

WORLD USA

Happy Global to promote Asian goods in US market

PAGE 10



Innovation lights a bright path for Shanxi's lanterns

CHINA, PAGE 5



Trade is smooth sailing

Eco-friendly exports to see growth amid demand for green transition

BUSINESS, PAGE 6

# CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中國日報 THURSDAY, JANUARY 16, 2025

## China, Sri Lanka boost BRI ties

Deals signed to bolster high-quality Belt and Road construction

By CAO DESHENG

caodesheng@chinadaily.com.cn

China and Sri Lanka have outlined a plan to further boost high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, amid a series of agreements they signed on Wednesday to enhance bilateral ties.

President Xi Jinping and visiting Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake witnessed the signing of the cooperation documents between the two countries, including an agreement on Sri Lanka's export of agricultural products to China, after their official talks at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing.

Xi told Dissanayake that China will actively support Sri Lanka in focusing on economic development, and will advance high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, enhance collaboration in fields such as modern agriculture, the digital economy and the marine economy, and create new highlights in bilateral cooperation.

In response, the Sri Lankan president said that his country remains committed to joint construction of the Belt and Road to enhance mutual connectivity in the region, and welcomes more investment from Chinese enterprises.

Dissanayake started a four-day state visit to China on Tuesday, and analysts said the trip has far-reaching economic and geopolitical implications. This is his first visit to China since taking office as Sri Lankan president in September, and his second overseas trip, following a visit to India in mid-December.

In recent years, China has deepened its strategic cooperative partnership with Sri Lanka with fruitful outcomes on Belt and Road cooperation, including the building of a container terminal in the Sri Lankan capital of Colombo, as well as roads and railways, and the development of Hambantota Port and Port City Colombo.

During their talks, Xi emphasized the long-standing traditional friendship between China and Sri Lanka. He said that over the 68 years since they established diplomatic relations, the two countries have maintained a healthy and stable relationship, setting an example of friendly coexistence and mutually beneficial cooperation between nations.

Xi said that China-Sri Lanka relations now face historical opportunities to build on past achievements and open up new prospects. He called for both sides to handle their relationship from a strategic perspective and work together to build a China-Sri Lanka community with a shared future.

China is committed to taking Sri Lanka as a priority in its foreign relations, and pledges continued support for the country in safeguarding its national independence, sover-



President Xi Jinping hosts a welcoming ceremony for Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake before their talks at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Wednesday. The Sri Lankan president started a four-day state visit to China on Tuesday. WANG ZHUANGFEI / CHINA DAILY

eignty and territorial integrity, as well as its independent choice of the development path that suits its national conditions, he said.

Xi assured Dissanayake that as China is committed to comprehensively deepening reform and advancing the modernization drive, new opportunities will be created for Sri Lanka's development.

He also expressed the country's willingness to strengthen coordination and cooperation with Sri Lanka in multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, and to work together to address major global challenges like climate change.

Both countries should uphold uni-

ty and self-improvement among the countries of the Global South to contribute to regional peace, stability and prosperity, Xi added.

Dissanayake expressed his appreciation for China's significant achievements in the fields of economy, technology and infrastructure, saying that China has always been a reliable friend and partner to Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka highly values its relationship with China, firmly adheres to the one-China principle, and appreciates China's valuable support in safeguarding its independence, sovereignty and legitimate rights and interests, he said.

He expressed Sri Lanka's commitment to enhancing cooperation with China in a broad range of areas including infrastructure, energy, agriculture, finance, poverty reduction, digital transformation, tourism and personnel training.

Noting that China is a leading country of the Global South and plays a positive role in international affairs, Dissanayake said Sri Lanka is willing to continue strengthening coordination and mutual support with China within a multilateral framework to safeguard their common interests.

Before their talks, Xi held a grand welcoming ceremony for Dissanayake at the Great Hall of the People.

## Yoon taken into custody after month of standoff

By YANG RAN

yangran1@chinadaily.com.cn

South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol was arrested at the presidential residence on Wednesday, becoming the country's first sitting president to be kept in custody.

South Korean investigators announced early Wednesday that they had arrested the impeached president during their second attempt to execute the arrest warrant.

Yoon's arrest is a result of his declaration on Dec 3 of martial law, which the National Assembly overturned just hours later. On Dec 14, the National Assembly voted to impeach Yoon, and a trial is underway in the nation's Constitutional Court. Yoon's presidential powers have been suspended.

In a prerecorded message, Yoon said he submitted himself for questioning to avoid any bloodshed, though he said the investigation and arrest were illegal. He deplored the execution of the arrest warrant, which he described as being carried out by force.

Da Zhigang, a researcher at the Heilongjiang Provincial Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Northeast Asian Studies, said the issue of Yoon's arrest has sparked a significant societal divide in South Korea, as seen in the recent surge in demonstrations by Yoon's supporters as well as his detractors, highlighting the intensifying political strife between the ruling and opposition parties.

Da said the president's statement showed that Yoon lacked confidence "in the presidential guards' ability to withstand a second arrest attempt led by the Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials. Given this, Yoon aims to enhance his image and public support by voluntarily cooperating with the arrest to avoid conflict."

Although polls have indicated that most South Koreans disapproved of Yoon's martial law decla-

ration and supported his impeachment, the prolonged political standoff has energized his supporters, leading to a resurgence of support for his People Power Party, the country's ruling party, in recent weeks.

According to the latest Realmeter poll results released on Monday, support for the PPP had reached 40.8 percent, while the main opposition Democratic Party's support was at 42.2 percent. The difference falls within the margin of error and represents a significant narrowing from the previous week's 10.8 percentage point gap.

The Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials said on Wednesday that during the investigation, the impeached president consistently refused to make any statements and declined to allow the questioning process to be recorded or videotaped.

Zhan Debin, director of the Center for Korean Peninsula Studies at Shanghai University of International Business and Economics, said that Yoon's arrest is of strong symbolic significance and is likely to expedite judicial proceedings.

Kwon Ki-sik, a former presidential secretary for monitoring of state affairs, said the arrest is likely to expedite the Constitutional Court's review of Yoon's impeachment case, and a verdict could be reached as soon as mid-March.

Yoon's legal team issued a statement on Wednesday saying that the CIO does not have the authority to investigate the president, and the arrest warrant was illegal. The team vowed to hold the CIO and the police legally accountable for what it called the unlawful execution of the arrest warrant.

Da, the Heilongjiang researcher, said that Yoon's case will likely lead to a prolonged struggle. "The CIO will try to speed up the investigation in collaboration with the Defense Ministry and the police. The ruling party will use favorable laws to defend and countersue."

See **Arrest**, page 3



A screen shows a prerecorded video message of South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol addressing the nation before his arrest on Wednesday, while his supporters demonstrate near the presidential residence in Seoul. LEE JIN-MAN / AP

## Shaping a new era of Sino-European cooperation

In recent years, the shift from globalization to localization has marked a profound transformation in the dynamics of China-Europe business collaboration. This transition, driven by the imperative to bring producers closer to consumers, is reshaping how both

regions address local demands while fostering greater economic inclusivity. It is crucial to recognize that localization does not contradict globalization; rather, it represents a reimagined framework for globalization — one enabled by new technology, which facilitates a more distributed and adaptive global network.

By prioritizing localization, businesses are adapting to modern supply chain challenges and meeting the evolving preferences

WORLD WATCH  
By Luigi Gambardella

of consumers. This approach is not only deepening the ties between Europe and China, it is also laying the groundwork for more resilient and sustainable partnerships.

However, building these partnerships requires more than strategic alignment — it hinges on mutual trust and transparency.

During Tuesday's phone conversation with European Council President Antonio Costa, Chinese President Xi Jinping rightly called on both sides to strengthen strategic communication, enhance strategic mutual trust, and uphold their partnership.

Overcoming cultural and operational differences remains a critical challenge, but enhanced communication and the establishment of shared governance frameworks can pave the way for more integrated and enduring collaborations.

Trust, after all, is the bedrock of any successful relationship, and in this context, it will determine the future trajectory of Sino-European cooperation.

The shared pursuit of digital transformation and sustainability provides a powerful platform for mutual growth and the cultivation of trust. Both Europe and China recognize the immense opportunities that arise when technology and environmental objectives are aligned.

See **Partnership**, page 3

## STUDY TOURS DRAW STUDENTS TO MUSEUMS

Growing fascination with history fuels boom in educational visits

By DENG ZHANGYU

dengzhangyu@chinadaily.com.cn

Determined to find a study tour slot for her 11-year-old daughter at the National Museum of China in Beijing, Liu Zhengqun had been monitoring the programs offered by the country's leading museum since December. Last week, she secured a place in a two-hour study tour for her daughter, who had been waiting for this chance since last summer.

"My daughter asked me to take her to the museum during the summer vacation," said Liu, from Wuhan in Hubei province. However,

in-depth

the rush for the museum was so huge at the time, that they failed to secure any tickets.

Liu was initially surprised by her daughter's must-do list for her first visit to Beijing. The child did not want to see the Great Wall or eat Peking duck like most tourists. She wanted to see the national treasures and learn the stories behind the precious artifacts.

See **Museums**, page 2



INSIDE  
Solidarity of global community can steady the ship  
Global Views, page 13

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## PAGE TWO

## Museums: Inspiring, educating millions

From page 1

"The school has been encouraging students to go to museums and explore more outside of classes. Study tours in museums are really popular now," said Liu.

At a meeting held by the National Cultural Heritage Administration on Jan 8, it was announced that museums around the country had received more than 1.4 billion visitors in 2024. With people's fascination for museums growing, the past year has seen the educational function of museums being significantly enhanced and study tours becoming increasingly popular.

Zhou Jingcheng, director of the public education department at the National Museum of China, said the popularity of museum study tours has increased rapidly over the past two years, leading to a boom.

Last year, the National Museum of China provided education services to middle schools in Beijing as many as 1,326 times, serving more than 38,000 students. At the same time, a large number of people from outside Beijing also came to the National Museum to participate in study programs.

"These study tours are designed to be very interesting and interactive and have been received warmly by children and teenagers. Many return to participate in different tours," said Zhou.

The museum's study tours are generally divided into two categories: one focuses on showcasing China's long history, with each program concentrating on a different dynasty, mainly targeting middle school students; the other highlights China's unique cultural symbols, covering four areas: art, science, intangible cultural heritage, and music, dance and clothes.

A regular study tour, often held on weekends, usually lasts two hours and includes a visit to an exhibition, a classroom session, and a hands-on activity, such as making a cup of tea after learning about China's tea culture.

In an effort to diversify its offerings, the museum introduced six outdoor tours to archaeological sites in other provinces last year, including Hebei, Shanxi, and Shaanxi. These trips, lasting three to five days, allow participants to experience the role of archaeologists firsthand. The outdoor tours, which are open to both children and adults, have proven to be extremely popular.

The museum's four-day winter camps, set to open in mid-January, sold out within two days at the end of December.

"The popularity of museum study tours can be partly attributed to people's increasing demand for high-quality spiritual products. Museums' efforts to provide interesting and various programs are also important," said Zhou, who is also director of the special committee on public education of the Chinese Museum Association.

## Diversified tours

The popular Jinsha Site Museum in Chengdu, North-western China's Sichuan province, has been conducting study tours since 2014. The spacious museum includes several exhibition halls, a relics hall where visitors can see the archaeological site itself, and a garden area that recreates the natural environment of ancient times.

In the past two years, the museum has organized about 140 study tours. These tours offer hands-on experiences such as working as an archaeologist, repairing relics, making golden wares and learning about ancient architecture.

According to He Lili, director of the museum's public education department, the interest in these programs has grown significantly. She has worked at the museum for a decade and recalls that 10 years ago, the Junior Interpreter study program received only a few dozen applications each year. Last year, the museum received more than 1,000 applications.

The museum is dedicated to promoting the culture of the more than 3,000-year-old Shu civilization. Many of the tours are specifically designed to focus on this ancient civilization.

For instance, the museum offered a four-day tour that allowed children to visit various locations to learn about the Shu civilization from different perspectives, including archaeological sites and other museums. During the tour, participants even had the unique opportunity to spend a night at the museum, sleeping in tents set up in the exhibition halls.

Last year, to make the tours more appealing, the museum partnered with a Shu embroidery factory and a lacquerware factory. Participants were invited to experience these traditional crafts firsthand after learning about related relics in the exhibition halls.

"Museums have become an important destination for family education. On Children's Day, long lines form at the entrance from early morning, with many parents bringing their children, hoping to take part in our study tour. This did not happen previously," said He.

Open to the public since 2019, the Confucius Museum in Qufu, Shandong province, capitalized on the trend of study tours in 2023 by launching several attractive educational products.

The museum is dedicated to the life, teachings and legacy of Confucius, the renowned Chinese philosopher and educator. It showcases a vast collection of artifacts, manuscripts and historical relics related to Confucius and Confucianism. Its tours are designed to enable visitors to explore details of Confucius' life, as well as his philosophical ideas.

One popular program centers on its large collection of traditional clothes from the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911), allowing participants to make replicas of antique robes. Another standout program focuses on food cooked in the Confucius family, where participants can prepare the same cakes as those made by the ancient people.

Cheng Liqi, director of the Confucius Museum's public education department, mentioned that during the National Day holiday in October, they conducted three



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

study tours per day, catering to 60 families. Despite their best efforts, they could not meet the significant demand from families visiting the museum from other cities. In November, students from several middle schools in Beijing and Shanghai visited the museum to participate in the tours.

Cheng's team also received invitations from schools in Fujian, Guangdong, and the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region to conduct in-classroom study tours. For these, the museum provides multimedia materials and creative products related to hands-on activities.

"They want to learn something during their visit while also having fun and relaxing. This is what people expect from study tours. And museums have made great efforts to meet these demands in the past two years," Cheng said.

She added that she could see the rapid increase in the number of students visiting museums, a trend supported by policies issued by government bodies at all levels.

## Policy and guidance

Early in 2016, the Ministry of Education and 11 other ministries jointly issued a guidance on promoting study tours for primary and secondary school students. Subsequently, lists of study tour destinations were circulated widely by government bodies. This form of study, characterized by "going out," is seen as an innovative way to connect school education with extracurricular education.

The National Cultural Heritage Administration has also launched several supporting policies to encourage

museums to collaborate with schools to promote traditional culture in an engaging manner. The most recent initiative, implemented in September, provides guidance on supporting archaeological sites to carry out study activities and calls for organizing more archaeology-themed tours.

Additionally, governments of various cities have implemented concrete policies to support this initiative.

Liu Kun, head of the public education department at Shenzhen Museum in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, mentioned that the department has been receiving lots of calls from schools every day since the local government announced a policy requiring students to spend half a day each week at cultural institutions in October.

"We have very limited number of workers to deal with such a big demand from schools," said Liu. In fact, the museum only has three employees focusing on study tours and programs.

The museum collaborates with schools to co-produce guidebooks for each exhibition, to help teachers and students learn from the book while visiting. However, it's still not enough to meet the massive demand.

During the summer vacation, the museum remained open for over 40 consecutive days, with peak daily attendance reaching approximately 25,000 visitors. As a result, it had to reduce the number of study tours due to a lack of staff.

"We really hope to engage the education system and some qualified social institutions to offer high-quality study tours with us," Liu said.

Museum study tours can be categorized into three types: school-led, museum-led, and institution-led.

Institution-led programs are developed independently by organizations such as travel agencies, cultural companies or study tour institutions. These programs currently dominate the market in terms of quantity, variety of themes, and number of participants, said Zheng Yi, director of the Department of Cultural Heritage and Museology at Fudan University.

School-led and museum-led study tours are relatively fewer in number, and thus cannot fully meet the market demand. Consequently, institution-led museum study programs have gradually become a popular choice among consumers, said Zheng.

There are controversies surrounding museum study tours led by third-party institutions. For instance, the explanations given during these tours are often not accurate and can mislead students. The high demand for these study tours also makes it difficult for other visitors to secure reservations. Also, groups of students crowding around a piece of artifact can disrupt the viewing experience of others.

"To ensure the healthy development of study tours, scientific guidance is necessary. It's better to manage and guide these activities rather than block them," suggested Zheng.

Zhou, the expert from the Chinese Museum Association, said the healthy development of museum study tours will happen over time. The quick boom has led to problems. The National Museum of China where he works is working on a guidance to standardize study tour services in museums.

In future, he said that technology could help meet the increasing demand.

## TOP NEWS

# China, Vietnam vow to enhance cooperation

Xi urges nations to push for stronger growth of socialist cause during phone talks with To Lam

By MO JINGXI  
mojingxi@chinadaily.com.cn

President Xi Jinping has called on China and Vietnam to maintain close high-level exchanges, push for more outcomes of bilateral cooperation, and promote people-to-people exchanges, as the two countries usher in the 75th anniversary of their diplomatic relations this year.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks on Wednesday during phone talks with General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam Central Committee To Lam.

The conversation came several months after the Vietnamese leader visited China in August, soon after taking office as general secretary that same month.

Xi said progress has been made in implementing the consensus reached in August between the two leaders.

As 2025 marks the final year of China's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) and is a crucial year for the CPV to prepare for its 14th National Party Congress, Xi said this year bears great significance for both China and Vietnam.

The two sides should continue to build up their parties, strengthen exchanges on socialist theories and practice, and push for the stronger development of the socialist cause amid ongoing global transformation, he said.

Xi stressed the need to give full play to the political guiding role of high-level exchanges and called for efforts to promote mutually beneficial cooperation to achieve more results.

China and Vietnam should step up connectivity, jointly build a frontier platform for cooperation on new quality productive forces, and build stable and smooth cross-border industrial and supply chains, he said.

China is Vietnam's largest trading partner, and bilateral trade, which exceeded 1.67 trillion yuan (\$227.8 billion) in the first 11 months of last year, is characterized by a diverse range of goods, including electronics, machinery, textiles and agricultural products.

Xi called on the two neighboring countries to engage their peoples in exchanges with a human touch, strengthen cooperation in such areas as media, tourism and youth, and build more projects in the public interest.

The two countries should also strengthen coordination on global and regional issues, uphold international fairness and justice, and jointly build a community with a shared future for mankind, he added.

To Lam expressed to Xi his sincere condolences over the loss of lives and property caused by the earthquake in Dingri county in southwestern China's Xizang autonomous region.

Noting that Vietnam will continue to consider the relationship with China a top priority in its foreign policy, the Vietnamese leader said his country will strengthen strategic relations between the two parties and countries, enhance policy coordination, and jointly organize activities to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations.

He also said that Vietnam will make joint efforts with China to properly manage and resolve differences, and to promote the building of a Vietnam-China community with a shared future that carries strategic significance.

The two leaders also jointly announced the official launch of the China-Vietnam Year of People-to-People Exchanges, and they exchanged greetings ahead of Spring Festival, wishing the people of both countries good health and prosperity.

## Vibrant display



A dragon dance is performed on Tuesday in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, as part of celebrations to mark the upcoming Spring Festival. PHEARUM / XINHUA

## Arrest: Turmoil 'harms ROK's national image'

From page 1

"What's clear is that this political turmoil harms South Korea's national image and economy. South Korea's national instability may also increase regional uncertainty," Da added.

In late December, the exchange rate of the South Korean won at one point plummeted to 1,487 against the US dollar, the lowest in more than 15 years.

When asked about Yoon's arrest at a regular news conference on Wednesday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said that he would not comment on South Korea's domestic affairs.

"China and the ROK are important neighbors and cooperation partners. China stands ready to work with the ROK for the sound and steady growth of bilateral relations," Guo said.

Agencies contributed to this story.

# Biden's move sparks concerns over Japan-US ties

By CAI HONG  
caihong@chinadaily.com.cn

US President Joe Biden's decision to block the acquisition of US Steel by Japan's Nippon Steel has raised fresh questions about the state of economic and diplomatic relations between the United States and its key Asian ally.

Experts see the move as a significant indicator of how Washington perceives its economic ties with Tokyo, if not the broader bilateral relationship. On Jan 3, Biden cited national security concerns for halting the proposed \$15 billion deal. However, on Saturday, the companies announced that the US administration would delay enforcing the order until June.

Observers noted that the delay will allow time for court review of the lawsuits filed by both US Steel and Nippon Steel. The lawsuits claim that the Biden administration and the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States violated constitutional due process guarantees, statutory procedural requirements, and engaged in unlawful political interference.

During a virtual meeting on Monday with Biden and Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba urged the US leader to address concerns brewing in both Japanese and American business communities over the acquisition's uncertain fate.

"Trust has been greatly damaged, and it is unclear what will be required to undo the harm," read an editorial in the Japan Times. "It is difficult to imagine a greater blow to the alliance — but now Japan must wonder if such a shock could be in its future."

Politicians in the US were quick to oppose Nippon Steel's acquisition of US Steel, citing concerns over national security and poten-

tial threats to US trade protection. Critics also questioned whether Nippon Steel would safeguard American jobs — a concern echoed by the United Steelworkers union, which firmly opposed the deal.

The Yomiuri Shimbun, Japan's largest newspaper in terms of circulation and influence, criticized Biden's order for opening the door to problems in Japan-US relations. Nippon Steel is reportedly the first Japanese company to face such scrutiny on national security grounds.

"It is greatly disappointing that Biden reached his final decision without fully considering the importance of the Japan-US relationship, which has developed through mutual cooperation since the end of World War II," the newspaper's editorial read.

The Yomiuri Shimbun also noted that Biden's actions appear to align with a growing trend toward protectionism, echoing sentiments previously associated with US President-elect Donald Trump, whose "America First" stance emphasized tariff policies and trade barriers.

Critics in Japan see Biden's decision as emblematic of an inward-looking shift in US policy, prompting warnings about the broader implications for bilateral ties.

Former Japanese prime minister Yukio Hatoyama openly criticized Biden in a social media post. "This is a poor decision by politicians who want votes," Hatoyama wrote, urging the Japanese government to support Nippon Steel and calling the situation "an opportunity for Japan's independence."

The backlash highlights growing unease in Tokyo over how Washington's evolving economic priorities might impact its closest allies, raising questions about the durability of trust in the decades-long alliance.

Japan has been the top source of foreign investment in the US for five consecutive years, according to the

US Bureau of Economic Analysis. However, The Yomiuri Shimbun cautioned that Biden's "unreasonable" decision to block Nippon Steel's acquisition could dampen future investments in the US.

