting for zero-proof drinks instead of alcohol. vcs

Harbin's snowy charm

International students visiting Harbin discover the city's enchanting snow-covered landscapes, rich cultural diversity, and the warmth of its people.

By MENG WENJIE
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Before her trip to Harbin in Northeast China's Heilongjiang province, 25-year-old Miriam Verzellino from Italy could hardly imagine just how cold it could be in the northernmost place she'd ever traveled to. "I wore about six layers, and finally — I felt too warm!" she laughed.

But it wasn't the cold that left the biggest impression on her — it was the enchanting, snow-covered city.

"I'm from southern Italy, where snow isn't very common," she said. "So, when I saw the entire city blanketed in white, it felt like magic."

Currently studying at the Communication University of China (CUC) in Beijing, Verzellino visited Harbin as part of the second Global Youth Bilingual Broadcast Announcing and Anchoring Contest, organized by CUC. From Jan 2 to 6, more than 20 young people from China, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, and Tanzania explored the city's winter wonderland.

For 19-year-old Yang Qihang, a fellow CUC student, this was also his first trip to Harbin, and he was captivated by its cultural diversity.

"I could really sense the blend of exotic charm here," he said. "Many buildings feature elaborate European-style facades, with classical domes, spires, and intricately carved windows."

This diversity was especially evident at the Harbin Ice and Snow World, a renowned theme park and city landmark that showcases spectacular ice sculptures of iconic buildings from around the globe, including the Petronas Twin Towers from Malaysia, the Merlion from Singapore, and the Temple of Heaven from Beijing.

"People in Harbin reinterpret these various cultures and regions through their unique ice sculptures. Walking through the

park felt like traveling the world," Yang said.

What impressed Yang most was how seamlessly Harbin has woven its ice and snow culture into everyday life.

Coming from Changsha in Central China's Hunan province, Yang noted that in his hometown, snow often brings concerns about traffic jams and travel disruptions. But in Harbin, locals have turned the harsh winter weather into an enjoyable and embraced part of their lives.

One example is the 18-meter-tall "celebrity" snowman at Qunli Music Park, which attracts many visitors.

Yang learned that this giant snowman was first built in 2019, when sanitation workers, after clearing the snow from the streets, created a smaller, three-meter-high version.

"I can see how much the people of Harbin cherish the snow and celebrate winter in such a romantic way," Yang said.

Li Weixu, 20, shared a similar observation. At the 37th China Harbin Sun Island International Snow Sculpture Art Expo, which opened on Dec 27, he was fascinated by the intricate and delicate snow sculptures.

"The locals even add color or cover the sculptures with velvet cloth, opening up endless artistic possibilities for snow," he said.

Li pointed out that while many high-latitude countries with cold climates have developed bold, forward-thinking cultures, Harbin goes beyond that.

"Here,

people don't just endure the cold — they transform the icy world into a lively place, turning the chill into warmth," he explained.

During their trip, students documented their journey through videos with bilingual or even multilingual commentary. They posted these videos on social media platforms both in China and abroad, allowing a wider audience to experience Harbin's ice and snow culture.

"Humans are naturally drawn to beauty, and I believe Harbin's stunning landscapes will attract more international tourists," Li added.

Kindness in the cold

Rio Otori, 20, a Japanese student at CUC, observed that behind this ice wonderland lies the passion and craftsmanship of its locals.

While strolling along Central Street, a historic pedestrian area in Harbin, Otori came across a craftsman carving a large ice block. Despite wearing gloves, Otori could feel the biting cold of the ice. But when she asked the craftsman if he was cold, he smiled and said, "As long as tourists like you enjoy these beautiful sculptures, I'm not cold at all!"

This response deeply moved Otori, especially when she noticed the craftsman's face reddened by the cold.

"The people of Harbin truly want the world to see their city," she said. "Behind the scenes, there are countless workers like him, enduring the cold to create these ice and snow wonders for visi-

tors from around the world."

Another standout feature of Northeast China is the warm hospitality of its people, which left a lasting impression on 22-year-old Tan Chau En, a student from Malaysia.

Visiting such a cold region for the first time, Tan had packed plenty of warm clothing. "But when I got here, I didn't even feel the cold because the locals are so warm," she said.