The US Chamber of Commerce echoed the concern, highlighting Japan's role as an "important and reliable ally" whose investments support nearly 1 million American jobs. "The decision could have a chilling effect on international investment in America," the Chamber warned.

Chen Youjun, a researcher at the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, interpreted the move as an instance of political interference in business.

"At the political level, the United Steelworkers — a coalition of 1.2 million active and retired members across the US, Canada and the Caribbean — strongly opposed the Nippon Steel deal and has been lobbying aggressively in Washington. Biden's decision reflects the influence of domestic conservative politics," he said.

Chen noted the business advantages of the deal, emphasizing Nippon Steel's technological edge. "Nippon Steel's technology and strength far exceed those of US Steel. Its proposed acquisition could help revitalize the American company, which has supported the deal," he said.

Sarah Bauerle Danzman, a political scientist at Indiana University, wrote on the Atlantic Council website that Biden's decision risks undermining the US' global economic standing. "This creates troubling risks for America's position in the global economy, which could worsen in the years to come," she said.

The Biden administration's move has also raised fears of an expanded use of national security claims to justify intervention in economic transactions. Such overreach could erode the legitimacy of

US government actions and encourage other nations to adopt similar reasoning to protect their own industries, potentially disadvantaging US commercial interests, Danzman wrote.

"By labeling Nippon Steel as a national security threat, rather than a national security asset, the United States makes it harder for its allies and partners to trust that it is a reliable partner," she said. "This will frustrate progress in developing more resilient supply chains around a range of critical items beyond steel, including critical minerals, electric vehicle batteries, semiconductors and biotechnologies."

US digital news outlet Politico noted that Biden's decision sends a troubling signal to foreign companies that political and diplomatic considerations might take precedence over business strategy when evaluating investments in the US.

Trump, who opposed the Nippon Steel deal during his first term, has reiterated his stance against the acquisition — at least for now.

However, some analysts and former Trump officials remain optimistic that Trump's history of fostering foreign direct investment and his somewhat favorable relations with Japan during his first term might outweigh his "America First" rhetoric. If the deal reemerges under Trump's administration, he could seize the opportunity to renegotiate it on terms more favorable to his political agenda.

Cai Liang, director of the North-east Asia Research Center at the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, expressed skepticism over Japan's ability to influence the outcome. "Japan can do little beyond voicing concerns. Nippon Steel's lawsuit against the Biden administration is more of a symbolic gesture to navigate an awkward situation than a practical effort to change the result," Cai said.

## Little explorer



Giant panda cub Lang Yue, who was born last year, explores for the first time the indoor enclosure at Ouwehands Zoo in Rhenen, the Netherlands, on Tuesday. PIROSCHE VAN DE WOUW / REUTERS

# Partnership: Strategic, collaborative approach essential to build trust

From page 1

This dual focus offers the chance to create a greener and more inclusive global economy, where collaborative initiatives can drive meaningful progress for both local and global communities.

A notable example is the partnership between China's CATL and Germany's BMW, which focuses on developing sustainable battery technologies to support the transition to electric vehicles in Europe. Such collaborations not only advance technological innovation but also underscore the importance of aligning environmental goals across regions.

Hungary's plan of undertaking a \$2 billion infrastructure project in Debrecen to transform the country's second-largest city into one of Europe's biggest battery production hubs highlights how the European-Chinese business collaboration in localization can benefit the local economy.

Similarly, European chipmaker STMicroelectronics announced its collaboration with Hua Hong Semi-

conductor, China's second-largest bespoke chipmaker, to manufacture microcontroller chips in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, by the end of 2025.

These joint projects showcase the potential of innovation-driven partnerships to transcend borders and foster a sense of global responsibility.

Central to this vision of collaboration is a commitment to human capital. Investing in workforce development is critical for both regions to keep pace with rapid technological advancements. Educational programs designed to build digital and transformative skills can prepare employees for the demands of the future.

Partnerships with universities play a pivotal role in cultivating a new generation of talent, one that is not only skilled but also ready to drive innovation in emerging industries. Recent initiatives between Chinese and European universities, particularly those in Italy and France, underscore the importance of placing people at the heart of economic progress.

Last year, the China-France Uni-

versity Presidents' Forum hosted at Tongji University in Shanghai explored ways to develop engineering talent through sustainable higher education.

Similarly, the China-Italy University Rectors Dialogue Meeting held at Peking University in Beijing in November, which was attended by Italian President Sergio Mattarella, resulted in new academic agreements and the launch of an initiative to expand European youth exchanges in China.

Another pillar of successful cooperation lies in enhancing the resilience of supply chains. Emerging technologies provide unprecedented opportunities to strengthen these operations, ensuring that businesses can adapt to disruptions with agility. Digital tools offer greater transparency and efficiency, which are key to creating supply chains that are not only robust but also competitive in the global market.

### Business relations

For example, JD Logistics' partnerships with European firms to

optimize cross-border e-commerce supply chains illustrate the potential of technology-driven supply chain resilience. By embracing new technologies, companies can navigate uncertainties and build the flexibility needed to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

For Chinese businesses seeking to expand their presence in Europe, a strategic and collaborative approach is essential to build trust. Success requires more than market entry; it demands a deep understanding of local dynamics and a commitment to aligning with European regulations and business practices. Chinese companies must clearly define their objectives and seek partnerships with European firms to achieve them.

Engaging in open dialogue with local governments and industry bodies is an important first step in identifying opportunities and navigating regulatory frameworks. Hosting collaborative events, such as workshops and forums, can also foster stronger connections and a clearer understanding of project feasibility.

Compliance with European regulations is essential for ensuring smooth market entry.

Beyond compliance, leveraging local expertise through partnerships with established European firms can help Chinese companies overcome market entry challenges. These collaborations provide valuable insights into the nuances of local markets, which are often shaped by language, culture and tradition.

Establishing joint ventures with trusted European counterparts can further strengthen these relationships by sharing investment risks and resources. In addition, collaboration with academic institutions and research centers can offer access to local expertise while enhancing innovation potential. Such partnerships not only foster goodwill with public authorities but also signal a commitment to contributing positively to the local economy.

Europe and China stand on the threshold of a new era in their relationship, one defined by shared aspi-

ration for a sustainable and digitally empowered future. As 2025 marks the 50th anniversary of EU-China diplomatic relations, this milestone serves as a crucial moment to reflect on the progress made and to envision a deeper, more dynamic partnership for the decades ahead.

Policymakers, businesses and academic institutions shall prioritize joint initiatives that capitalize on their shared strengths, ensuring long-term progress and mutual benefit. By embracing collaboration, innovation and people-centered initiatives, both regions can position themselves as leaders in global progress.

This is not merely a partnership of convenience; it presents a bold vision of what is possible when two economic powerhouses join forces to address the challenges and opportunities of our time. Together, we can drive meaningful change and inspire a model of cooperation that benefits the entire world.

The author is president of ChinaEU, a Brussels-based association promoting China-Europe business cooperation in the digital area. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## CHINA

## Sanmenxia Basin yields tons of oil in Henan

By LI PEIXUAN  
lipeixuan@chinadaily.com.cn

China has discovered 427 million metric tons of oil in the Sanmenxia Basin, marking a significant breakthrough for small and medium-sized basin exploration, the China Geological Survey said on Wednesday.

The Sanmenxia Basin, in western Henan province, was identified last year as a key exploration target by the CGS, a division of the Ministry of Natural Resources. Initial exploration achieved a maximum daily industrial oil output of 15.83 cubic meters, the first significant oil breakthrough in the region.

Following the discovery, the CGS partnered with the Henan government and related enterprises to drill two additional wells. These produced maximum daily oil flows of 15.5 cubic meters and 92.52 cubic meters, respectively, according to the CGS.

**427 million**

metric tons of oil was discovered in the Sanmenxia Basin in Henan province.

"This discovery confirms the promising oil exploration prospects of the Sanmenxia Basin and boosts confidence in continued exploration," said Bai Zhongkai, head of the CGS's oil and gas resources investigation center.

The Sanmenxia Basin spans 4,550 square kilometers and is one of the 356 small and medium-sized basins in China. As of 2020, resource evaluations had been conducted for only 89 of these basins, leaving significant untapped potential, the CGS said.

Su Yinao, an academician with the Chinese Academy of Engineering, said the Sanmenxia Basin's success could serve as a model for similar exploration nationwide.

"Solid geological surveys in the basin led to the discovery of high-quality hydrocarbon source rock, overturning the belief that the region lacked oil and gas potential," said Zhang Zuoheng, director of the CGS's oil and gas resources investigation center.

The CGS emphasized the importance of innovative technical methods, citing the development of an efficient and environmentally friendly system tailored to small and medium-sized basins.

"This approach enabled rapid breakthroughs and will be critical in future exploration efforts," Zhang said.

The success in the Sanmenxia Basin suggests resource potential in the remaining 267 unevaluated basins, potentially bolstering China's oil and gas reserves and energy security, the CGS added.

Looking ahead, the CGS plans to accelerate construction of an exploration and development base in the basin to assist oil and gas companies in boosting evaluation and production capabilities.

Additionally, the agency will focus on intensifying surveys in other small and medium-sized basins in southern North China to uncover more oil and gas resources. Promising basins with favorable geological conditions will be prioritized for further surveys and technical research, with an aim to transform them into growth hubs for China's energy sector.

## Winter catch



A fisherman displays a huge fish he caught during a winter fishing festival in Luoyang, Henan province, on Wednesday. Amid the fishermen's echoing shouts in the cold wind, fish leaped out of the water and into the nets, yielding a bountiful harvest for the joyous anglers. LI WEICHAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

## More companies going global for IP protection

Regulator opens centers nationwide to offer guidance, handle overseas cases

By CAO YIN  
caoyin@chinadaily.com.cn

Chinese enterprises going global for intellectual property protection is intensifying, following a notable increase in the enterprises' patent and trademark applications overseas, an official from the country's top IP regulator said.

Last year, the number of patents and trademarks applied for by domestic entities overseas continued rising, "meaning that more innovators have realized the use of IP rights to expand the international market and make themselves more competitive in the world", Hu Wenhui, deputy head of the China National Intellectual Property Administration, said at a news conference on Wednesday.

Data released at the conference showed that the number of international design applications submitted by Chinese enterprises and individuals through the Hague Agreement ranked first in the world last year, reaching 4,868, an increase of 29.5 percent year-on-year.

The administration also received 7,039 applications for the World Intellectual Property Organization's

Madrid System for international trademark registration from Chinese entities in the past year, a growth of 13.6 percent year-on-year, according to the data.

In addition, 130,000 high-value domestic invention patents were authorized overseas last year, nearly double the number at the end of 2020. These patents involved 16,000 innovators, an increase of 6,700 compared with the end of 2020.

"These figures have indicated that our creators and IP applicants are becoming more active overseas," Hu said.

Kang Lixia, a lawyer at Beijing's Panray Law Firm who specializes in patent affairs, said the growth of international IP applications "not only demonstrates that the enterprises have enhanced their IP protection awareness when going global, but also means that their innovation capabilities are becoming internationally competitive."

"When exploring overseas markets, many enterprises have realized the importance of strengthening the protection of self-developed technologies and original products," Kang added. "Some

even turned to me before the exploration to learn about how to prevent IP risks if they are to produce and sell goods abroad."

To strongly protect the IP rights of domestic innovators and encourage more of them to go global, Hu said that the administration established 33 IP protection centers nationwide last year, with optimized services to guide the enterprises in conducting self-inspections of export products and the handling of overseas cases.

Meanwhile, in response to measures taken for the upcoming 9th Asian Winter Games, Guo Wen, another official from the administration, said that a campaign to fight IP infringements involving the sporting event has been underway since the end of last year.

"We've registered 19 special symbols of the event, such as the emblem and mascots, to strengthen IP protection, and also opened a quick channel to review patent applications related to the games," she said.

The administration has also urged major online platforms, including Douyin, Kuaishou, JD and Pinduoduo, to take steps to protect IP rights while selling authorized products related to the Games, which will be hosted in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, from Feb 7 to 14.

## Natural disaster management a priority

By HOU LIQIANG  
houliqiang@chinadaily.com.cn

The Ministry of Water Resources announced on Wednesday that it will prioritize enhancing China's flood and drought control systems this year, as the nation grapples with the increasing frequency of extreme weather events driven by the climate crisis.

The pledge came in a statement released after the ministry's annual work conference, held on Monday and Tuesday, which reviewed 2024 achievements and set goals for the year ahead.

Reflecting on its handling of widespread flooding and drought disasters last year, the ministry urged heightened vigilance among officials in response to extreme weather conditions.

China's seven longest rivers experienced 26 major flooding events last

year, with 1,321 waterways across the country rising above flood control warning levels, the statement said. Of these, 67 rivers recorded their most severe deluges on record.

Severe droughts also affected large areas of Southwest China, North China, Northwest China, and regions between the Yellow and Huaihe rivers, it added.

Despite these challenges, the ministry highlighted its success in mitigating disasters, emphasizing that efforts "effectively safeguarded lives and property while minimizing disaster-related losses to the utmost degree". This accomplishment contributed to China's record grain output of 700 million metric tons in 2024, it noted.

Looking ahead, the ministry warned of an increasingly dire situation as extreme weather events become more frequent, calling for sustained vigilance and a deeper

understanding of the nation's still-inadequate flood defense capabilities.

The statement underscored the urgent need to accelerate the modernization of China's flood control and disaster mitigation systems to "proactively tackle challenges posed by extreme weather conditions".

The ministry outlined eight priorities for 2025, with enhancing flood and drought control systems at the top of the list. Beyond engineering improvements, the ministry aims to strengthen monitoring and forecasting systems and better coordinate related efforts. It plans to leverage information technologies to advance water resource management.

By promoting a space-air-ground-water integrated monitoring system, the ministry intends to expedite the establishment of digital twins for river basins, water networks and management projects, enabling more intelligent oversight.

## Increased vigilance urged to safeguard biodiversity

By CAO YIN  
caoyin@chinadaily.com.cn

The Supreme People's Court has called for relentless efforts to protect the environment, even as the country has seen a decline in pollution-related crimes in recent years.

Chinese courts concluded 232,000 environmental cases in 2023, a 5.8 percent decrease from the previous year, the top court said. Of these, 5,386 were criminal cases involving pollution, down 11.5 percent year-on-year.

"The number of environmental criminal cases has gradually decreased, but violations and offenses in some key areas are still showing a high incidence," the court said. It disclosed six cases related to national parks on Monday, underscoring the need for vigilance.

In one case, a defendant surnamed Han illegally captured two golden coin turtles, also known as three-banded box turtles, in a tropical rainforest national park in Hainan province in August 2022 and April 2023. He brought the turtles, classified as national key protected wildlife and valued at 100,000 yuan (\$13,638), home for his personal enjoyment.

The Hainan No 2 Intermediate People's Court ruled that Han's actions constituted the crime of endangering precious wild animals. However, because he confessed and his actions did not significantly harm the local environment, he was sentenced to one

year in prison with a one-year reprieve and fined 5,000 yuan.

The Supreme People's Court approved the ruling, saying it struck a balance between punishment and ecological protection.

"The punishment serves as a deterrent to others and helps to protect biodiversity and maintain ecological balance in the park," it said, adding that it also encourages residents and tourists to safeguard their environment.

The court emphasized the significance of national parks in biodiversity conservation and called for stricter enforcement of environmental laws to support the country's goals for green development and carbon neutrality.

China has made strides in handling environmental cases over the past decade. The number of environmental adjudication divisions, including specialized tribunals and panels, grew to 2,813 in 2023 from 134 in 2014, making China's judicial system the most extensive of its kind globally.

The top court has also issued 21 judicial interpretations and 22 legal guidelines to improve the accuracy and efficiency of environmental case handling.

Highlighting the role of national parks in beautifying the country and preserving biodiversity, the court urged all levels of the judiciary to promote harmony between humanity and nature through the rule of law and to accelerate the green transformation of socioeconomic development.

## FROM THE GRASSROOTS

## 'Beibei' brings crowds to famed Bear Cave Street

By ZHANG XIAOMIN  
zhangxiaomin@chinadaily.com.cn

A 6-meter-tall mechanical polar bear named "Beibei" is drawing crowds to Bear Cave Street, a cyber-punk-themed destination that has become a social media sensation in Dalian, Liaoning province.

Unveiled in mid-2022, the attraction occupies less than 10,000 square meters and was transformed from an old factory workshop. In 2023, it welcomed 1.5 million visitors, with 60 percent coming from outside the city.

Beibei, weighing 25 metric tons and featuring 200 movable joints, performs daily shows that captivate audiences. On Tuesday, a crowd gathered as the mechanical bear blinked, shook its head and "awoke", prompting cheers. Operated by a technician, Beibei interacts with individuals in the audience, creating a lifelike experience.

"When I waved to it, it turned its head and blew air, making it seem alive," said a visitor from Beijing.

Xiao Di, founder of Dalian Betop Culture Technology Co and the architect of Bear Cave Street, said the street is more than a commercial venue. It preserves the city's industrial heritage while introducing a vibrant, modern aesthetic.

Located in Shahekou district's Wisdom Park, the project revitalized a site that once housed a factory established in 1930. The industrial park spans 200,000 square meters. "We've turned it into a new landmark for urban leisure tourism," Xiao said.



Tourists view the 6-meter-tall mechanical polar bear "Beibei" in Bear Cave Street in Dalian, Liaoning province, on Dec 21. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Briefly

## Foreign Ministry ropes in new media director

Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning has assumed the position of director general of the Department of Press, Communication and Public Diplomacy of the Foreign Ministry, according to the ministry's website. Mao, 52, has been serving as the 33rd spokesperson and deputy director general of the department since September 2022. She has been engaged in diplomatic work for over 27 years, spending most of her professional career in the ministry's Department of Asian Affairs. The department manages news coverage on major diplomatic events, guides China's overseas diplomatic missions on information dissemination and provides services to foreign media organizations and foreign journalists in China, the ministry's website said.

## Former vice-governor guilty of taking bribes

Wang Yixin, former vice-governor of Heilongjiang province, pleaded guilty to accepting bribes totaling 129 million yuan (\$17.59 million) during a trial at the Intermediate People's Court of Heze, Shandong province, on Wednesday. Prosecutors accused Wang of taking advantage of his various positions from 2008 to 2020 to

help companies and people in such matters as business contracting, land development and job promotions. From May 2005 to the second half of 2023, Wang accepted property and money totaling over 129 million yuan directly or through other people, prosecutors said. Wang confessed his crimes. The court said sentencing would be announced at a later date.

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# CHINA



## LANTERNS LIGHT WAY FOR SHANXI VILLAGE

Workshops combine tradition with modern desires to create popular products

Workers stack semifinished lanterns for drying at a workshop in Yangzhao in Jishan county, Shanxi province, on Jan 11. PHOTOS BY ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY

By ZHU XINGXIN in Taiyuan and CHEN LIANG

As the Year of the Snake draws near, the rural landscapes of northern Shanxi province are vibrant with a festive spirit, adorned by a myriad of red lanterns.

In the renowned "lantern village" of Yangzhao in Jishan county, Shanxi, the bustling season has returned, as villagers engage in meeting orders from domestic and international markets, with workshops brimming with an array of lanterns awaiting shipment.

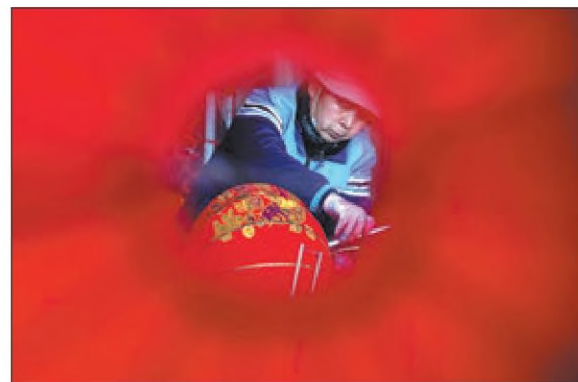
Jiao Tingting, 25, has been learning the art of lantern-making from her grandfather since childhood, progressing from bamboo lanterns to modern foldable ones. "In traditional Chinese culture, lanterns are often seen as symbols of good fortune, prosperity and reunion," she said.

Lanterns not only illuminate but also carry rich cultural connotations and symbolic meanings, and have evolved into a decorative item.

The tradition of lantern-making in Yangzhao dates back to the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. In 2008, "traditional lantern making craft of Yangzhao village" was listed in the first batch of city-level intangible cultural heritage in Yuncheng, the village's administrative city.

Most lanterns from Yangzhao are handmade, with workers diligently producing lanterns using a standard procedure in workshops.

"We are busy making lanterns throughout the year, especially during various festivals when the demand is higher," said Guan Jungeng, who manages a local lantern



A worker makes a lantern in the village on Jan 11.



A worker prints patterns on lantern covers at a workshop on Jan 11.

processing factory. "To welcome the Year of the Snake, orders have significantly increased since October, and workers have been busier. I have been answering order calls and managing deliveries all the time."

Yangzhao is home to 22 compa-

nies and professional cooperatives engaged in lantern making, along with three lantern accessory manufacturers. Annually, they produce around 10 million pairs of lanterns — pairs traditionally symbolizing good fortune — with a total output



A worker decorates lanterns at a factory in Yangzhao on Dec 30. SHI YUNPING / FOR CHINA DAILY



A worker packages lanterns in the village on Jan 11.

value of 150 million yuan (\$20.5 million). Lanterns provide employment for over 2,000 people in the village and surrounding areas.

Guan said that the workers in his factory are mainly local villagers. Workers are paid by the piece, and

one person can produce 200 to 300 lanterns per day. Villagers engage in lantern-making during their free time from farming.

It is reported that some villagers can earn over 100 yuan per day making lanterns, resulting in an

annual income of nearly 40,000 yuan. Many villagers have built two-story houses and can afford to purchase cars.

Yangzhao's lanterns were once presented to the imperial court as decorative items. Leveraging traditional production techniques, the village primarily manufactures plush lanterns and traditional palace lanterns, which are exported across the country and overseas. The 1.2-meter-diameter plush lantern is the best-selling item. Adorned with auspicious patterns such as peonies and phrases such as "surplus every year", it embodies people's fervent hopes for a better life.

In recent years, workshops in Yangzhao have continued to innovate and have created nearly 100 varieties of lanterns, including sheepskin, flower, white gauze and acrylic colors. To meet market demands, workers have begun producing electronic toy lanterns that incorporate interactive elements such as sound and light, which have become a new favorite in the market.

Jiao emphasized the importance of creating lanterns in ways that appeal to young people, combining heritage with innovation. She said that she has also opened an online store to further tap into overseas markets. "Our lanterns can also be custom-made to suit different clients' requirements," she said.

According to Ma Jinfeng, Party chief of Yangzhao, the village is upgrading its infrastructure to develop a lantern industry park. "Red lanterns not only decorate people's lives, but also bring us prosperity," he said.

Contact the writers at [zhuxingxin@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:zhuxingxin@chinadaily.com.cn)



Workers place semifinished lanterns for drying on Jan 11.

## BUSINESS

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## CITIC plant in Morocco gets Africa's first Lighthouse Factory tag

By YIN MINGYUE, TAN GUOLING and PANG BO

CITIC Dicastal's Morocco plant has been recognized as Africa's first "Lighthouse Factory", marking a major milestone in the continent's adoption of intelligent manufacturing.

The recognition by the World Economic Forum on Tuesday highlights the Chinese company's efforts to advance high-quality cooperation in countries and regions participating in the Belt and Road Initiative while supporting Africa's industrialization and sustainable development, experts said.

A "Lighthouse Factory" represents the highest standard in intelligent manufacturing and digitalization, serving as a model for best practices in applying "Industry 4.0" technologies.

The latest cohort of Factory Lighthouses provides a blueprint for accelerated deployment of artificial intelligence solutions that bolster productivity, enhance problem-solving capabilities and foster innovation, said the World Economic Forum.

"Across our Global Lighthouse Network, digital technologies are revolutionizing production ecosystems," said Kiva Allgood, head of the Centre for Advanced Manufacturing and Supply Chains, World Economic Forum.

"From AI-driven control towers to zero-code workflows, Lighthouses exemplify sustainable innovation, setting benchmarks that millions can follow to drive transformational change across the entire ecosystem," she added.

Located in the Atlantic Free Zone, CITIC Dicastal Morocco spans 25.33 hectares and comprises three phases dedicated to the production of aluminum wheels and castings.

With an annual capacity of 6 million aluminum wheels and 5 million aluminum castings, it is the largest investment project since the establishment of a strategic partnership between China and Morocco in 2016.

This is CITIC's third Lighthouse site and first one abroad. Badr Lahmoudi, president of CITIC Dicastal Morocco, expects that the know-how of the Morocco plant will be shared across other CITIC plants in countries and regions including Mexico, the United States, Germany and China.

The factory employs advanced intelligent manufacturing technologies, integrating smart equipment, real-time network monitoring, big data analytics, and artificial intelligence into production processes.

These innovations have tackled key industry challenges such as casting process control, defect detection, mold maintenance and energy resource management, said the company.

For example, the "AI-BOX" multitasking machine learning algorithm enables precise control of temperature variations during mold operations and autonomously adjusts process parameters.

This system optimizes over 1,700 control points and improves anomaly handling efficiency by more than 300 percent.

Additionally, a comprehensive mold database, built using 3D scanning and AI fitting algorithms, proactively assesses mold conditions and provides tailored

maintenance plans. This full-life cycle management approach enhances productivity and reduces operational disruptions.

The adoption of artificial intelligence and big data technologies has significantly boosted operational performance, increasing overall equipment efficiency by 17.35 percent, enhancing labor productivity by 26.58 percent and reducing the product defect rate by 31.11 percent.

In the field of intelligent manufacturing, CITIC Dicastal Morocco Lighthouse Factory has set a benchmark for the industry, said Lin Shen, an associate research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of World Economics and Politics.

"Its successful practices inspire other enterprises to increase investment in smart equipment and 'internet plus' intelligent manufacturing technologies, driving transformative changes in production methods across the sector," Lin added.

In addition, the factory's innovations in casting process control have optimized workflows, reduced energy use and minimized waste, providing a model for low-carbon production, Lin said.

According to the World Economic Forum, CITIC Dicastal Morocco has realized a 53 percent reduction in Scope 1 and 2 emissions. Scope 1 emissions are direct emissions from owned or controlled sources of an organization. Scope 2 emissions are indirect emissions from the generation of purchased energy.

"By integrating intelligent manufacturing with green development, it fosters industrywide sustainability, enhances resource efficiency, and promotes collaborative efforts toward smart and eco-friendly growth," Lin added.

Beyond technological advancements, the project's broader implications extend to Africa's industrial development.

Zhou Mi, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said that the project can help accelerate the industrialization process in Africa, which shows the exploration of a reasonable industrialization path combining local characteristics, rather than simply repeating the process of industrialization in other countries.

"This achievement reflects the strategic collaboration under the Belt and Road Initiative, fostering local employment, enhancing technological expertise, and advancing the industrial and supply chain infrastructure in Africa," Zhou said.

"For Morocco's manufacturing industry, an obvious external effect of upgrading the manufacturing level is expected to be seen," he said.

He also said that the plant, the very first "Lighthouse Factory" in Africa, proves that countries are contributing their collective wisdom, exploring effective pathways for high-quality cooperation under the BRI through a model of consultation, joint construction and shared benefits.

The success of this project hinges on the complementary cooperation between both sides, leveraging their respective strengths, he added.

Contact the writers at yinmingyue@chinadaily.com.cn



Export-bound NEVs awaiting shipment in Taicang, Jiangsu province. JI HAIKUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Eco-friendly exports rosy despite barriers

Experts point to strong global demand for green transition, new energy goods

By LIU YUKUN liuyukun@chinadaily.com.cn

China's green trade is set for continued growth, said analysts, emphasizing the necessity of diversifying supply chains to mitigate future geopolitical risks.

The remarks came after China's General Administration of Customs said recently that China led global green trade with electric vehicle exports exceeding 2 million units for the first time last year. The country also witnessed a surge in exports of electric motorcycles and bicycles, surpassing a value of 40 billion yuan (\$5.5 billion) for the first time.

Last year, exports of wind power generation units from China grew 71.9 percent, while solar products maintained export levels exceeding 200 billion yuan for the fourth consecutive year. Additionally, exports of lithium batteries reached a record 3.91 billion units.

Experts highlighted the strong global demand for green transition, adding a possible increase in demand for new energy facilities may propel their imports

from China this year.

"We are more positive than consensus on global demand for wind, solar and power grid equipment. We believe growth could accelerate in the first half of this year and our 2025 demand growth forecasts for wind, solar and grid equipment demand are 12 percent, 20 percent and 10 percent higher, respectively, than consensus of around 0-5 percent," said Ronald Wu, an analyst from financial services provider UBS.

"We believe the impact of an additional 10 percent US tariff on these sectors in China would be limited," Wu said.

Despite the significant and growing global demand for green transition, seizing international trade opportunities poses challenges for Chinese enterprises. Wu said geopolitical tensions and international trade relations are likely to have negative impacts on trade.

"An example is the establishment of carbon or environmental border tax mechanisms by various countries and regions, with the European Union expected to implement its Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism by 2026, covering six indus-

tries such as steel, aluminum and hydrogen," he said.

Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University, said that future trade barriers will become more severe, continuously affecting China's renewable energy product exports. While China has made significant progress in making renewable energy like photovoltaics and wind power more affordable to a wider range of users, trade protectionist measures by economies like the United States and the EU have created challenges.

"To address escalating trade barriers, Chinese renewable energy enterprises can diversify their strategies. By expanding into emerging markets such as Southeast Asian countries that haven't been impacted by US tariffs, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America, companies can mitigate risks and cater to more global demand," Lin said.

Ken Liu, head of mainland and Hong Kong utilities and renewables at UBS, highlighted the significant demand for Chinese power infrastructure products in Europe and the Middle East, particularly as the latter region is transitioning from heavy oil economies to ones with more diverse sources of income, driving substantial growth in power infrastructure needs.

## Measures set to spur holiday shopping

By SHI JING in Shanghai shijing@chinadaily.com.cn

As Chinese consumers have been increasingly emphasizing value for money, retailers and local governments have come up with more attractive discounts and subsidy plans this year for the Spring Festival shopping season.

German supermarket chain Aldi has provided about 300 kinds of low-priced special goods for the holiday among its outlets in Shanghai, over 200 of which are priced below 100 yuan (\$13.6).

Aldi said consumers have been attaching greater importance to value for money. Therefore, providing special goods featuring lower prices has become a new feature for Spring Festival shopping, which has been an increasingly noticeable trend in recent years.

According to a report released by consumer and retail analytics company NielsenIQ in late November, about 47 percent of 1,100 surveyed Chinese consumers said they will only purchase items which they will actually use, saying they are more careful with their spending habits nowadays. This result was 7 percent higher than the figure collected at the beginning of 2024.

On the other hand, up to 39 percent of consumers have attached greater importance to products' cost effectiveness and shoppers are becoming more accustomed to comparing prices across different platforms, up from 30 percent seen at the beginning of 2024. In this sense, consumers placing more emphasis on cost effectiveness have become the mainstream in the Chinese market, said NielsenIQ experts.

Online retailers' offers have become especially appealing for

this year's Spring Festival, as the National Development and Reform Commission and the Ministry of Finance unveiled on Jan 8 the expanded consumer goods trade-in program and subsidies for home appliances.

Tmall, an online marketplace of tech behemoth Alibaba, has listed government subsidies in the provinces of Zhejiang, Guangdong and Jiangsu, as well as Shanghai, for eight designated categories of home appliances, which are as high as 2,000 yuan for each purchase. Combined with Tmall's Spring Festival promotions, consumers can enjoy discounts of up to 40 percent.

Online discounter Pinduoduo has also set up a special area on its platform to list government subsidies for home appliance purchases — many of which are white goods — subsidizing up to 20 percent of purchase costs. Another 400 yuan subsidy for each purchase has been provided to Pinduoduo users in Shanghai, Jiangsu, Shandong, Jilin and Fujian.

As Pinduoduo has provided more subsidies for agricultural products, special goods for the Spring Festival, time-honored brands and Chinese domestic brands, consumers can also enjoy a maximum 50 percent discount for such purchases.

Local governments have also stepped up similar spending incentives. Cities in more than 10 provinces — including Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Anhui — have begun issuing a new round of consumption coupons since the beginning of the year.

The local government of Ningbo, Zhejiang, announced on Dec 27 that it would issue a total of 200 million yuan in coupons from January to March to boost consump-

tion, especially during the Spring Festival. The coupons will cover new car purchases, secondhand auto deals, restaurants and supermarkets. Subsidies for each new car purchase can be as much as 7,000 yuan, and those for used vehicles can reach a maximum 5,000 yuan.

On Jan 6, the government of Wuhan, Hubei province announced that it will release over 100 million yuan of consumption coupons to further stimulate purchases in retailing, catering, tourism and sports.

Henan province announced on Jan 6 that it will issue 200 million yuan of consumption coupons in the first quarter, covering the sectors of retailing, catering, tourism and accommodation. Local governments in the province are also encouraged to issue more consumption coupons based on their own situations.

The culture and tourism bureau of Pudong New Area in Shanghai announced in late December that it would issue six different kinds of consumption coupons to travelers booking tourist attraction tickets and hotels via online platforms including Trip.com, Qunar, Meituan and Fliggy throughout January. A maximum of 800 yuan in discounts can be granted to travelers using the above-mentioned four platforms.

Zhu Keli, founding director of the China Institute of New Economy, said the issuance of such coupons can further boost consumption during the Spring Festival.

"Consumer confidence will pick up amid the government's incentives, which is conducive to the development of related industries and the optimization of the overall consumption structure," Zhu said.

## Dalian upgrades public transport

By ZHANG XIAOMIN in Dalian, Liaoning zhangxiaomin@chinadaily.com.cn

Altogether 1,032 brand-new electric buses were recently deployed in Dalian, Liaoning province, replacing all gasoline and natural gas buses that were over 10 years old.

"Now that these updated vehicles have been fully deployed, 100 percent of Dalian Public Transport Group's buses are green energy vehicles, with the proportion of new energy buses exceeding 85 percent," said Zhang Yong, a senior manager of Dalian Public Transport Group.

This is the largest public transportation upgrade project since China introduced the large-scale equipment upgrade and consumer goods trade-in program in March 2024, with the procurement to production delivery cycle taking only three months after the initiation.

In October, its parent company — Dalian Public Transport Construction Investment Group — signed a procurement contract with CRRC Times Electric Vehicle Co Ltd.

"These new vehicles have achieved many technological breakthroughs and innovations, utilizing the latest new energy technologies," said Liu Junhua, general manager of CRRC Times Electric Vehicles Shenyang company. "They offer advantages such as low noise and strong power, and can comprehensively enhance passengers' travel experience."

The new buses are primarily the 8.5-meter and 10.5-meter models, as well as 7-meter, 12-meter and double-decker bus models.

Their "lightweight design, power matching, energy consumption per 100 kilometers" are industry-leading. CRRC Times Electric Vehicle has independently developed a battery water heating control system, ensuring the batteries operate at optimal temperatures in extremely cold environments.

The new buses are equipped with CATL's new generation of lithium iron phosphate batteries, providing longer range and reducing carbon emissions.

They also feature an automatic chassis lifting function, along with manual wheelchair ramps and wheelchair areas, greatly enhancing the passenger boarding and alighting experience.

"The new vehicles are equipped with many electronic devices, including electronic rearview mirrors, 360-degree surround view and blind spot monitoring, which significantly enhance visibility while driving, greatly increasing safety levels," said Wang Chao, a driver. "Our driver seats also feature shock absorption and adjustable functions, making them very comfortable to sit on, which helps alleviate driver fatigue."

## Briefly

## Top liquor brand reports profit surge

Kweichow Moutai, China's leading liquor producer, reported profits exceeding 120.7 billion yuan (\$16.46 billion) in 2024, up 10.2 percent year-on-year. The company's revenue climbed 13.3 percent year-on-year to reach 187.19 billion yuan, according to a report released on Tuesday. Moutai also emphasized its strong focus on innovation, with spending on research and development rising 11 percent from the previous year.

## Banks report forex settlement deficit

China's commercial banks saw a forex settlement deficit of \$110.3 billion in 2024, official data showed. In yuan terms, forex purchases by banks reached 16.54 trillion yuan (\$2.25 trillion), while sales stood at around 17.33 trillion yuan, data from the State Administration of Foreign Exchange showed. In December alone, commercial banks saw a net forex settlement deficit of 76.8 billion yuan, according to the administration.

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An automated production line at the CITIC Dicastal Morocco plant, Africa's first Lighthouse Factory. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## ACROSS ASIA

## Editor's note:

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

Decades of development have turned Singapore from a lush island and fishing village into a thriving metropolis, but at huge cost to its nature.

Research groups are now embarking on studies to coax wildlife back to the country's urban and coastal areas, through vertical greenery or underwater structures known as fish houses that can provide a habitat for these creatures.

Such work comes amid a global push for countries to halt the rapid retreat of nature.

Under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, a United Nations treaty that aims to stop or even reverse damage to nature, countries have pledged to restore, maintain and improve nature's contributions to people over the next six years.

Researchers' findings could not only help to make urban Singapore a habitat hospitable to both humans and animals, but also offer solutions for other areas grappling with the loss of biodiversity due to development.

Peter Todd, an associate professor at the National University of Singapore, or NUS, who conceived the study on the fish houses, said: "As coastlines around the world are increasingly modified by urbanization and the need to defend against sea level rise, it is vital that we find ways to mitigate some of the worst effects."

## Condos for fish

About 70 percent of Singapore's coastline is guarded by hard structures, including sea walls, that help protect land and infrastructure from erosion caused by waves and tides.

This has resulted in the loss of fish habitats such as coral reefs and mangrove forests, said researchers in the Experimental Marine Ecology Laboratory of NUS.

A little more than five years ago, to encourage the return of fish life, the researchers deployed the fish houses, artificial structures made of concrete blocks, at the base of sea walls at five different sites at Pulau Hantu, one of Singapore's southern islands.

"Sea walls and other concrete coastal infrastructure are usually designed in a very uniform way and are structurally very simple, but marine animals need places to hide, find shelter, rest and more," said Daisuke Taira, a research fellow at the university involved in the study.

"Such gray infrastructure destroyed their habitats, so with the fish houses we are trying to do something to mitigate the impacts for the fish to come back and utilize these habitats."

In a coral reef, for example, hard corals and their different growth forms — some have branches, others look like plates, while others grow massively — provide a highly complex environment that can support fish, sea slugs, crustaceans and many other creatures.

Mangrove forests also have tangled webs of roots that provide little pockets of space for fish to rest or hide in.

However, degraded habitats and human-made coastal defenses typically lack the variety of features found in natural shores, and creating microhabitats is important in improving biodiversity, the researchers said.

To investigate what types of arti-



A fish house with tunnels and crevices to mimic fishes' habitats. DAISUKE TAIRA VIA THE STRAITS TIMES

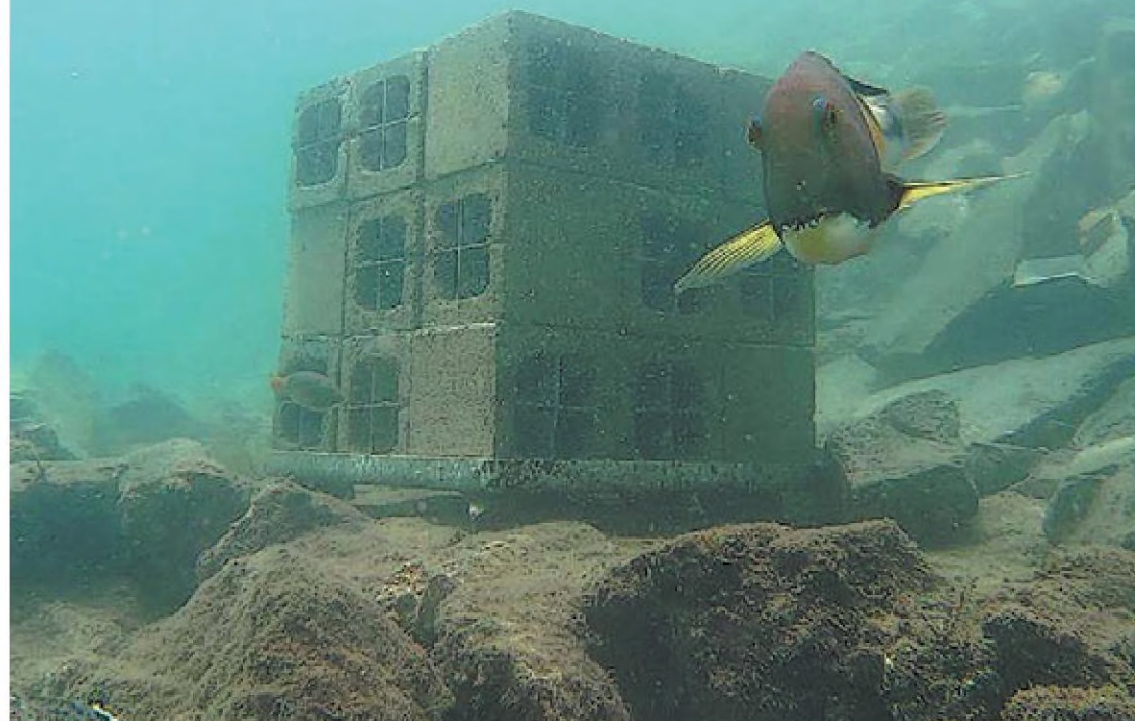
As coastlines around the world are increasingly modified by urbanization and the need to defend against sea level rise, it is vital that we find ways to mitigate some of the worst effects."

Peter Todd, associate professor at the National University of Singapore

Vertical greenery systems in which vegetation is incorporated into walls. KATHARINA HECHT VIA THE STRAITS TIMES

# Building blocks for comeback by nature

Researchers look at innovative ways of undoing human damage



An anchor tuskfish swims by a fish house in Singapore. DAISUKE TAIRA VIA THE STRAITS TIMES

cial structures are most effective in attracting the return of fish life, the research team tested three different fish house designs of varying complexity, in terms of their shapes and the size of holes within each block.

The most simple fish house design involved 27 concrete blocks stacked up in the shape of a cube, and had 100 holes, each 6.25 centimeters by 6.25 centimeters.

The more complex design was still cube-shaped, but had 100 holes of 25 different dimensions.

The most complex freestyle design was non-cuboid in nature,

with the concrete blocks stacked in different shapes. It had holes of different dimensions and other habitat features to mimic little tunnels or crevices in a coral reef or rock.

The study co-author Rachel Mark said the aim was to find out what types of spaces fishes need, so the blocks can be deployed to the sea wall area to attract fish diversity.

The researchers found that the two cube-shaped fish house designs attracted about 27 fish species, while the most complex freestyle fish house design drew in more species of fishes, and in greater numbers.

The study also showed that fish use the houses for different reasons by day and by night.

During the day they typically enter the fish houses to find food and sometimes rest or ambush other fish. The time spent in the houses is also short, about a few seconds to 30 minutes, and they prefer spaces larger than them as they search for food.

At night they primarily use them for resting, which largely explains why they spend a longer time in them and in smaller spaces with less visual exposure where they can snug-

ly fit their body to avoid predators.

Taira and Mark said the findings show that the effectiveness of fish houses depends on their design.

"This study provides more technical information on how fish houses deployed near sea walls can be designed to support higher fish diversity, which can be incorporated into future coastal defense construction," Taira said.

## Green walls

On land, too, researchers are finding ways to improve biodiversity by using human-made vertical green-

ery systems in which vegetation is incorporated into vertical surfaces such as walls.

Such green walls could help mitigate rising temperatures and loss of biodiversity, which are the results of climate change and urbanization, said a report published in the international journal Building and Environment in November.

The study was a collaboration between Utrecht University in the Netherlands, Nanyang Technological University in Singapore and BioSEA, a company in Singapore that specializes in ecological design.

The temperature regulation of green walls has been studied before, but the biodiversity benefits these walls deliver are not well researched, especially in tropical climates, said Katharina Hecht of Utrecht University, the lead researcher.