Tan recalled an incident when she was holding a *tanghulu*, a candied fruit snack, with her phone tucked under her arm. Due to the many layers of clothing she was wearing, she didn't notice when her phone fell while crossing the street. Fortunately, a group of local girls walking behind her noticed and kindly picked it up for her.

Realizing that Tan was an international visitor, the girls started a conversation, asking how she was adjusting to the local weather and food.

"If I were approached like this in other places, I would usually avoid the conversation. But in Harbin, talking to strangers feels natural. People here are open and friendly — they genuinely just want to chat," Tan said.

Verzellino echoed this sentiment. "I'm a foreigner, but I don't feel like a stranger here because the people are so welcoming," she said.

She also noted that food portions in Harbin tend to be quite generous, often encouraging sharing with friends. "In China, food brings people together with family and friends, which is something very similar to Italy," she explained.

"This is one of the most valuable things — being able to share our food, lifestyles, and experiences with others," Verzellino added. "Through these moments, we learn more about ourselves, our countries, and ultimately, we enrich our lives."



Clockwise from above left: Chinese and international students enjoy the snow at the Sun Island International Snow Sculpture Art Expo in Harbin, Heilongjiang. Tan Chau En enjoys the fireworks display at the Harbin Ice and Snow World. Yang Qihang attends the opening ceremony of this year's Harbin Ice Festival. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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Above: Li Yuxuan skydiving at Thai Sky Adventure in Thailand on Aug 19, 2024.
Top right: Li Zhiyu running a 50 km ultra-trail race in Chongli, Hebei, on July 13, 2024.
Right: A trainee practicing rappelling techniques at a training event hosted by Northguard Defence Ltd. in Chengdu, Sichuan, on Dec 18, 2024. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Chasing thrills, defying limits

Extreme sports are becoming increasingly popular, as young enthusiasts explore their potential and embrace the excitement of adventure, **Li Xinran** reports.

"Once you've experienced the exhilaration of free-falling from the sky, every step on solid ground will make you look up, yearning to return," said 30-year-old Li Yuxuan, known as "Xueli" on social media, a passionate skydiver and blogger.

To date, Li has completed 2,516 jumps and garnered over 334,000 followers on Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok. Many of her popular videos feature daring stunts, such as enjoying snacks or fruit while leaping from a helicopter.

Li's videos have captivated fellow skydiving enthusiasts and piqued the curiosity of netizens eager to learn about the sport.

Indeed, the popularity of extreme sports like skydiving and ultra-trail running is rising among young people in China. On the Chinese lifestyle platform Xiaohongshu, over 140,000 posts are tagged with "extreme sports".

Li's skydiving journey began in 2016 when she tried her first tandem jump — where the jumper and instructor are strapped together during descent — while studying abroad in Australia. In 2019, she began training for solo jumps, facing many challenges along the way.

At the time, language barriers posed a challenge since her English wasn't proficient. She also wasn't the most athletic person, and the rigorous training almost made her want to quit.

Most importantly, both tandem and solo jumpers need strong mental resilience — a quality she initially felt she lacked.

"I must be the most timid skydiver ever," she joked. While professional athletes typically jump from heights of 1,000 meters, giving them little time before deploying their parachutes, recreational jumpers like Li usually start from 3,000 to 4,000 meters, enjoying a longer free fall.

"Free-falling is one of my favorite parts of skydiving. It feels like you're flying. You're focused on the moment, fully immersed in it," said Li. "Another thing I love is the view, especially at sunrise and sunset. The world is so beautiful that it makes me realize that the problems I have back on the ground aren't that important after all."

Grounded thrills

While Li Yuxuan explores the skies, Li Zhiyu finds joy in earthbound pursuits.

The 21-year-old has been participating in Spartan races since 2022 but discovered a new passion last year: ultra-trail running. With distances ranging from 50 km to 330 km — well beyond the 42 km of a marathon — it is widely regarded as an extreme sport.



“There's a space between the safety zone and the danger zone that allows us to push forward and grow by expanding our comfort zone. Doing so opens doors to new experiences and possibilities.”

Li Yuxuan, 30, a skydiver

According to Li Zhiyu, unlike the seasonal nature of Spartan races, ultra-trail offers year-round events in southern Chinese provinces, which satisfies her need for continuous activity.