The study compares the green walls with their natural counterparts such as natural cliffs, which Hecht said is a novel approach to evaluate whether building walls perform to their full potential in providing ecosystem services.

A total of eight green walls on buildings, four climber and four foliage, as well as four natural cliffs and eight non-vegetated building walls, were studied between August 2022 and March 2023.

A total of 280 animal species were recorded across all 20 walls — foliage walls, climber walls and walls with no vegetation. Of these, natural cliffs hosted the most number of species, with 115 recorded, including the Asian hermit spider. Foliage green walls hosted 111, such as the yellow-vented bulbul, while climber green walls hosted 77 species, such as the pond wolf spider. Walls without any vegetation had only about 20 to 39 species.

The researchers also found that animal diversity increases when there is more surrounding vegetation, such as trees within 10 meters of a wall, which can act as stepping stones for creatures to move from other nearby green spaces to the walls.

The research also supported the findings of earlier studies that showed that green walls can act as temperature buffers for the building during the day and at night. They can help to cool the building in the day while providing insulation from cooler temperatures at night.

Green walls can help lower the temperature around the building wall by an average of 0.6 C to 0.7 C, the study showed.

On the implications of the study, Anuj Jain, director and principal ecologist at BioSEA and the study's senior author, said he hopes the collection of such data can be useful for decision-makers, such as building developers, to make more informed decisions in the built environment.

This can help to ensure regenerative, meaning having more nature than its original state, and multi-functional building designs that are hospitable to wildlife.

On green walls, Jain said: "Green walls cannot replace a natural cliff, they cannot replace a forest, but they are attracting a decent diversity of animals, particularly insects, where the details depend on the configuration and the complexity of the wall itself."

"That itself is already a very good starting point to incorporating biodiversity in urban environments."

THE STRAITS TIMES, SINGAPORE

## Free health checks seen as an antidote to diseases in Indonesia

Indonesia will introduce free medical screenings next month as part of the country's effort to detect various diseases early and avoid preventable deaths, the government says.

Dedek Prayudi, a spokesman for the Presidential Communication Office, said people would be eligible for a free health screening on their birthday at Community health centers starting from February.

People can go to their nearest community health center to get the free health checkup, Dedek said. "It's easy and it would cost a lot of money if paid for from their own pocket."

President Prabowo Subianto wants people to stay healthy, Dedek said.

"His perspective on health is not just treating sick people, as promotive and preventive efforts are much more important."

The government has allocated 4.7 trillion rupiah (\$290 million) for the

program this year, which will cover 60 million people accessing the service.

The government says it hopes that over five years the number of recipients will increase to 200 million people.

The primary focus of the free health checkups, Dedek said, will be on screening people for noncommunicable diseases such as heart disease, stroke, cancer and diabetes.

According to socioeconomic registration figures from 2023, noncommunicable diseases are the biggest cause of death in Indonesia, with cardiovascular diseases accounting for 600,000 deaths a year.

"The government sees that as something serious that must be given special attention," Dedek said.

Apart from noncommunicable diseases, the health screenings will target specific diseases and medical conditions depending on a patient's age and gender for increased effec-

tiveness and to reduce mortality and disability.

Children under 5 will be tested for preexisting conditions and birth defects, such as congenital hypothyroidism, a partial or complete loss of function of the thyroid gland that can disrupt growth, brain development and metabolism.

Older children aged up to 18 years will be checked for obesity, diabetes and oral health, while screenings for adults will test for common types of cancers based on gender.

Elderly people will be screened for geriatric medical conditions, in addition to cardiovascular diseases.

Diah Satyani Saminarsih, founder of the Center for Indonesia's Strategic Development Initiatives, said the free checkups would be a good first step in tackling Indonesia's problem with noncommunicable diseases and that the initiative complemented the Health Ministry's

### \$290 million

has been allocated for the free medical screening program starting from February 2025, which will cover 60 million people accessing the service.

focus on improving primary health-care services.

However, she also urged the government to come up with a plan on how to follow up on each patient's medical findings.

"Let's say that a patient finds out she has cancer. Can the government guarantee that she will be able to receive treatment for life? Or in the case that (the costs) will be footed by the national health insurance program, what happens if the patient cannot pay the premium? These are key technical aspects the govern-



People with their children brought in for a monthly medical checkup at an integrated services post in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, on Aug 10, 2023. CHAIDEEH MAHYUDDIN / AFP

ment must prepare beforehand."

Diah called on the Health Ministry to intensify awareness campaigns on the importance of medical checkups, saying that the reason behind peo-

ple's hesitation to get regular screenings is not only cost, but also a lack of information and social stigma.

THE JAKARTA POST, INDONESIA

## WORLD

# French PM's policy speech sparks row

Govt on shaky ground as Bayrou opens door for renegotiating pension reforms

By **MOHAMMAD ARIF ULLAH** in Paris  
For *China Daily*

French Prime Minister Francois Bayrou's first general policy speech at the National Assembly in Paris has left his government on shaky ground.

In the speech on Tuesday, Bayrou addressed the nation's financial challenges, stating, "Since the war, France has never in its history been as indebted as it is today."

Talking about the contentious pension reforms that raised the retirement age from 62 to 64, Bayrou acknowledged the need for dialogue, noting, "We can explore a new path for (pension) reform ... provided it meets the set requirement."

The Socialist Party, or PS, has struggled to define its position on the proposed pension reforms. Speaking to national television TF1 on Tuesday, PS First Secretary Olivier Faure remarked: "The prime minister has opened a door. That at least is a win."

He acknowledged Bayrou's willingness to discuss alternatives to the retirement age but warned that insufficient guarantees might still lead his party to back the no-confidence vote.

The party's reluctance stems from concerns that the reforms

might grant undue influence to employer organizations.

"He gives a veto right to the employer's federation," said Laurent Baumel, PS deputy from Indre-et-Loire, criticizing Bayrou's proposals.

Faure added that unless the government committed to a clear and democratic debate on pension reforms, the Socialists could not rule out a censure motion.

The emotion within the Socialists' camp has been turbulent. Negotiations with Bayrou had initially given Faure the hope of persuading PS deputies against supporting the motion. Promises of pension adjustments and easing burdens on workers initially softened resistance.

However, doubts resurfaced as Bayrou's speech approached, with Faure demanding clear commitments to democratic oversight.

Bayrou's overtures failed to appease other left-wing parties within the New Popular Front, or NFP, coalition. The hard-left France Unbowed party, or LFI, and the French Communist Party swiftly announced their intention to vote against the government.

LFI coordinator Manuel Bompard argued on Tuesday: "If I put myself in the shoes of a Socialist deputy, I fail to see how they could



French Prime Minister Francois Bayrou arrives to deliver his general policy speech at the National Assembly in Paris on Tuesday. BENOIT TESSIER / REUTERS

justify not supporting the censure motion."

The Greens party also criticized Bayrou's approach. Pouria Amirshahi, a Greens lawmaker, told Franceinfo TV: "What Francois Bayrou has announced is inadequate. Despite engaging in negotiations in good faith, the government has offered little in return."

Adding to the debate, constitutional scholar Anne-Charlene Bezzina weighed in on Public Senat TV that Bayrou makes appeals to everyone to avoid polarization.

"However, he has not particularly courted the Socialist Party or the National Rally. Instead, he plays responsibility on all parties," Bezzina said.

The Socialist Party remains the only significant left-wing group undecided on the motion, prompting both internal and external pressures. A closed-door meeting of PS deputies was scheduled for Wednesday afternoon to determine the party's stance.

Meanwhile, Labour Minister Catherine Vautrin announced on Wednesday that a "specialist" would be appointed to facilitate upcoming negotiations, underscoring the government's commitment to dialogue.

## Prekarious future

Bayrou's government, formed in the wake of last summer's snap elections, faces a precarious future. The motion of no confidence, spearheaded by the LFI, is scheduled for a vote on Thursday.

While the far-right National Rally has declared it will not support the motion, the government's survival hinges on Socialist deputies withholding their votes.

Gerard Raymond, president of France Health Associations, expressed skepticism about Bayrou's broader strategy on Franceinfo TV on Wednesday, saying, "We need structural reform. Injecting more money alone will not improve the healthcare system."

Despite Bayrou's conciliatory gestures, critics argue his government's survival strategy risks alienating all sides.

His plan to grant a three-month negotiation window has been derided as insufficient. If the talks fail, the current pension framework remains, deferring reforms to a future administration.

Reactions from civil society highlight the broader stakes for Bayrou's reforms. Labor unions remain skeptical about the government's ability to implement meaningful changes.

Constitutional scholar Bezzina concluded: "He has placed responsibility on all political actors but has yet to bridge critical divides."

Bayrou's gamble to delay definitive action on pensions may buy time, but whether it ensures stability or exacerbates divisions remains to be seen.

The writer is a freelance journalist for *China Daily*.

# Behavioral red lines highlighted for AI safety

By **MIKE GU** in Hong Kong  
mikegu@chinadailyhk.com

It is essential to pay special attention to the safety of Artificial Intelligence during its development, Stuart Russell, a distinguished professor of computer science at the University of California, Berkeley, said at the Asian Financial Forum 2025 held in Hong Kong on Monday and Tuesday.

For safety reasons, AI systems need to have behavioral red lines, Russell said.

"The problem with general-purpose AI is that it can go wrong in so many ways that you can't easily write down what it means to be safe. What you can do is write down some things that you definitely don't want the systems to do. These are the behavioral red lines," he told reporters, explaining why drawing these red lines for AI is important.

"We don't want AI systems to replicate themselves without permission. We don't want them to break into other computer systems. We don't want them to advise terrorists on how to build biological weapons," said Russell, adding that it is hoped that AI development will be under human control, rather than becoming uncontrollable.

This is why it is crucial to draw behavioral red lines at the early stages of AI development, especially with the help of governments, Russell said.

"So, you can make a list of things that you definitely don't want to do. It is quite reasonable for governments to say that before you can put a system out there, you need to show us that it's not going to do these things," he said.

Russell pointed out that AI gives rise to new forms of cybercrime. Currently, criminals are using AI to craft targeted emails by analyzing social media profiles and accessing personal emails, he said.

This allows AI to generate messages that reference ongoing conversations, impersonating someone else, he added.

However, Russell stated that AI also boosts the defense against crimes.

"On the other side, we have AI defenses. I'm part of a team in various universities in California working together to use AI as a defense (mechanism) to screen emails against phishing attacks, to look at the activities of algorithms operating within the network, and to see which ones are possibly engaging in various activities," he said.

## Healthy competition

When asked about AI competition between countries, Russell said, "I think, in general, the competition is healthy." However, he emphasized that excessive competition in AI should be approached with caution, as it could jeopardize AI safety.

"Safety failures damage the entire industry. For example, if one airline doesn't pay enough attention to safety and airplanes start crashing, that damages the whole industry," he said.

AI cooperation, based on safety, is both allowable and economically sensible, Russell said.

"In collaboration with several AI researchers from the West and China, we've been running a series of dialogues on AI Safety, specifically to encourage cooperation on safety. Those have been quite successful. The behavioral red lines I mentioned earlier are a result of those discussions," he said.

Regarding AI cooperation between China and the United States, Russell stated that both countries now emphasize on ensuring AI safety.

"I think there's at least as much interest in that direction in China as there is in the US. Several senior Chinese politicians have talked about AI safety and are aware of the risks to humanity from uncontrolled AI systems. So, I really hope that we can cooperate on this dimension," he said.

"The US and China have agreed not to allow AI to control the launch of nuclear weapons, which I think is sensible," he added.

## Hanging in the balance



A four-story building tilted precariously in Vidyasagar Colony, Baghajatin, Kolkata, India, on Tuesday. Preliminary investigations revealed that inferior quality materials were used in the construction of the building. DEBAJYOTI CHAKRABORTY / GETTY IMAGES

# UAE sustainability prize awards global innovators

By **CUI HAIPEI** in Abu Dhabi  
cuihaipei@chinadaily.com.cn

Eleven pioneering organizations and high schools worldwide were awarded the 2025 Zayed Sustainability Prize on Tuesday in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, in a global effort to foster solutions to common challenges.

In a ceremony held at the Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre and attended by 11 heads of state, ministers and business leaders, UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan presented the awards to the winners in six categories — health, food, energy, water, climate action and global high schools.

The prize, the president said, inspires solutions that address critical social and environmental challenges.

In a keynote speech, Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber, UAE minister of industry and advanced technology and director-general of the prize, lauded the work to deliver innovative solutions that address the world's most pressing challenges.

"This year's winners showcase solutions that leverage advanced technologies, including AI, enhance local resilience, and deliver transformative, scalable impact worldwide. In doing so, they embody the power of progress in accelerating

sustainable development and inclusive socio-economic growth," he said.

The award has seen 33 finalists selected for 2025, including two entries from China, after receiving almost 6,000 submissions.

Xinjiang Shawan Oasis Sustainable Development Institute, a nonprofit that specializes in solar-powered smart greenhouses that transform desert land into farms, is in the food category.

The desert greenhouse solution has been successful in providing vegetable and fruit supplies in desert areas, said Chen Gang, executive director of the nonprofit. More than 30 kinds of vegetables have been planted in such greenhouses, including eggplant, tomato, pepper, cucumber, potato, leaf lettuce and watermelon.

The Beijing World Youth Academy, a private school, is a finalist in the global high school group, which offers student-led sustainability solutions.

Xiong Zitian and Zhang Yuran, both 15, have led a group of 30 students to recycle food and organic waste through composting, and cultivating plants for the school community.

"By doing the program, we learn scientific research methods through experiments and tests of soil fertility, which will help us in the future," said Zhang.

# WEF report lists biggest global risks

By **XING YI** in London  
xingyi@chinadaily.com.cn

State-based armed conflicts, extreme weather events, and geo-economic confrontation topped the first three risks for the year, according to the World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report 2025 released on Wednesday.

The report came out ahead of the forum's annual summit next week, from Monday to Friday when senior government officials and business leaders will convene in Davos, Switzerland, to discuss pressing global issues from escalating geopolitical, environmental, societal and technological challenges.

"Rising geopolitical tensions and a fracturing of trust are driving the global risk landscape," Mirek Dusek, managing director of the World Economic Forum, told media at an online briefing of the report. "In this complex and

dynamic context, leaders have a choice: to find ways to foster collaboration and resilience, or face compounding vulnerabilities."

Relying on a survey of more than 900 experts, policymakers, and industry leaders about their perceptions of global risk in the short, medium, and long term, the report found that 23 percent of the respondents see state-based armed conflict as the most likely to present a material crisis on a global scale in 2025.

"Fear and uncertainty cloud the outlook in various parts of the world, including Ukraine, the Middle East, and Sudan, with multilateral institutions struggling to provide effective mediation and work toward resolutions," said the report.

Environmental risks dominate the longer-term outlook.

The geo-economic confrontation was also on the imminent risk list, as the incoming US administration

has suggested that it will implement higher tariffs on imports.

Borge Brende, president and CEO of the WEF, said on Tuesday that the forum is expecting online participation from United States President-elect Donald Trump, which will be Trump's first appearance in such an event after he is sworn in on Jan 20.

Carolina Klint, chief commercial officer of Marsh McLennan Europe, a professional services firm in risk management and insurance brokerage, said, "We will likely see trade wars develop."

However, she said that businesses have an opportunity to engage with policymakers to advocate for the revival of multilateral and bilateral trade agreements.

"By promoting a more collaborative approach to trade, we can in fact help reduce some of the fragmentation that we see and maybe foster a more stable economic environment," she said.

## CHINA DAILY USA

### NEW YORK HEADQUARTERS

1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,  
New York, NY 10036

Telephone: 212-537-8888  
Fax: 212-537-8898

editor@chinadailyusa.com  
readers@chinadailyusa.com

Subscription: 212-537-8899

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Washington, DC 20045

Tel: 202-662-7249  
Fax: 202-662-7247

SAN FRANCISCO  
235 Montgomery Street, Suite 900  
San Francisco, CA 94104

Tel: 415-348-8288  
Fax: 415-348-8388

SEATTLE  
800 Fifth Ave, Suite 4100  
Seattle, WA 98104

Tel: 206-922-2866

## HOUSTON

1001 South Dairy Ashford Suite 100  
Houston, TX 77077

Tel: 713-595-7660

## CANADA / TORONTO

4711 Yonge Street, 10th Floor  
Toronto, Ontario, M2N 6K9

Tel: 416-481-5706

CHINA DAILY (ISSN 0748-6154) is

published daily except weekends by China

Daily USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New

York, NY 10036. Periodical postage paid

at New York, NY and additional mailing

offices. POSTMASTER: Send address

changes to CHINA DAILY USA, 1500

Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036.

Vol. 38 - No.1498



## Rescue mission

A miner is transported on a stretcher by rescue workers after he was rescued from below ground in an abandoned gold mine in Stilfontein, North West Province, South Africa, on Tuesday. A total of 78 bodies and 166 survivors have been hauled out in the rescue operation that began on Monday, with hundreds more still stuck 2 kilometers below the surface. THEMBA HADEBE / AP

## WORLD

## Mediators make final push for Gaza cease-fire deal

DOHA/CAIRO/JERUSALEM — Negotiators were trying to hammer out the final details of a complex, phased cease-fire in Gaza on Wednesday after marathon talks in Qatar aimed at ending a conflict that has inflicted widespread death and destruction and upended the Middle East.

More than eight hours of talks in Doha had fueled optimism. Officials from mediators Qatar, Egypt and the United States as well as Israel and Hamas said on Tuesday that an agreement for a truce in the besieged Palestinian enclave and the release of hostages was closer than ever.

However, a senior Hamas official told Reuters late on Tuesday that the Palestinian group had not yet delivered its response because it was still waiting for Israel to submit maps showing how its forces would withdraw from Gaza.

During months of on-and-off talks to achieve a truce in the devastating 15-month-old conflict, both sides have previously said they were close to a cease-fire only to hit last-minute obstacles. The broad outlines of the current deal have been in place since mid-2024.

If successful, the planned phased cease-fire could halt fighting that has decimated Gaza, killed tens of thousands of Palestinians, displaced most of the enclave's population of 2.3 million, and is still killing dozens of people each day.

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

Israel launched its assault in Gaza after Hamas-led fighters stormed across its borders on Oct. 7, 2023, killing 1,200 people and taking more than 250 hostages, according to Israeli tallies.

Since then, Israeli forces have killed more than 46,700 Palestinians in Gaza, according to health officials in the enclave.



A Palestinian boy stands next to a damaged tent for displaced people at the site of an Israeli strike on a beachfront cafe, in Deir al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip, on Tuesday. RAMADAN ABED / REUTERS

Palestinians were once again hoping the latest talks would deliver some relief from Israeli airstrikes, and ease a humanitarian crisis.

"We are waiting for the cease-fire and the truce. May God complete it for us in goodness, bless us with peace and allow us to return to our homes," said Amal Saleh, 54, a displaced Gazan.

"Even if the schools are bombed, destroyed and ruined, we just want to know that we are finally living in peace."

Under the plan, Israel would recover about 100 remaining hostages and bodies from among those captured. In return, it would free Palestinian detainees.

The latest draft is complicated and sensitive. Under its terms, the first steps would feature a six-week initial cease-fire.

The plan also includes a gradual withdrawal of Israeli forces from central Gaza and the return of displaced Palestinians to northern Gaza.

The deal would also require Hamas to release 33 Israeli hostages along with other steps.

## Two phases

The draft stipulates negotiations over a second phase of the agreement will begin by the 16th day of phase one. Phase two includes the release of all remaining hostages, a permanent cease-fire, and the complete withdrawal of Israeli soldiers.

Even if the warring sides agree to the deal on the table, that agreement still needs further negotiation before there is a final cease-fire and the release of all the hostages.

If it all goes smoothly, the Palestinians, Arab states and Israel still need to agree on a vision for post-conflict Gaza, a massive task involving security guarantees for Israel and billions of dollars in investment for rebuilding.

Despite the efforts to reach a cease-fire, the Israeli military, the Shin Bet internal intelligence agency and the air force attacked about 50 targets throughout Gaza over the past 24 hours, Shin Bet and the military said in a statement on Wednesday.

Israeli strikes killed at least 27 Palestinians across the enclave. Those included seven people who were in a school sheltering displaced families in Gaza City. Another six were killed in separate airstrikes on houses in Deir al-Balah, Bureij camp and Rafah, medics said.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Films can help foster China, India relations

Movies appeal to Chinese viewers and prompt calls for stronger cooperation

By APARAJIT CHAKRABORTY  
in New Delhi  
For China Daily

Several Indian films have, in recent years, become hits in China, prompting industry insiders and observers from both countries to call for enhanced cooperation in the movie sector to foster mutual understanding between the two neighbors.

"Indian movies have a special appeal to Chinese audiences because of similar cultural values," the Chinese embassy in New Delhi said in a statement. "Humanistic care and profound feelings transcend borders. China and India can strengthen cooperation in the movie sector and promote mutual understanding between the two peoples."

Indian films have sparked multiple waves of enthusiasm in China, the embassy said. Among them, *Dangal* tops the Chinese box office, earning nearly 1.3 billion yuan (\$177.3 million).

In November, the Tamil action thriller *Maharaja*, starring Vijay Sethupathi, made a record-breaking debut in Chinese cinemas. Last week, Chinese embassy spokeswoman Yu Jing shared a post on X featuring the cast, writing: "*Maharaja* has become the highest-grossing Indian film in China since 2018, reaching (rupees) 91.55 crore (\$10.6 million). Well done!"

Indian films with romantic and social themes have recently gained popularity in China, carving out a lucrative market niche.

*Maharaja*, directed by Nithilan Saminathan, grossed more than 50 million yuan (\$6.8 million) at the box office in the first 10 days, according to cinema ticket sales platform Maoyan.

Ahead of its release, the film earned an impressive 8.7/10 rating on Douban, China's movie review site, and is expected to rank among the top 10 Indian films in China in box office earnings.

Indian actor Aamir Khan's Hindi films have enjoyed significant success in China, with *Dangal* (2016) becoming a major hit.

*Dangal* ranks among the top 20 highest-grossing foreign films in China. Other Hindi films such as *Secret Superstar* (2017) also achieved remarkable box office success.

Indian director Goutam Ghose said filmmakers from both countries can collaborate on projects that will enhance bilateral relations.