"I can't sit around all day at home — except during finals week. I need to stay active," she explained.

She finds that compared to Spartan races — where she must save up energy and strategize for man-made obstacles — ultra-trail running allows her to focus solely on running. Moreover, ultra-trail races are typically held in mountainous areas, providing an immersive experience in nature.

"It's simpler than Spartan races and more interesting than running on paved marathon roads," Li Zhiyu said.

Although running may seem like an ability we're born with, completing a 50 km race is no easy feat.

"Once, I found myself crying while climbing uphill toward the end," Li Zhiyu said. "Honestly, I admire myself for finishing the entire race."

While some may see extreme sports as inviting trouble, enthusiasts find the challenges deeply rewarding.



“By the time I headed back, it was getting dark, and I felt like a star under the 'spotlight', with everyone cheering me on and exclaiming, 'You did it!'”

Li Zhiyu, 21, an ultra-trail running enthusiast

"Upon crossing the finish line, I felt the pain fade away," Li Zhiyu recalled. "By the time I headed back, it was getting dark, and I felt like a star under the 'spotlight', with everyone cheering me on and exclaiming, 'You did it!'"

Now, she wants to achieve even more. After watching a vlog of a fellow enthusiast completing the 168 km version of an ultra-trail, Li Zhiyu was inspired to try it herself. Her personal best for a 50 km race is 12 hours, while completing 168 km takes nearly a full day, and the grueling 330 km version can take five to six days. Currently, she is focusing on daily training and rehabilitation, referring to this phase as her "depot repair" stage.

"Training for longer distances is like climbing stairs; you must first conquer 5 km and 10 km runs before attempting a 50 km race. Those aiming for the 330 km trail must undergo physical examinations, video interviews, and complete multiple 100 km races first," she explained.

Outdoor enthusiast Li Jiaxi, 28, echoed Li Zhiyu's sentiments, stressing the importance of acquiring sufficient experience and knowledge before pursu-

ing extreme sports.

"Understanding the sport, its risks, and undergoing adequate training are essential prerequisites," said Li Jiaxi, who has dabbled in skiing, skydiving, cliff diving, and recently learned rappelling techniques.

Rappelling is both a stand-alone training activity and a valuable skill applicable to extreme sports like mountain hiking and caving, as well as professional scenarios involving firefighters and rescue personnel, according to Li Jiaxi.

In his opinion, most extreme sports demand a great deal of time and financial investment.

"Climbing a 3,000-meter-high mountain requires months of physical training and learning skills like rappelling, which can take one to two weeks to learn and months to master," Li Jiaxi noted. "The equipment can cost tens of thousands of yuan, which exceeds many people's budgets."

According to Li Yuxuan, skydiving began to gain traction in China in 2017 and saw significant growth starting in 2020, with provinces like Hainan in South China actively promoting the sport. Tandem jumps typically cost between 2,000 and 4,000 yuan (\$272.81 and \$545.62), depending on the location and altitude. For experienced jumpers with their own equipment, however, the cost is usually just a few hundred yuan per jump.

Safety first

Li Jiaxi emphasized that safety is always the top priority in their enthusiast group chat and during training.

"Whether training solo or as a team, wearing safety gear, including helmets, is mandatory. Mutual equipment checks are crucial. Only after thorough inspections of gear and ropes can we proceed with the descent," he said.

Li Yuxuan also highlighted the importance of safety. Despite having completed more than 2,500 jumps, she still feels nervous and vigilant before each jump. "An experienced jumper once told me, 'If you're not nervous at all, that should raise a red flag,'" she said. She views extreme sports as a means to step outside one's comfort zone. However, she observed that many people see them as either safe or dangerous, with no middle ground.

"There's a space between the safety zone and the danger zone that allows us to push forward and grow by expanding our comfort zone. Doing so opens doors to new experiences and possibilities," she said.

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A new breed of hope

A 31-year-old returning to his hometown in Gansu rebuilds local livestock industry, revitalizing the community after a devastating earthquake.

By GUI QIAN and MA JINGNA in Lanzhou

At the end of 2023, a severe earthquake hit Jishishan in Gansu province, destroying local farmlands and collapsing cattle and sheep sheds, leaving the area in urgent need of reconstruction.