"There are many beautiful stories from both sides. Stories from history, stories from today's time can connect India and China so well. Co-production can be an interesting scope for the younger generation in bringing new vision and new perception between the two countries," he said.

## Bridging gaps

Films can bridge gaps in understanding, especially as newer generations may forget the rich historical and cultural ties between India and China, Ghose said. His film *Raahgir* was screened at the 2020 Shanghai International Film Festival.

Hong Yanyan, a doctoral scholar at The University of Adelaide in Australia, said: "Indian films resonate with Chinese audiences because they blend universal themes with emotionally rich narratives. Films like *Dangal* and *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* focus on family bonds, personal struggles and social issues — topics that strongly resonate in China, where family values and social narratives hold deep cultural significance."

Having studied the popularity of Indian films in China, Hong said the portrayal of everyday challenges, heartfelt performances and engaging music make them uniquely appealing.

Indian cinema offers an extraordinary gateway to understanding the country's culture, values and people, she said. She suggests that joint film productions, cultural exchanges and film festival collaborations can help bridge the gap and strengthen ties between the two countries.

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.

## Experts reject Japan's claims over Diaoyu Islands

By JIANG XUEQING  
in Kawasaki, Japan  
jiangxueqing@chinadaily.com.cn

Experts have dismissed Japan's sovereignty claims over the Diaoyu Islands as unfounded, urging both Japan and China to shelve the dispute and pursue joint development.

"As a matter of historical fact, the islands referred to as the Senkaku Islands by Japan were originally Chinese territory," said Tadayoshi Murata, a historian and professor emeritus at Yokohama National University, during a hybrid discussion held in Kawasaki, Kanagawa Prefecture, on Monday.

According to Japanese records, on Jan. 14, 1895, Japan's Cabinet decided to erect national markers on the Diaoyu Islands and incorporate them into the jurisdiction of Okinawa Prefecture.

However, this act was "opportunistic, capitalizing on its victory in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-95), and cannot be considered a legitimate act of sovereignty," Murata said.

Okinawa Prefecture, previously the independent Ryukyu Kingdom, was annexed by Japan in 1879, and the Diaoyu Islands were not included in that annexation.

"Japan calls these islands inherent territory, but since Okinawa itself was annexed later and isn't

inherently Japanese, claiming the islands as 'inherent' is contradictory," Murata said. "The argument doesn't hold water."

He also found that since the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), Chinese maps and documents have consistently included Diaoyu Dao, Huangwei Yu and Chiwei Yu — all part of the Diaoyu Islands — as China's territory.

Before its annexation as Okinawa under Japan's Meiji government, Ryukyu was an independent state under the investiture of the Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368-1911). Chinese emperors legitimized each king of Ryukyu through investiture ceremonies, sending 24 missions to report on the kingdom's state.

Murata said historical accounts from these missions identified Diaoyu Dao, Huangwei Yu and Chiwei Yu as navigation markers, with Ryukyu's territory beginning at Kume Island — a view shared by both China and Ryukyu.

In 1885, Japan's Ministry of Home Affairs instructed Okinawa governor Sutezo Nishimura to survey uninhabited islands between Okinawa and Fuzhou in East China's Fujian province, with plans to erect national markers.

However, Nishimura raised concerns, noting these islands were documented and used as navigation markers by Qing investiture

missions to Ryukyu, warning of potential disputes.

To avoid conflict, then-Japanese foreign minister Kaoru Inoue advised delaying action. But the First Sino-Japanese War gave winning Japan a chance to erect markers.

Murata said this decision was part of Japan's broader strategy to occupy Taiwan and the Pengu Islands during that period.

"Given the current circumstances, I believe the issue of these islands must be approached from a broader perspective," he said. "The East China Sea should become a zone of peace, friendship and cooperative development."

## Joint management

The best solution is an agreement to jointly manage the issue, showing the world that Japan and China can coexist peacefully without confrontation or resorting to war.

Ukeru Magosaki, director of the Japanese think tank East Asian Community Institute and a former senior official at Japan's Foreign Ministry, agreed with Murata, saying the Diaoyu Islands are not inherently Japanese territory.

He cited Japan's acceptance of the 1945 Potsdam Declaration, which limited the country's sovereignty to the islands of Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu, Shikoku and

other minor islands as determined.

Magosaki also highlighted that when the United States transferred administrative control of Okinawa to Japan, it refrained from taking a stance on territorial claims. "From an international standpoint, this means that the 'Senkaku Islands' cannot be recognized as Japanese territory."

Takakage Fujita, secretary-general of the Association for Inheriting and Propagating the Murayama Statement, a Japanese civic group, told China Daily that resolving territorial disputes is challenging, as a misstep can spark nationalist tensions and conflict.

During the 1972 negotiations to normalize diplomatic relations between Japan and China, Japanese prime minister Kakuei Tanaka and Chinese premier Zhou Enlai agreed to shelve the Diaoyu Islands issue.

"These two visionary leaders understood from history that prioritizing the normalization of Japan-China relations was far more significant for Asia's peace and prosperity than disputing over small, uninhabited islands," Fujita said.

Tensions reignited in 2012 when Japan unilaterally and illegally "nationalized" the Diaoyu Islands. Fujita urged a return to the 1972 shelving approach as the best way forward.

## Analysts laud Malaysia-Singapore economic zone



The Johor Bahru-Singapore Rapid Transit System Link is under construction in Johor Bahru, Malaysia, on Sept. 23. SAMSUL SAID VIA GETTY IMAGES

By PRIME SARMIENTO in Hong Kong  
prime@chinadaily.com

The establishment of a joint special economic zone in Malaysia's Johor state is expected to develop Singapore and Malaysia into a key regional hub for logistics and high-tech manufacturing, analysts say.

Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and his Singaporean counterpart Lawrence Wong signed an agreement to create the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone, or JS-SEZ, on Jan. 7 during the annual leaders' retreat in the Malaysian city of Putrajaya. Both countries will establish separate funds to facilitate investments in the zone.

The initiative aims to attract high-value investments to Johor, complete

50 projects within five years, and create 20,000 skilled jobs.

At a news briefing following the signing, Wong said the zone's "greater potential" relies on the two countries "working together to attract new investment projects globally."

Khairussaleh Ramli, president and group CEO of Maybank in Kuala Lumpur, said in a statement that the zone will promote greater economic integration and boost intra-regional trade, as well as enhance Southeast Asia's resilience as an economic bloc.

Xu Le, a lecturer on business, strategy and policy at the National University of Singapore's Business School, said the strategic location of the JS-SEZ makes it a "strong contender" for making a logistics and trade hub in Southeast Asia.

The zone will leverage the strengths of both countries while addressing their respective limitations, she said.

Combining Malaysia's land and labor resources with Singapore's global connectivity and high governance standards will make the zone "an appealing destination" for global investors, she added.

Ian Yoong Kah Yin, a private equity investor and former investment banker in Malaysia, said the JS-SEZ could make Malaysian exports more competitive by streamlining the supply chain, as Singapore is technologically more advanced than Malaysia.

"Production costs, however, are expected to be higher than other major manufacturing hubs in ASEAN given the strong demand for labor and land in the JS-SEZ. The focus of industries in the JS-SEZ will be high value-added manufacturing," he said.

Yoong said that while it might appear that Johor will be the bigger

beneficiary of the JS-SEZ by capitalizing on trade and foreign investment diversion, it is Singapore, as a global business hub for multinational corporations, that will enjoy "significant benefits" from being able to offer competitively priced manufacturing operations located in nearby Johor.

Xu said the JS-SEZ will encourage Singaporean industries to relocate to Johor to benefit from lower rental and labor costs. She said this will not only bridge gaps in skills and technology in specific areas, but also generate more job opportunities and support the development of a skilled workforce in Johor, narrowing disparities with Singapore's highly skilled labor force.

The zone, together with the completion of the Johor Bahru-Singapore Rapid Transit System, will foster greater connectivity and collaboration across various sectors, including business, financial and professional services, and manufacturing, Xu said.

## Glittering grandeur



A team member dusts a chandelier at the Blackpool Tower Ballroom in Blackpool, England, on Tuesday, as part of the annual spring maintenance. The venue undergoes a thorough clean each year, with its chandeliers lowered for detailed care. ANTHONY DEVLIN VIA GETTY IMAGES

## WORLDUS



Happy Global, a B2B platform that aims to empower Asian brands to enter the US market of small- and medium-sized retailers, was officially launched on Jan 13 in Dallas, Texas. MAYZHOU / CHINA DAILY

## B2B platform to promote Asian brands

By MAYZHOU in Dallas, Texas  
mayzhou@chinadailyusa.com

At a 7-Eleven store in North Dallas, two candies from China – Kozed and Peelerz – are displayed at the most prominent and convenient spot – the booth right at the entrance next to the newspaper stand.

Store clerk Raj said that the two candies have been selling very well compared with other similar products.

"I've been working here for one month, and I know that the sales are very good because people are always getting it, in the morning, evening; people are always getting a bag."

The two candies are among the newly launched products by Happy Global, a new channel platform that aims to empower Asian brands to expand into the US market with a focus on small- and medium-sized retailers.

After three years of operation to test the waters, Happy Global was officially launched on Jan 13 in Dallas, where its global headquarters is located.

The launch was held in conjunction with its inaugural Open Platform Conference at the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center. Scores of its brand partners, channel providers and potential investors attended the event.

Happy Global introduced three modules: a product center, a marketing promotion section, and an integrated purchasing and sales section to the attendees.

Victor Chen, co-founder and CEO, said a three-year dry run has helped the company to "verify the

“For brands, we provide consumer insights, promotion, pricing, marketing, testing, and we help brands to penetrate the US market.”

Sarah Li, Happy Global vice-president

feasibility of Happy Global's business model."

"We look forward to taking 'Global Sourcing, Global Selling' as our mission, aiming to cover 1 million small- and medium-sized retail stores and achieve \$10 billion in revenue," said Chen.

"With good partners, good team and good product as our foundation, we will cooperate with more brands and manufacturers to deliver cost-effective products to small- and medium-sized retail channels in the United States, ultimately achieving a win-win situation for product brands, channel providers, stores and consumers."

According to Sarah Li, vice-president at Happy Global, the US retail market will reach \$9 trillion by 2030, with 70 percent – about \$6 trillion – being offline sales. While 60 percent of the market is taken by retail giants such as Costco and Target, 40 percent, worth \$2.4 trillion, is captured by small- and medium-sized retail stores.

It is an underserved market including small regional chains

with fewer than 20 locations, local convenience stores, gas stations, grocery stores, tobacco stores and liquor stores.

"They generally lack capabilities of product selection, sourcing, pricing, testing, promotion, marketing, data analysis," said Li. "And these are the target stores for Happy Global."

"For brands, we provide consumer insights, promotion, pricing, marketing, testing, and we help brands to penetrate the US market," Li continued.

"For local service providers, we partner with them to increase the distribution efficiency. For stores, we provide high-quality, cost-effective product portfolios, and we help stores to improve their operational efficiency by empowering stores, and help stores to serve their consumers."

Li said that Happy Global, through three years of deep cultivation in the US market, has directly and indirectly covered around 200,000 small- and medium-sized retail stores in the United States.

Kozed is a gummy candy from the Pearl River Delta Industrial Zone in China. Launched in the US market in December, Kozed candies are already available in 500 stores.

"We estimate that by Q1 2025, we will achieve \$1 million in retail sales," Li said, adding that they expect \$10 million sales by the end of 2025.

The day after the launch and conference, business partners toured Happy Global's office and warehouse, checked out product samples, and visited a 7-Eleven

store to see the product.

Charlie Kratka of Dr. Distro, a distribution company in Florida, said he's been working with Happy Global the past couple of years.

"I've never been stuck with one of their items. Everything I've ever purchased from [Happy Global], I've profited on and sold in full. They are one of my favorite vendors," he said.

Kratka said the conference helped him understand what Happy Global is getting into, and that the company has done "an incredible job."

"I've never sold chips or chocolates or candies other than gummies, but I would be willing to try some exotic snacks," said Kratka. "I am interested in purchasing some of those snacks. I'm all up on a large scale."

Li said that she believes what Happy Global is doing will benefit both manufacturers and consumers.

In her visits to US stores and in studying consumer research, "the most frequently heard word is inflation", and distribution partners and store owners hope for "more high-quality cost-effective products".

She also visited dozens of brands and factories in the snack and beverage industries in China and saw a shrinking domestic market.

"I've seen the desire for efficient matching of supply and demand from both sides of the Eastern and Western hemispheres. Whether actively or passively, we believe that 2025 will be the beginning of Asian brands and the manufacturers deeply penetrating the US offline market," Li said.

## Trudeau's exit opens debate on policy shifts

Expert expected 'tremendous continuity' in core economic and trade measures

By YANGGAO in Toronto  
guoyang@chinadailyusa.com

The pending resignation of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has opened a debate on the direction of the country's policies.

Trudeau announced his resignation on Jan 6, and said he would remain as prime minister until his ruling Liberal Party picked a new leader.

"A change of prime minister within the same party, I don't think, makes any difference. The structural factors that shape trade policy remain unchanged, regardless of leadership transitions," Robert Wolfe, professor emeritus at Queen's University, told China Daily.

"There's tremendous continuity in Canadian trade policy," said Wolfe, who served as a foreign service officer in the Department of External Affairs.

But he dismissed the idea that Trudeau is directly responsible for the more general economic challenges facing Canada, pointing to global factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and inflation.

"To the extent that people think Trudeau is responsible for economic problems in Canada, they may feel better that he's gone," he said.

Wolfe acknowledged that some sectors, especially oil and gas, are unhappy with Trudeau's policies. However, he noted that core policies, such as industrial carbon pricing, wouldn't see significant shifts with different leadership.

"Business has already started making significant investments aligned with industrial carbon pricing. Any major rollback would be both economically disruptive and politically unwise," he said.

US President-elect Donald Trump has criticized Canada and suggested that it become the 51st state of the United States.

"It's a very silly idea with no implications, other than worrying about how many people in Congress might take him seriously," Wolfe said.

He said such rhetoric distracts from concerns like trade tensions, including Trump's proposal of a 25 percent tariff on Canadian imports.

Regarding US-Canada trade relations, Wolfe said he believes Canada's geographic and economic ties to the US limit the scope for significant policy shifts.

"Canada is a fairly small, open economy heavily reliant on its trade relationship with the US."

"The fundamental economic interests of both countries don't change based on who occupies the prime minister's office," he said.

Wolfe sees potential opportunities in Canada's relationship with China, particularly in fostering a more stable diplomatic dynamic.

Wolfe said Canada and China are likely to maintain their cooperative engagement in multilateral forums like the World Trade Organization, where they often align on issues.

"While leadership changes may influence the tone or short-term tactics, the core economic and trade policies are expected to remain consistent," he said.

Andrea Perrella, an associate professor at Wilfrid Laurier University,

offered his insights on Canada's domestic politics.

"Elected members of the Liberal Party were increasingly voicing their concerns about Trudeau's leadership, and public opinion polls have, for a long time, been very unfavorable to him," he told China Daily.



The fundamental economic interests of both countries don't change based on who occupies the prime minister's office."

Robert Wolfe, professor emeritus at Queen's University

The timing of Trudeau's departure could serve as a strategic move to address those pressures, he said.

"A leadership campaign can attract considerable attention and draw potential voters to reconsider their support for the Liberals," Perrella said. "But whether this support will last is another question."

Trudeau's resignation could also reshape the dynamics between the Liberal Party and other major parties, like the Conservatives and the New Democratic Party.

"If the leader veers the party to the right, it may draw some support away from the Conservatives. However, such strategies have not always worked well for the Liberals in the past," he said.

Perrella speculated that Trudeau's resignation could lead to changes in Canada's policy priorities, particularly in response to external pressures.

"It is likely that Canada will increase defense spending in reaction to Donald Trump's statements and potentially adopt a stricter stance on borders," he said.

"If trade with the United States becomes more difficult, Canada will necessarily have to open up trade deals with other parts of the world," Perrella said, likening Canada's potential trade strategy to that of "a northern Australia."

Julian Castro-Rea, a professor of political science at the University of Alberta, told China Daily that Trudeau's resignation could presage a significant shift in Canada's foreign policy.

"The bad news for Canada is that his departure may signal a turn to the right for the country's government, aligning even more with US priorities," he said.

He suggested that Canada is increasingly perceived as a relay of US power, and the trend could deepen under potential successors, such as Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre or former deputy prime minister Chrystia Freeland.

Castro-Rea said he regretted what he called Canada's dwindling role in promoting hemispheric partnerships, especially with Latin America.

He added that Canada had prioritized relationships with what he called hegemonic political and economic global powers over the interests of Latin American countries.

## Trump plans new agency for revenue collection

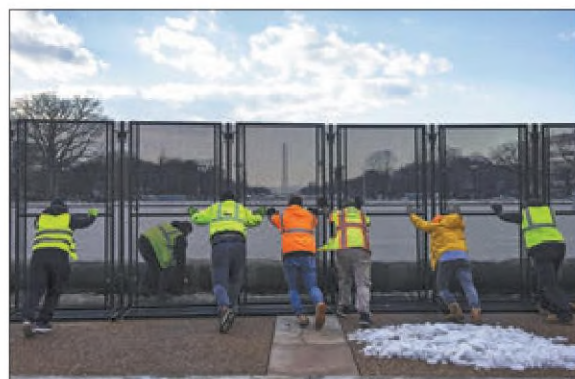
WASHINGTON – US President-elect Donald Trump on Tuesday announced plans to create a new agency called the External Revenue Service to collect tariffs and other revenues from foreign nations.

"We will begin charging those that make money off of us with Trade, and they will start paying," Trump said on Tuesday on his social media site, Truth Social. He compared his planned creation to the Internal Revenue Service, which is the nation's domestic tax collector.

The creation of a new agency requires an act of Congress, and Republicans hold the majority in both the House and the Senate.

Trump, who has vowed to shrink the size of government, would be creating a new agency to perform functions already handled by existing agencies, including the Commerce Department and the Customs and Border Protection, which collect duties and revenues from other nations.

The president-elect has tapped two business titans to lead his Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE,



Workers test the strength of temporary security fencing on Monday near the US Capitol building ahead of the presidential inauguration. FRANCIS CHUNG / AP

a nongovernmental task force assigned to find ways to fire federal workers, cut programs and slash federal regulations, all part of what he calls his "Save America" agenda for a second term in the White House.

Billionaire Elon Musk and fellow entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy are leading the DOGE's ambitious efforts to reduce the

size and scope of the federal government.

Tariffs, with the threat of a potential 25 percent levy on all goods from some allies, have raised concerns among industry insiders.

## Inefficient way

Economists have said the cost of the tariffs will be passed on

to consumers and are generally skeptical of them, considering they're the mostly inefficient way for governments to raise money and promote prosperity.

Democratic lawmakers were quick to criticize the External Revenue Service plan.

"No amount of silly rebranding will hide the fact that Trump is planning a multitrillion-dollar tax hike on American families and small businesses to pay for another round of tax handouts to the rich," Oregon Senator Ron Wyden, the top Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee, said in a statement.

Also on Tuesday, House Speaker Mike Johnson ordered that flags at the US Capitol be raised to their full height on Inauguration Day, pausing a 30-day flag-lowering order following the death of former president Jimmy Carter.

The Republican leader's decision means that Trump will not take the oath of office for his second term under a half-staff flag, a prospect that he had previously complained about.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau speaks during a press conference following a meeting with federal, provincial and territorial leaders in Ottawa, Ontario. BLAIR GABLE / REUTERS

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## China, EU can continue to contribute to each other's success by strengthening partnership

Beijing has repeatedly said that it remains ready to work with Brussels to ensure that China and the European Union remain firm partners. It has called for Brussels to deepen strategic communication to enhance mutual understanding and political trust so as to promote the sound and steady development of China-EU relations and make new contributions to world peace and development.

China and Europe have generally been on good terms since China established diplomatic relations with the European Economic Community, predecessor of the European Union, 50 years ago.

For a long time, they had complementary economic and trade ties on which to strengthen their cooperation. But as China has moved upstream on the global industry and supply chains, competition has emerged and intensified between the two economies. This competition has produced trade frictions in some areas. So much so that the EU identified China as a "systemic rival" in 2019. The ongoing tit for tat over EU restrictions on Chinese electric vehicles is the latest sign of such unease.

But for all the competitive aspects of their relationship, Beijing and Brussels do not have to engage in mutually undermining rivalry. Sustaining and amplifying the mutually beneficial side of their relations are of particular significance amid today's growing uncertainties.

The central message from Tuesday's phone conversation between Chinese President Xi Jinping and European Council President António Costa, that both sides seek to uphold their partnership, should thus be reassuring for both sides.

As President Xi correctly pointed out, China and Europe have "no fundamental conflicts of interest or geopolitical contradictions", and have been "partners of mutual achievement". This does not mean Beijing and Brussels should look aside from their present spat. But there are obviously better, more productive ways to handle it. The talks between the two leaders offered timely mutual assurance as both economies brace for unpredictable changes as a new administration takes office in the United States in a matter of days.

The next US administration will not necessarily upend the US' relations with China and Europe. But with the incoming US leader threatening tariff hikes against China and the EU, both Beijing and Brussels are naturally respectively considering the vulnerabilities of the Chinese and EU economies and the best means of self-protection. Choosing to follow Washington's lead and wield the baton of unilateral sanctions would not only betray the EU's long-standing commitment to free trade. More importantly, it would bog Brussels down in the mire of anti-globalization and trade protectionism, and end up hurting the EU economy. If the present trade spat with China could be resolved via constructive consultation, it would change the ball game.

The two sides' agreement on organizing a China-EU summit this year, an annual event absent last year, in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of bilateral diplomatic relations, indicates they opted for constructive engagement. As the top Chinese leader stated, as "defenders of the multilateral trading system", Beijing and Brussels must strive to hedge their "symbiotic relationship" against the complex, severe uncertainties in today's world. The history of the bilateral relationship shows, as Xi highlighted, that so long as both sides respect each other, treat each other as equals, and engage in candid dialogue, they will be able to work together and accomplish big things. Partners do not have to share the same ideals, they can also be those who are able to shelve their differences and seek common ground, he said.

Just as Costa emphasized, both the EU and China respect the UN Charter, uphold multilateralism, seek to preserve free trade, and oppose bloc confrontation, hence they should cooperate, rather than compete. If the EU and China can resolve their trade disputes and expand their cooperation, they would no doubt instill badly needed stability and certainty into the turbulent international situation.

Building on the momentum generated by the two leaders' talks, the two sides should make good preparations for the next China-EU Summit. Both sides should also give full play to the roles of their strategic, economic and trade dialogue mechanisms, and step up their cooperation in response to climate change and the potential threats posed by artificial intelligence, and provide more convenience for people-to-people exchanges, so as to further consolidate their friendly relations and continue pushing forward the mutually beneficial China-EU partnership.

## AI curbs show Biden's rejection of cooperation

Looking back over the past four years, from its first sit-down with the Chinese side in Anchorage in March 2021, the Joe Biden administration has shown no qualms about carrying out its China policy from "a position of strength".

That explains why, even though it has repeatedly claimed that cooperation is one of the three pillars of its China policy, it has never worked with Beijing to leverage the strength of that pillar as a stabilizer of relations. Instead, it has focused on continually reinforcing the other two pillars, competition and confrontation. Artificial intelligence is a good example of how the Biden administration has rejected cooperation in favor of competition and confrontation, although it has gone through the motions to make it look like it is cooperating with China on AI.

As agreed by the two heads of state in their San Francisco summit in November 2023, the US and China held the first meeting of intergovernmental dialogue on AI in Geneva in May. The two sides exchanged views on the technological risks posed by AI, global governance of the technology and its use, as well as other issues of respective concern. They also agreed to promote the sustainable development of artificial intelligence on the basis of safety, reliability and controllability. Later in June, carrying forward that consensus, the second China-US Track 1.5 Dialogue took place in Beijing, during which participants from both countries reached a consensus to further deepen their cooperation in the field of AI.

Yet, on Monday, one week before it leaves office, the administration unveiled sweeping export restrictions on artificial intelligence semiconductors and model parameters, with China being the main target. The US' restrictive measures on AI chip exports, which extend its long-arm jurisdiction by setting obstacles in the way of normal trade between third parties and China, not only seriously hinder normal economic and trade exchanges between countries, affect global scientific and technological innovation, and damage the interests of companies in various countries around the world, but also divide the world on AI, pushing the technology to evolve in a direction opposite to what it agreed with China in Geneva.

No wonder many US high-tech companies and industry organizations have clearly expressed their dissatisfaction with the move through various channels, arguing that the measures have been hastily formulated and issued without sufficient discussion. Reportedly Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang is embarking on a trip to China this week, a visit apparently intended to figure out how to sidestep the Biden administration's latest AI chip curbs.

Beijing has responded to the move by adding seven US companies to the unreliable entity list on Tuesday. Although the Chinese measures are not equivalent in scale and consequence to the US moves, they show Beijing's firm resolve to safeguard its core interests.

The development of AI is a double-edged sword. While it can be a boon for social progress and international security, it can also aggravate unfairness and injustice and be a threat to peace and stability. Unlike the US, which is seeking to build a high fence around the technology to ensure it serves only itself, China is committed to ensuring that artificial intelligence technology is beneficial to humanity, safe and fair, and always developing in a direction that is conducive to the progress of human civilization.

China therefore supports strengthening global governance of artificial intelligence and advocates giving full play to the main role of the United Nations to form a global artificial intelligence governance framework and standards with a broad consensus. China has always believed that the development of AI should not be a tool for competition and confrontation between countries, but a means of cooperation for the benefit of the whole of humankind.

At their meeting in Lima, the Chinese and US leaders affirmed the need to address the risks of AI systems, to improve AI security, and to enhance international cooperation on AI, stressing that a prudent and responsible attitude must be adopted in developing AI technology.

It is to be hoped that the incoming US administration realizes that it is in a position of strength for humankind to ensure that what is essentially alien intelligence is used for good and for the good of all.

## CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

## Contact us at:

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

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

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

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

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

## Cai Meng



## Opinion Line

## Stability in ROK crucial for country as well as Northeast Asian region

Impeached Republic of Korea President Yoon Suk-yeol was detained at his residence in Seoul on Wednesday, weeks after investigators first attempted to arrest him for briefly declaring martial law in December.

Investigators entered the residence early on Wednesday in a second attempt to arrest Yoon following an earlier failed attempt after a Seoul court issued an arrest warrant against him on Dec 31 on suspicion of instigating civil unrest and abuse of power.

Extension of the warrant to arrest Yoon was granted on Jan 7. The National Assembly passed an impeachment motion against Yoon on Dec 14, which was delivered to the constitutional court for deliberation for up to 180 days, during which Yoon's presidential power was suspended.

After the failed execution of a martial law on the night of Dec 3, Yoon

was named by investigating agencies as the suspected ringleader in a case of insurrection.

Yoon's case and all the political chaos surrounding it are part of complex political developments in the ROK, and whatever the outcome, they will likely reshape the ROK's political landscape, prompting all circles of its society to consider how to create a healthier, more stable political environment.

With the ROK at a critical juncture of economic development and diplomacy, that a sitting president is embroiled in such a serious legal crisis sends the message of the country being politically unstable. That will dampen the confidence of domestic investors while international partners will think twice before investing in the ROK.

Since taking office, the Yoon administration has been implementing a pro-United States and pro-Japan for-

eign policy while adopting an unfriendly attitude toward China, but China consistently adheres to the principle of noninterference in other countries' internal affairs, and believes the people of the ROK have the wisdom and ability to properly handle their domestic affairs, like Yoon's case.

Northeast Asia has always been an extremely sensitive region, and as a key regional stakeholder, the developing political situation in the ROK will have its impact on the whole region. The ROK is an important neighbor and friendly cooperative partner of China, and China hopes that the situation there stabilizes as soon as possible to promote the sound and steady development of bilateral relations, which serves the common interests of both China and the ROK and also the region as a whole.

— WU YIXUE, CHINA DAILY

## 'TikTok refugees' prove the digital world is flat

As TikTok awaits the US Supreme Court's decision on whether it can continue to operate in the United States, the huge flow of US TikTok users to Chinese social media app Xiaohongshu as it is called in Mandarin, proves that the world is indeed flat in the digital age.

With the app's existence threatened, "TikTok refugees" have emerged. By threatening to block TikTok, US politicians are only driving its users to other social media platforms.

By proposing the ban on TikTok, US politicians have provided China with an opportunity to increase cul-

tural exchanges with the rest of the world. For too long, US social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Meta (formerly Facebook) and YouTube have dominated the social media landscape.

By threatening to ban TikTok, US politicians have helped Xiaohongshu, a Chinese platform, to go global and that's an opportunity Xiaohongshu should make the most of. It's time Xiaohongshu optimized its app, and improved its network services so that more US users can enjoy its content.

Further, while Xiaohongshu's original user base was mostly Chi-

nese users, the inflow of "TikTok refugees" opens a channel for it to spread Chinese culture around the world.

More US users will get to know what the Chinese are talking about and make friends with the latter online, further bridging the cultural gap across the Pacific.

Xiaohongshu marks only the start for more Chinese social media platforms to get more US users. WeChat, Sina Weibo, Douyin, Kuaishou should all prepare so they can be bridges for Sino-US cultural exchanges.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

## What They Say

## Japan can revitalize by strengthening ties with neighbor

China and Japan have markedly intensified their efforts to try and reinvigorate bilateral ties since the Shigeru Ishiba government took office in October, particularly after his meeting with the top Chinese leader on the sidelines of the 31st APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting in Lima in November.

In the latest move in that regard, the ruling parties of the two countries agreed on Tuesday that they would maintain close dialogue and communication no matter what the state of China-Japan relations. The two governments also reached a 10-point consensus on people-to-people and cultural exchanges in Beijing last month.

People-to-people and cultural exchanges and exchanges between their respective ruling parties served as important icebreakers in the normalization of Sino-Japanese relations in 1972, which ushered in a new chapter for the two neighbors.

In their meeting with Chinese For-

eign Minister Wang Yi in Beijing on Tuesday, the Japanese delegation, led by Secretary General Hiroshi Moriyama of the Liberal Democratic Party and Secretary General Makoto Nishida of the Komeito Party, expressed Tokyo's willingness to work with Beijing to push for concrete results in practical cooperation in various fields.

That's a clear message that Ishiba is not only looking to improve the communication with Beijing but more importantly seeking to strengthen pragmatic economic and trade collaboration with the world's second-largest economy.

The Ishiba government undoubtedly faces an acute need to inject some vitality into the Japanese economy, which has endured long-term stagnation since the 1990s, when Washington successfully contained Japan's catch-up through imposing on it a series of trade, financial, technological pacts favoring the United States. Both the former Shinzo Abe and Fumio Kishida governments failed to do so.

Although it is correct to fuel growth through innovation as the Japanese policymakers propose, Japan needs such a huge market as China to digest its commercialized innovation capacity so as to fully realize the values of its world-class industries and labs.

The structural complementarity between the Chinese and Japanese economies and industries has remained largely untapped due to the interference of external forces.

Born and growing up after World War II, Ishiba and his colleagues should be well aware that although it was the US that boosted Japan's quick recovery after the war, it was the common development of China and the Asia-Pacific that had sustained Japan's prosperity afterwards. Those historical lessons in both mending ties and rebooting the economy walk hand in hand with each other, and are still of strong reference value today.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

## COMMENT

Daniel Noboa Azin

## Ecuador and China: 45 years of a dynamic and transforming relationship

**W**e live in a highly dynamic reality, which requires each country to strengthen its political, social, and economic relations to face the global challenges of our time.

The diplomatic relations between the Republic of Ecuador and the People's Republic of China, during these 45 years, are a clear example of this commitment to the growth of our nations, through joint work and cooperation at all levels.

One of the fundamental pillars to upkeep mutual support has been the comprehensive strategic partnership, which since its inception established a framework to promote political dialogue, trade, investment, and collaboration in science and technology.

In addition, it has served as an instrument to promote meetings and encounters between leaders of both countries, reflecting a cooperative approach to facing global challenges.

We must also highlight the relevant role played by Ecuador's incorporation into the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2018, an initiative promoted by China to improve connectivity and sustainable development.

For our country, this has meant integration into an ambitious infrastructure and trade project and the drive to improve the professional training of young Ecuadorians.

The New Ecuador that we promote is committed to youth, to their energy, and to their development. Therefore, we firmly believe that education and professional training are the keys to any nation's sustainable progress.

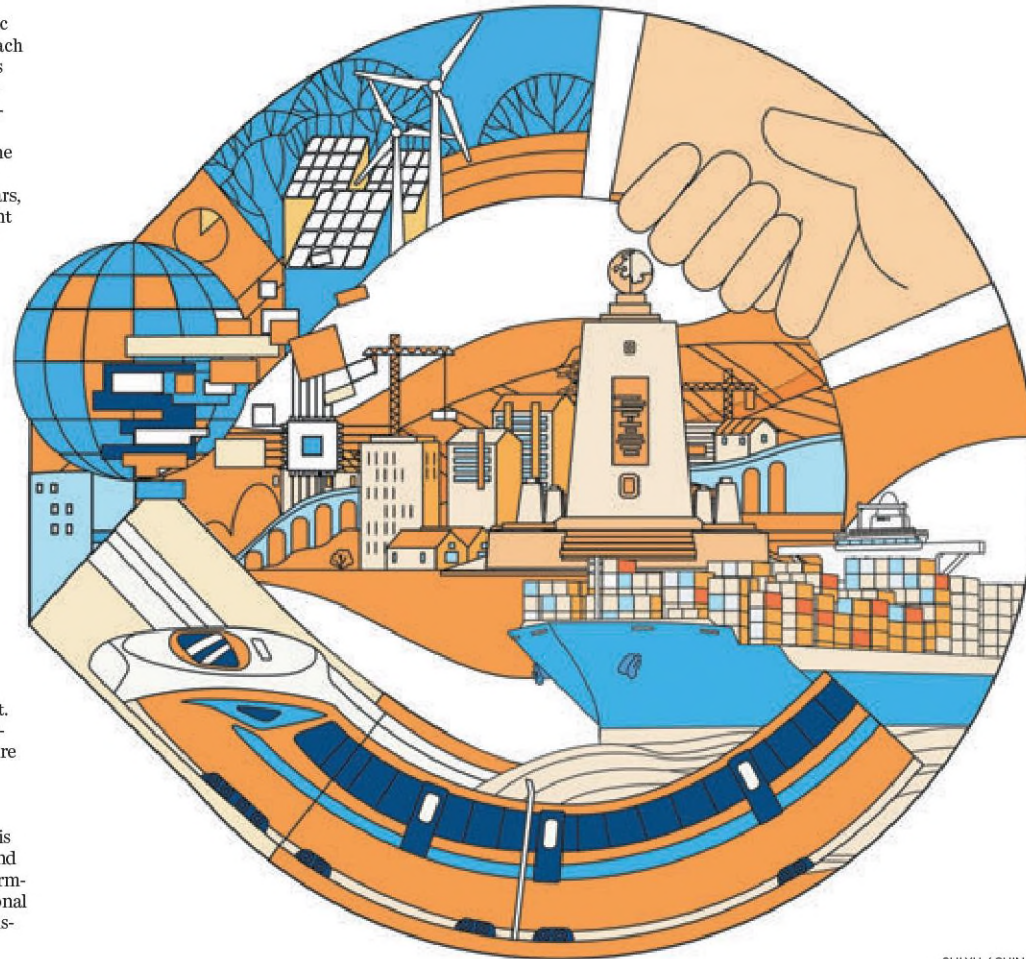
In light of this, consolidating professional training programs in China and educational exchanges will raise the capabilities of our youth and facilitate deeper cultural ties between the two nations.

Furthermore, the recent entry into force of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Ecuador and China marks another significant milestone in our bilateral relations.

With confidence and a mutual commitment to development, we have eliminated tariff barriers, promoting free trade through a clear and fair regulatory framework.

These joint initiatives reflect the trust and desire to strengthen ties between both nations under the approach of respect.

China is positioned as one of Ecuador's



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

**We trust that Chinese investment in Ecuador will increase, which will translate into job creation and a boost to strategic and infrastructure sectors, essential for the country's development.**

main trading partners, benefiting our economy and diversifying Chinese exports in our market, in a win-win dynamic.

We trust that Chinese investment in Ecuador will increase, which will translate into job creation and a boost to strategic and infrastructure sectors, essential for the country's development.

Also, cultural interactions have grown enormously in this time. The Chinese community in Ecuador has been fundamental in keeping these ties alive. Through festivals, exhibitions, and cultural exchanges, both countries have shared traditions that enrich the identity of our peoples. This approach also underlines the importance of understanding

ourselves as trading partners, as well as allies in the cultural and educational fields.

Together we look to the future in which our relations of brotherhood, work, and cooperation are strengthened, to better face global challenges.

These 45 years of fruitful diplomatic relations, in addition to being a reason for celebration, refresh our commitment to work together to achieve a better tomorrow.

Rest assured that the government of New Ecuador will spare no effort to crystallize our common objectives.

*The author is constitutional president of the Republic of Ecuador.*

Colin Mackerras

## Year of the Snake will be good for China

**M**any famous people were born in the Year of the Snake. There's Polish astronomer and mathematician Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543), a major figure in the "scientific revolution", who established that Earth revolved around the sun, not the other way around. Then there's the greatest of German literary figures, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832).

But let's talk about years, not people. One of the traditions of the Year of the Snake in China is transformation. There have been plenty of bad "snake" years. One is reminded of the Great Depression and the Wall Street Crash of (October) 1929. Another year I would like to mention is 2001. It was the year when the Sept 11 terrorist attacks on the United States took place. It was also the year when China joined the World Trade Organization — which helped expedite China's economic development and integrate its economy with the global economy.

Looking back at the past year, two trends stand out for me. One is the deterioration of the situation in the Middle East. The region is seeing a genocide being committed by the Israeli state, witnessed in real time on TV screens across the world. And the US is complicit in this genocide, with its global standing going down drastically, even in parts of the West. On the other hand, apart from the West and a few US ally countries, China's standing has improved across the world, because it has stood with the ordinary people against the Israeli and American ruling elite.

The other development is the continuing rise of BRICS, along with China's rising economic status throughout the world. The year 2024 saw the addition of



**China is a global leader also in artificial intelligence. Despite the controversy over the rapid development of AI and its implications on human society, its importance in the world is undeniable.**

several major countries to BRICS, with Indonesia becoming the first country to join the grouping in the first days of 2025.

The rise of BRICS frightens the US elite, because it symbolizes the loss of their global economic dominance because of the decline of the US dollar as the principal international reserve currency. Although the decline of the dollar is an ongoing process, the year 2024 saw the acceleration of the process.

So what about 2025? I believe it will be a good year for China. Of course, we have to take into account Donald Trump's return to the White House after four years and his threat to impose high tariffs on imports from China, as well as other countries.

If Trump imposes punitive tariffs on Chinese goods, I believe he will cause more damage to the US than China. Looking at recent history, we can clearly

see that the Chinese people's spirit of independence and self-reliance is very strong. They will not cave in under the pressure of punitive US tariffs.

Self-reliance is a major part of Chinese culture, which has influenced China's development. The other features include the emphasis on education and resolving problems harmoniously. Despite the bad periods in China's history, Chinese people's resilience, fighting spirit and industriousness have seen them through many a crisis. Three factors stand out in all this.

The first is the Chinese people's love for peace. Contrary to what the Western media say, I regard China as a peace-loving country. Unlike the US, which has been at war throughout its entire history, China avoids war. The century of humiliation taught it that a country is better off strong than weak. However, that does not mean it wants war.

The second factor is China's emphasis on reducing pollution and moving toward a sustainable, green economy. China's leadership of the green revolution over the last few years has been extremely impressive. The country is now the global leader in electric vehicles (EVs), and solar and wind energy. This is a remarkable achievement, and shows China is sensitive to the dangers that climate change poses to our world.

Some Western countries have recently accused China of "over-production" of EVs, which are important to build a sustainable, green world in the future. However, the Western countries have targeted China because they are afraid that they will lose their market share of vehicles to China. But their attitude is mean considering how important EVs are to sustainable living. More importantly, these

countries don't mind dominating markets through "over-production" when it suits them.

The third factor is China's technological advancement. China's scientific prowess before the "scientific revolution" beginning in the 16th century was unsurpassed in the world. But after that, China failed to advance like the West. But those days are over, with China catching up with the West in terms of technology and in some ways even eclipsing the West.

In space research, China has moved ahead so fast that it became the first country to bring lunar rock samples from the far side of the moon. And despite Western attempts to hold it back, Huawei remains a global leader in innovative telecommunications.

China is a global leader also in artificial intelligence. Despite the controversy over the rapid development of AI and its implications on human society, its importance in the world is undeniable. Plus, AI will be a major determinant of the global geopolitical order.

The geostrategic balance of power in the world has changed greatly in the last half a century, in China's favor. China faces some major problems, economic and environmental, as do other countries. But the Chinese people seem to be overcoming their problems more sensibly and calmly than others. I think it is largely due to their culture of education, harmony, peace and rationality. I expect the coming Year of the Snake to see further Chinese advancement.

*The author is a Sinologist and an emeritus professor at Griffith University in Australia.*

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

Feng Chen and Mou Silu

## Proactive fiscal policy will help build a dynamic economy

**T**he Central Economic Work Conference in December 2024 to assess the economic landscape and set priorities and targets for 2025, signaled a more proactive fiscal policy. To do so, the government will take a series of measures including raising the fiscal deficit ratio, increasing government spending, and issuing ultra-long-term special bonds and local government special bonds.

The work conference's decision highlights the government's determination to support economic recovery and growth.

With 2024 proving to be a pivotal year in achieving the goals of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25), the economy has not only become more resilient but also made steady progress toward realizing all-round high-quality development. But China still faces various challenges: economic and geopolitical uncertainties on the global front, and weak demand, unemployment, slower growth and pressures on businesses at home. Addressing these challenges requires a recalibrated fiscal approach that balances short-term responses with long-term objectives.

Fiscal policy is a critical tool for stabilizing the economy, particularly when aggregate demand is weak. While China has long adhered to an "active fiscal policy", the decision to adopt a "more proactive" stance underscores a shift to counter-cyclical measures that reflect the current economic reality.

The move is aimed at stimulating demand through increased public spending, optimizing supply structures to foster innovation and productivity, and mitigating economic risks, dealing with external uncertainties, and stabilizing the real estate, equities and other key markets. Importantly, it also seeks to boost market confidence and create an environment conducive to sustained growth.

**By improving public welfare and supporting key industries, the policy will contribute to both social stability and economic resilience.**

A more proactive fiscal policy means greater emphasis on implementing fiscal measures of higher scale and structure to ensure maximum impact. On the scale side, increased fiscal deficit ratios and expanded public spending are key to boosting domestic demand, which has remained weak. In this regard, special bonds will play a critical role, with plans to broaden issuance, diversify investment channels, and increase their use as project capital.

Besides, additional measures, such as issuing ultra-long-term special bonds, supporting "new infrastructure" projects, and increasing central-to-local transfer payments, will provide further momentum for economic growth and public welfare.

On the structural side, precision allocation of budgets is crucial. More resources should be allocated for improving people's livelihoods, boosting consumption, and supporting long-term development and other critical programs, while grassroots social programs should be safeguarded and measures taken to ensure government departments practice frugality by cutting non-essential expenditure. This will ensure fiscal resources are directed toward initiatives that yield the greatest economic and social benefit.

The shift to a more proactive fiscal policy shows the government is determined to address both the domestic and global challenges. While consistent measures need to be taken to address the global economic volatility and geopolitical uncertainties, targeted solutions are needed to resolve domestic issues such as uneven regional development and industrial upgrading.

By taking these measures, China can position itself as a stabilizing force in an unpredictable world. The policy's emphasis on expanding demand and optimizing supply structures seeks to meet the immediate needs while laying the groundwork for long-term modernization. The policy is expected to stabilize market expectations, stimulate economic activity, and promote innovation and industrial upgrading. By improving public welfare and supporting key industries, the policy will contribute to both social stability and economic resilience.

To achieve these results, the government must ensure fiscal policy is forward-looking and effectively implemented, and government departments coordinate their programs and align the national goals with local realities.