In response, 31-year-old Lu Xiaopeng arrived to help establish the Jishishan Cattle and Sheep Breeding Center, aiming to revitalize the local livestock industry.

Lu, a graduate of animal husbandry and veterinary medicine, had previously worked on a farm, in an animal hospital, and at a seed company. Upon being appointed head of the center, he brought advanced breeding and management expertise to the region.

Lu led a newly recruited team of 24 local employees, including five recent university graduates, to build the largest farm in the area from the ground up.

Under the leadership of the local government, construction of the breeding center began in early April 2024, and it officially started operations by mid-July.

With a total investment of 36.59 million yuan (\$4.99 million), the center spans 196 *mu* (approximately 13.07 hectares). It includes 11 cattle sheds and 14 sheep sheds, currently housing 4,250 sheep and 800 cattle.

"We have achieved the goal of becoming operational in the same year as construction," said Lu.

Lu joined the breeding center just a few months after the earthquake. In the livestock industry, there were few local professionals,

creating an urgent need for experts.

There was also a personal reason for Lu: being from the Gannan Tibetan autonomous prefecture, not far from Jishishan, this job allowed him to work close to home.

"This is an important platform, as there has never been such a large breeding center here before. I see it as an opportunity for my career development," he said.

Benefiting locals

According to Lu, the goal of the breeding center is to help over 2,000 households in Jishishan increase their income and achieve prosperity. Most of these households are from Chenjia village and Sibaozi village, both of which were significantly affected by the earthquake.

Farmers can purchase high-quality cattle and sheep from the center at prices lower than the market rate. The center then buys back the calves and lambs at prices higher than the market rate.

Throughout the breeding process, the center provides technical support, including nutritional formulas, artificial insemination for cattle and sheep, as well as disease prevention and health care.

"In simple terms, it's about enabling farmers to raise livestock without worries and sell with confidence," Lu said.

The center also benefits local households by purchasing their forage, subsidizing land transfer fees, and offering them shares with dividends.

"Every inch of the breeding center

belongs to the nearby villages. The 196 *mu* of land was entirely transferred from these villages, and we pay 800 yuan per *mu* each year," he elaborated. "The local government has allocated shares to 732 households affected by the disaster, giving each household 50,000 yuan in shares. With a 2 percent dividend, the center provides an annual payout of 1,000 yuan to each household."

The center also creates job opportunities, especially for local young people. All of the center's employees are residents affected by the disaster. By working here, they gain both technical skills and higher incomes.

Empowering talent

In Lu's view, the key to revitalizing rural areas is to attract young people and college graduates to return and work in their hometowns.

He mentioned that the main workforce in Jishishan's agricultural production consists of people born in the 1950s and 1960s, and many young people are reluctant to return to rural areas due to lifestyle considerations.

"The loss of talent poses substantial challenges for rural areas in terms of innovation and knowledge," Lu said. "Youth should, in fact, be the backbone of rural development. Their professional skills can elevate entire industries."

Lu also noted that rural areas offer abundant opportunities for young people's personal development.

"Competition in first- and sec-

ond-tier cities is extremely intense. College students from northwestern regions face considerable pressure when seeking employment in big cities. However, if they return to their local areas, they become a highly knowledgeable group capable of making significant contributions to rural development," he explained. "By shifting their mindset, they can discover a new arena to showcase their talents."

The five university graduates currently employed at the breeding center have already infused the facility with fresh energy.

They have created accounts on Douyin and Kuaishou, where they post videos related to livestock farming, build their fan base, and prepare to launch e-commerce live streaming.

Plans for a "smart ranch" are also underway. Lu and these young team members are working on establishing a big data platform for the breeding center. By equipping each cattle and sheep with electronic ear tags to track every step of their growth, they aim to integrate this data for more scientific decision-making.

Lu has witnessed how much these young people have learned and grown. When they first arrived, they all started as feeders, but over time, based on each person's qualities, abilities, and performance, they were assigned to different roles.

"Our promotion system offers them long-term development opportunities — we have positions



Top: The Jishishan Cattle and Sheep Breeding Center covers approximately 13.07 hectares and features dozens of sheds. WANG HU / FOR CHINA DAILY
Above: Lu Xiaopeng works at the breeding center. LI YANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Below: The cattle and sheep raised at the center. SONG LEILEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

like shed leader, district leader, regional leader, team leader, manager, and more," Lu said.