Amid the advancement of Chinese modernization, the policy shift highlights the importance of adaptability and precision in addressing complex challenges. By balancing immediate economic needs with long-term development goals, the government is well-positioned to navigate uncertainties and sustain high-quality development. This approach will reinforce China's commitment to foster resilience, promote shared prosperity and build a dynamic economy.

*Feng Chen is a professor at the School of Economics and Finance, Xi'an Jiaotong University; and Mou Silu is a research associate at the same institute. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.*

## GLOBAL VIEWS

ZHU FENG

## Solidarity can steady the ship

Last year was one of turmoil and uncertainty, and the international community must act collectively to foster greater global stability

Reflecting on the turbulences and upheavals in global politics last year, it is evident that 2024 was a year of profound significance in shaping and transforming the trajectory of international development. The numerous events of the



year signal that the global community is navigating an era of heightened uncertainty and transition.

On Nov 5, Donald Trump was elected the 47th president of the United States. The advent of Trump's new term marks the return of a country driven by interests-centered unilateralism, protectionism and populism. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991 and the end of the Cold War, successive US administrations have espoused policies of liberal internationalism, emphasizing the primacy of US-led international rules and a "rules-based order" as central to its national strategy.

However, Trump's campaign rhetoric, in which he repeatedly threatened to launch trade wars and signaled intentions to withdraw from global governance mechanisms such as the World Health Organization and the Paris Agreement, has raised widespread concerns that a Trump-led White House not only seeks to "reshuffle" international rules based on hegemonic power and self-serving interests but also poses a renewed challenge to multilateralism and global governance systems.

What has become even more concerning are Trump's two proposed geopolitical expansionist ambitions. One involves controlling Greenland, an autonomous territo-

ry of Denmark, and the other seeks to exert control over the Panama Canal. He even dramatically suggested that if the economy of Canada continues to falter, the nation should consider becoming the 51st state of the US. Greenland, located at a pivotal position along Arctic shipping routes, is gaining strategic importance as global warming enhances its accessibility. Moreover, Greenland is home to significant reserves of strategic minerals, including rare earth elements. Should the US aggressively pursue control over Greenland, it would signal a return to imperialist expansionism in the 21st century. While the likelihood of a US military occupation of Greenland is slim, attempts to pressure Denmark politically and economically to sell the island would present a catastrophic challenge to global geopolitical stability.

Throughout 2024, the world also witnessed the unrelenting continuation of the Ukraine crisis. Casualties among soldiers and innocent civilians continued to climb amid the relentless military operations. Ukraine's spring offensive in April saw Ukrainian forces penetrate Russian territory, a new development that captured global attention. However, by the year's end, the tide had decisively turned against Ukraine. Ukrainian incursions into Russian territory had been decisively thwarted, and Russian advances within Ukraine's borders expanded significantly, enlarging the occupied territories in eastern Ukraine. The battlefield dynamics have become increasingly unfavorable for Ukraine.

Although Trump has expressed intentions to initiate dialogue with Russia upon assuming office and pursue a ceasefire agreement accommodating various interests,

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov insisted that the US must take the first step toward resuming dialogue and respect Russia's legitimate interests.

Regarding the crisis in Ukraine, Lavrov emphasized that Russia seeks not merely a ceasefire but a lasting peace. As 2024 has drawn to a close, the conflict showed no signs of de-escalation. As the Joe Biden administration authorizing Ukraine to use US-provided medium- and long-range missiles against Russian targets, the move risks escalating hostilities to catastrophic levels. The dispatch of troops by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to assist Russian military operations in Ukraine, as part of its comprehensive security cooperation agreement with Russia, has further internationalized the conflict. As the world has stepped into 2025, questions remain about whether the Ukraine crisis will move toward dialogue and ceasefire or spiral into broader military confrontation. In a bid to secure leverage in future negotiations, it is possible that the conflict could witness a dangerous escalation.

The Middle East experienced unprecedented transformations in 2024, marking the most disruptive developments in the region since the end of the Cold War. The Israeli government under Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly ignored United Nations General Assembly resolutions demanding a halt to military offensives in Gaza. In July, Israel's sustained attacks on Palestinian residential areas in Gaza destroyed critical healthcare infrastructure, leaving civilians without medical facilities. Meanwhile, Israel's retaliatory strikes on Iran, coupled with continued offensives against Hezbollah in Lebanon and

Houthi forces in Yemen, have further deepened the turmoil that began on Oct 7, 2023. The Israel-Palestine conflict has now spread beyond Gaza to neighboring regions. In mid-November, Syria witnessed the overthrow of the Assad regime after 12 days of attacks on Damascus by the nation's opposition forces. Forced into exile in Russia, former president Bashar al-Assad left behind a fractured country now governed by an interim administration led by Abu Mohammed al-Jolani. The collapse of the Assad regime has severed the "Iran-Syria resistance axis", a key "Shiite linkage" that has contained Israel for the past three decades. The new Syrian government has garnered support from the US, Turkey and Israel, and Russia's naval base and military presence in Syria now face significant vulnerabilities. At the beginning of this year, the new administration in Syria has proposed domestic dialogues to rebuild political structures through elections. However, questions loom over whether post-Assad Syria will resemble Afghanistan, which is governed by the Taliban, or the fragile coalition governance of Iraq. The trajectory of Syria's political future will undoubtedly influence the broader reorganization of the Middle Eastern geopolitical landscape.

Global instability in 2024 extended beyond the Ukraine crisis and the Israel-Palestine conflict. Myanmar and South Sudan continued to grapple with severe domestic conflicts. In Somalia, Al-Shabaab's insurgency prompted the African Union to deploy a stabilization mission. Meanwhile, countries such as Bangladesh and Georgia experienced waves of public protests. On Dec 27, the UN Security Council approved an African Union-led task



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

force to combat Al-Shabaab, set to be deployed in January 2025. Additionally, political unrest in Ethiopia and other nations underscores the fragility of governance across parts of Africa in 2025. There remain uncertainties over whether the Global South can maintain political stability and achieve sustained economic growth.

However, despite all the transformations and turbulences in the global landscape, fostering mutual respect, equal cooperation and joint actions among countries remain an essential principle for the international community to sustain an open, inclusive and mutually beneficial global system rooted in genuine multilateralism.

President Xi Jinping has emphasized the traditional Chinese cultur-

al value of "sharing weal and woe together like passengers in the same boat" to confront challenges and threats. In today's interconnected world, this philosophy extends to the spirit of "shared responsibility as residents of the same planet" for various countries and their people. Looking ahead to the rest of this year, the international community must act collectively, inspired by this spirit of global solidarity, to overcome difficulties and build a brighter future.

*The author is dean of the School of International Studies at Nanjing University. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

EFE CAN GÜRCAN

## World of difference

Trump will need to recognize that the geopolitical landscape has changed since his first administration

On Jan 20, Donald Trump will take office at a time of global volatility unparalleled since the Cold War era. As the world speculates on how his second term might shape US foreign policy, one question looms large: how will US-China relations be in Trump's second term? Will



Trump sustain the confrontational approach that defined his first term, or pivot toward recalibration? To understand what

lies ahead, it is essential to consider three dominant perspectives on Trump's foreign policy, each with its own merit: his "transactional leadership" style, the "Jacksonian" tradition shaping his foreign policy doctrine, and the institutional dynamics that have fostered a bipartisan consensus on China—all within the context of China's evolving strengths in economic, technological, military and diplomatic realms.

A common perspective holds that Trump's leadership style is "transactional" to its core. He thrives on short-term, measurable gains, often at the expense of long-term strategy or alliances. Trump's transactionalism, which defined his first term, prioritizes deal-making over coherent policymaking and ideological commitments, leveraging unpredictability as a negotiation tool.

In his dealings with China, Trump has alternated between combative rhetoric and unexpected praise. This seemingly erratic behavior appears to be a transactional strategy aimed at keeping opponents off balance and maximizing leverage. Trump's approach, which involves elements of "high anchoring" and "brinkmanship" strategies, is exemplified by his proposed 60 percent tariffs on Chi-

nese goods, a tactic that involves setting extreme demands to push the boundaries of what is considered negotiable. Trump's unpredictability, such as his dramatic shift on TikTok from proposing a ban to opposing restrictions, reflects his tendency to use issues as bargaining chips. Similarly, his threats to "retake" the Panama Canal illustrate a willingness to escalate disputes for short-term advantage, often blurring the line between negotiation and provocation.

From an ideational perspective, Trump's approach is often associated with the Jacksonian tradition of US foreign policy. By invoking Andrew Jackson—the seventh US president remembered as a racist slaver and genocidal tyrant with Napoleonic aspirations—as his political hero, Trump aligns himself with a lineage that views free trade, international cooperation, and multilateral agreements as constraints on US autonomy.

Interestingly, Trump's focus on acquiring territories such as Panama and Greenland echoes Jackson's expansionist approach. Jackson sought territorial gains through purchase and, when thwarted, covertly supported settlers, fueling a proxy war in Texas. Jackson's administration also used naval force in Sumatra to assert US power and secure US interests, a strategy mirrored in Trump's nationalist ambitions.

Trump's Jacksonian populism appears to have driven his decisions to withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement, the Paris Agreement and the World Health Organization. It also informed his criticism of NATO as "obsolete" and his rejection of NAFTA in favor of bilateral deals. Trump's populist rhetoric about China—labeling it a "thief" of US intellectual property—further underscores this Jackson-



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

nian ethos. Under the Trump doctrine, moreover, the National Security Strategy shifted from counterterrorism to long-term rivalry with so-called revisionist powers, particularly China. This framework justified the trade war, which resulted in tariffs on Chinese goods and restrictions on technology companies such as Huawei.

Trump's disruptive style and alignment with a crude nationalist tradition aside, his policies toward China align with a broader institutional consensus that has emerged during the 2010s. Long before Trump's first presidency, US political elites began viewing China's peaceful rise as a strategic threat. The Barack Obama administration's pivot to Asia marked the beginning of this shift, which

Trump expanded upon, and Joe Biden has reinforced.

Trump's free and open "Indo-Pacific" strategy, unveiled in 2017, built on Obama's regional focus, reviving alliances such as the Quad and promoting "Freedom of Navigation" operations in the South China Sea. His administration passed the BUILD Act, creating the US International Development Finance Corporation to challenge China's Belt and Road Initiative.

Trump's policy on the Taiwan region also became a cornerstone of his China strategy. His administration normalized arms sales to Taiwan island, and passed the Taiwan Travel Act, fostering high-level diplomatic exchanges. Biden has expanded many of these initiatives, expanding the US tariffs and sanc-

tions on China, introducing the "Indo-Pacific" Economic Framework for Prosperity, initiating the "Chip 4 Alliance" and forging the AUKUS security pact with Australia and the United Kingdom. Therefore, the past three administrations reflect a bipartisan consensus that China is the US' principal geopolitical challenge, ensuring continuity in US-China rivalry regardless of Trump's leadership style.

Finally, Trump's Cabinet picks and campaign donors suggest continuity in his hard-line stance on China, which strongly reflects this bipartisan consensus. Key donors, such as Timothy Mellon, who praised Trump's trade efforts, and Robert Bigelow, advocating for US dominance in space exploration, align with his nationalist agenda. Elon Musk presents a more nuanced case; while opposing US tariffs and maintaining business ties in China, rising tensions over China's efforts to reduce reliance on Tesla and Starlink could push Musk closer to Trump's policies.

Trump's Cabinet selections further reflect an aggressive stance. Marco Rubio, J.D. Vance and Mike Waltz are among the staunchest critics of China, advocating for measures such as banning Chinese telecom equipments, bolstering Taiwan island's military capabilities, and enhancing US military readiness in the "Indo-Pacific" region. Elise Stefanik previously targeted Chinese influence in elections and academia, while Pete Hegseth and John Ratcliffe focused on countering China's development efforts.

Despite this bipartisan consensus, the US faces a transformed geopolitical landscape compared to Trump's first term, as China has significantly bolstered its global position. Economically, China has achieved significant progress in strategic industries such as manufacturing, green technology and

artificial intelligence, while the BRI continues to expand its influence in Africa, Southeast Asia and Europe. Militarily, advancements in hypersonic weapons, naval and aerial capabilities, and cyber technologies enhance China's ability to counter US expansionism. Diplomatically, China has diversified its multilateral engagement and alliances with nations such as Russia, Iran and Saudi Arabia, challenging US containment efforts. Therefore, a hawkish approach alone may be insufficient without a nuanced understanding of China's evolving strengths.

Trump's return to the presidency is likely to deepen the US strategic rivalry with China, but the dynamics of this confrontation have shifted significantly. China's remarkable progress in economic, technological, military and diplomatic spheres ensures that it is not merely a passive player but an active agent in global power realignments. While institutional and ideational dimensions of US policy point to continuity in countering China's peaceful development, Trump's unpredictable and transactional style introduces an element of volatility that Beijing is well-prepared to manage. Ultimately, the impact of Trump's second term will depend not only on how he balances these dimensions of his foreign policy but also on how China leverages its strengths. This chapter in US-China relations may redefine the contours of global power in an increasingly multipolar world.

*The author is an adjunct professor at Shanghai University and visiting senior fellow at the London School of Economics. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

## CULTURAL HERITAGE



Almost a century after excavations began at the Yin Xu Ruins in Anyang, Henan province, new findings continue to refresh understanding of this remarkable page in Chinese history.

In its latest announcement about discoveries at the late Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century-11th century BC) capital site, the National Cultural Heritage Administration said that archaeologists have found a road system with at least three east-west and three north-south roads on the northern bank of the Huanhe River (now known as the Anyang River), among which is a north-south road believed to have been a traffic artery.

Spread across the north and south banks of the Huanhe River in the suburbs of Anyang, Yin Xu covers about 30 square kilometers.

Niu Shishan, a researcher at the Institute of Archaeology at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, who is leading the team at the Yin Xu Ruins, says they have found multiple road ditches (where roads have sunk with vegetation now growing on them) and other ditches in recent years.

The longest road ditch stretches for 1.6 kilometers. It is 15 meters wide and up to 30 meters at its widest. Through archaeological studies this indicates that the road was originally at least 1.6 km long, Niu says.

Its surface is covered with fine sand, with many small stones and broken pottery pieces in the soil beneath. Bronze horse bridles and stone tools have also been found. In addition, a profusion of wheel ruts are still visible on the surface.

In *jiaguwen*, or oracle bone inscriptions, the earliest known writing system in China and which was discovered in 1899, the Shang people called their capital Dayishang, or "the grand city of the Shang Dynasty".

Since it was excavated in the 1920s, Chinese archaeologists have studied the Yin Xu Ruins for nearly a century, making it a sacred place for archaeological studies in the country, and the first known site of a capital in Chinese history with documented evidence confirmed



From top left: An aerial photo of excavated sacrificial pits at the royal mausoleum area of Yin Xu Ruins in Anyang, Henan province. The newly excavated area on the north bank of the Huanhe River in the ruins. A large-scale sacrificial pit where archaeologists found the bones of eight horses. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



The new discoveries have helped fill in many blanks about the north bank area of the Huanhe River. "Our archaeological work at Yin Xu used to focus on the south bank area, where we had unearthed a large amount of oracle bone inscriptions," Wang says. "But we didn't know much about the large area to the north of the river. The road system in the northern bank area exceeds our imagination. The direction of the roads even aligns with Yin Xu structures, indicating the northern area was also important.

"In this way, the new discoveries totally changed our understanding of the layout of Yin Xu, and offered clues for the leading role that the Central China Plains played in the development of Chinese civilization during the Shang Dynasty," he adds.

Since the groundbreaking discovery of the tomb of Fu Hao, China's first known female general and consort of Shang king Wu Ding, which yielded a dazzling number of exquisite bronze, jade, bone and ivory artifacts in 1976, the focus had been on excavating tombs, according to Wang.

In the last two decades, archaeologists have started to prioritize creating a clear layout of Yin Xu, leading to the discovery of the site of a capital from the middle stage of the Shang Dynasty to the north of the Huanhe River, and road and water systems to the south. These new discoveries are another highlight, and may help connect earlier remains found at the site, says archaeologist Chen Xingcan.

Lei Xingshan, an archaeology professor at the Beijing Union University, says the layout of city walls, road networks, and river systems are the keys to uncovering the secrets of large-scale settlement sites in archaeological studies.

"Archaeologists have discussed for years how to study large-scale settlement sites," Lei says. "Now, we are increasingly focused on the exploration of framework details like these. The seemingly simple city walls, roads and water systems often provide crucial archaeological clues."

Contact the writer at wangru1@chinadaily.com.cn

## Yin Xu slowly reveals its secrets

More complete picture of ancient capital emerges as archaeologists unearth detailed road network, Wang Ru reports.

by archaeological excavations and oracle bone inscriptions. In 2006, Yin Xu was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

"This is the longest known traffic artery in Dayishang discovered in the Yin Xu Ruins with clearly defined ends," Niu says. "It is also the widest road ditch discovered there so far."

Due to the slight eastward deviation of the artery at its northern end to align with the orientation of previously identified Shang Dynasty structures, Niu says the roads were probably intentionally designed and built.

Archaeologists believe that besides the already confirmed roads, there may have been two more north-south roads, but further studies are required to identify them.

In addition, they also discovered two sections of the ancient river course of the Huanhe.

Earlier findings of the royal mausoleum area, including trenches



Niu Shishan, head of the archaeological team of Yin Xu Ruins, checks a sacrificial pit.

found to have surrounded the graves and sacrificial pits, believed to be part of a moat system designed to protect the mausoleum, were listed as one of China's

top 10 archaeological discoveries in 2022.

Since then, archaeologists have continued to study the royal mausoleum area. Recently, they found two

large-scale tombs in the west trench, one of which has a tomb passage, which symbolizes the high social status of its occupant.

They have also found a settlement dating back to the early stages of the Western Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century-771 BC) in the western part of the area. It covers 80,000 square meters and is the largest settlement from that era discovered in Yin Xu to date, Niu says.

According to veteran archaeologist Wang Wei, the settlement may shed light on how the Western Zhou people used Yin Xu after they conquered the Shang Dynasty.

Forty-eight sacrificial pits have been excavated to the east of the western trench. The pits fall into three sizes: large, medium and small, with large ones predominant. Excavations have confirmed that they are divided into six rows, and most contain horse sacrifices. Additionally, evidence of human, cow, dog, pig, elephant, bird and other sacrifices has been found.

## New clues at Erlitou site suggest a bigger role

By WANG KAIHAO  
wkaikhao@chinadaily.com.cn

More than 65 years after its discovery, the Erlitou site in the heart of the Central China Plains, continues to yield new clues about the grand picture of early-stage Chinese civilization.

Best known for its bronze and turquoise artifacts, the site, spread across some 3 square kilometers in Luoyang, Henan province, was first found in 1959. Recent findings of architectural remains, road networks and other infrastructure indicate that the site, which dates to between 3,750 to 3,520 years ago according to carbon dating results, was the location of the capital city of the Xia Dynasty (c. 21st-16th century BC) during its late period.

It is the first central dynasty with extensive territory recorded in Chinese history.

Physical proof has popped up all over the Erlitou site that ushers the dynasty in from the realm of legend. In 2024, major breakthroughs were made around the core palace area, archaeologists recently revealed.

Walled sections are confirmed to have been unearthed on the crossroads by the palace area, according to Zhao Haitao, an associate researcher with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Archaeology who leads excavations at Erlitou.

Previously unearthed crossroads are located to the west and south of the palace area, dividing the area into four subregions. Following the

"The strict and orderly multigrad layout of the city indicates the existence of a mature and developed system of governance and institutions at the time."

Zhao Haitao, associate researcher, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Archaeology

discovery of roadside walls in the three other subregions, Zhao's team speculated the remaining southwest section would have the same structure.

In 2024, that speculation was confirmed as the northeast corner of the wall in this zone was revealed. The remaining wall is about 2 meters across at its widest, and its discovery reveals for the first time the layout of the four subregional walls at the intersection of the crossroads.

"This discovery will significantly help the exploration of important issues such as the formation and development of the network-style layout of Erlitou urban centers, the content, characteristics and relationships of each subregion," Zhao explains.

"The strict and orderly multigrad

layout of the city indicates the existence of a mature and developed system of governance and institutions at the time," he adds. "It's a key indicator for determining the transition of the city of Erlitou into a dynastic state."

Similar walled blocks, known as *lifang*, are noticeable elements of urban layout in the later history of China, particularly in the then capital of Chang'an (present-day Xi'an, Shaanxi province) during the Tang Dynasty (618-907) period, over 2,000 years after Erlitou.

"Each walled area corresponded to a unit of daily life with various functions," Wang Wei, a veteran archaeologist with CASS, says. "New findings at Erlitou could indicate this was the prototype of such structures."

According to Lei Xingshan, an archaeology professor at Beijing Union University, "it's also crucial inspiration for other prehistoric city ruins elsewhere in China."

"Such multigrad urban layouts could be a benchmark for conducting other studies throughout a lineage," Lei says.

A complex composed of foundations has also recently been excavated in the palace area. Coded D17 ("No 17 palace"), it includes two groups of row-house-style buildings, both built on rammed earth terraces, according to Zhao.

The row-house building on the north side, for example, has five rooms on its facade. It is one room deep, and 40 meters wide in an east-west orientation, and covers an area of about 310 square meters.

"It's the widest single-row building in terms of facade found at the Erlitou site so far," Zhao says.

Before this discovery, archaeologists had wondered whether the area was a central square, and the layout of previously discovered ruins nearby also confused researchers.

Expanding work beyond Erlitou per se sometimes helps demonstrate its core status. Other than the palace area, interesting discoveries were made last year at the Guchengcun site, which is across the river from the Erlitou core zone. Long considered an independent archaeological site, three newly unearthed moats and a rammed wall are now giving pause for thought.

The No 1 section of the moat spans over 1,700 meters. It is nearly 10 meters wide and 2 meters deep. The direction of No 2 and 3 moats parallel the main roads and ruins in Erlitou.

"They also embrace the Erlitou site from its north and east," Zhao says. "They probably functioned as the outer boundary of the city."

If this hypothesis is proved correct in follow-up research, it would mean that the Erlitou site was larger than 3 sq km in size.

"If so, the Erlitou site could be far larger than other archaeological ruins of its time in China," Wang says. "This would further demonstrate its core status in a state."

Only an area of 59,500 sq m has been excavated at Erlitou in the 60-some years since its discovery, and many questions await to be answered. Construction of a new national-



Zhao Haitao (center), leader of the archaeological team at the Erlitou site, and his colleagues check new findings on the site in 2024.



An aerial view of the newly excavated D17 palace ruins at the site. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

level archaeological research center focusing on the Xia and the following Shang Dynasty (c. 16th-11th century BC) began in September in Luoyang. It will be equipped with

research labs, restoration facilities and warehouses for archaeological materials. It is expected to become a new hub for international cooperation on Xia-Shang studies.

LIFE



From left: Pop singer Shangguan Xi'ai (left) tours Yangzhou, Jiangsu province, with Duan Zhiqiang, a historian from Fudan University. Pop idol Liu Yu (left) and cross-talk performer Yan Hexiang (middle) join Liu Qing, a professor of philosophy at East China Normal University, to tour Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. Zhou Kui, an associate professor at the Communication University of China, acts as a guide at the China Grand Canal Museum in Yangzhou. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

# Giving the Canal a Grand new look

In Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris*, Gil Pender, a Hollywood screenwriter who is nostalgic for the Paris of the 1920s — which he considers the golden age of literature and art — is magically transported back to that era during a visit to the city. There, he encounters famous US writers like F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and Gertrude Stein.

For Hong Kong novelist Ma Chiahui, who is well-versed in ancient Chinese poetry, the city of Yangzhou during the Tang Dynasty (618-907) is the place to which he dreams of traveling back in time.

Located in present-day Jiangsu province, Yangzhou was a bustling metropolis during the Tang Dynasty due to being a transportation hub on the Grand Canal, an ancient waterway that was begun in the 5th century BC, which eventually ran from Hangzhou to Tongzhou district in Beijing.

The city was a gathering place for scholars and literati, who were often immortalized in the work of Tang poets like Li Bai and Du Mu, who used their literary talent to extol the prosperity and beauty of Yangzhou.

"During its heyday, Yangzhou must have had an irresistible charm," Ma said during his stay in the city as part of the recently aired 10-episode online reality show, *Shine! The Grand Canal*, produced by video streaming platform Youku.

The program brings 20 well-known figures from various fields, including Ma, Duan Zhiqiang, a scholar from the National Institute for Advanced Humanistic Studies at Fudan University, architect Zhang Jiajing, philosopher Liu Qing, comedian Liu Yang, and pop idol Liu Yu, together to explore different cities along the Grand Canal.

Their itinerary includes stops in Ningbo, Shaoxing, and Hangzhou in Zhejiang province, Suzhou, Yangzhou, and Huai'an in Jiangsu province, Luoyang and Kaifeng in Henan province, as well as Tianjin and Beijing. More than a decade has passed since the Grand Canal, the world's longest and oldest intact artificial waterway, was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the program seeks to reimagine the canal, taking a multidimensional perspective that integrates the insights provided by the guests.

To illustrate its significance and value, the program is based on a series of day tours during which the guests visit historical locations related to the Grand Canal, and experience local lifestyles firsthand. They later come together to dine and share their experiences and insights from the day.

Online series explores the waterway's enduring importance and the ways it has shaped the lives of those who live along it, **Xing Wen** reports.



“

It (the online series) shows life along the Grand Canal through food, fun, and chats with local residents, giving viewers a peek into the culture and history of these cities.”

User comment from review site Douban

In one recent episode, some of the participants visited Yangzhou, which dates back to 486 BC when construction of the canal first began.

Yangzhou's 2,500 years of history intertwines with that of the waterway, a history of interdependence, prosperity, and development.

For that particular episode, comedian Yan Hexiang, architect Zhang Jiajing, and Zhou Kui, an associate professor from the Communication University of China and a Yangzhou native, served as volunteer guides at the China Grand Canal Museum in Yangzhou.



Top: The Gongchen Bridge is a historical stone arch bridge over the Grand Canal in Gongshu district in Hangzhou, Zhejiang. Above: The recently aired online series *Shine! The Grand Canal* brings together celebrities with different expertise to visit cities along the canal.

They used their respective expertise to talk about the Grand Canal with visitors, presenting information in either a humorous or academic manner.

Yan later took Zhang and Zhou on a leisurely tour through the streets and alleys by rickshaw. They visited a teahouse to sample *tangbao*, or soup dumpling, a local delicacy, and

explored a historical bathhouse to experience the bathing and foot massage traditions that can be traced back to the Tang Dynasty.

Meanwhile, Ma, Duan, and pop singer Shangguan Xi'ai paid a visit to the Mausoleum Park of Sui Emperor Yang Guang, who started the construction of the Beijing-Hangzhou section of the Grand Canal.

The trio also visited a beauty salon for a traditional local shave. The barber began by shaving from the right side of the neck with gentle strokes, then moved to the left side of the neck, before moving the blade to the forehead, eyebrows, cheeks, carefully and gently removing facial hair, ear fuzz, dead skin, and stubble left by hair clippers, in a series of 72 strokes.

In the end, the barber lightly ran the blade along the bridge of the nose to complete half the stroke, known as the "72 and a half stroke", leaving clients feeling refreshed.

That night, the two groups gathered to share their experiences and discuss the history behind their discoveries.

Zhou states that the advancement of Yangzhou's service industry was closely related to the Grand Canal.

"For instance, public bathhouses were set up for laborers," he says. Yangzhou was once a prosperous gathering place for salt merchants during the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911) due to its transportation facilities.

"There were many laborers, especially those working in the salt fields, who needed to relax and recover their strength at the bathhouses after a hard day's work carrying salt," Zhou says.

He organized a quiz for the other

participants to guess the meanings of phrases from the Yangzhou dialect and explain their cultural connotations.

Duan points out that Yangzhou was not only an important hub on the Grand Canal but also connected to the Yangtze River basin. Goods traveling along the Yangtze River could be shipped through Yangzhou to northern China, while the salt produced in Yangzhou could be shipped to the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River.

The history of Yangzhou, a city with a glorious past, reminded Ma of Istanbul, a city at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, which also enjoyed past glory.

He speaks of the Turkish word *huzun*, which Nobel laureate author Orhan Pamuk uses in his autobiography, *Istanbul: Memories and the City*, to encapsulate the collective melancholy experienced by the city's inhabitants following the fall of the Ottoman Empire.

"Though I'm walking through today's Yangzhou, I'm imagining what it used to be like," Ma says, adding that at that moment, he experienced a feeling of *huzun* of his own.

Discussions such as these provided the audience with insight into how the Grand Canal has shaped Yangzhou's past and present.

"Even though the show focuses on the Grand Canal, it really digs deep into exploring and understanding each city along the way.

"It shows life along the Grand Canal through food, fun, and chats with local residents, giving viewers a peek into the culture and history of these cities. It doesn't shut about the Grand Canal, but it's just there, part of everyday life. Those cozy little snapshots of urban life keep the poetic charm of the ancient canal alive," commented one user on the review site Douban.

Zhang Jin, an expert involved in the World Heritage application for the Grand Canal, views the series as a kind of "ceremonial ritual" to drive the conscious protection of its heritage.

"The goal of the program is to increase public awareness of the history of the Grand Canal and promote its preservation, a habit that will inspire future generations to carry on the legacy," she explains.

"Historical memory needs to be awakened. We have already taken action to that end, and we will continue to do so in the future. What we still need to think about is how we can use historical memory to make things better today," Duan adds.

Contact the writer at [xingwen@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:xingwen@chinadaily.com.cn)

## Sichuan's Tibetans cashing in on crafts

CHENGDU — Tucked away in the snowy valley of Maisu township, Dege county in the Garze Tibetan autonomous prefecture, the Khyenle Guesthouse on the scenic Sichuan-Xizang Highway is buzzing with activity.

"We've been fully booked recently with magazine teams and social media influencers coming to capture our culture," says Dawa Drolma, the young Tibetan proprietor.

Dawa Drolma is from a family steeped in the ancient craft of Lima copper casting. This intricate technique, involving a blend of gold, silver, tin, zinc and other metals, has been passed down for six generations in her family.

Despite its beauty, she grew up understanding the challenge of taking such treasures beyond her hometown. The aspiration took her

to the United States in 2013, where she pursued marketing and business management studies.

Taking a global perspective, including an internship at the Smithsonian Institution, she drafted a business plan for a workshop which she called Khyenle. In 2017, armed with new skills and insight, she returned home, determined to transform the family workshop.

Dawa Drolma and her brother expanded the workshop, introduced new product designs and embraced online platforms to reach a wider audience.

Today, their Lima copper creations, from traditional Buddhist statues to modern cultural merchandise, are sold worldwide. The workshop has become profitable, paying off family debts and creating opportunities for local artisans, contributing to community prosperity.

"When I was a child, career aspirations were unclear for most of us. Now, many children dream of becoming artisans," the young businesswoman says.

Maisu has some 30 handicraft workshops and around 2,000 artisans skilled in traditions such as copper casting, black pottery, yak hair weaving. The Maisu Handicraft brand, registered by Dege county, is paving the way for the Tibetan cultural industry.

Dawa Drolma and her brother are leading examples of the blend of tradition and innovation in Garze, a hub of intangible cultural heritage, which is home to 555 items listed in various heritage directories.

The prefecture is also home to 11 national-level inheritors, 101 provincial-level inheritors, and 595 at the

prefectural level. Over 20,000 people are engaged in traditional crafts, placing the prefecture at the forefront of Sichuan province.

In Litang county, young entrepreneurs Silang Qezhoen and Zhoima Lhamo have been running a project since 2018 that helps local Tibetan women produce artisanal soaps made from yak milk and butter.

The soaps, which visitors have nicknamed "Gifts from the Plateau", highlight the region's cultural heritage and growing entrepreneurial landscape.

"Many of these women spent their lives herding and doing household chores," says Zhoima Lhamo, adding that now, they not only contribute to their family incomes but also develop their self-worth.

Over the years, Garze has made significant strides in preserving and



Dawa Drolma, proprietor of the Khyenle Guesthouse, prepares ancient Lima copper casting products for orders to be mailed out. SHEN BOHAN / XINHUA

promoting its intangible cultural heritage. Efforts to cultivate a diverse group of grassroots inheritors are underway, alongside devel-

oping dynamic methods for living heritage transmission.

XINHUA

## SPORTS

## TENNIS

## Exit brings Down Under feeling

Zheng Qinwen suffers Australian Open shock against inspired Siegemund

By SUN XIAOCHEN  
sunxiaochen@chinadaily.com.cn

Zheng Qinwen is so popular and bright a star in the professional tennis world even brand logos, coveting her huge exposure, have been seen on her opponent in a bid to share the limelight.

Halfway into her second-round match against Laura Siegemund at the Australian Open, fans watching TV at home on Wednesday morning soon captured an intriguing tiny detail on the German veteran's attire — a newly-added logo of what appeared as a Chinese brand on the front of her dress that wasn't there just two days ago during her opening-round match.

Zheng's surging popularity, and the attention that comes with it, has apparently made almost everything and everyone around her, and even against her in Wednesday's case, marketable to potential sponsors.

Yet, fame comes at a cost and the reigning Olympic champion learned it the hard way as Zheng suffered a major upset at the hands of Siegemund, who stunned the world No 5 with a 7-6 (3), 6-3 win at the John Cain Arena that put an abrupt end to Zheng's attempt of repeating her final run of last year.

Zheng, who's had a breakout second half in 2024 anchored by an Olympic gold medal in Paris, admitted that she's not 100 percent physically ready for the major challenge.

"I got some small issues (with my right elbow) after the WTA Finals. I even was discussing with my team if we have to come to play the Australian Open or not," Zheng, who narrowly lost to world No 1 Aryna Sabalenka in last year's final, confessed at the post-match news conference on Wednesday.

"I carried the pain with me into this tournament. I felt it sometimes in my swings and to contain it I had to cut short my practice sessions. So yes, it affected my game," said Zheng, who skipped all the warm-up tournaments before the season-opening major this year.

Zheng also revealed after Wednesday's loss that she had to begin her off-season training later than normal last month, due to



China's Zheng Qinwen walks off the court after losing her Australian Open second-round match against Germany's Laura Siegemund on Wednesday. Zheng, last year's runner-up and world No 5, lost 7-6 (3), 6-3 in the biggest shock of the tournament so far. REUTERS

fatigue from a busy 2024 season and off-court assignments for advertising shoots for her increasing list of sponsors.

Still, the 22-year-old big-serving star, who's racked up four singles titles on the WTA Tour to go with the Olympic gold, refused to make excuses for her poorer-than-expected performance.

"I tried what I can do during this match but I feel maybe today was not my day," said Zheng, who struggled with her serves throughout the match. She landed only 56 percent of her first serves.

"There are a lot of details at some important points that I didn't make the right choice. I had a lot of chances to break her in the first set, but maybe my concentration was not there. I always gave some easy mistakes in those moments.

"Even with the elbow issue, I still believed I had the chance to win today. ...I felt I didn't have that extra energy and extra strength in the first-set tiebreaker."

With her surprising defeat of last year's finalist, Siegemund, who entered this year's AO at No 97, has won more than just the 70 ranking points and nearly \$180,000 prize money for making into the third round at Melbourne Park.

Little known in China before Wednesday, Siegemund now has made her presence felt in the emerging tennis market and has earned an endorsement deal, at least for a day, from a Chinese company.

"I knew I had to play more than my best tennis," Siegemund, who is expected to rise to top-80 with the victory over Zheng said in her on-court interview.

"I had nothing to lose, so I just told myself to swing freely. (Zheng) is an amazing player, just one of the best players right now.

"But I know that I can play well and I just wanted to show that to myself and make it a tough fight."

As a former top-30 player, Siegemund came into this match having posted four wins against top-5 opponents in her career, although all of those previous wins had come at Stuttgart, her career-best tournament on home soil where she was champion in 2017 and runner-up in 2016.

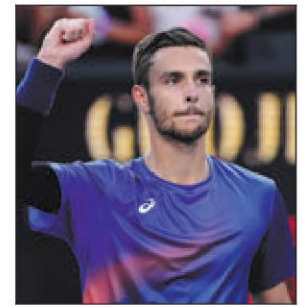
On Wednesday, though, Siegemund was performing as if she was on her beloved indoor clay of Stuttgart's Porsche Arena. Firing return winners almost at will and finding passing winners with ease.

Zheng was able to battle back

and push the first set into a tie-break, but the German would not be denied. Siegemund successfully read most of the power plays from Zheng throughout, and she won the last five points of the breaker to light up the upset alert.

By ousting the Chinese title contender, Siegemund reached the Australian Open third round for the second time in her career after reaching there in 2023.

"It's nice to be in the third round (again). I didn't expect it. My goal was to win a match here and defend my points. Singles is not my priority anymore, but at the same time I know what I can do. I know my game is there," said Siegemund, who's more focused on the doubles since winning the 2020 US Open title with her partner Vera Zvonareva of Russia.



Lorenzo Musetti of Italy gestures after defeating compatriot Matteo Arnaldi in the Australian Open first round on Tuesday. AP

## Musetti's man bun is gone, but he still wins by a hair

Lorenzo Musetti's man bun is a thing of the past: The Italian tennis player showed up at the Australian Open with his famously lengthy locks sheared, and he wound up winning his first-round match Tuesday by, um, a hair.

The 16th-seeded Musetti, a Wimbledon semifinalist last July and Paris Olympics bronze medalist last August, needed 4 hours, 6 minutes to get past countryman Matteo Arnaldi 7-6 (4), 4-6, 7-6 (5), 6-3 at Melbourne Park.

Gone were the strands that dangled nearly to his shoulders under a backward white hat at the All England Club and, as recently as late November, at the Davis Cup Finals, which Italy won.

Gone was the top knot the 22-year-old Musetti featured at the Summer Games.

"For now, the short hair had a good start in Australia. Let's hope it can bring me luck," Musetti said. "It's a new look. But if I hadn't had such long hair for such a long time, people wouldn't even have noticed it."

Perhaps. But a glance at social media made clear that fans definitely made note of this new 'do.

He said this is the closest his hair's been cropped since he was 15. Even when he won the Australian Open junior boys' title at age 16, it was a little longer.

"I'm getting old," Musetti said with a smile. "So I am trying to look younger."

His victory over the 39th-ranked Arnaldi was even tighter than the final score indicated. Musetti only managed to collect eight more points, 169 to 161.

"It was quite a long match. ... Honestly, it could have gone either way," said Musetti, who never made it past the second round in three previous appearances at the Australian Open.

"I am proud to have won, despite not playing my best tennis. When you play your best, it's easy to take a victory home," he said. "These are the matches that make you grow and mature as a player."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Djokovic makes slice of history



Novak Djokovic blows a kiss and celebrates winning his match on Wednesday. REUTERS

Novak Djokovic made a slice of Grand Slam history on his way into the Australian Open third round on Wednesday.

Defending champion Aryna Sabalenka, two-time Melbourne winner Naomi Osaka and a rampant Carlos Alcaraz were all also winners on a rainy day four.

Djokovic needed four sets for the second match in a row before defeating Portuguese qualifier Jaime Faria 6-1, 6-7 (4), 6-3, 6-2.

It was Djokovic's 430th singles match at a major to claim sole ownership of most ever played, men or women, in the Open era ahead of Roger Federer (429) and Serena

Williams (423).

The Serb is chasing an 11th Australian Open title and historic 25th Grand Slam crown.

"Grand Slams, of course, they are the pillars of our sport. They mean everything for the history of the sport," said Djokovic, 37, now coached by former rival Andy Murray.

"Whether I win or lose, I will always leave my heart out on the court. I'm just blessed to be making another record."

Djokovic is drawn to meet Spain's red-hot Alcaraz in the last eight.

Four-time Grand Slam winner Alcaraz dropped just five games in an ominous display of strength to sprint into

the third round.

The third seed showed no mercy to Japan's Yoshihito Nishioka in a 6-0, 6-1, 6-4 rout in 81 minutes.

"The less time you spend on court in the Grand Slams, especially in the beginning, it is going to be better," said Alcaraz, who is yet to go beyond the quarterfinals in Melbourne.

Sabalenka dropped her serve three times and faced 11 break points before overcoming Spain's Jessica Bouzas Maneiro 6-3, 7-5, rattling off the last five games in a row.

"She played incredible tennis today and it was a really tough one. I expected this tennis from her, I'm really glad I was able to win this match," said Sab-

alenka, who beat Zheng Qinwen in the 2024 final.

The win kept the Belarusian world No 1 on course for a rare hat-trick of consecutive Australian Open titles, a feat last achieved 26 years ago by Martina Hingis and only matched by four other women in history.

Former world No 1 Osaka, the 2019 and 2021 champion in Australia but now unseeded, stormed back to defeat 20th seed Karolina Muchova 1-6, 6-1, 6-3.

American seventh seed Jessica Pegula, beaten in the US Open final by Sabalenka last year, eased through 6-4, 6-2 against Belgium's Elise Mertens.

AFP

## Teen qualifier Fonseca 'wants more and more' after upset win

Fearless 18-year-old qualifier Joao Fonseca declared he wants "more and more" after beating ninth seed Andrey Rublev in straight sets on his Grand Slam debut on Tuesday in a major Australian Open shock.

Roared on in Melbourne by Brazilian fans decked out in yellow, the prodigious teenager appeared totally unfazed as he stunned the Russian 7-6 (1), 6-3, 7-6 (5).

Fonseca last month became the second-youngest champion of the NextGen ATP tournament since current world No 1 Jannik Sinner claimed the title, also aged 18, five years ago.

Fonseca won a second ATP Challenger Tour title in Canberra this month, then powered through qualifying at Melbourne Park to take his place in his maiden Grand Slam main draw.

"I think when I arrived here my first goal was to qualify for the main draw," said Fonseca, who is ranked

112 in the world and came into the first-round meeting with 27-year-old Rublev on a 13-match winning streak.

"Of course, my expectations are bigger now. I want more and more.

"I think that's the mentality of the champion," added Fonseca, who faces Italy's Lorenzo Sonego next.

He had never faced a top-10 player before, but if he was nervous he did not show it as he went toe-to-toe before Fonseca clinched the first set emphatically on the tiebreak.

Unleashing some thunderous groundstrokes, the Brazilian raced into a 3-0 lead in the second set, at one point beckoning the Margaret Court Arena crowd to show some more appreciation.

Fonseca took the second set with an ace.

He was in trouble in the third when Rublev broke for a 3-1 lead, but the youngster broke back immediately to put his more experienced



Brazil's Joao Fonseca celebrates after winning his Australian Open first-round match against Russia's Andrey Rublev at Melbourne Park, in Melbourne, on Tuesday. REUTERS

opponent back under pressure. They went to the tiebreak again and Fonseca powered into a 4-0

lead, then staved off a mini Rublev fightback to seal the deal on first match point.

"My first win in a Grand Slam, my first time playing in the main draw of a Grand Slam," said Fonseca.

"So everything's new for me, but I played such a good match.

"I'm just very happy with myself, very proud the way that I fought and the way that I stayed mentally on every game, every point."

In the lead-up to the opening major of the year, the sometimes combustible Rublev opened up on his battle with anxiety and depression.

During his career he has reached the last eight at all four Grand Slams but never gone further.

Hitting serves at up to 133 mph (214 kph), Fonseca delivered 14 aces and had just one double-fault while saving five of the six break points he faced.

He accumulated 51 total winners, 18 more than Rublev, a quarterfinalist in Melbourne three of the past four years and Fonseca's first oppo-

nent ranked higher than No 20.

"I was just focusing (on) my game, trying to put no pressure on myself, playing (against) a top-10 guy," Fonseca said. "I was just playing my game and, well, now we're in the second round."

He'll next face 55th-ranked Sonego, who got past three-time Grand Slam champion Stan Wawrinka in four sets earlier Tuesday.

Asked the key to his strong play in the tiebreakers against the far-more-experienced Rublev, Fonseca said he tries to employ "all the intensity in the important points," "go for the shots" and show "courage."

He also cited 20-time major champion Roger Federer as an inspiration.

"Like Roger says: 'Talent is not enough' ... So I put (in) a lot of hard work," Fonseca said. "Just me and my team knows that."

AGENCIES