"I myself am a young person who returned to the countryside from the city. For others making the same choice, the most important thing is to humble ourselves, settle down, and focus on doing every small task well. Only then can we carve out a unique path," he added.

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Small moments across the Strait forge lasting bonds

About a month ago, a video of me went viral online. Here is what happened: on Nov 28, table tennis legend Ma Long and a delegation organized by the Ma Ying-jeou Foundation visited my school, Chengchi University in Taiwan.

The campus buzzed with excitement as throngs of students gathered to catch a glimpse of the Olympic champion, and I was among them. As Ma Long arrived, I couldn't help but shout, "My mom says you're so handsome!"

That moment was captured on video and soon spread across social media in both Taiwan and the Chinese mainland.

When I first saw the video trending, I felt a mix of surprise and joy. It wasn't just about being noticed — it was the thought that my lighthearted comment resonated with so many people.

I even received messages from strangers on both sides of the Strait, expressing hopes that more mainland athletes might visit Taiwan in the future.

The magic of sports lies in its ability to foster unity and interaction, enabling deep and

genuine connections through shared effort and laughter.

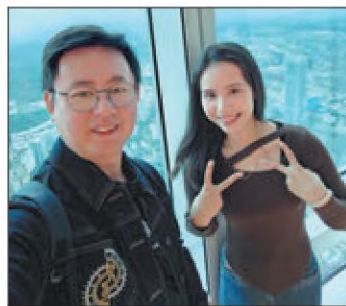
I vividly recall my experience during last year's Dragon Boat Festival in Guangdong, where I participated in a cross-Strait exchange program.

My teammates included students from both Taiwan and the mainland. They paddled in sync with the rhythm of shouted commands. As the drummer, every beat I called out was met with the full effort of everyone on board. The trust and coordination we shared made us feel like one single entity.

After the race, we sat together on the riverbank, exchanging stories while eating *zongzi* (sticky rice dumplings), the traditional treat of the festival. At that moment, I realized that sports offer more than just the fleeting joys of victory — they create a profound sense of belonging and build emotional bridges across the Strait.

Beyond sports, these emotional connections are also woven into the details of everyday life.

Zhou Zhou, an exchange student from the Communication University of China in Bei-



Zheng Yaling (right) and Zhou Zhou take a selfie together at the Taipei 101 skyscraper in Taipei, Taiwan, on Dec 7, 2024. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

jing, told me that Taiwan's warm hospitality is one of the main reasons why mainland visitors find it so captivating.

He recounted two heartwarming stories. One rainy evening in Taipei, when he was stranded outside the campus without an umbrella, a passing couple noticed and

kindly offered theirs, refusing to take it back. They simply said, "Pass it on to someone in need." Another time, Zhou wanted to have one last meal of soup dumplings before leaving Taipei, but the restaurant had already closed. Recognizing him as a regular, the owners reopened the kitchen and prepared a fresh batch just for him.

During my studies at Hunan University in Changsha, Hunan province, from 2020 to 2024, I was often touched by the small, thoughtful gestures of my friends from the mainland.

My roommates, who came from Hubei, Shanghai, and Zhejiang, frequently shared homemade snacks that gave me a taste of their hometowns: Hubei's fragrant rice wine cakes, Zhejiang's crispy Jinhua ham pastries, and Shanghai's iconic crab shell pies.

One especially memorable moment was during the Mid-Autumn Festival when a professor invited me to her home to gaze at the moon and enjoy mooncakes.

It reminded me of similar family gatherings back in Taiwan, where we would sit together in the courtyard, also savoring

mooncakes and admiring the full moon. The shared traditions across the Strait reflected our deep cultural bond. That evening, surrounded by such warmth, I felt truly at home, even though I was miles away from my own family.

I believe it's these subtle emotional connections — whether it's a Taiwan mother cheering for Ma Long or a mainland student being enchanted by Taiwan's gentle human touch — that form the most precious bonds across the Taiwan Strait. They don't rely on grand speeches or elaborate rituals; instead, they arise naturally from genuine interactions and heartfelt experiences, drawing us closer together.

Written by Zheng Yaling, a student at Chengchi University in Taiwan.



Online Watch the video by scanning the code.